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KONEV RETURNS TO THE LIMELIGHT

Little more than a year ago Marshal of the Soviet Union I.S. Konev was relieved of his post as Commander of the Warsaw Pact Forces on health grounds (Tass, July 24th, 1960, Background Information, 26 July 1960). Now against a background of a mounting Berlin crisis largely provoked by Khrushchev and Ulbricht, he has recovered sufficiently to be appointed to the militarily less important position of Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Forces in East Germany (ADN, 10 August 1961), replacing Col.-General I.I. Yakubovsky.

Konev is now 64 years old, the same age at which General K.N. Galitsky has recently been replaced by Col.-General A.S. Stuchenko as Commander of the Transcaucasian Military District,¹ and therefore in view of his proximity to retirement and his recent health record there is reason to think that his transfer to East Germany may be due more to political than military considerations.

His record is that of an obedient Party member who is believed to have been as close to Khrushchev as any of the Marshals, and who has certainly played a conspicuous part in the build-up of Khrushchev's military reputation. For example, it was Konev who started the recurrent practice of listing Khrushchev first, instead of in alphabetical order, when reciting the names of selected Party leaders.²

Thus it seems probable that his appointment to E. Germany is another link in the recent chain of Khrushchev's politico-military measures - the addition of 3,000 million rubles to the "defence" budget, the suspension of demobilization, and the reported eagerness of workers in the arms industry to resume the eight-hour day, all of which at present seem to be intended more for their propagandist effect than as serious preliminaries to an intentional shooting war for Berlin.

Another reason for suspecting an artificial motive behind the appointment is its striking parallel with the wholly artificial Turkish-Syrian crisis of three years ago. This was largely manufactured in Damascus and Moscow, and was the occasion for the ostentatious despatch by Khrushchev of Marshal K.I. Rokossovsky to the Turkish frontier to become - temporarily - Commander

¹Tiflis Radio, 7 August 1961

²Raymond L. Garthoff, Problems of Communism, November-December 1959.

of the Transcaucasian Military District. There Rokossovsky started some large-scale manoeuvres and indulged in some high level sabre-rattling, only to return quietly to Moscow a few months later,³ after Khrushchev had shown the crisis was finally over by drinking champagne at the Turkish Embassy. (Economist, Nov. 1st, 1957).

Konev's military record lends itself to use for attempts at intimidation. When he occupied Northern Moldavia in 1944 he became the first Soviet commander to advance beyond the USSR's borders into the East European countries. In 1945 his troops advancing from the South greatly helped Marshal Zhukov's front in its capture of Berlin. And finally it was Konev's men who took Prague.⁴ On the Party side, his career began as a military commissar, and his ties with Khrushchev are due largely to the fact that the First Secretary was Member of the Military Council on Konev's front during the war. Thus political rather than military considerations seem to have inspired his appointment as Commander-in-Chief in East Germany.

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³Tass, 2nd January 1958.

⁴Biographic Directory of the USSR, Scarecrow Press, N.Y. 1958,

LEGENDARY RED ARMY FIGURE RETURNS

London Times
August 12, 1961

The recall from retirement of Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Koniev and his appointment to one of his old commands as Supreme Commander of Soviet Forces in Germany is one more demonstration from the Soviet side that, in case of need, it is prepared to fight a conventional war over the access routes to Berlin.

The 64-year-old veteran who was responsible for the forcing of the Dnieper and the destruction of Field-Marshal von Bock's forces on the Smolensk front in 1941 became known during the war as an exponent of the method of taking cities by severing the approach roads. The son of a central Russian peasant family, and possessing the same talent for proverbs as Mr. Khrushchev, he said during the war that "a city is like the branch of a tree. Sever the roads leading to it, and the city will fall."

Joining the ranks of the Tsar's Army 45 years ago, Koniev fought in the Red Army during the revolution, commanding an armoured train in the Far East, where he returned in the thirties to lead the Second Red Banner Army. He first became known outside Russia when he commanded the counter-offensive on the Kalinin front in 1941.

Beria Trial

He was made a Marshal in 1944. Troops under his command liberated Prague, and after the war he commanded Soviet Forces in Austria. In 1953 he presided at the trial of Beria, Stalin's secret police chief, who was condemned and shot.

Koniev's proximity to Mr. Khrushchev can be seen in the fact that in 1957 he bitterly denounced his old commanding officer, Marshal Zhukov, when he was dismissed as Defence Minister and divested of membership of the central committee and presidium. Koniev was Supreme Commander of the Warsaw Pact Forces from May 1955, until July last year when he retired on grounds of ill health.

A man of somewhat morose temperament and few words, his hard-set jaws and shaven head earned him the nickname of "the tank". However the dancing mischievous blue eyes reveal the alertness of mind which produced the military style which acquired almost legendary proportions in the Red Army. His campaigns have been characterized by swift, oblique movements, flanking attacks and a skilful use of guerrillas and the element of surprise.

Caught off Balance

His style was probably seen at its best in the capture of Kirovgrad, Znamenska and Pyatikhatka, all of which fell as a result of wide, sweeping movements to approaches where the enemy was least prepared. At the crossing of the Dnieper he ordered his men not to wait for pontoons but to cross the river on tree

trunks, barrels and saw-stuffed capes, calculating successfully that the enemy's unreadiness would be greater than his own. Furthermore he established 18 separate bridgeheads on a 60-mile front when the enemy expected a concentration of forces for a breakthrough.

Possessing a renowned library on the subject, Koniev's knowledge of military history is profound. He reads German and English and spent a considerable time in a study of military theory in the Soviet Army's academies. In his work he has a passion for accuracy, calculates long, smoking hard and gives orders in a low, hoarse voice. At the same time he cultivates close relationships with his men, whom he addresses as "brothers."