

Radio Free Europe/Munich
Non-Target Communist Area Analysis Department
Background Information USSR

1 April 1963

MARSHAL BIRYUZOV'S PROMOTION

Appendix:

Soviet Youth and the Army
(Bulletin, Institute for the
Study of the USSR, by Nikolai
Galay)

Introduction

When Red Army Day was celebrated on February 23rd, 1963, Marshal M.V. Zakharov was still Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces. At that time the order of precedence in the military hierarchy was as follows:

Malinovsky, Grechko, Zakharov, Yepishev, Biryuzov, Chuikov (Red Star, 23 February 1963).

The first indication that Marshal S.S. Biryuzov had been promoted came on March 15th, 1963, when the obituary notice of Lt. Gen. P.A. Kupriyanov in Red Star was signed in an unusual way:

Malinovsky, Grechko, Biryuzov, Yepishev...

The real significance of the listing on 15th March only became clear on 29th March, when Red Star identified Marshal Biryuzov as Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces. As Marshal Zakharov was born in 1898, and therefore is 65 this year, the reason for his replacement seems likely to be that he is retiring on pension. (Red Army Marshals do not have as elastic a career as the Party leaders who control the Presidium.) Moreover Zakharov has been Chief of Staff since May 1960, so that his term of office appears to have been of normal length.

Biryuzov was born in 1904, and thus is six years younger than Zakharov. But as a Marshal, Biryuzov is the senior, because he has been a Marshal of the Soviet Union since 1955, whereas Zakharov was not promoted to that rank until four years later, in 1959.

Since April 1962, Marshal Biryuzov has been Commander of the Strategic Rocket Troops (London Times, 8th November 1962) and therefore some analysts in Moscow have interpreted his promotion as

"a victory for the proponents of strategic rocket power over military leaders who had resisted the diminution of the role of the ground forces". (New York Times, 29 March 1963).

This is an attractively simple theory, but it might be an oversimplification. Biryuzov has had control of the missile forces for only eleven months, whereas for the previous five years he was Commander-in-Chief of the Anti-Aircraft Defense Forces. It would therefore be equally possible to argue that his new appointment is a victory for anti-aircraft defense, but it would still be unconvincing. Probably a more relevant stage in Biryuzov's career is the fact that he was Chief of Staff of Marshal Malinovsky's army at Stalingrad (Reuter, 28 March 1963). It would be logical for Malinovsky to want to employ the man who was his right hand in the greatest battle of the war once more as Chief of Staff.

SOVIET YOUTH AND THE ARMY

Bulletin, Institute
for the Study of the
USSR,
February 1963
by Nikolai Galay

Each September, recruiting stations all over the Soviet Union are filled with 19-year-old young men - the annual draft for service in the armed forces. For periods ranging from two to four years, depending on the arm of the service, these young people are torn away from their families, studies or work in offices, factories and collective farms. The nature of this service (for which women with medical, veterinary or special technical training may also be conscripted) can best be judged from the text of the oath which each young soldier takes after his first few weeks of service:

I, a citizen of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on entering the ranks of the Armed Forces, take this oath and swear to be an honest, brave, disciplined and vigilant soldier, strictly to guard military and state secrets, and to carry out without question all military regulations and the orders of my commanders and superiors.

I swear to make a conscientious study of military affairs, to take care of military and national property by all means in my power, and to be loyal to my people, to my Soviet homeland and the Soviet Government to my last breath.

I will always be ready, on the order of the Soviet Government, to defend my homeland, the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, and, as a member of the Armed Forces, I swear to defend it with courage, skill, dignity and honor, not sparing my blood nor my very life to achieve complete victory over the enemy.

If I break this my solemn oath, then may I be subject to the rigorous punishment of Soviet law and the universal hatred and contempt of the workers.¹

The stringency of the conditions which the new recruit swears to fulfill is emphasized by the reference to the "rigorous punishment of Soviet law" in the event of breaking this oath. In order to gain a more complete idea of the rigor of conditions of military service in the Soviet Union, one must bear in mind factors which even in peacetime make it far more arduous than it is for any young soldier in the West.

¹Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya (Large Soviet Encyclopedia), 2nd ed., Moscow, Vol. XXXIV, 1955, p. 544.

Throughout the period of service there is no right to home leave, which is granted only as an incentive or in the event of special family circumstances; as a result of the extra-territorial system of manning the armed forces the entire period of service, is, as a rule, spent far from home; financial remuneration is minimal, amounting to no more than 3 rubles a month; in addition, there is exceptionally rigorous physical and mental training under conditions of iron discipline. Thus, the draft for military service is the young Soviet citizen's first harsh contribution to the state.

This list does not exhaust all the burdens and obligations laid upon the draftee. Unlike those of non-Communist states, the Soviet armed forces, apart from being a state body, also constitute a supra-state, ideocratic formation. The obligations assumed by a Soviet serviceman when he takes the oath relate to the first category and do not differ from those in other countries, but from the ideocratic, Party standpoint the army, and therefore every soldier in it has another mission: not only must it be the obedient instrument of the Party, but it must also be inspired by Communist ideology. Every soldier must be educated in the spirit of readiness to serve Communist aims. The outward expression of these obligations is membership of the Komsomol or the Party. Even those who do not join Party organizations must be educated in a spirit of "awareness" or "consciousness" (soznatelnost), that is, they must become sympathetic to Party goals. This means the assumption of an additional, so-called social-Party obligation, the voluntary undertaking to be an example of selfless and disciplined service. This leads to a situation in which from 6 O'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night, apart from one hour's rest after the midday meal, the young soldier is engaged in continuous activity under the constant surveillance of his superiors in a state of nervous tension engendered by artificial competition in all aspects of his service and training. These social-Party obligations in no way lighten the burden of the draftee.

In a short paper of this sort, it is necessary to limit any analysis of the attitudes of Soviet young people to the most essential points. The present writer proposes to deal with three main aspects of the question: first, the general attitude to military service taken by the generation at present affected; second, the problem of the different generations within the armed forces; and third, the effect on youth of Khrushchev's reform of the structure of the armed forces since 1960.

+

Krasnaya zvezda, the official organ of the Central Political Administration of the Army and Navy, paints a glowing picture of the willingness, pride and even joy shown by newly enlisted draftees. A desire to perpetuate the military traditions of fathers and elder brothers, recognition of the need to defend the peaceloving Soviet Union from the threat of warmongers and enthusiasm for acquiring

have equal chances for promotion. Combined with persistent propaganda about the importance of military service as the highest duty to homeland and state, these factors provide a favorable psychological basis on which to cultivate a positive attitude toward service in the army. Moreover, the great majority of young people are not anti-militarist by nature, are highly patriotic and regard military service as a natural duty.

The reason for this is that World War II, by uniting the people in the face of a threat to the very existence of the country, aroused strong patriotic feelings among the population at large. Pride in victory and the enhanced stature of the state on the international stage augmented these emotions. Since the war the transformation of the country into a major industrial power and the brilliant successes of Soviet science and technology, and in particular the feats of the spacemen, have shrouded the heads of the young in an almost chauvinistic cloud. The entire younger generation was affected. Most of those now aged from 28 to 35 (i.e., the draftees of 1948-54) were either studying or working in defense industries during the war years and were fully aware of the events of the time. Their fathers were at the front and this naturally boosted their patriotic fervor and made them regard the army as a youthful ideal. The army continued to enjoy this heroic image until the end of the fifties.

The members of this age group, however, are no longer on active service but in the reserve. They are also too old to be in the Komsomol and only the minority has passed into the ranks of the Party. Moreover, whatever their romantic ideas when they went off to do their military service, they soon learnt its more prosaic side and the advice they give to those who are now being drafted into the forces - the "war babies" - is sometimes far from enthusiastic. Those who wish to make the army their career on occasion receive such withering comments as the one used in a sketch in Krasnaya zvezda: "Don't be a fool, Igor; only failures put on a gray overcoat voluntarily, and you are our bright boy."³ True, such advice is nothing new, having frequently been proffered to the children of privileged parents of the "new class" and in some cases to those who had received a full secondary education. Bearing in mind that before Khrushchev's school reform began in 1958 almost half of the young people were completing their secondary education, it may be concluded that such advice must have been fairly commonplace. Now that most students are required to combine instruction in the higher grades of secondary school with work in industry, the proportion of those who complete the course has probably fallen off, and this will be reflected among those drafted. Nevertheless, for all those who have completed their secondary education or have still to do so the prospect of merely acquiring technical qualifications as drivers, electricians, fitters or radio operators can hardly be very attractive. For the majority, military service constitutes a compulsory break in the normal

³Ibid., August 26, 1962.

development of their careers. The younger generation provides a ready response to the liberalizing trends which typify contemporary youth literature. Owing to their age at the time, the young draftees of today did not consciously experience the wave of patriotism during the war. It is difficult to say how strongly these "war babies", as persons who have not consciously experienced a threat to the very existence of their state, feel the need to serve in the army. Colonel Vakulov, writing in Krasnaya zvezda, says of them:

The time has arrived when the war babies are coming to do their service in the army. Many of them were brought up without fathers. In their infancy they underwent many hardships and grim experiences, and saw many frightful and terrible things. All this could not but affect their defenseless minds.⁴

Quite definitely, these young people are susceptible to what the Soviets call the "cosmopolitan" and "corruptive" influences of the West, of which jazz, interest in abstract art and the longing for an individual and prosperous life are the outward manifestations of inward spiritual turmoil.

Taking into account both this turmoil and the inevitably harsh demands of military service, the Soviet authorities are trying to eliminate conflicts in service life resulting from abnormal living conditions, old traditions and the coarseness of superiors at all levels which may have an adverse effect on young recruits. Military service means in fact subjection not only to regulations and military law, but also to the disciplinary powers of superiors, which can on occasion be quite arbitrary. The Soviet military press does not refrain from giving details of the harshness, injustice and coarseness which all too often mark the behavior of older soldiers to their juniors, of superiors to their subordinates, and inveighs sharply against them. The new army regulations are noteworthy for their attempt to intensify the "conscious" element in discipline and provide evidence of the constant campaign against such manifestations.

All these features are common knowledge to young recruits, who learn of them from the Soviet press, from the accounts of their immediate predecessors and from the first-hand experience as soon as they join a unit. Krasnaya zvezda, commenting on the rude treatment of their juniors by older soldiers and the scornful sobriquets applied to youngsters, as well as the way in which they latter are detailed for the most arduous and dirty work, remarks: "A Soviet youth, brought up to recognize man's respect for man, cannot put up for long with customs that degrade human dignity."⁵

⁴Ibid., August 31, 1962.

⁵Ibid., September 2, 1962.

There are, of course, the usual complaints about the more tiresome manifestations of discipline, which are certainly not peculiar to the Soviet Army and have been a feature of service life since time immemorial:

"There's only one thing that I can't understand. If I keep my hands in my pockets, will our army be any the weaker for that? And if I learn to mark time as our sergeant Galanin does, will the army grow any stronger? Why don't they give us a respite? Learning to shoot is another matter, that's necessary. I have to know how to turn a steering wheel if I'm supposed to be a driver. That much is clear. But why the devil must I stand to attention before every Tom, Dick and Harry? Maybe that very sergeant is ten times as stupid as I am."⁶

There is, however, the more serious question of conflicts between the more educated or those already accustomed to leadership in civilian life and their superiors in the army. A soldier who before being drafted had been in charge of a Communist labor brigade declared, when arrested for insubordination: "Before my army service I had fifty workers under me, but here..."⁷ The correspondent reporting this incident wrote that the soldier understood the importance of discipline, but was himself accustomed to lead and therefore did not find it easy to subordinate himself unquestioningly to a superior.

Even within the officer corps cases of petty tyranny occur. The tendency for young officers to get themselves out of the army, despite the obstacles to this course of action, is regularly reported in the military press by correspondents who lament the inadequate attention paid to difficult subordinates. Such conflicts are too complex to be put down simply to the coarseness of superiors or the moral instability of subordinates, as the press usually tries to make out. They are rather a reflection of the problem of different generations, which is particularly urgent in the army.

Until Stalin's death, the problem of the conflict between the older and the younger generation, the problem of "fathers and sons", was relatively unimportant in the Soviet armed forces, as in all privileged organizations bound by military life generally ensured that the army should be dominated by the influence of the older generation, which set the tone to a greater degree than in civil life. For a long time, therefore, it seemed possible that Soviet military life, with its emphasis upon Communist education and the need to join a Communist organization - Party or Komsomol-, its iron discipline and social and material incentives for the military intelligentsia superior to those for their counter-

⁶ Ibid., August 4, 1962

⁷ Ibid., August 21, 1962.

parts in civil life, would mitigate the conflict between "fathers" and "sons". Reports which began appearing in the Soviet press soon after Khrushchev's 1960 reforms of the armed forces - reforms aimed at creating a firm Communist morale and outlook among Soviet officers - suggest, however, that this is not the case. An article in Krasnaya zvezda entitled "A Dangerous Aberration" presents the problem vividly:

The action takes place in the office of the senior commander. The gray-headed commander calls on the young officer to be frank. He recalls his youth in the army, recounts the difficulties he experienced and cites examples from the last war.

All this, however, has little effect on the lieutenant. He remains silent and the conversation is clearly flagging. Finally the lieutenant seems to break out ... and, deciding that he apparently has nothing to lose, he literally inundates the lieutenant-colonel with countless why's:

"Why do you ram your opinions down our throats?"

"Why do you think that we young people cannot have our own outlook?"

And finally, this phrase:

"You think on old-fashioned lines. But times are quite different now."

The writer goes on:

"You think on old-fashioned lines," "the outlook of the young." I have heard all this somewhere before and I try to remember where precisely. Finally I remember. An electric train. A warm quiet car. Two young lieutenants. They came in and apparently were continuing a conversation they had already begun:

"You know, Kotka", said one of them, "I barely managed to persuade the old man to let me go on leave. He talks about nothing but battlepreparedness and discipline. Such impenetrable conservatism."

"No, I must say the old champions are played out. There's no talking to them."

"There are sputniks, rockets and electronics all around, but they blather on about the importance of internal routine and their own front-line experience."

"Who needs front-line experience now?"

"All that is hopelessly out of date. Every newspaper says so."

The correspondent's comment is unambiguous:

One thing is quite clear and indisputable: this eloquent talk about the special outlook of young people, their "ultramodern" views is just absurd. It does nothing but harm our common cause. We have had, we have, and we shall have only one Marxist-Leninist outlook... By this and this alone must we check our course toward our sacred goal - Communism.

Analysing the reasons for this phenomenon, the correspondent mentions two factors which, in his opinion, are responsible for this attitude. The first is

...an important mistake among certain young officers: this disregard for the experience of their seniors, that is, those who have passed through the hard school of war.

It would be no exaggeration to say that some young people of my acquaintance with lieutenants' pins simply reject battle experience and regard those who possess it as proponents of something old which has outlived its usefulness. Others even become irritated by examples from the past: "Why do you carry on at us all the time about how hard it was for you, how much you experienced and put up with? Times are different now; and what business is it of ours what you did?" Is such conceit a good thing?⁹

The second factor is the development of modern military technology. The same correspondent several times refers to it as a reason for the skeptical and even nihilistic attitude of younger men toward their seniors:

Now we have rockets, sputniks and electronics around, but you go on regaling us with this "old woman" (mortar). Surely it is time it was on the scrapheap.¹⁰

The author makes a logical attempt to demonstrate the danger of these views, noting that the existence of such powerful means of attack and defense as nuclear missiles is no excuse for taking it easy, as some young soldiers seem to think. He refers to the obvious harm that such a philosophy can cause, but his irrefutable logic merely serves to underline the existence of an acute conflict between the older and younger military intelligentsia similar to that which divides the generations within the civilian intelligentsia.

In his story "Private Smorodin, Sergeant Vlasenko and I",

⁸Ibid., March 4, 1961.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

B. Nikolsy deals with another conflict on a somewhat different

This excerpt reveals the crux of the situation. The author goes on to describe how a soldier refuses to carry out an order, an incident which follows another occasion when the same soldier is drilled by the same sergeant. The story has not dénouement, only the hint of a happy ending. For this misdemeanor the soldier is severely punished, but in the description of the feelings of the onlookers sympathy lies not with the sergeant, who is, strictly speaking, in the right, but with the soldier.

It is interesting to note that this story was published immediately after the removal of Marshal Golikov from the post of the Head of the Central Political Department of the Army and Navy in May 1962, apparently in connection with the change in the nature of discipline in the Soviet armed forces.¹² The problem of the different generations in the armed forces, which came very much to the fore against the background of this purely military reform, tends to affect the willingness of the great majority of young people to do military service and make sacrifices for the state and the army. The position is made no better by the fact that the leadership of the Soviet armed forces consists of old officers now past their best who were brought up and trained under the Stalinist system. Khrushchev's new reforms and reorganization of the structure of the armed forces were aimed at eliminating these sources of friction.

+

Khrushchev's reforms have already been examined in detail in the pages of this journal.¹³ In the present context, it is sufficient to make the following points. The main object of the reform was to transform the political and social physiognomy of the Soviet armed forces, being designed to eliminate the constant instability and chronic split in the mind of every serviceman which resulted from the need to reconcile state and Party goals. This was to be done not merely by means of organizational measures - the nominal enrollment of as many servicemen as possible in the Komsomol and Party - but also by training personnel in the spirit of Communist Party principles. In other words, the object was not only to subordinate state considerations permanently to those of ideology, but to inculcate a Communist spirit in every individual soldier. In attempting to transform the Soviet army into a body more consonant with Communist aims, there was to be increased emphasis upon the importance of Komsomol and Party organizations in the army, enforced discipline was to give way to self-imposed, "conscious," discipline and the principle of one-man command (edinonachalie) was to receive more limited application in practice.

¹² See, Bulletin, 1960, No. 10, pp. 3-15.

It is quite obvious that the extension of the rights and functions of Party and Komsomol committees will be received favorably by all young people, whether in the forces or not. The same may be said regarding the change in the nature of discipline, the curbing of arbitrary actions and the encouragement of initiative on the part of the subordinates, although these changes have been dictated not simply by social considerations but also by the arrival of the atomic age, which requires an army trained in a spirit of initiative and self-discipline.

At the same time, the new reform cannot but enhance the duality which typifies the attitude of young people toward the army and aggravate the problem of the generations in the armed services. The main reason for this is the impossibility of reconciling morality, friendship, comradeship, duty to party, etc., as understood by the Communists (in this case the older generation) and by others (in this case the younger generation). The oath taken by the recruit means two quite different things according as it is interpreted literally or as those who formulated it intended it to be understood: the ideas of state and homeland, on the one hand, are identified with Party interests on the other, since they are expressed in the very same words. The impossibility of resolving such contradictions produces a duality in the character of the Soviet armed forces and in the attitude to them of young people serving in them which is indirectly attested by the desire for emancipation from Party tutelage which is being increasingly expressed by young people in Soviet literature: a number of books by both older and younger writers have appeared which give an authentic picture of war and military life with heroes endowed not only with Communist enthusiasm but also with such ordinary human feelings as love, self-denial and heroism accompanied by fear of death.

+

The above survey suffers from one great defect in that it deals only with secondary manifestations of political and psychological moods. It might seem that the lack of a sufficient quantity of statistical and other material relating to the subject here discussed rules out the possibility of drawing general conclusions at the present juncture; but forces which are at work in the broad masses of the people but which have not yet manifested themselves in action can, as a rule, only be judged by such secondary symptoms, so that it is perhaps justifiable to draw certain conclusions regarding the question to what extent the younger generation in the Soviet Union supports the regime and to what extent it represents a politically unreliable element. First, one must consider the marked duality in the attitude of young people. On the other hand, they loyally fulfill their military obligations to the state; yet in most cases they carry out their politico-ideological duty of being ardent fighters for Communism in a passive and, for the most part, nominal manner. Despite constant political indoctrination, a third of the young people in the army do not belong to the Komsomol, and this suggests a considerable volume of resistance to the spiritual influence of the Party.

Second, there is a tendency toward spiritual emancipation among young people, which encourages them to form their own opinions. This is undoubtedly due to the achievement of greater cultural and spiritual maturity. One-third of enlisted men in the army now have had a full secondary education and almost two-thirds are town-dwellers. This means that young people in the armed forces can no longer be regarded as the blind unreasoning instruments of the Party. This spiritual emancipation is facilitated not only by irreversible social and political processes which have been in evidence since Stalin's death, but also by the effect of the modern military and technical revolution, which has made it necessary to train the army in a spirit of independent military thought and initiative.

It should not, however, be thought that enhanced initiative within the army is going to lead to a revolutionary onslaught on the regime. Army life and strict military routine do not provide fertile soil for open demonstrations of dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, the vague and rudimentary ideas which a young man takes into the army with him mature during the course of his service - a period too, when an immature youth is transformed into an adult. His return to civilian life must inevitably be accompanied by the discharge of these accumulated but hitherto restrained tensions, and this will in its turn lead to an intensification of the emancipative processes now at work all over the Soviet Union.