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Why the Film *In August 1944th (Moment of Truth)*, Filmed in 1975, Was Not Released On the Screen

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Abstract

The organizer of film production, educator in Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), Honored Worker of Culture of the Russian Federation Boris Krishtul began his creative film career back in 1960, when he entered the correspondence department of the Faculty of Economics of VGIK and got a job as an administrator of the film crew of A. Rowe's film *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*. Then B. Krishtul worked as an administrator on the set of the films *Sofya Perovskaya*, *Retribution*, *Red Tent*, *The Seagull*, *Egor Bulychov and others*, *This sweet word is freedom!*, *The right to jump*.

In the 1970s – 1990s, B. Krishtul was the executive producer of such well-known films as *Front behind the front line*, *Crew*, *Say a word about the poor hussar*, *Winning a lone businessman*, *Arsonists*, *Furious bus*, etc.

One of the brightest pages of Boris Krishtul's creative biography is his work as a film director on the set of the film adaptation of Vladimir Bogomolov's famous novel *In August 1944 (Moment of Truth)*, which was filmed in 1975, but, alas, never reached the audience.

Keywords: Boris Krishtul, In August 1944th, film.

1. Introduction

The organizer of film production, educator in Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), Honored Worker of Culture of the Russian Federation Boris Krishtul began his creative film career back in 1960, when he entered the correspondence department of the Faculty of Economics of VGIK and got a job as an administrator of the film crew of A. Rowe's film *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*. Then B. Krishtul worked as an administrator on the set of the films *Sofya Perovskaya*, *Retribution*, *Red Tent*, *The Seagull*, *Egor Bulychov and others*, *This sweet word is freedom!*, *The right to jump*.

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There are still many legends around this film. Also published are interviews of the actors who played the main roles in it – Sergei Shakurov ([Shakurov, 2012](#)) and Alexander Ivanov ([Ivanov, 2020](#)), memoirs of the writer Vladimir Bogomolov.

Boris Krishtul kindly agreed to give an interview about the filming of this film to film historian Alexander Fedorov.

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– *I read with great interest the chapter from your book (Krishtul, Artemov, 2002) devoted to the filming of the film “Moment of Truth”. In it, you describe in detail the conflict between the author of the novel “Moment of Truth” (“In August 1944”), writer Vladimir Bogomolov (1924–2003) and director Vytautas Žalakyavičius (1930-1996). Since March 1975, you have been the executive producer of this film adaptation, and, of course, you have been privy to all the details of the events. You also cite in your book the following fragment from the letter of the writer to the general director of the studio N.T. Sizov: “The whole trouble with the director's script is that the director has the most remote, incorrect idea of the people and events that he must depict, and with the non-intervention of the studio, he persists in his delusions and his ignorance. These delusions of the director and his ignorance of the subject of the image cannot lead to anything good. Sincerely, V. Bogomolov, 22.06.75”.*

– The conflict between the writer and director began to flare up literally immediately after V. Bogomolov read the director's script for the film. Instead of discussing it with us, Bogomolov for some reason stated his position in a letter addressed to the General Director of the studio. Such an act offended the director. V. Žalakyavičius “stood a pose” and asked me to protect him from contacts with V. Bogomolov. I found myself between a heavy hammer and a massive anvil. How to suppress the brewing squabble? No matter how hard he tried to convince the writer what a wonderful director is making the film, he heard the same thing in response: he doesn't understand ... he didn't fight ... he's off topic ... The director, on the other hand, was laconic in relation to the author and limited himself mainly to unprintable words.

After showing Vladimir Bogomolov the working materials of the film, I realized from his face that he did not like the material. – And these are counterintelligence officers?! Bogomolov exclaimed with pathos. – Unshaven, in dirty tunics (as if I forgot that this is how I described them, crawling through forests and swamps for weeks). Your director didn't fight, he doesn't know what the film is about...

– *In several publications in the press (and in your book, too), the following lines of the writer from a letter to the general director of the “Mosfilm” studio N.T. Sizov: “Since the director persists in his ignorance, in his delusions without the intervention of the studio, I consider it necessary to warn the studio that if all the necessary amendments are not made to the director's script, I will not be able to be responsible for the ideological content and artistry of the picture, and I will have only one way out: remove your name from the credits. Sincerely, V. Bogomolov, 22.06.75”.* From which it seemed to follow that the writer gave up on the film and retired. Is it so?

– Alas, no. Although at first it seemed so. “Vladimir Osipovich, maybe we'll put a caption “based on”? I asked Bogomolov. He immediately agreed and assured me that he would “step aside”, that he would not be in the credits ... He left me at parting – in general, do what you want...

But in the fall of 1975, we received a telegram from Moscow: "Stop filming and urgently arrive in Moscow." It turned out that, having learned that V. Bogomolov had filed a lawsuit against us, on November 26, 1975, Sizov signed order No. 705 to suspend the production of the film. Its preamble read: “In connection with the creative disagreements that arose over the footage between the author and the director of the film *Moment of Truth*, and also because of the death of artist B. Babkauskas...”.

On December 5, 1975, a meeting of the Moscow City Court was held on the claim of V.O. Bogomolov about the prohibition of filming the film *Moment of Truth* at the film studio *Mosfilm*. The court ruled: “Production of the film should be suspended and no filming should be made without the consent of the author. To try to find an acceptable solution for the author and the film studio and continue the work in order to prevent unprofitable expenses for the film studio.

By the way, in his now published diary, V. Bogomolov again returned to the fate of the work by V. Žalakyavičius, and what surprised me most of all was that he never remembered the trial, as if it never happened! The writer claimed that the true reason for the closing of the film was the death of the performer of the role of General Yegorov. Of course, the death of the wonderful Lithuanian artist B. Babkauskas was a heavy blow for the film crew, but our film did not die because the artist was gone – the outstanding writer Vladimir Bogomolov “buried” the living picture of the talented director with his own hands.

– *Have you ever seen the official text of the contract in which V. Bogomolov transferred the rights to film adaptation to “Mosfilm”? Were there clauses in this text that allowed the writer – in case of disagreement with the final result – to sue the studio? Or veto filming?*

– We filmed in 1975, and in May 1973 the USSR joined the Geneva Convention for the Protection of Copyrights (World..., 1952). This prompted the writer to sue.

– *Were there any other attempts to save the film after the trial?*

– Two weeks after the trial, a special meeting of the secretariat of the Union of Cinematographers of the USSR took place, at which eminent directors branded Bogomolov with pathos and defended V. Žalakyavičius. But anybody would not have been able to change the position of the author. Shooting of the film was stopped forever, the crew disbanded... “Clinic,” as my deputy put it, handing over the costumes and props of the unfinished film... Perhaps V. Bogomolov is right about something. After all, he is the master of his work. But the fact that millions of viewers have lost the opportunity to watch a beautiful picture (everyone who has seen the filmed material is sure of this), the fault lies with Bogomolov. Let it remain on his conscience...

– *The history of Soviet cinema knows many cases when the working material of a film unfinished for some reason was deposited by the studio with the State Film Fund. After all, even then it was clear that we were talking about the work of an outstanding director. Why didn't you insist then, in 1976, that all the filmed materials of “Moment of Truth” end up on the shelves of the State Film Fund?*

– This is always the decision of the film studio management. All filmed material was destroyed.

– *You are one of the few who have seen the entire material of the “Moment of Truth”. What were your personal impressions? From acting, directing? If this film were to be completed after all, would it (given the huge popularity of the novel) become the box office champion, surpassing “Pirates of the 20th Century” in the number of millions of viewers?*

– I know many examples when the material was called brilliant, but the finished film turned out to be mediocre, and vice versa. I remember how they praised the material of the films *Red Bells*, *Memory*, and how they scolded the material of the films *The Ballad of a Soldier*, *Belorussky Station*, *Burn, Burn My Star*... It's like judging Rodin's sculpture by the hand, ear or shoe... You have to look at the whole!

Filmography

In August 1944.../Moment of Truth. USSR, 1975. Directed by Vytautas Žalakevičius. Screenwriter Vladimir Bogomolov (based on his own novel of the same name). Actors: Sergey Shakurov, Anatoly Azo, Alexander Ivanov, Bronius Babkauskas, Borislav Brondukov, Nikolay Trofimov, Mihai Volontir, Elena Safonova, Sergey Sazontiev, Boris Shcherbakov and others.

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