

ON THE MANY NAMES OF ZOZO

by Mike Pearce

Photographs via the author unless stated otherwise.

A LONG TIME AGO, I wrote an article about Zozo for this journal. It appeared in Volume 18, having waited a number of years to be published, but finally, Paul Leaman, then our Editor, inserted it, saying that 'it was different.' This, in fact, is a fair comment. It was not like anything which had appeared previously. Re-reading it, I now think that I was being a bit naïve; only I believed things Zozo wrote, rather than realising that he was justifying himself to the world.

The article began: 'I first came upon "Zozo" when I bought his book *Dans l'Air et Dans la Boue (In the Air and in the Mud)* second-hand, in a bookshop in Bordeaux.' I did not then realise that it is one of the rarest and most fascinating of memoirs of the first Air War, since it was just a scruffy little paperback of which I had never heard. I bought it simply because it was about World War One flying and very cheap!

The book was not easy to read; indeed the first owner had given up about page 100 for, after that, the edges of the pages were not even cut! What is more, the book is couched in the most difficult language, full of slang terms, some current in the Edwardian period, some military, some peculiar to the flying services and not a few simply unrepeatable. Also I was not quite certain at first that 'Zozo' was the same person as the author, 'Jean Violan', due to his habit of dropping, at times, into the third person, which is really confusing.

But who was 'Zozo'? I had no idea and could not find a way to discover his name. The book is almost totally anonymous, although a carelessly edited clue remains. 'Are you Sergeant D...?' asked one officer of the author. The search for his identity took me several years. The first breakthrough came from another rare book, *Souvenirs d'une Vieille Tige* by Antoine Odier. One paragraph reads, 'Let me tell you about "Zozo". He is known, more or less officially, as Dawrichery. But it is quite probable that that was not his real name since Stalin, who was his brother, was not called that...'

Were Zozo and Stalin brothers? This is just possibly true, (half-brothers, anyway) and Zozo even claimed it at one time. Stalin, whose real name was Ioziv Vissionarevitch Zhugashvili, officially had only sisters¹. However, there would seem to be four candidates for the dubious honour of being his father.

His mother, Katerina, had married Zhugashvili, a handsome but faintly disreputable shoemaker who became more and more unstable as time went on and gradually acquired the nickname 'Crazy Beso'. When he took to beating his wife, she placed herself under the protection of Damien Davrishishvili², Prefect of Police in Gori, Georgia, who began a notorious affair with the pretty mother. This became so well known that Damien's wife left him and went back to her mother for a year. When the two were finally reconciled, Zozo was the result.



Stalin in 1905.



The young Zozo.

He was thus about eighteen months or so younger than the other Ioziv. They certainly knew each other well and were boyhood friends. Stalin also used the nickname 'Sosso', or 'Zozo', before adopting 'Stalin' – which one account suggests means 'Man of Steel' – a more seriously revolutionary title³.

Other possibilities for fathering him, apart from 'Crazy Beso', were a wealthy neighbour who became the lad's godfather and paid for his education, and the local priest – Stalin did say at one stage that he was the son of a priest, but that was when he was trying to get into seminary school! 'Crazy Beso' not only beat his wife but also the 'little bastard' who was officially his son, so it is easy to see what his opinion was.

This nasty little history at least gives us Zozo's real name at last: Iosiv Davrishishvili.

Our Zozo was born on 23 October 1882 at Gori, Georgia.⁴ He later called himself Jacques-Joseph de Davrichewy (the surname being a French variation of the Georgian one and spelt with several variations).

Although a student at the Sorbonne in Paris (his father, and those of a couple of his friends, had got them out of their native country due to their revolutionary ideas), Zozo went back to Georgia for the revolution of 1905, in which he said that he played a prominent part. He related the story in *Dans l'Air...* of how he organised a robbery of the Treasury at Dusheti, to obtain funds for the revolutionaries, by getting a sympathiser in the Army to forge an order to the local Army Commander to send as many of his men as possible up into the mountains, to round up the revolutionaries who were gathering there. In the meantime, young Zozo and his gang dressed up in army uniforms, marched down to garrison the Treasury overnight, as the soldiers always did, tied up the staff and rifled the place. I am not quite sure how much to believe of his story of getting 100,000 roubles, for which he said that he was condemned to death in absentia. It might be one of his exaggerations.