

RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

COMMUNIST AREA

This material was prepared for the use of the editors and policy staff of Radio Free Europe.

0603

USSR: Military

4 June 1970

MARSHAL GRECHKO

Andrei Antonovich Grechko was born in the village of Golodayevka (now called Kuybyshevo) in Rostov Oblast, Ukraine, in 1903. He was born in a peasant family, and joined the Red Army in 1919. He graduated from the Taganrog Cavalry School in 1926. To this day he still has the southern good looks and nonchalant appearance of the better type of Ukrainian cavalry officer of pre-war days. He joined the Communist Party in 1928, and graduated from the Frunze Military Academy in 1936. When Germany attacked Poland in 1939 Grechko was commander of an infantry regiment which fought in the subsequent Soviet attack on Finland. He remained on the Finnish front until 1941, becoming the operations officer of an army corps. In 1941 he graduated from the General Staff Academy, and was sent to command a division.

By 1942 he was already a corps commander, and during 1942-43 he successively led the 12th, 47th, 18th and 56th Armies. In 1943 he was promoted to Deputy Commander of the 1st Guards Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front. Later in 1943 he took over the command of the 1st Guards Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front, and in 1944 he was made Commander of the 4th Ukrainian Front in the West of the country. The major war-time operations in which he took a prominent part were the defense of the Transcaucasus in 1942, the liberation of the North Caucasus (the fighting round Krasnodar), the Taman Peninsula and Kiev in 1943, the battles for the Carpathians (1944) and operations in Moravska-Ostrava in 1945.

For the next eight years (1945-53) he was Commander of the Kiev Military District, and here he developed his acquaintance with N.S. Khrushchev who was political representative of the Military Council of the District during the war and head of the Ukrainian C.P. until 1947. When Khrushchev became First Secretary of the C.C., CPSU, after Stalin's death, Grechko was promoted to become Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Forces in Germany.

In June 1953 he personally led the operation which suppressed the rising in East Berlin and the other cities of East Germany. In March 1955 he was duly rewarded by promotion to the rank of Marshal, and from that day until late in 1969 fourteen years later, the Soviet Forces in Germany were never commanded by an officer of lower rank than General of the Army. (The present incumbent, Kulikov, is only a Colonel-General).

In 1957, before the fall of Marshal Zhukov, Grechko was made Commander-in-Chief of the Land Forces, and he was simultaneously appointed a First Deputy Minister of Defense. He appears to have helped the "Ukrainian faction" of Khrushchev, Konev, and Malinovsky in the removal of Zhukov from power. In 1960 Grechko was promoted again, to become Supreme Commander of the Warsaw Pact Forces, and after Malinovsky's death in 1968, he became Minister of Defense.

He was made a full member of the Central Committee in 1961 at the 22nd Congress, but in view of his advanced years (he is already 67) it seems improbable that further political promotion, up to Politbureau level, awaits him. The Zhukov and Voroshilov cases appear to have put an end to the acceptance by the Party of representation for the Marshals in the supreme decision-making body in Moscow.

A first-class organizer (as the invasion of Czechoslovakia showed), Grechko is also a leader who takes pains to ensure that his troops are well equipped. He displays no great political ambition, but he is an excellent tactician -- or diplomat -- when it comes to squeezing the maximum finance and the latest weaponry out of the Politbureau.

Grechko is an indefatigable traveller, who visited Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Egypt and Poland in 1968. He went to Pakistan, Hungary, India, Czechoslovakia (where he appears to have played a major part in the removal of Dubcek), the Mediterranean, Poland, East Germany, and Afghanistan in 1969. In 1970 he has so far been reported in East Berlin, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Byelorussia, with an invitation to visit Norway still outstanding. Averaging more than six journeys abroad each year, it is clear that Grechko is by no means a desk-bound bureaucrat, and it is sometimes hard to tell just where his military responsibilities shade off into semi-diplomatic or arms-dealing activity.

His popularity must be limited by comparison with Marshal Zhukov, for example, but at least his appearance is less Neanderthal than that of Marshal Malinovsky. However, appearances are usually deceptive, and the efficiency with which he, Yakubovsky and Pavlovsky crushed Czechoslovakia overnight, the patience with which he is building up a strong air and naval position in Egypt, and the ruthlessness with which he responded to the Chinese probing on the Siberian and Kazakh borders in 1969 all argue that Grechko is a much more dangerous opponent than Malinovsky, who perpetrated the blunder of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, could ever have been.

r.r.g.