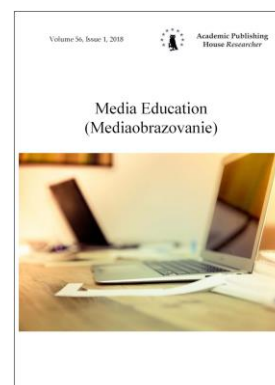




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Interview

“I Played a Major Role in the Destroyed Movie ‘*Moment of Truth*’ (‘*In August of 1944*’)”

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Abstract

Alexander Ivanov's acting career was quite short – from 1974 to 1986. During this time, he played roles in two dozen films (*Goal Choice*, *Pseudonym: Lukach*, *Close Distance*, *Life is Beautiful*, *Sashka*, *From the Life of Alexander Blok*, *Red Bells*, *The File of a Man in the Mercedes*, etc.). But his main role in the film adaptation of the famous novel by Vladimir Bogomolov *In August of 1944... (Moment of Truth)*, alas, has remained unknown to the audience...

There are almost no memories of the details of the shooting process of this unfortunate destroyed film at the moment. The existing publications, as a rule, are reduced to describing the conflict between the film director V. Žalakevičius (1930–1996) and the writer V. Bogomolov (1926–2003).

The performer of one of the three main roles in this film – Alexander Ivanov – agreed to give this exclusive interview.

Keywords: Alexander Ivanov, interview, films, role, *Moment of Truth*.

1. Introduction

Alexander Ivanov's acting career was quite short – from 1974 to 1986. During this time, he played roles in two dozen films (*Goal Choice*, *Pseudonym: Lukach*, *Close Distance*, *Life is Beautiful*, *Sashka*, *From the Life of Alexander Blok*, *Red Bells*, *The File of a Man in the Mercedes*, etc.). But his main role in the film adaptation of the famous novel by V. Bogomolov *In August of 1944... (Moment of Truth)*, alas, has remained unknown to the audience...

In March 2020, the channel "Film History" published a small note entitled "*In August of '44.../Moment of Truth (USSR, 1975): a film that will never be seen by viewers*" (Fedorov, 2020) that 400,000 people have read.

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2. Interview

The performer of one of the three main roles in this film – Alexander Ivanov – agreed to give this exclusive interview.

– *How did you get to the shooting of the film "Moment of Truth"?*

I'll start a bit from a distance. After graduating from school in Krasnodar with a gold medal, I entered the Moscow Institute of Oil and Gas Industry, participated in the institute amateur activities. Studying there in the third year, I accidentally learned that that the crew of the TV series *Walks in the Tormerents* needs extras. So I was on the set for the first time and even played a small episodic role. And so after the end of filming a former classmate of famous Russian actor and film director Sergei Bondarchuk – Adiba Shirakhmedova – came to me and invited me enter to the State Institute of Cinematography, because this year in the studio of Sergei Bondarchuk there were vacancies, and the maestro was looking for talented guys... So, quite unexpectedly for myself, in the fall of 1973, I was on the entrance exams for the additional actor's set in the Institute of Cinematography. Successfully passed the creative competition and was accepted for the first year. For insurance the first month I even combined studies in two universities, but then finally decided, making a choice in favor of State Institute of Cinematography.

I was completely involved in the learning process... And then one day I was again found by Adiba Shirakhmedova, who then worked as a second director at famous Soviet film director V. Žalakevičius, and offered me to read the script of the film based on the novel *In August 1944...* and at the same time pay attention to the role of Lieutenant Andrei Blinov. I chuckled – overnight – read and the script, and then the novel, which was then very popular, and, of course, caught fire desire to play in this film.

Soon the tests were scheduled: Žalakevičius himself gave me the lines, and in the end he chose me to play Lieutenant Blinov. And Adiba Shirahmedova persuaded Sergey Bondarchuk (who was not only a Master, but also the head of the department in the State Institute of Cinematography) to give me a one –year free schedule for filming in the film *Moment of Truth*, which was filmed mainly in Lithuania (Vilnius, Druskinikai) and at the field site "Belarusfilm" in Smolevichi.



Alexander Ivanov as Lieutenant Blinov
(the author of this photo and their owner is a talented artist and photographer
Alexander Samoylov)

– Have you seen the previous films of V. Žalakevičius before the shooting of "Moment of Truth"?

Yes, I've seen Žalakevičius' films, especially his picture *Nobody Wanted to Die* (1965), made a strong impression on me, and as I understood later, *Moment of Truth* was shot in this truthful, tough, ascetic, male style. In my opinion, it turned out even stronger than in *Nobody Wanted to Die*.

– How did V. Žalakevičius conduct rehearsals with you? What were his requirements for acting? How, in general, were the shootings held?

At the time of filming I was twenty years old, and the director's efforts all sought to portray the truth of life. Look at the faces of the Russian boys in old photographs who went to the front from the school bench. Don't they look like boys? The war has put off its tragic imprint. The costume – makers, makeup artists and prop guys did a great job. We've prepared a worn – out, "sighted" uniform. The plan was to focus on old photos from the war years, not the statutory rules.

For example, in the scene of the group's first exit into the woods there was a "ritual" of preparation: our trio gave to driver Khizhnyak documents enclosed in caps, a belt with a buckle and an automatic rifle. In the right pocket was placed "Walter", behind the trouser belt "Nagan", and in the left pocket of the TT, which on the slang of the individuals was called "mallet" – as an effective striking weapon in the hand-to-hand weapon. In addition, we have always been in good physical shape – with us almost daily engaged in sambo and tactical techniques of counterintelligence veteran detective Colonel Blinkov, who was a consultant on the shoot. I asked him once: "Why the TT, it's not a sighting weapon?" He replied that, firstly, it's a statutory weapon for officers and, secondly, it's an indispensable close combat weapon. Everything was done on a very serious level, not as an example of the current war movie fiction.

Imagine – the first exit of the film crew for life, in the forest. Fog, five o'clock in the morning, sunrise is just beginning. And here is a one-and-a-half meter, at the wheel of which – driver Khizhnyak (B. Brondukov), goes to the field, stops ... Body tarpaulin is reclining, from there jumps Alekhin (S. Shakurov) and commands: "Lieutenant Blinov! Follow me!" I'm running after him. The glade is empty. I look around – nobody, I say: "Captain Alekhin! Captain Alekhin!" Silence... And suddenly strong hands from behind intercept my throat and begin to choke me... I resist, my hand breaks down, and the camera shoots my face, pressed to the ground, on which you can see the bushes of ripe strawberries, specially planted props... And so the camera slowly slides on my face, strawberries and passes on the hand of the hero Shakurov. And then his close – up and calm voice: "Quiet, Lieutenant, the forest does not like noise"... Thus, the entire scene was built by the director in action, and played the phrase of my character, addressed to Tamantsev: "Why don't you like this forest? Berries all around, mushrooms"...

Closer to the finale was another key scene – the director asked to shoot an episode of the military combing of the forest to release the guys from the military school – blush, muzzle. They were in new military uniforms sitting at a long wooden table, and from the edge sat and ate his porridge my character – skinny, tightened "wolf". And then Colonel Polyakov (Nikolai Trofimov) came out of the staff tent, called: "Lieutenant Blinov!" and sent him back to the woods with Alekhin and Tamantsev, when from the general was already given a command to start a army operation ...

Here V. Bogomolov made a comment to Žalakevičius about the behavior of my character, who, having received an order from the colonel, turns around not by statute. I psychologically justified the behavior of my character in this scene by the fact that he had previously felt as if suspended from the final operation to catch saboteurs, was in an anxious wait. And suddenly – such a chance! And Blinov in a joyous impulse allowed himself to forget about the statute for a second...

In general, the preparatory period in *Moment of Truth* was quite long. At first we shot scenes of passages through the streets of Vilnius, it helped us to enter the atmosphere of the film and gradually psychologically prepared us for shooting in key episodes. Because of the filming of the entire "Lithuanian" expedition Žalakevičius did not fit into the schedule, artists sometimes had to paint the yellow leaves of trees to take the autumn look and give the opportunity to stretch the filming period on nature until autumn ...

I was hot back then, doing martial arts, trying to do everything myself. And one day – during the shooting of the jump from the second floor window to the passing "Dodge" – twisted his leg, and was mercilessly scolded by Žalakevičius for giving up the understudy.

V. Žalakevičius all the time emotionally charged us actors, he explained the role is no longer words (as is known, he spoke in Russian with a Lithuanian accent), but gestures, plasticity. He was an outstanding director who saw every frame in all its imagery, including acting speech, mimics, plastics, composition, light and color. He always knew exactly what he wanted to achieve from all the participants in the filming, and was able to convey his vision to each of us. When he and I looked at the film's working materials on the editing table, he made me very precise comments on the nuances of my role, seeking from me a full "empathy" in the character's character.

– *How did your relationship develop with the director and the actors on the set? After all, many of them were already celebrities, and you at that time were a very young actor.*

V. Žalakevičius treated me very warmly, in Vilnius he introduced me to the creative elite there – cinematographers, artists, sculptors ... The actor's ensemble *Moment of Truth* was outstanding. In terms of acting I learned a lot from Sergey Shakurov, Anatoly Azo, Nikolai Trofimov, Borislav Brondukov. Almost all summer of 1975 we spent together, became friends. In relation to me, a novice actor, from their side there was absolutely no arrogance of the masters. We talked on equal terms.

It turned out that B. Brondukov was then filmed in two films at the same time – in *Moment of Truth* and in the film by Emil Lotyanu *Tabor goes into the sky*, so he had to constantly in Vilnius to move from one film set to another... And we went to him visit and watched as they sang and danced gypsies ...

– *It is widely known that writer V. Bogomolov was dissatisfied with the film footage shown to him: "And these are counterintelligence?! Unshaven, in dirty uniforms... The officers' uniforms aren't ironed, the cloaks are stale, and the boots are dirty. ... I won't put my name under this film. Change the names of the heroes... Well, do what you want!" Moreover, he wrote a letter to the director of the film studio "Mosfilm" N.T. Sizov: "Dear Nikolai Trofimovich! 1) I do not object to the continuation of the studio's work on the film adaptation of "Moment of Truth" of V. Žalakevičius or with the invitation of another director (as suggested by the studio), provided that the main idea of the novel, the system of images and prevent stunned and westernized characters. 2) As I told you 16.02.1975, repeated and confirmed the day before yesterday in a letter to the Chief Editor of the Soviet Goskino D. Orlov, I agree to any use of the material shot last year by the studio without mentioning my name in the credits and mentioning my novel".*

– *What can you say about it? In particular, about "westernization of characters"? Did you know during the filming of the conflict between director and writer?*

Yes, I learned about this conflict when shooting was stopped, although I had not met with V. Bogomolov himself. Of course, we can say that in *Moment of Truth* there was a kind of "westernization", to put it in modern language, because Žalakevičius (as opposed to the director's version of M. Ptashuk) tried to get away from literalism in his interpretation of the novel, putting its pages into action. But, for example, Nikita Mikhalkov was easily allowed to take off a real western in *He's his own among strangers*. And the hard truth of *Moment of Truth* caused rejection... Well, for example, in the final of the film there was a frame, when the camera was shooting Alekhin lying with his head punctured (the German saboteur was trained to beat on the slaughter), and the flies were already coming down on the blood, and it was not clear whether he was alive or not... Yes, it is hard, but it is true...

In my opinion, Žalakevičius saw in the characters certain prototypes, namely: Alekhin – as if a famous chess player – analyst, master of calculations of different variants and moves. Tamantsev, Taman... – a hero, a stately, confident, powerful. Blinov is a rookie, for whom much is new... Through mistakes and miscalculations young, green, but on the move gaining experience, which led him to the final junction, where he shot the main enemy. And all in all, three heroes, each unique, but together – power. And there wasn't much to look at from the westerns – it was deep and our way...

– *Have you seen the film materials?*

– The shooting of the film was already virtually completed. And even more. There was only one staff scene left to shoot with General Egorov and something else in the *Mosfilm* pavilion, and after B. Babkauskas died they were looking for a double actor. It was time for this – the set was being built on *Mosfilm*. That's where it all started... And the film in draft was almost ready. Deadline for the film was in a hurry, because everything that was filmed in Vilnius and Druskininkai had to be remade, because of the chemical failure of some film footage. Žalakevičius' friends from the Lithuanian Film Studio joined in. By that time the group had already moved to the *Belarusfilm* field in Smolevichi. And at night I moved from Lithuania to Belarus and back, as all the passages of Blinov in the city by director A. Grikevičius (1935–2011) and operator D. Pečiūra. Because of the outgoing time, the expedition was brought a mounting table and sent an editor, and V. Žalakevičius was mounting all the material on the way out. I watched the material on the assembly table with the director, there was also a review of the defective material so that I could take into account the shortcomings of the filming.

We returned to Moscow with the film almost ready. I missed a year of classes and immediately plunged into my studies waiting for a call to sound...

– *How and when did you find out that shooting the film was stopped? What was the reaction of the film crew?*

Our entire crew was set up to get the best results, everyone was confident that we were involved in the production of an outstanding piece of art. And when we were told in the autumn of 1975 that the shooting of *Moment of Truth* had been put on hold (that was the wording at first), it certainly upset everyone...

– *Have you had any friendships with the director and participants since 1975?*

Alas, somehow everything fell apart ... We were already looking forward to the future success of *Moment of Truth* – festivals, meetings with the audience and so on. And then were so upset that even to speak and remember our "dream project" was painful... It probably separated us... True, with actress Elena Safonova, we then met again and again at Institute of Cinematography, where she entered the acting department ...

– *Have you seen a film adaptation of Bogomolov's novel of 2001?*

– I tried to watch it, but immediately realized that M. Ptashuk's film turned out to be illustrative, verbose, in my opinion, much worse than that of Žalakevičius. And the cast, to put it mildly, was inferior to our...

– *Did you realize then that the role of Lieutenant Blinov could be your big acting hour?*

Of course I did. And I was filled with pride and joyful expectation when in 1975 with my own eyes I saw on the wall of one of the central cinemas of my native Krasnodar advertising poster *Moment of Truth* with my photo as Lieutenant Blinov. Of course, if this film was released on the screens of the country in 1976, it would have been a triumphant success. And my acting biography would certainly have been different...

– *And what happened after you graduated from Institute of Cinematography?*

Unfortunately, S. Bondarchuk – in contrast to S. Gerasimov – almost did not practice shooting his students in their own films, although once I took off with his master in a small episode in the film I. Talankin *Goal Choice*, and then he invited me to a small role of Commandant of Winter in his *Red Bells*, where my partner in one of the scenes was Franco Nero ...

Thus, on the course I was the first to get the main role, but as a result, on the defense of my diploma in 1977 was shown only in the play (the role of Gaev in *The Cherry Orchard*) without film

work. But after the blow of the ban on the movie *Moment of Truth*, I did not break, played in the theater – studio of the Cinema Actor, worked in the cinema, on dubbing.

I had another acting chance – shooting in a film dedicated to the centenary of Alexander Blok (*And the eternal battle... From the life of Alexander Blok*, 1980, directed by D. Barshchevsky – A.F.). I starred in the title role, a lot of hope for this work, expecting that this picture will be an event. But, unfortunately, the film turned out to be directed, illustrative and did not cause any public resonance...

And then I left *Mosfilm* (the last film with my participation was shot in 1986) and went to work in the Russian Orthodox Church. At first I worked as a church gardener, then I started to do ecological landscape design for the improvement of Moscow churches and the Holy Trinity Sergius Lavra. These works have been awarded at the Best Yard in Moscow competition. Then I was able to recreate the traditions of making lamps from colored glass, porcelain and bronze: now my works are available in almost all Christian churches around the world, including in Jerusalem and Athos. I have been awarded orders of the Russian Orthodox Church, medals and certificates of various exhibitions of ecclesiastical art for my ecclesiastical services, so it is possible to consider that in the ecclesiastical environment I have self –realized ...

(Alexander Fedorov asked questions to Alexander Ivanov)

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Filmography of Alexander Ivanov

- 1974. Target selection
- 1975. In August of '44.../*Moment of Truth*
- 1976. Pseudonym: Lukac
- 1977. Dialogue
- 1978. Close range
- 1979. Here on my land
- 1979. Life Is Beautiful | La Vita è bella
- 1980. And the eternal battle... From the life of Alexander Blok
- 1980. I wish you success
- 1981. Front in the enemy rear
- 1981. Sashka
- 1982. I saw the birth of a new world
- 1982. Red Bells
- 1983. Hurricane comes unexpectedly
- 1983. Karastoyanov Family
- 1985. Inconvenient person
- 1985. There lived a brave captain
- 1986. A lone bus in the rain
- 1986. Dossier of a man in a Mercedes
- 1986. End of Operation Resident