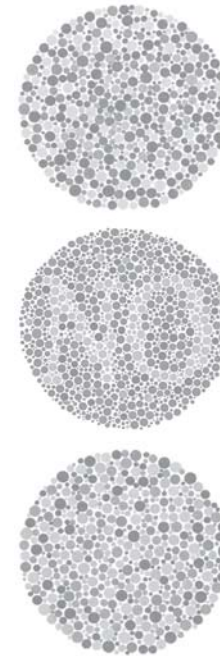


BORIS KORNEV

COLOUR-BLIND

Not All Eyes Can See Enemies

Novel



Kornev B. Colour-blind: Not All Eyes Can See Enemies.

ISBN

Individuals suffering from mild forms of colour blindness, learn to associate colours with certain objects and are usually able to identify these colours in everyday life, as people with normal colour perception. However, their perception is different from the normal one.

...It is impossible to stop being colour-blind.

(Magazine "Health", 1983)

Dedicated to my father's memory...

In our childhood, we used to play war. Perhaps it was our most favourite game. Who is on our side? Who is on Germans'? Those were selected in turn because they were always hated and they always lost. Even when we told our friends some film not about the war we had just seen, we would often call its bad characters "Germans" – so strong were the impressions of the main tragedy of the 20th century. Of course, it had only passed ten years. Someone had lost a father or a brother. Some had lost all of their family... Not many people had a TV then and there were only a couple of films about the war. We surely absorbed all THAT from our parents' stories.

When my father had free time, usually at bedtime, he also told me many interesting stories about the war. Just like a bedtime story. Without going into complicated reasoning about patriotism, about the Motherland and other high concepts, he would just draw a picture of the first battles, retreats, captivity and escape... In my mind they were all mixed up like in a kaleidoscope. In my memory there was only one thing – the actions and events and the fact that my father had been strong and brave.

Another ten years passed, and it was now possible to compare all this with what was described in the books and in the movies. My father once took the whole family to watch the film "The Living and the Dead". I remember him look at us then. He knew we could understand a lot.

Over time, I became more interested in not the action, but the answers to more and more appearing questions. How did he do it and why could not the other people do it? What was the cause of certain actions of different people? I wondered what they had been feeling when they were doing things. Why did they shout, "For the Motherland! For Stalingrad!" when going into the assault, if the machine gunners of the defensive squads were behind them? Why is everything

shown more gently in the film “The Battalions Are Asked to Fire” than in the story of the epic “Exemption”? Just because the second film is separated from the first one by ten years of quiet peaceful life? But then over time everything might wear off...

Gradually, from conversation to conversation the complete picture of everything that had happened with my father in those tragic years for the whole country was becoming clear. Or, to be precise, how and why he had chosen his fate taking such difficult but independent decisions in those critical moments.

Of course, the choice is always inevitable. This is the only way to change the relationship of man with himself and with the world. Any of those choices as a litmus test reveals the true essence of each person. War only makes it more ruthless. It seems to me that my father was always determined by the search for his place in the great cycle of events and understanding the effects of making difficult decisions, which was his personal responsibility.

Being strong, considerable and self-sufficient, my father tried to do everything himself all his life. Before the war, in the war and after the war. By the make of his character he was always closer to the nature than to people. After retiring he lived in his village with his wife six months a year. His grandchildren used to come and stay with them in the summer. He was needed. When his wife fell ill, he was looking after her and after her death he had been living on his own for ten years. He cooked his own meals, he proudly fed his sons and grandchildren with cabbage soup when relatives came to visit him. He kept his wardrobes in order. Everything was always washed, ironed and folded up nicely.

...He had lived for ninety years. One day he said to his son, “It is time to end this story...”

Recently there has been a broadcast of the parade in Red Square. A journalist surrounded himself with young boys and began to question them on the air, “Do you know, guys, who reviewed the troops at Victory parade in 1945?” The boys looked at each other, searching for clues. The one who was bolder than the others, mumbled timidly, probably as he used to do in the classroom, making sure he could correct himself, just in case, “M-m, was it Lenin?” I can not exactly describe what I felt then. Some rare strong surprise turning into fear. That feel-

ing was sharper than those sensations which are experienced today by many of us, stuck in endless traffic jams, or seeing people looking for food waste in the rubbish bins. That is the economy. It is also complicated. But this is history, the genetic memory of our people. Such things can be corrected only through the generations. That is if they can be corrected. Spiritual immaturity and social indifference, gradually affecting today's youth, can completely distort young people's mind, and then we will all inevitably come to an even greater tragedy than the one that occurred in the last century.

I guess everyone needs to put an effort to prevent this trouble. Everyone needs to do something – even if it is scanty – the right thing for children, history, memory. Maybe then the new generations of boys will get the awareness of their involvement in the complex history of the country, and for each of them it will suddenly become clear what the Motherland begins with...

The novel “Colour-blind” is about the most tragic period in the history of Europe and about a particular person – a small grain of sand in this cycle of hardship and sacrifice in a whirlpool of political lies and hypocrisy. It is those, tens, hundreds of thousands of such self-confident but not convinced, first slowed down and eventually stopped the spinning trouble flywheel. It gradually, with great difficulty, began to rotate in the opposite direction engaging more and more people in this grief whirlwind. Most often, they did it without ideological and selfless heroism, not noticing changeable variety of colours of the artificial and superficial. The main thing was for the dense layers of mud and lies TO SEE THE GOOD. It was equally important TO SEE EVIL under the glittering in the light, thickly smeared jam.

But how difficult it is! After all, even seventy years after the tragic events there is too much easily painted in different colours all in a row, and then for the sake of short-term political expediency as easily repainted again.



B. Kornev

PROLOGUE

Б К О Т О Е П Е

—Near the mouth of the river Lemovzha there is a high mountain. From its top you can see the snow-covered Luga break the dark blue spot of sharp tips of firs with its white strip. For a skier it is the most dangerous and beautiful place in all the way from Khotnezha to Sabsk. You need to carefully look ahead and hold fast to your legs bent in your knees. And as luck would have, the wet sharp snow flakes are flying towards you and hurting your face and covering your eyes. God forbid, if on a steep long slope between occasional pines there is pit or a root – you won't have time to go round or keep your balance...

After that there would be another fifteen miles along the Luga, then time to go home. The boy is twelve. He is a village postman and he must deliver mail every day. In winter he does it on skis and in summer by foot running barefoot through the woods.

People treat him differently. Some are looking forward to seeing him. Others are scared and take any mail from him with a bad feeling. He will remember one of them for the rest of his life. He was said to be a painter and to have been in exile since before the revolution. The postman often delivered him several papers and magazines and the man drew steady round letters of his surname "Dokukin" with a sharp pencil. He would always smell of paints and his sleek, brushed short and already greying hair was lightly covered with white paint. In his lounge, in the corner on a bench there were neatly stacked canvases. Sometimes shiny black cars pulled over near the painter's little house. Inside them there would be a whole family of some officer or high-rank military man in the uniform with red stripes. Dokukin painted their portraits.

"You are quite late today," he would say instructively but with respect to the young postman. "Why is there no "Art Almanac" or yesterday's "Pravda"?" Usually they would drink tea with small colourful candies and Dokukin would have long conversations about everything

with the boy as if he was a grown-up. About the war, about Lenin and Stalin, about communism. It was clear and interesting.

Sometimes the painter would hand the postman a brush and invite him to the easel to colour in some little things: the clouds in the sky or the same oval brooch on the dress of another warlord's wife. Then he would retreat slightly to the side, then stare at the boy, then his art, and say with a gentle pat on his head, "You are quite an impressionist, Fyodor, you definitely are..."

In the summer they visited an old Swedish cemetery that was lost in the bushes near the village of the same name as the river, and looked at the tombs. Later, having crossed the bridge, already on the other side of the Lemovzha, Dokukin showed a steep cliff of the yellow-red sand. He called it "time-section" and he would talk about the largest extinction of all living organisms that had supposedly taken place over three hundred million years ago. They had died out and sunk to the bottom of the great sea, which had been then at this point. This is how the whole mountain had formed.

They walked out, winding through the woods, to the top of the cliff. There they could see everything at a glance: the village of Khotnezha, the bend of the river, the bridge and the domes of the Church of the Holy Virgin...

Before the boy left, Dokukin always gave him a book and coloured prints of paintings by some artist. At night, climbing with a candle onto the stove, the boy would stare at them for a long time, and then slowly read to the sound of rain. He would enjoy the letters and words, little realizing the meaning of what he saw and read. He only remembered something about an Angel with a sword, about the Battle of the Ice, Minin and Pozharsky, Suvorov's victories... On the cover there was a Russian hero, fighting a whole army of enemies with an axe.

One day the boy's father tore some pages from the book, wrapped tobacco into them and smoked. The guy cried for a long time. He was scared to lose the new and tempting world of Dokukin and his clever books. Mother severely scolded father and tried to comfort her son as much as she could. "You need to buy the same one in town," she said and gave him some money. Together they went to the post office head. He agreed to buy the book for them in town and later, when the boy stayed on his own, asked him to fix the radio aerial on the highest place in the village, the church cross.

Not many people had been going to the church lately. It had started to break down, the cross had got rusty and the floor had collapsed. The boy tied something to his leg and started climbing up. The iron ladder was creaking and breaking under his feet. The people gathered nearby, they were watching him and sighing, "What an idiot!"

In general, he did fix the aerial. He was about to climb down but the ladder crossbar crackled under his foot, and the guy fell down, waving his arms. He hit the ledge before his unbuttoned jacket got caught on the small dome cross.

...The village radio worked now. The boy's mother was crying all day, and the post office head gave her half a pound of chocolates. A week later she got the new book.

Later Dokukin learned everything and told the boy off. Of course, he could have killed himself! He would say quietly to himself, "This blue-eyed boy is so lucky, he is also responsible. It's just that he is still naive... God bless him!"

PART 1

EVERYTHING ENDED

Е В Е Р Ы Ы Н И Ы Е Н Д Е Д

WITHOUT EVEN STARTING

М И Н О Н Е В Е Н С Т А В И Ы Е

LINE-UP. EUROPE BEFORE THE GREAT WAR

...As none of the leaders of the democratic countries, Stalin was ready at any moment to take scrupulous study of the correlation of forces. And precisely because of his belief that he was the bearer of historical truth, which was a reflection of his ideology, he firmly and resolutely defended the Soviet national interests, without burdening himself with hypocritical, as he thought, morality or personal loyalties.

(Kissinger H. Diplomacy. M., 1997)

It all started with the fact that in August 1929 at the Hague conference, the winners in World War I cancelled the control of the economy and finance in Germany¹. They must have cancelled it as being unnecessary. It was very effectively carried out by another country. Five years before it had provided Germany with loans six times more than the reparations it was paying to the Treaty of Versailles. That was why the US attended the conference in an unobtrusive role of the arbitrator. For only then they could regulate the political aspirations of the European countries with the help of aggressive and financially dependent Germany. The whole history of the Weimar Republic shows that ensuring its “correct” policy was timely cash infusions and financial perturbations controlled by creditors. The key players in determining the strategy of all these processes were central financial institutions of the USA and Great Britain.

No wonder that in the late 30’s – early 40’s the whole of Europe lived under the laws of the jungle. Yesterday’s allies would become enemies, and enemies would become allies, sometimes in a matter of days.

Britain and France then took the apparently permissive position against the military revanchist plans of Germany hoping for its great war against Bolshevik Russia. Without caring about the subject of Versailles arrangements, they first allowed Germany to uncontrollably develop its economy in 1929, then in March, 1937, they found it best not to notice the seizure of Rhineland and Austria a year later by Germany. A little later, in September 1938, giving Hitler the Sudetes, they guaranteed Czechoslovakia the boundaries of what was left of it. But after six months they did not keep their promise. Czechoslovakia disappeared from the map of Europe with the same ease with which the victors in the World War I refused to create any anti-Hitler coalition.

After the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, it became clear for the Polish diplomats that it was now their turn to come to the violation of the Versailles regulations. Literally the day after the signing of the Munich Agreement, Poland in the form of an ultimatum demanded from the Czechoslovak government to transfer the Cieszyn and Frystat areas and got its own way. A month later Hungary also claimed its share. Sensing the vulnerability of the country after the Munich Agreement, the Czechoslovak government sent six million pounds of gold into the cellars of the English bank as part of its contribution to the Bank of International Settlements. Germany demanded the gold and received it with the consent of the British finance minister.

Less than ten days after the occupation of Paris by the troops of the Third Reich, the English fleet shot the French warships anchored in Oran, Mers-el-Kebir and Dakar. During that operation under the cynical name “Catapult”, hundreds of French mariners were killed. The French fleet was not going to surrender to the Germans, who had already occupied Paris! All the masks, traditions and decorum were discarded. “No action has been more necessary for the salvation of England,” Churchill said at the time, fearing that the French ships would fall into the hands of Hitler. When making a choice, the British Prime Minister chose to send 1300 French men to the land of dead.

After such a metamorphosis in the Allied camp, Hitler no longer bothered himself to ask anyone for anything. Now he determined himself which country would be next.

As for Poland, in its leadership, despite twenty years of “independence”², there still dominated illusions and rudiments of the former political relations. Starting from 1934 and almost up to the war, it

insisted on the alliance with Germany against the USSR. As if its rulers had not read “Mein Kampf”³ and did not know what it was destined in the nearest future. Naturally, in the most critical moment of the talks on forming a coalition against Germany, the Polish representatives refused to even discuss the issue of so hated Red Army passing through its territory.

At that time, the Soviet Union was fulfilling its obligations to Mongolia and was busy in the east with the conflict with the Japanese at Khalkhin Gol⁴. In such circumstances, it could either wait for the German attack, optionally together with those who, persistently refusing the coalition with the USSR, already had their contracts with Hitler, or begin negotiations with Germany.

As Winston Churchill liked to say, “The only way a man can remain consistent amid changing circumstances is to change with them while preserving the same dominating purpose.” So the Kremlin chose the second option.

On August 23, 1939 in Moscow the famous non-aggression pact was signed. In it Germany renounced any impact in Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Bessarabia, and a little later – Lithuania. A number of former areas of the Polish state on the request of the Soviet Union could become its part. Everything else was said orally, in person of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Later, this uncertainty would be used by the Third Reich to justify the war with the USSR.

Two days later, the British Foreign Secretary and the Ambassador of Poland in London signed their Anglo-Polish alliance treaty. They committed themselves to provide immediate assistance to each other in the case of direct or indirect attack “of any European state”. A secret protocol was attached to the treaty. In it the notion of a “European state” was paraphrased – it was Germany and no one else! Prudent and persistent in its aspirations, England was not going to be at war with the Soviet Union because of Poland.

That’s why it insisted on the reservation in the secret protocol.

Hitler, in turn, on learning about the pact of Poland and England, at first thought and overturned the initial start date of operations “Weiss” and “Himmler” scheduled for August 26⁵. However, having received confirmation that England still would not do anything other than a formal declaration of war, made up his mind in four days. On September 1st, 1939, Germany invaded Poland from the west. When

the Polish government fled the country and the state, as such, had once again stopped existing, the USSR regained what had been taken away twenty years ago and did the same from the east.

The events caused by the Polish-German war, showed an internal inconsistency and apparent incapacity of the Polish state. All this happened in a very short time... The population of Poland is abandoned to their fate. The Polish state and its government effectively ceased to exist. By virtue of such provisions the agreement between the Soviet Union and Poland came to an end... Poland has become a convenient field for all sorts of accidents and surprises that could pose a threat to the Soviet Union. The Soviet government has remained neutral until then. But in view of these circumstances it can not be stay neutral to the situation...

(From the text of Note of the Soviet government on September 17, 1939)

The same day, 21 rifle and 13 cavalry divisions, 16 tank and two infantry brigades crossed the Polish-Soviet border. That was 700,000 people, 4,500 tanks and 4,000 air crafts.

Then, in violation of the August agreement, German troops actually moved smoothly to the borders of the USSR. Only the active hostilities under commander Chuikov and brigade commander Krivoshein against the German forces in the zone of interests of the Soviet Union forced Hitler on September 20, 1939, to give the order to retract the German troops from Lviv and other cities, captured by the Wehrmacht. The German generals who were willing to go to the already open military confrontation with the USSR, qualified this decision of Fuhrer as a “day of disgrace of the German political leadership”, but they were forced to obey the order.

On November 2, 1939, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted a law on the inclusion of the territories of Western Belarus and Western Ukraine into the structure of the Soviet Union. Galicia was added as well. History had given a final opportunity to complete the strengthening of the Red Army and the Soviet state before the imminent major war.

...It must be said in favour of the Soviets that for the Soviet Union it was vital to push the original positions of the German armies as far to the west as possible... They had to force or fraud to occupy the Baltic

states and a great part of Poland before they were attacked. If their policy was cold and calculating, it was also at that time highly realistic...

(Churchill W. Second World War. M., 1991)

DELAYED DROP

The plane easily ran up on the unpaved airfield, pushed and quickly gained altitude. On board there were five people: a lieutenant instructor and four senior officers of the Infantry Division. The Infantry has the order: each officer must make a parachute jump. Usually they are scared. To be “scared” is the wrong word. There is a mixture of feelings. Violent resistance and full obedience at the same time. It is natural. Who wants to take chances? In Pushkin there is a whole cemetery of parachutists crashed. Those were professionals from the Airborne Brigade. And these couldn’t even be compared. But even for them one parachute jump was required. Otherwise they would be disgraced.

The instructor wore a badge on his chest with a big number “100” on it. That meant, in spite he was only twenty six, he had made at least a hundred jumps. Recently he had been increased in rank and appointed the commander of the first section of the best squadron of the Airborne Brigade. It was he who was usually trusted the delicate mission of pushing some frightened major or colonel from the aircraft, or more often from the aircraft wing. As always, he instructed each of them in detail, checked their parachutes, backpacks, sealing and locking of the closing pin, he casually put an elastic ring tied to a pull-ring of the main parachute on everyone’s right hand. Holding the metal bars, he pulled the first man to the wing of the aircraft. In such cases, he never put on the reserve parachute. It was in his way when he had to lead “the client”, holding tightly his shoulders.

On the wing of an airplane it was certainly not very comfortable, but it was always easier to jump. The wind blows anyway – you just have to let go. Even if you lose consciousness, your arms drift apart in the free flight, so the elastic ring would stretch and pull the ring and the parachute with it. He just needed to choose the moment when the centre of gravity shifted dramatically, and just push.

The colonel and two majors jumped quite easily. The third major seemed somehow reserved and even stubborn. Coming along with the instructor on the wing, he immediately sat on the surface and grabbed the iron pipe with the face that asked for nothing more to try. The whole “theory” of the centre of gravity was suddenly destroyed. All attempts to persuade the major or simply push him off were useless. Even somehow awkward. After all, in his brigade the instructor was considered a professional in such cases. After thinking for a moment, he pointed at something to the pilot. After a few seconds the pilot made a sharp turn to the left, and the major, with his both hands on the cross tubes, first hung in the air, and then finally came off and flew down. “Do not pull the ring straight away,” the pilots thought, “because the parachute canopy will catch the plane tail and we will have to circle the airfield, trying to drag back the misfortune parachutist. Someone like him will never dare cut the lines and open the reserve parachute.”

Below the plane, the white circle of the parachute canopy was slowly disappearing. The instructor followed him. He easily turned in the air, saw the familiar landscape below him and habitually reached out his hand...

...There was no ring. That was it! Hundreds of possible reasons for that flashed in his mind in an instant. However, the ring still was not there! But the land was approaching quickly. The cars at the airport and a couple of planes were becoming distinct... The people had become visible. There was a pond nearby, and a river. It didn’t make any difference, though, they would not save...

Suddenly, around a falling parachute jumper everything merged into one big grey spot: the sky, the land and people in the runway. The bright sky had disappeared, the same as the terrible whistling in his ears from the air flow hitting his chest. Before his eyes there was his parents’ warm house on the bank of the fast river, Dokukin with his clever books, a pot with hot cabbage soup and smiling Ma.

“Fuck that!” the instructor thought in despair. He suddenly felt like stretching lazily on the warm stove, lighting a candle and reading... Instinctively he straightened his arms sideways and with his eyes wide open he flew inexorably towards the approaching ground...

The parachute strap moved. Somewhere on the side just for a moment the saving ring flashed. The parachute jumper managed to pull

it with one finger. Another second – and he was on the ground. The parachute managed to extinguish the deadly speed of the free fall.

The lieutenant did not have the strength to stand up, nor could he gather slings. He was painfully dragged across the grass and turned from side to side. Some people ran up to him, they extinguished the canopy, felt his body and asked something. The political commissar of the squadron appeared in front of the instructor. The instructor saw him bending over to him, looking at him, smiling and chewing something as usual... Neither the young officer, no political officer – none of the air assault brigade staying in Staraya Russa – knew they all would have to make their main, most complicated jump a month later. They had to rush recklessly into a whirlpool of threats and conflicts of the new life, demanding a difficult choice and its “saving ring”.

EVERYTHING ENDED WITHOUT EVEN STARTING

In September 1939 the Parachute Brigade, where Fyodor Astakhov served, was not in use. Even after the Germans violated the terms of the Treaty of Moscow and took Lviv. But when the Finnish campaign started, they would now and then be pulled on full alert at the airport and forced to wait for an order for hours... The order wouldn't come. Weeks were passing by. Only in early January, 1940, they remembered about the brigade at last...

The huge, slow bomber TB-3⁶ was strongly shaking and swaying from side to side. The noise from its four engines, frost and cold wind through the cracks were piercing the entire aircraft. Inside the fuselage on the floor, on the corrugated duraluminum, in the aisles between the booths, behind the fuel tanks in the bomb bay there were paratroopers. The soldiers tried to snuggle close to each other in order not to roll on the floor, like balls of billiards. Those who were sick, would creep to the open bomb bay for a few minutes, and then come back. Whenever the aircraft dumped in an air pocket, the white mixture of the morning pasta flew back into the plane spraying everyone. It looked like a special camouflage mask, frozen on their faces, ear flaps and highly raised brown coat fur collars, sticking out from under the white camouflage cloaks. They all got used to that.

The squadron commander of the paratroopers captain Alexei Bogdanov and some major, with a parachute, but obviously an infantryman, settled in the wing, next to one of the engines. The noise of it was terrifying, but they could sit comfortably. The captain was without a helmet and with his head bowed, he was shouting something to his neighbour. His short brown hair was sticking up, his grey eyes under the reddened eyelids looked heavy and tired. From the back of the cab a navigator came and whispered something in Bogdanov's ear. The captain, usually being gloomy and dissatisfied, now became dreary.

“Sokolov, Astakhov, move closer to me!” Bogdanov shouted to the squadron's political commissar Sokolov and commander of the first platoon.

Valentin Sokolov was a blond smiling guy aged twenty five. Two years ago, he had been sent to a company of paratroopers as a political commissar from the Narva District Komsomol Committee of Leningrad⁷. He had been sitting together with the newcomers and now crawled to Bogdanov almost all white with frozen pasta mixture.

“What are they thinking about, bastards?” Bogdanov said. “There's no ammunition there. They have just reported on the radio. Do you get it, Astakhov?”

“It's simple. We'll land and be dead in half an hour.”

“Maybe those who were surrounded, have at least something?” Sokolov faintly shook his head in the direction of the major who was a Division 18 representative.

“Who knows? Anyway, we can't count on them,” Bogdanov grabbed his chin with frozen fingers. When he was angry, he always grabbed his chin with his hand, as if locking his mouth. “Anyway, this is what we'll do. I will bail with the squadron and the two of you will fly back. Sokolov, you've got to deal with the Headquarters. You can do it. You only have three hours. And don't come back without mines!” The latest words were addressed to Astakhov. Bogdanov said them in a distinct voice without tearing his eyes from Fyodor.

“Aye! We'll fly back,” Astakhov said.

At that moment they heard a loud clatter of enemy's guns. All at once went bustling and glued to the windows. Then everyone was hunting for low-speed bombers. Usually they flew without fighter support and crept across the sky at a speed of 170 kilometres per hour towards certain doom. This time they could see two Fokkers⁸ go into

the TB-3 tail and open fire on it. Both bomber's guns somehow were silent, and from under the wing there already slipped a black plume of smoke and flames. The plane was slowly pulling back on its side and stretching to the ground. One after another, the parachute jumpers were falling out of the bomb hatch and through the top turret, slipping down the huge wings of the falling black machine. About five of them were flying down with burning parachutes. Others were slowly descending and between them scribbling machine guns, the fighters with a blue swastika on the fuselage were darting in and out. There, where for half an hour ahead of schedule fell the third platoon of paratroopers, the enemies were waiting for them...

The other planes safely left the remaining two platoons and returned to the base. Near the northern shore of the lake the Red Army soldiers from the 18th Division of the 8th Army and a small troop of paratroopers of the 201st Brigade were freezing at 40 degrees below zero. They lay on the ice in front of the islands, hidden behind large metal shields on runners. There was neither ammunition for artillery, nor mines for mortars. Next to the offshore islands Finnish skiers would appear now and then. They caused a sense of hopelessness with their unpunished raids. Nevertheless, the Red Army men tried to make out a reinforced concrete pillbox in the blinding snow and destroy it with grenades. The volunteers, one by one crept to it waist-deep in the snow, not even trying to look for minefields.

The Finns could have surrounded and captured all of them, but something held them back. Most likely, they were not able to imagine why almost an entire squadron of paratroopers, right before their eyes having landed on the ice, was not advancing. Perhaps the Finns feared some kind of trick, because of course they understood that this was being done to break the two surrounded infantry regiments. But the Finns didn't know about the lack of ammunition! This was saving them and allowed to wait.

Astakhov and Sokolov quickly completed all the formalities and took the machine mines and shells prepared for them. The one who was supposed to send them to the northern shore of the lake, was suddenly summoned upstairs to prepare for the meeting of some chief. But the trucks were left, and no one was interested in them until the paratroopers themselves appeared in the warehouse. Now they had to wait for a correspondent, doctors and get back.

"Listen. Fyodor, why are you so gloomy?" the political commissar said, smacking Astakhov on the shoulder. "I am always like this. As if you didn't know..." "Not today! Happy birthday! Did you forget? I didn't. Here you are," Sokolov said and offered Fyodor a rusk. "I wish we could have a drink. Never mind, it's not the end of the day yet. Looks like we've done everything. We've sorted them out, haven't we? Do you agree, Fyodor?" As if he had reported the work done and with a sense of satisfaction from doing hard work, Sokolov confidently sat on a wooden bench in the courtyard of the Headquarters.

"Yes, sure. Everyone always agrees with you," Astakhov said, looking around. The Headquarters's yard is not the best place to wait and talk.

"The squadron commander must have second sight having sent you here. He knew you would shout and bang the table with your fist in the major's office. They would have clapped me straight away."

"I can do much more than this," Valka continued chewing something. "Sometimes I even think I am someone's relative. Some boss'. Why not? I used to feel like that in the orphanage. Everyone used to be bullied but me. Do you think it was just a coincidence?"

"Of course not!" Astakhov played along. "I think this relative is somewhere nearby, maybe even over there, on the third floor, looking at you." Fyodor pointed at the building of the area commander with a smile.

"OK, that's enough. I am just lucky," Sokolov said calmly and stood up. Then he asked seriously, "Do you think our men from the stricken plane are alive?"

"I think they killed them all," Astakhov answered vaguely. "There are Finns and ice everywhere, with nowhere to hide. And the Fokker shot many of them while they were descending. I saw some of them with their parachutes burning..."

"Shit!" Sokolov muttered. Suddenly he said to himself, "What will the other two platoons be able to do?"

"The same thing as three platoons," Fyodor answered sharply. "By the way, we have an unpleasant journey ahead, we have to go along their shore."

"Firstly, at least we'll get a lift, we won't walk. Secondly, it's getting dark," the political commissar answered busily. "Do you agree, Fyodor?"

"Yes, it is getting dark, I agree. But I feel there won't be any space for us in the trucks."

"What do you mean?"

"Look, Valka, what a mess," Astakhov said angrily. "First they made our squadron wait for two days in the cold, right on the tarmac, then simply left us without shells..."

"That was just for the authorities," the political commissar started explaining, clearly mocking about the staff officers. "As soon as they ordered, the landing troops would be right there. Ready..."

"Like, they are sitting there all in white in the hoarfrost," Astakhov interrupted him, "disguised as the colour of snow on the airfield, resting, listening to political information. Do you think it will be different now? If we are plunged into the shit, we'll get enough of it".

Sokolov suddenly frowned and said sharply, "Stop! No more discussions, There is a correspondent coming to see me. He doesn't give a toss about your questions, whether it's a mess or not. He needs any victory, even the smallest one. And you are right, there won't be any space for us in the truck."

"We'll ski behind the truck," Astakhov said quickly and confidently, following the political commissar. As if he did it every day and knew everything beforehand.

Ten minutes later, in white camouflage overalls, they hooked ski sticks to the truck with ammunition and raced on skis on Lake Ladoga. Ahead of them two more trucks with mines rattled. All they needed to do was to get to the other side before midnight and deliver ammunition. There was no space at all in the trucks. In the first two there were doctors and their equipment and medicines, and in third truck the place was ordered for the Moscow newspaper correspondent. To search for another vehicle would mean to be late to their men. Nobody would give them any other transport, anyway.

The sky was clear and full of stars. Only a bright crescent of the moon was illuminating their way. Under their feet quite invisible in the dark cracks and piles of hacked recent bombings pieces of ice were flashing. A little miss – that would be it! No one would even stop.

They were noticed quite soon and from the Finnish coast they began to methodically and routinely shell. The outbreaks of exploding shells nearby made it lighter and at the same time more frightening. It was more frightening because now, just behind the truck the cracks

appearing only for a moment under the feet of the two bent skiers were getting very distinct.

Suddenly the truck going a little ahead jumped and the political instructor jumped high in the icy bump. His ski poles shot up and their metal rings took off the hooks of the rear bumper of the truck. Valka's hood got unbuttoned and his loose helmet moved on his eyes, wet of snow and sweat. It pulled his released visor of the knitted balaclava. Astakhov managed to grab Valka Sokolov who was just about to fly backwards. The bottom canvas of the gloves didn't slide. Grappled together, they had travelled to their destination for another thirty minutes, helplessly looking at the flickering cracks, ice hummocks, and ice-holes... Like two jumpers with only one parachute.

The 5th of January came. All morning the coastal artillery was firing the ice from the Finnish coast, and from the other side mortars were hitting out without masking. The boom was unimaginable. A platoon of tanks appeared from nowhere. Someone very "clever" sent them right to the ice in the direction of the islands to liquidate the fire points. The Finnish battery did not even aim at them; they just broke the ice with explosions and sank them. Only two troopers managed to jump out. They swam out of a massive ice-hole and got to the troopers, wet but alive.

It was impossible to conquer the Finns' position. By mid-day the battle near the north coast of Lake Ladoga subsided. Gradually everyone began to recover. There was hardly anything left from the Infantry battalion expecting the help of paratroopers under fire. Only a handful of people. On the side there were two solid dark spots of already collected dead and wounded people.

The wounded were being looked after by doctors and nurses brought here on the trucks with shells last night. With their curved surgical knives they struggled to cut off icy rubber canvas boots from the men screaming from the unbearable pain. Then they applied dressing to their legs, covered with blood blisters of frostbite. The nurses with their faces turned away and eyes squinted turned away, tried to lift and move Red army soldiers affected with gangrene, with black falling off noses and ears, into the truck. They didn't know what was better: to cream the already dead tissue or not to touch it. The wounded were wiped with goose fat and stacked directly on fir branches, chopped on a neutral shore.

The first time in his service, Astakhov was feeling especially lousy. Weird and lousy. Like something snapped: as if it was all over, without even starting. He felt deep frustration. First, they had waited a long time to be sent over. Around ten people had been sent immediately to the hospital with frostbites. Then they had flown without cover. They had lost a whole platoon with the stricken plane. They had forgotten shells. Again, freezing on the ice, they had been waiting for ammunition. At last, they had got everything they needed, but as a result, they had only had their people killed, wounded or frostbitten. The only good thing was he and the political commissar had not suffered in vain. If they had not brought the ammunition, everyone would have been dead by the morning. Even he, being simply a lieutenant, couldn't help realizing something was wrong up there.

Senior lieutenant Valka Sokolov merrily winked at Fyodor and rakishly told the soldiers about himself and Astakhov suffering a great deal, delivering ammunition. He was loved in the squadron, and he seemed to be explaining why this time he had not been with them. He was always very open, he always chewed something and shared everything. In all outbreaks he was the first. But not this time.

Today he tried to explain in detail why and who had won the battle, and how good it was for all⁹. For the Soviet Union and for the Finnish people. He spoke of it as some fun, he looked so sincere and convinced in what he was so colourfully describing that people quickly believed and agreed with him inexorably. Only sometimes young, recently mobilized Red Army men cautiously looked towards the lorries painted in white with dark corpses of frostbitten soldiers, then they would listen to the political commissar's confident speech again. The Moscow correspondent was taking photos of their joy and jubilation.

Only after a month of the war it would be specified where the Mannerheim Line was. On the 7th January 1940 the order on the transition to defence and reorganization of troops would be issued. The Leningrad Military District would be finally transformed into the North-Western Front. Commander of the 1st rank Timoshenko would be appointed Commander of this front and the minister of defence at the same time. Marshal Voroshilov would hand over his responsibilities.

LINE-UP.

BALTIC STATES BEFORE THE GREAT WAR

Regarding Finland, perhaps it was here immediately after 1917 that a rare cynical political experiment took place. It involved various foreign states and their political leaders. Aspirations of many people, like invisible light rays, were refracted in the snowy expanses of the northern country, revealing their colourful range of lies and hypocrisy.

First of all there was young Soviet Russia. In the first year of its origin it laid a powerful potential of its rejection. It had to unceremoniously intervene in a civil war in Finland and maintain it as a weapon inspired coup of the Finnish Red Guards against the government and the Seim. Having gained independence from the splitting Russian Empire in the revolutionary fire, Finland before the war had had a very complicated relationship with the Soviet Union. The decree of the Soviet government on the 18th of December 1917 brought the long-awaited freedom for Finland, but at the same time it escalated the territorial disputes with its large eastern neighbour. All attempts of violent solutions did not add any confidence in each other. Then came England with its irrepressible desire to revive the Russian intervention in the north through Finland. There were also Germany, France and Belgium, and they understood the significance of the northern bridgehead against the Soviet Union and in the next ten years helped to build the Mannerheim Line for a good reason. In the late 30-s it was Germany again. It first surrendered Finland as a bargaining chip, and within three months after its defeat in the winter campaign of 1939 it built there its military airfields.

Just before the war with Germany, the Soviet leadership once again set their sights on Finland. This time, with a view to its final defeat. It was certainly not good when a nearby country with an incomprehensible orientation proclaims neutrality, and is recognized by the United States, England and Germany. So the Soviet air crafts suddenly began to bomb Helsinki at the time when German tanks crossed the Niemen and Dvina. As a result of this policy, on the third day after the Germans attacked the USSR, Finland also declared war against the Soviet Union, and a month later it returned the land annexed in March 1940. Then it took almost all of Karelia and only then stopped and didn't bomb or assault Leningrad no matter how much the lead-

ers of the Third Reich asked... even in October-November 1941, in the most tragic days for Leningrad, when the Germans temporarily occupied Tikhvin.

Prime Minister Churchill to Field Marshal Mannerheim

Personally, secretly, confidentially

I am very saddened by what we can expect in the future, namely that we are forced to declare war against Finland in a few days due to our loyalty. If we do that we will wage war as the situation demands. I am confident that your troops have advanced so far that the security of the country during the war is guaranteed and the troops could now stop and cease hostilities. You do not need to announce it officially, it is enough to give up the fight by military means and immediately stop military operations... For many English friends of your country it would be a shame if Finland found itself in the dock with the accused and defeated Nazis. Remembering our pleasant conversations and correspondence concerning the latest war, I feel the need to send you a purely private and confidential message to think over before it is too late.

29 November 1941

(Mannerheim C.G. Memoirs. M., 1999)

On Independence Day, December 6, 1941, the society learned about three significant events. On that day, the Finnish parliament solemnly informed that the liberated territories were reunited with the republic, and reported both the capture of Medvezhyegorsk and Britain's declaring war. The next day, in response to a note from the British Government on 28 November and the request in a private telegram of Churchill, Mannerheim, certainly without declaring that to Germany, let alone the Soviet Union, actually stopped all active operations of the Finnish army.

At the end of the war, when the West had simply written Finland off from the accounts, it signed a truce with the Soviet Union and proclaimed its non-alignment and neutrality. By this Finland radically changed the public opinion in the country, stopped the natural transition to the communist government after the Soviet victory in the war and surprisingly concluded a quite respectful agreement with the Soviet Union. Not surrender or occupation, as it was done at the time

with all the satellites of Germany, but namely the peace treaty. Excluding the UK and the USSR, each European country, somehow participating in the World War II, had been occupied at least twice, some even three times. Finland had not.

Those who are always ready to respond by force of arms on each call to a foreign country are not always right. On the other hand, those who patiently and confidently seek a peaceful compromise are not always wrong. On the contrary, the latter are more likely to benefit, not only morally, but also in practice.

(Churchill W. Second World War. M., 1991)

In late autumn 1939 everything was as clear as day. Thinking about how to protect his country from the north, Stalin proposed to Finland to conclude the Soviet-Finnish mutual assistance pact modelled on the agreements already concluded with the Baltic states. In Finland there was supposed to be placed a limited contingent of Soviet troops, as well as this country was offered to make the exchange of territories. But the Finnish delegation refused to conclude such an agreement and left the negotiations. At that time many politicians of the northern neighbour dreamed of Greater Finland spread to the Urals and supported the slogan of former President Svinhufvud, "Any enemy of Russia must be a friend of Finland". With those "friends", spending up to a quarter of its state budget, Finland was rapidly building fortifications, military bases and airfields, buying weapon, developing close cooperation with other countries configured against the USSR.

In this scenario, there was one thing to do. There was no moral when it came to security of the state. There was only policy which was to move its border away from the main cities by any means. By what means?

Well, at least the following way. It was possible to bring the NKVD battalion to the border, to fix an incident with shots from a mortar, then to organize a universal indignation rally and distribute 30,000 promotional flyers. Then Molotov needed to make a speech listing the aggressive actions of Finland. And before the war, between six and seven o'clock in the morning on the radio they could read out the message of the Central Committee of the Finnish Communist Party to the workers to Finland...

That was what Zhdanov wrote down in his notebook. That was what they did. And on the 30th November the troops of the Leningrad Military District already crossed the border of Finland.

Despite the enormous losses of the Red Army by the end of February the first and second bands of the 135-kilometre impregnable Mannerheim Line were disrupted and the outcome of the war was fixed. And in the summer of 1940 the three Baltic states – Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia – found it best to become the republics of the Soviet Union.

Latvian Foreign Minister came to us in 1939, I told him, “You will not go back until you sign joining us”... I instructed our security officers not to let him out until he signed. The Minister of War from Estonia came and we told him the same.

(Chuyev F. A Hundred and Forty Talks with Molotov:
From F. Chuyev's Diary. M., 1991)

From the point of political view, after all this, the Soviet Union was allegedly expelled from the League of Nations. The Nations who were unable to overcome the inertia of their thinking and go for an alliance with the “Bolsheviks” against Hitler. Why “allegedly”? Because Western leaders then could not and did not try to do anything apart from playing two regimes off each other – Stalin and Hitler. Only seven out of the fifteen countries voted for the exclusion. Some of them were not there, others at the time were thinking about something else. In general, it was all the same, England and France.

...League of Nations Council consists of 15 members, only 7 votes out of the 15 were cast for the resolution to expel the Soviet Union, that was, the resolution was passed with minority of members of the Council of the League. The remaining eight members of the Board were either abstained or absent. The composition of the representatives of 7 countries voted for the “exclusion” of the USSR, speaks for itself: these seven include England, France, Belgium, Bolivia, Egypt, Union of South Africa, Dominican Republic...

(From TASS statement. 16 December 1939)

From the military point of view, the beginning of the Finnish campaign was a model of useless management, poor intelligence and ex-

treme self-confidence of the High Command. But three months later for everyone in the world it became clear that if Stalin took a decision, the Red Army would destroy anyone. It thus would incur any losses, but Stalin's orders would be complied. Nevertheless, it was then that commanders of the Red Army, especially in its younger and middle structure, first got disbelief in the high command and in their own strength. They were living witnesses of striking discrepancy of what was officially proclaimed by the state machine and of what was actually happening. To destruct a wooden hut on the average there were done 7 sorties and 27 demolition bombs and 20 fire bombs were dropped. At the final ratio of the number of air crafts 26 to 1, ratio of combat losses amounted was 8 to 1 in favour of the tiny Finnish aviation. Finally, for one killed Finnish soldier there were six Soviet soldiers, and for one wounded soldier there were seven Russian soldiers. In one day of fighting, the Red Army lost an average of more than a thousand people as dead and three thousand wounded. There were 105 such days.

FYODOR ASTAKHOV

Until 1927 the Astakhov family – mother, father, two sons and four daughters – lived on a farm five kilometres from the village of Khotnezha. They had everything they needed made by themselves. They had forest land cultivated with great difficulty for growing grain, hay harvesting for winter feed of their only cow, a deep ten-meter well and a house. Hundreds of stones and stumps had been dug out of the ground and dragged into a ravine. Large barns were full of hay and firewood.

Fedka, the youngest son, was a short, dark-haired, blue-eyed and well built boy. He had attended a village school for four years. Somehow he learned to read and write. But his large family were short of funds for life. He had to work. First he grazed cows, then he helped his father and elder brother in logging, later on, when he was about ten, Fyodor was entrusted to deliver district-mail to villages.

That was his childhood.

Then collectivization¹⁰ began. Collective farms were created. Many people had to leave their farms and move to villages. The Astakhov moved their home log after log to the village of Khotnezha. Fedka was

busy working on the farm, the same as other village guys. They were campaigning, collecting all that remained from dispossessed rich peasants and bringing into the common shed. They were building a new life. Without the rich.

By then the eldest son of the Astakhov, Alexey, had gone to serve in the Red Army, and the younger one went on working with his father in the lumber harvesting. In the evening he went to a night school, then ran to the dance in the neighbouring village. There in fights with the boys from the nearby villages Astakhov got his first friends: Petrov, Petka Lukin, Vitka Likhachev, brothers Klenov, Nikitin. For their active participation in the collectivization, all of them were awarded with badges. They were walking around with pride. For some reason the badges were completely black.

Later on, senior Klenov, Vsevolod by name, as the most active and ruthless fighter against the kulaks, became a foreman of the farm, and then he took a job at Sabsky village council where he quickly got the taste of power, and began to grow, as they say, "in the Soviet line". Vitka Likhachev ruined his left arm for life at harvesting, so he kept himself to himself, read a lot, learned languages himself, liked to do Maths and tried not to socialize. He still lived in Khotnezha at his nan's and worked as an accountant in the collective farm board.

During these years, Fyodor rarely visited Pyotr Mikhailovich Dokukin, who he had loved to see in childhood. Later on, in 1937, he learned from his mother the artist had been taken away. No one knew anything. The doors were wide open, there were no paintings. On the window sill there were left his glasses, similar to pince-nez. They said someone had come for him... Fyodor felt like something important and intimate had been taken away from him.

When called to the army, Astakhov gladly went to the draft board. He wanted to be a driver, and then to stay on the re-enlistment. Firstly, such a profession would always be useful in life, and secondly, the army was great. Everything was provided: food, clothing, accommodation, everything was said and ordered. He was strong and efficient. He would never be the worst. He might even become some important commander with stripes and a large number of orders. Like the ones in Dokukin's paintings. But they didn't take him as a driver.

"You don't differ colours, mate!" Captain of the Medical Commission said.

"What do you mean?" Fyodor muttered.

"You don't differ red from green. You can go to the paratroopers and become a ranger," the doctor added with sympathy. "They are nearly pilots. They have a nice uniform and the light before the jump is only of one colour."

"But it's scary," a guy in his underpants interrupted. "to jump from a plane relying just on a piece of cloth? Not for me. Scary. What if it gets stuck or rips up?"

Fyodor thought to himself, "At least it's not infantry. Alone, in the rear of the enemy, I will perhaps be alright. I will be good."

Their Parachute Brigade was in Pushkin. Here in the early thirties the Soviet airborne troops were born. The first skydiving, the first dead. Sabotage, needles in parachutes – the whole cemetery of the dead. They could not understand where and when these metal needles were inserted into packs with a parachute. Either during packing, or already inside the aircraft. And maybe in a total mess right before the jump from the wing. They didn't find. But in family albums in photos of brigade commanders a third of senior commanders were shaded – "enemies of the people". And there were many students. The barracks were closely filled with beds. They were so close together that sometimes young paratroopers would wake up at night because the person next to them beat his neighbour in his dream, as if pulling the ring with his hand to the count "10". As with skydiving.

In 1936 Astakhov was twenty six years. He was a career officer, lieutenant, parachuting instructor, he had made more than a hundred jumps. He was brought up on the songs telling that "The Red army is the strongest", that it would only fight in the enemy territory and would not allow the enemy to their land. 1937 purge of staff hardly touched junior commanders. He hardly knew anything about that then. So everything was fine with him, Fyodor Astakhov, – he was serving, everything was turning out great for him.

Everyone who served in the aviation and airborne troops, was given a new uniform. It was very similar to the German black SS uniform. Only in dark blue. The coat was decorated with blue piping, which went onto the collar and the top edge of the cuffs, as well as on the side seams of the commander breeches. Under the coat there was a light shirt with a tie. Instead of the spiked helmet they had a dark blue garrison cap with blue piping and the same cloth star, with an enamel

red asterisk on top. Of course, they had boots rather than foot cloths as many Red army men had at the time.

At the same time, in summer 1939, in Pushkin, Fyodor met Tonya Pavlova, a short, brown-eyed, smiling girl. Tonya worked as a midwife in a maternity hospital that was near the Kirov factory in Leningrad. In summer, when she was off her shift, she loved to go by train away from the city, to Pushkin, with her friends. There they could swim, sunbathe, just walk. They saw each other at the entrance of Alexander Park in the queue for ice-cream. It was simple – the time had come and they fell in love. Fyodor and Antonina were seeing each other for several months. Fyodor was 26, she was 22. Just the right time to settle down. Fyodor loved to walk with Antonina. All women of the area seemed to know her. They would always greet her, then stop and talk about something. Fyodor would joke, “It’s impossible to be with you!” Everyone knew everything about her. Everyone loved her. During his leaves, Astakhov visited Tonya at home, she lived with her mother and sister in a communal flat in Turbinnaya street. They dreamed of their future life together, dreamed to get a room and have children.

Fyodor’s father had died in spring. His mother, a clever, strong woman, stayed on her own in the village. She had to look after everything: a cow and a log house of two rooms, which stood on the shore of the fast and shallow river Lemovzha. Her four daughters had already married and left for Leningrad. She had not heard anything about her elder son Alexey for a long time. Only Fyodor knew that his older brother had been wearing maroon buttonholes with raspberry piping and three bars since last year. He was captain of the KGB.

FROM VALYA PAVLOVA’S MEMOIRS:

...Tonya was my aunt. Before the war, we used to live together near the Kirov plant, in Turbinnaya street, in the same flat. I was glad when her fiance Fyodor used to visit her. My neighbour, friend Shura, and I used to lift our heads up high, but could only see his big boots polished to a high gloss, breeches and a belt with a buckle. I was five and Shurka was only three. He would lift me over his head and then quickly lower to the floor, pausing only at the very floor. I liked that and used to shout, “More, more!” and would find myself just under the ceiling again. Mum said that Uncle Fyodor was a paratrooper. They were new troops. My dad also was a military man. He was a Commissar of a flight school and

also previously served in Pushkin, near Leningrad, and then went on a business trip to the Lake Baikal. His name is Boris Potapovich and he works in a military newspaper.

Antonina married Fyodor on the 2nd December, 1939. For the wedding we all went to his home in the village of Khotnezha. It was fun and there were a lot of guests. I remember high red sandy beaches along the river Lemovzha, the house on the bank, an old church on the hill. To the left there was a small white house of the school, and to the right there was a post-office.

A month later, Fyodor went to fight in Finland. We were very worried about him when the trucks would bring the wounded and frostbitten from the Mannerheim Line. In summer I heard the grown-ups say, “Fyodor is now in Bessarabia, in Izmail.” On the 1st of March, 1941, Tonya and her 7-month old Lerik went somewhere to the Baltic republics. That was the new location of Fyodor’s service...

PYOTR DOKUKIN

Pyotr Mikhailovich Dokukin was a distant relative of Baron Cherkasov, who initially worked as a clerk and copyist in the office of Peter the Great, and later, taking advantage of the special confidence of the Empress Elizabeth, would often artfully sign decrees himself. Almost all cases, both of national or insignificant importance, were passed through him. He held a position of a secretary and exclusive and intimate friend of the Empress.

When he became old, Baron Ivan Antonovich Cherkasov, and later his son, often visited Redkino Manor of Yamburg County. There, on both sides of the river Vruda, there were ten villages, including those that are still called Khotnezha, Big Sabask and Volna. After the conquest of Ingria, the history of these places has been associated with a variety of colourful historical figures. At first, the villages were granted to the notorious Admiralty adviser Alexander Kikin but six years later they were confiscated from him in connection with the case of Tsarevich Alexei and given to Prince Ivan Fedorovich Romodanovsky. Then they belonged to his daughter. Being a cousin of the Empress Anna Ivanovna maternally, she was married to the son of

the first Russian chancellor Golovkin and therefore was very influential. During the reign of Elizabeth Petrovna, the family were exiled to Siberia, as usual. And Redkino manor was granted to privy councillor Ivan Antonovich Cherkasov in eternal hereditary possession.

Since the beginning of the XIX century, most of the other estates of Yamburg County had become a possession of the nobles of the non-Russian origin, mostly from the Baltic States and Germany. Living in the capital, they bought estates near St. Petersburg, but closer to the western borders of the province. Village Smerdovitsy was owned by the Tiesenhausen, one of which had been a Decembrist. The Roerich lived in Izvara. In these places there lived a native of Saxony, who was the chief of staff headquarters protecting the road to St. Petersburg in the Patriotic War of 1812.

From this “setting” of the Secretary of the Russian Empress, military German and Russian Decembrist, Pyotr Mikhailovich Dokukin was born in 1875.

The village of Sosnitsy, the birthplace of Pyotr, is very close to Izvara. There was Roerich estate. Nicholas Roerich was three years older than Dokukin. They were both interested in painting. The earliest, cherished childhood experiences that shape a human mind and retain their value over the rest of their lives, were associated with the estates of their parents. With age, the two boys’ hobbies gradually grew apart. Nicholas collected herbaria and minerals, and Pyotr began to read forbidden books and got enrolled in some circle of “fighters for justice”.

Dokukin entered the Imperial Academy of Arts as Roerich was graduating from it. That probably determined the fate of Dokukin. A few years later, Nicholas was already a famous artist, and Peter, having got into revolutionary ideas, together with other emerging artists, painted cartoons of the czar and his ministers. Then they printed leaflets. There were very few of them. So basically they were distributed immediately among the students of St. Petersburg University.

Then at the turn of the century Russian students were particularly freedom-loving. Students gathered in various clubs, where philosophical debates were intermixed with political debates and literary disputes. Symbolism¹¹ was becoming fashionable. In one of the student groups meetings, which were often attended by women from Bestuzhev courses, Pyotr met Aynikki Koskinen, a daughter of a Finnish pastor. Aynikki wanted to be a teacher, she loved music and poetry, but in

a noisy and chaotic atmosphere of a student circle she felt uneasy. Many girls were interested in politics, women’s rights and had their hair cut short. Aynikki respected the independence of judgement and breadth of her friends, but she did not want to imitate them – her blonde long straight hair in a plait lay heavily on her back. It was that beautiful fair plait that Pyotr saw first, and then her calm blue eyes. No one knows how eye contact happens and love is born... Aynikki had a rare gift – she knew how to listen. She could listen in order to understand, not to object or argue. Pyotr would tell her about his childhood, his hobbies and dreams.

Aynikki and Pyotr fell in love and soon got married. Their modest wedding was held in Koivisto, where the father of the bride, the new pastor of the newly constructed Lutheran church¹², lived.

Aynikki loved her husband, but despite all the efforts of Pyotr, she could not and did not want to take his political views. A year before the outbreak of World War II, Pyotr Dokukin was arrested and together with a group of students of the Academy exiled to the North Urals. Koskinen left St. Petersburg for Koivisto. Soon she gave birth to a son.

In February 1917 Dokukin was released. He was already quite famous among the activists of the victorious revolution. But the exile had left its indelible mark on his health – he had a severe lung disease. On behalf of the Provisional Government, Pyotr became actively engaged in museums, monuments, libraries, creative unions. Here he met Roerich again. In March 1917, Gorky gathered writers, artists, actors and created the Commission on the development of art in Russia. Nicholas Roerich became his assistant. Dokukin was actively involved in this work. However, this did not last long. Soon Nicholas Roerich and his family left for treatment in Finland. Dokukin remained – a whirlwind of the revolution completely took his life.

Only in the beginning of 1918 he was able to visit his family and for the first time to see his Toivo. He was the dead spit of his mother. The same blue eyes, the same smile. But his hair was like Pyotr’s, dark. Aynikki’s mum was seriously ill, and she refused to accept her husband’s offer to move to Petrograd.

Another two years passed. The Finnish Civil War and its first war with Russia were over. In October 1920 the Tartu agreement¹³ was signed and a new border now ran along the river Sister. Koivisto and the whole province of Vyborg became the Finnish territory.

The war continued for another two and a half months after signing the peace treaty. It was impossible to go to Koivisto where Dokukin's wife and son lived.

Meanwhile, the situation in Russia had changed. Dokukin's liberal views inherent in his genes, quickly came into conflict with the gradually absorbing anything and everything new Stalinist regime of governing the country. He, an educated and creative person, was not needed. It was at this time that his chronic lung disease aggravated.

Dokukin cut all his ties and in 1925 went to his home village. It was not a move of desperation or a result of resentment. He was still interested in politics and the events taking place in the country. But now in a detached and passive way. More out of habit and pending changes for the better. It was not his time. He read a lot, he painted portraits of statesmen and their families. The time of his life was slipping through his fingers. His loneliness was slowly corroding the soul. The memories of the revolutionary youth lost contrast. Only one memory was bringing him a heartache. Aynikki's light face, the setting sun filtering through the arched windows of the church, and organ sounds – Bach's "Air" – captured all his senses and took them up, leaving wrenching sadness.

It was then that he liked the boy-postman, and he often spoke to him frankly. Not so much to teach the boy, just because he needed that. For someone to listen to his thoughts. Only this way, in a conversation, he could comprehend what was happening around him and his place in all that confusing whirl of life. Also, he reminded him of his son, who Dokukin had seen only once.

Years passed. The boy he had befriended visited him less and less frequently. The new life that Pyotr was waiting for did not come. The old life was becoming worse and worse. In 1937 he was arrested and quickly sentenced to 15 years. No wonder – more than half of all the characters of his paintings had been executed.

After the second account of rejection from his homeland, Dokukin was unable to get up. At this time, it seemed, if someone just pushed him into the abyss – he would fly without resistance. Only memories of his famous ancestor Baron Cherkasov, sent into exile for this loyalty to one person or one idea, kept him alive and made him hope that he would still be in demand. In demand with the new, civilized power.

Dokukin was kept in a transit camp for prisoners near Kingisepp and for the third year he had been expecting to be sent to a familiar

area of the Northern Urals. He was not sent because he was still needed. To be exact, not he, but his "voluntary" testimony in a long chain of cases. No one seemed to be able to stop the flywheel of endless interrogations, testimonies and confrontations, where everything had been predetermined in advance.

Prisoners learned about the beginning of the war simply because a week later the town and an important railway junction of Kingisepp were bombed by German planes. Local guards began to prepare for evacuation. The most "valuable" prisoners had been already moved. Reinhardt's tanks drove parts of the 8th Army off to Koporskaya plateau and on the 15th August took Narva. NKVD officers arrived at the camp, and many prisoners realized that was the end.

RIPPED PHOTO

In autumn of 1940 at the request of the newly formed governments, the Red Army entered Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia¹⁴. The 8th Army was transferred here after the end of the Finnish War, so were the fifth Airborne Corps at the end of operations in Bessarabia. Local people treated them in different ways. Some people greeted the Red army, met it with flowers, like in Bessarabia, and some held their anger and hid, waiting for the right time. Every day there were incidents, sabotage, arsons...

Lieutenant Fyodor Astakhov was located in a wooden house at an old Latvian's, on the outskirts of Dvinsk. Soon his wife and little son came to him. They had to get furniture, clothing. They were going to start a new life.

A month passed. They gradually got used to the new location. Fyodor would return home from the barracks late at night and could not get enough of the tiny son, wife and a cosy room. When he had dinner, Valerka was already fast asleep in a small crib with lace curtains. Antonina would bring a big iron frying pan from the kitchen and the smell of fried potatoes and burgers filled the house.

Sometimes Fyodor came home with his friend Valka Sokolov. That bubbly guy would instantly eat all the potatoes and then politely wait for the offer to eat burgers. At the same time he managed to talk inces-

santly about his life in an orphanage, and then at the Kirov factory... In the conversation it was revealed that he knew Tonya's brother Boris who, like Sokolov, too, in the early thirties had been a member of the Narva District Committee of the Komsomol. In the morning, before leaving, Astakhov gently pulled his little son out of the crib, pressed to his face, and then lifted him high on his outstretched hands and said, "When you grow up you will be a paratrooper or a pilot, like you dad!" Tonya tried to take the baby from Fyodor's strong arms and put him back into the crib.

Another three months passed. They got some furniture. In the new big wardrobe there were a coat and a fur-coat, hangers with dresses...

That Sunday in June they did not really reason. The Finnish war had taught them a lot. Fyodor got the big new fur-coat and documents ready. Tonya got Valerka ready and prepared a bag with clothes. Their host made them chicken soup. They sat down before leaving, in silence. Astakhov took their only family photo from the chest of drawers, cut himself out, in the form of the commander, and said, "If Germans know you are a commander's wife, they will shoot you."

They ran to the station. Antonina was holding her little son. He was quiet and taking everything in.

There was pandemonium at the station Dvinsk-2. People were standing or sitting on suitcases, bags and even chairs they had brought with them. They were all waiting for a train. They had been waiting since morning with their bicycles, pushchairs, baskets... There was no news about the train. But they were still waiting for it. As if they forgot that three days before the military families had tried to organize to go to the east. However, those "panic" events were rigidly stopped by the directive from Moscow.

Time was running out. By 2 pm. Fyodor was to arrive at his squadron location. His squadron and his deputy commander were to arrive by 3 pm. That was 10 kilometres from Dvinsk, near the village of Medumi. He had around 40 minutes. They could hear a loud boom in the distance...

There was no help at all from the station master. He was sitting in his office, overcrowded with military and civil people, and shaking his head. Instead of being quiet, he was saying, "There must be a train, there must be..." Some woman, a cleaner or a switch-woman, tried to help him, "They said in the morning there should be a train for evacuating military families but it's not here for some reason."

"Give them a ring! Find out what the matter is. Is there anyone else here?" some major shouted.

"Your station master had gone mad," a civilian said.

Fyodor with his wife and son squeezed into the office. Judging by the faces of the people there, no one knew anything. Everyone was trying to look for answers and demand something.

The military Commandant entered the room and slammed the door, "Calm down! Everyone, leave the office and wait for the train at the platform. Get the families ready. The train will only stop for five minutes, not a minute longer. You, comrade captain," the military Commandant addressed to a tall massive military man who was likely to be from a provision sector, "you are to organize the leavers at the platform. There will be only eight carriages and they need to load in time."

"Wow, he talks business," Fyodor thought. "Where had he been before? No, it can't be true." He was watching that show and thought that Dvinsk-2 was nearby, there was no sign of the train, but the boom was approaching.

"Tonya, we've got to run from here," Astakhov shouted to his wife, pulling her out from the overcrowded room. He jumped off the platform and pulled them down, taking his son into his arms. Antonina was holding the fur-coat and a bag with food. She barely jumped onto the tracks, breaking the hem of her new cotton polka dot dress.

"There will be the train. Fedya. Look, everyone is waiting. The boss said so," Tonya tried to argue plaintively.

"No, no! We need to find something, at least a rail car. You can't stay here."

"But why?" Tonya couldn't understand. "I can't hear any planes or cannons..."

"Can you hear that noise?" Fyodor pointed somewhere upwards. "They will be here soon."

On the long-haul rails, behind the bushes, away from the main platforms, he saw a small shabby freight train with old carriages from roughly planks knocked together. There was a locomotive ahead. Now it was slightly smoking.

"It is facing the east," Astakhov said to himself. "No time to wait. If it's smoking, it will leave in a minute. We can't wait for Germans at the station." Fyodor broke off iron loops with a lock on the carriage and pushed the rusty, creaking doors. Inside it was empty except for

a wooden box near the wall, and a bunch of hay. Antonina didn't cry. She settled on the hay. Valerka was next to her. They had a fur-coat and food! Fyodor's confident voice calmed them down.

"Get to my mother's village. Germans won't get there. Don't worry about me. Whatever happens, whatever may be said about me, I will survive." Then he boldly waved his hand, as if cutting them as in the family photos, from the impending disaster. He gave the last look at them, pushed the doors gently and fixed them together with a piece of wire so that they could be opened from the inside. High in the sky there were first German planes, and there was no hope that this train would leave.

After a moment, Astakhov felt a jolt from towing the carriages. The train moved slowly away from this station. To the east, towards his home village.

In his life there would be more than one moment of the same warm feeling of calm both for himself and for his loved ones. He felt the train being an unknown force. It was taking him away from trouble, rattling its wheels, or the disaster was disappearing itself with the train going. For a few seconds Fyodor watched the train go, then quickly turned and ran towards the platform with people. There he could see military bikes parked. Over the town there were already circling the enemy planes, choosing a goal, and with a roar rushing down and dropping bombs.

Five minutes later the station was on fire. All around there lay the dead and wounded, broken bicycles, scattered rags, summer colourful cotton dresses, shawls...

THIRD DAY OF WAR

The coalition against the aggressive Germany did not have a chance to work. The policies of all, without exception, major European countries were determined only by their own national security. And their security was based on the fact that for the time being they had by all means to avoid any direct confrontation with the new German army. That army, inspired by the revanchist aspirations and Nazi ideology, was nourished with omnivorous capital loans of the same Western Europe and the United States.

Signing an agreement with Germany on non-aggression, pushing its boundaries from Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev, Minsk and Odessa due to the capture of the territory of Finland, the accession of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the return of Bessarabia and western regions of Ukraine and Belarus, the Soviet Union completed the task of strengthening its security.

Was it done in a nice way? Politics is different from jurisprudence because it starts where the law can do nothing and does not mean anything. Moreover, it happens very often in the world, both then and now, that both law and science of history were just at the service of politics.

However, all these achievements in the field of security were, as it turned out, not for long.

The attempted anti-German coup in Romania in January and in Yugoslavia in March 1941, was simply linked by Berlin with subversive activity of Moscow and London agents. The Soviet pact of friendship and non-aggression with the Serbian pro-British government signed by the Soviet Union in April, was to contribute to the consolidation of the joint Anglo-Yugoslav-Greek front against Germany. That's what they thought in Berlin.

And that was the last straw for the outbreak of the war. Trying to justify their aggression, on June 22, 1941 the German Ambassador handed Molotov a note on twelve pages, "explaining" in detail the causes of the German attack.

...In Moscow, at the delimitation of spheres of influence the Soviet government announced to the Reichsminister of Foreign Affairs that with the exception of then disintegrating former Polish state, it did not intend to occupy, Bolshevize or annex any states under its sphere of influence. But in reality, as the course of events showed, the policy of the Soviet Union at that time was exclusively directed to one goal, namely to wherever possible promote the military power of Moscow to the West in the space between the Arctic Ocean and the Black Sea... Having occupied and Bolshevized all provided to the USSR at the talks in Moscow by the Reich government sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the Soviet government clearly and unambiguously violated the Moscow Agreements...

(From Note of Germany, 21 June 1941)

Housed in the Dvina fortress, the Infantry Division of 8th Army a few days before had moved towards Germans towards Kaunas and was defeated. Everyone left of it focused in a small town of Zarasai. Everything was muddled up. Along the road to Dvinsk there were crowded civilians and military men. Some were walking, some were sitting and some were standing. Most of them gathered around the field kitchen. Commanders were shouting at each other. "Panic, prisoners, saboteurs," could be heard everywhere. In yesterday's order it was also written about traitors and alarmists and that they shouldn't be in the Red army. If only there was one sensible, clear order! About what specifically to do. They wished someone began to speak in the military language, not the language of slogans and posters. In such circumstances, people tried to just do nothing or be extremely vigilant and see saboteurs everywhere. That was safer.

Yesterday the main forces of the 5th Airborne Corps under the command of the legendary General Bezuglov arrived at the area to the northwest from Dvinsk. Paratroopers platoon commander Lieutenant Fyodor Astakhov had just sent his family to a safe place. His wife Tonya and little son Valerka were going to the east in a freight train and he was driving a motorbike from Dvinsk to the location of his squadron. Endless columns of soldiers and equipment were moving the same way and crowds of refugees were moving towards them. It was hot. The dust had formed a thick wall along the way. Huge glasses on top of the helmet saved him from the dust.

Around the corner, near a large bush with bunches of green rowan, he caught a glimpse of the mutilated bodies of Lithuanian policemen. There were around eight of them. They must have been leaving Kaunas in their uniform in a small group. They were a good target for shaumits. Nearby, there were crowds of refugees and war people. Shaumits were Lithuanian voluntary helpers of the advancing German army. They seemed to be everywhere. On the first day of the war, they easily took power in Kaunas, then in Vilnius, and now they hosted here, in Latvia. They would jump out onto the road, throw grenades at the retreating military units and disappear. Exactly like the Finnish skiers the year before.

The motorcycle was rattling so much that he could hear nothing else. Everything kept moving like in a silent movie. Like a change of the scene, in front of his eyes there flashed a different, but familiar

picture: he and Valka Sokolov were rushing on their skis on the Lake Ladoga, with their sticks hooked on the rattling truck with shells... The road continued to wind. Astakhov kept driving like in a dream for some time. There was a kilometre and a half to the place of destination. In front of him, to the right of the road, Astakhov noticed something was wrong.

Good Lord! The Red Army men in boots with putties and long rifles at the ready were leading Bogdanov, his company commander, and with him almost the entire platoon of paratroopers. They were all unarmed. Ahead of the column some lieutenant-colonel or NKVD captain with three bars on his lapels¹⁵ was proudly marching. It was difficult to say which ones – they had been changed so often lately. Most of them were red, anyway. Astakhov, without even braking, turned on his motorcycle, showering all with fresh road dust. He stopped in their way and thought: what should he do? The situation was unusual, he didn't want to make things worse. He carefully started pulling the gun out of the holster. He was stopped by Bogdanov just in time, "Astakhov, stop, be quiet, they will kill you!"

He heard someone's voice from the column, "The political commissar began to shout and wave his gun, so they shot him immediately."

"Who? They shot Sokolov?" Astakhov shouted.

"He is over there."

On the sidelines, in the dusty grass, there lay the very Valka Sokolov, the cheerful man, always ready to help his men. His motionless face with naive astonishment was looking at the sky, his right arm was twisted unnaturally, a bright red star could be clearly seen on his sleeve. His documents lay beside him, and the wind picked them up, carrying them under the feet of indifferently walking in different directions soldiers and refugees. It did not register with Fyodor Astakhov that Valka, with whom he had spent so long and experienced so much, was killed. Killed by the insiders! "How could it have even happened? We are here in order to stop Germans and save retreating units. Maybe these Red Army men are the very disguised Germans that capture our bridges? I don't think so. Germans wouldn't put on putties..."

Three people ran up to Astakhov, pulled him from the motorcycle, tied his hands, kicked and pushed him into the column. There the insiders quickly clarified the situation, nodding at the guards, "They have never seen this uniform. They think we are Germans."

“But if we were Germans, why would we be in the Russian rear in the German uniform? Germans are not stupid. What about the colonel? Does he know any documents? He can’t be such an idiot! Has he never seen parachutists?”

“Such a shame about Sokolov. He was such a nice guy and he’d been with us since the Finnish war.”

“We need to take him with us,” Astakhov nearly ordered and together with two men came out of the column. The guards shouted loudly and began to pull back their bolts. The people from the column continued. They carefully picked up Valka and carried him back.

Five hours had passed. Until the corps commander Bezugly came, no one was believed. At last they sorted things out. The maroon squadron from the 5th Brigade was located near the village of Medumi along the road to Dvinsk. The 2nd platoon came, they were waiting for the others, Captain Bogdanov with platoon commander examined the neighbourhood through binoculars. Suddenly a captain of the special department of the 8th Army saw people in “suspicious” uniform, “displayed vigilance”, called the Red Army men from the retreating units and ordered them to disarm the platoon of paratroopers. It was not easy to do that but Bogdanov decided not to fight back. It was the right thing to do in the situation of general nervousness and suspicion. The political commissar of the squadron Sokolov came to the rescue and began to shout, argue and show them documents. The secret agent got his gun, so did Sokolov. The secret agent shot first...

No one was punished. The NKVD captain was taken away straight away by the Head of the Army Special Department. The incident was hushed up. They had other things to deal with. But Valka died. Of course, one man doesn’t count when thousands die or are encircled. But for Astakhov and for his mates from Bogdanov’s squadron it was hard. After the mess in the Finnish campaign, today Fyodor for the first time over the past year and a half again experienced a lousy sense of shame and some frustration from the fact he was a commander. The paratroopers lost five hours. The same as in Bessarabia, a year before. Nothing had changed. Then five hundred of them were ejected near Izmail to stop Romanians reiving people and cattle¹⁶ from Bessarabia. While they were all gathering, another three hours passed.

Meanwhile, the 8th tank division of Wehrmacht after a breakthrough, overcoming the resistance of the Red Army, as part of the 56th

tank corps by the evening of June 22 seized the bridge across the Dubysa, the tributary of the Neman, near the town of Aregol. This was an important success by Army Group “North” in the Battle of Leningrad. The German commanders had remembered the significance of this crossing since the First World War. Now, advancing without stopping and ignoring their lagging neighbours, the Germans had to capture the bridges over the Western Dvina, cross to its right bank and take Dvinsk. Then the way to Pskov and after that to Leningrad would be open. There were no further defensive structures. The old structures were dismantled and they had already passed the new ones. The 8th and 11th Armies of the North-Western Front in the first two days suffered heavy losses and were now retreating in divergent directions. At the junction between them a gap of up to 130 kilometres wide was formed, which they could not close. They sent there the understaffed 21st Mechanized Corps of Lelyushenko and 5th Airborne Corps of Bezuglov, who had nothing to fight tanks with, they had neither weapons nor training.

As a result, on the 24th June, the German tank division overtook a big road leading to Dvinsk in the area of Vilkomerz and wedged into the 170 kilometres inland of the Lithuanian SSR. They left far behind not only their neighbours, but also the Russian troops, located in the border area. The 290th Infantry Division of the Wehrmacht, of course, could not keep pace with the rapid tank raid. Only ten or fifteen kilometres separated the advance units of the German tank division from the desired goal. In binoculars they could already see well the town of Dvinsk.

The continuous movement of the column forward suddenly stopped. 27 brand new heavy tanks T-4¹⁷ clumsily stalled progress and began to move as something incomprehensible: backwards, sideways, interfering with each other. Anywhere but forward. Something was in their way. Judging by the nature of fire, it was chaotic, crazed shooting of the enemy mortars. It was a barrage on the stretch of the road Zarasai – Dvinsk near the building of the former prison.

The tanks had to wander around the destroyed houses for over an hour, not daring go onto the road and get a mine under the track. Then the shooting died down and the Germans, as if making up for lost time, with a vengeance rushed to the town. Seven wrecked tanks were left to burn on the road and on the edges.

23 June 1941

...it looks an organized retreat so far is not necessary to talk about. The exception is, perhaps, the area ahead of the front of the Army Group "North", where apparently the retreat across the Western Dvina river was really planned in advance. The reasons for this preparation can not be set at the moment...

(Halder F. War Diary. Daily records of Chief of General Staff of the Land Forces 1939–1942. M.: 1968–1971)

What can you say? All the intelligence of the Third Reich could not guess what the causes of "organized retreat" of the enemy were. They just lacked imagination.

From the border of the Lithuanian SSR, the German tank corps – 41st Reinhardt and 56th Manstein – were moving in two long columns to the Western Dvina. Across the river, on a huge three-hundred-kilometre area, there was a normal peaceful life, if you didn't look closely. And farther east, in the same clouds of dust and smoke two Soviet mechanized corps were moving: number 1 from Pskov to Leningrad and number 10 from Leningrad to Vyborg. Some evil force was driving them in the opposite direction, and no one could turn them towards the Germans rushing to Dvinsk, Pskov and Leningrad. Everything was done according to the plan. The plan to defeat Finland, compiled in November 1940.

The main objectives of the North-Western Front are as follows: the defeat of the armed forces of Finland, the mastery of its territory within the delimitations and access to the Gulf of Bothnia on the 45th day of the operation...

(From the Directive NKO and the General Staff of the Red Army commander of the Leningrad Military District, 25th November 1940)

Well, who could have known then, in 1940, that the following year, on June 22nd, the Germans would start the war, and the first day they would easily cross the Neman and four days later the Dvina as well. Who in these conditions would look at the first line of the Directive, which was developed and had to operate "in conditions of the USSR

against Finland"? Everyone sees only their duties, their area of responsibility. Aviation's responsibility was to bomb, the tankists' – to advance to the border and wait for instructions, and artillery's – to shoot. The first line is the competence of the High Command.

And where was it? Maybe it was the duty of the Army General Meretskov, who on the eve of June 21st, by the decision of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee was entrusted the general management of the Northern Front? It probably was. Never mind the war, the Politburo, of course, was an important organ of power, but the lawlessness machine, gaining momentum and not manageable, confidently continued its work. The army general on the third day after the appointment was beaten with batons by NKVD officers.

Stalin, without the personal attention of whom not a single problem was being solved, even a question of the composition of spare parts for T-34 tank, then suddenly "got upset" and for a whole week after the start of the war was virtually inaccessible.

Until now, no one has seen any film or read a textbook about what was going on with the leadership of the troops in the north-west direction in the very first days of the war. Meanwhile, the leaders did not come up with anything better than just replace the three commanders of the North-Western Front in five weeks. And a little later they did the same in the Leningrad Front. Only here they replaced four people in just over a month.

It becomes clear why instead of stopping the German forces on the Dvina, bombing the crossings captured by them, not giving up Pskov without a fight, the military authorities did quite an opposite thing. At that precious time at the headquarters of the North-Western Front they were passing the buck. That was important. Not even bothering himself with those indecent occupations, the chief of the Operations Department, together with all the documents, just surrendered...

What about the troops? What about them? It was those Tank Corps, which by the beginning of the war had been fully staffed, having left for 300 miles from the advancing German troops, that now disembarked from platforms in the woods, in a swamp. They did not receive any orders from the High Command, except the Directive of defeating Finland approved before the war. Lacking additional guidance about crossing the border, they clumsily "poked" in the Finnish defence. In addition, each weapon, as if doubting the wisdom of

the enterprise, on average, shot once towards Finland in one hour. And early in the morning of July 4, as the combat reports, all “safely got out of the fight”.

Is it possible to judge in these circumstances the commander of the Northern Front Popov, because he did not exercise his personal initiative and fulfilled exactly what was stated in the approved document by Stalin? He simply did not have the order to abandon the invasion of Finland and immediately throw all mechanized units to meet the advancing Germans at Leningrad. Even if God Himself came down from heaven, or if Finland asked to return to Russia, nobody would have dared to do what had not been cancelled by Stalin himself.

Only on the 5th of July, Zhukov's order from the General Staff was finally received for the return of the tanks to Leningrad, towards Luga. There militia was urgently creating a new, last line of defence.

As a result of the complete lack of leadership and lost time, the effects of the first enemy attacks in the North-Western Front were disastrous. Disorderly troops were retreating. Having lost control, or rather, having not acquired it, the front commander could not do anything against the adjusted flywheel of total predestination. Initiative, responsibility, risk and independence were simply milled and frayed in the dust of its blunt teeth. Military operations clearly acquired the character of an unprecedented defeat.

Only 90 serviceable tanks from once fully stocked 10th Mechanized Corps returned to Luga from Finland. This being said, more than 64 thousand of Red army men found themselves as prisoners of the Finns. That was almost five infantry divisions. Here, near Finland, and not there, outside Dvinsk, Pskov and the turn of Luga, in the first three months of the war, Soviet troops lost or drowned in a swamp four and a half thousand tanks. It was seven and a half times more than the original number of the very two tank corps of Manstein and Reinhardt, which acted in the Leningrad direction as part of the Army Group “North”. It was only later, in late July, after Hitler personally arrived at the headquarters of the Army Group “North” and demanded a speedy capture of Leningrad, a new front commander, Marshal Voroshilov with his power stopped trains with tanks of the 1st Mechanized Corps going to Leningrad and then sent them “to defeat the Finns”.

Of course, he was guided by his proletarian anger and a burning, painful desire “to teach presumptuous Finnish fighters a lesson” and

to restore after the Winter War his battered reputation after the “winter war” of an experienced commander who had signed the shameful act of transferring Commissariat cases to another commander. As historians wrote at the time, “Voroshilov did not wait for the results of his command, he returned to Leningrad and gave one of his most famous orders to manufacture tens of thousands of spearheads, which the first marshal was going to kill Jerries with, when they burst into the city of Lenin”.

BRIDGE OVER THE DVINA

In the evening on the 25th June, after a long and useless analysis of the incident on the road, the squadron of Bogdanov was ordered to keep the defence on the left bank of the Dvina, covering the retreat of our troops from Zarasai to Dvinsk. They had to keep the German tanks with only 37-millimetre mortars, and allow our units to cross to the right bank. The parachutists did not have any other weapons.

By the morning there appeared tanks on the road with large white crosses on the armour. The black vehicles all together deployed in a combat operation and quickly went round the paratroopers from three sides. They were already very close, crawling persistently to the bridge, ignoring a handful of soldiers who were busy around their mortars, measuring out the tilt of the gun.

From the direction of the prison building on the left bank of the Dvina six mortar shells were firing mines towards the confidently approaching German tanks. In the truck behind the bushes another half of its body was full of boxes of ammunition. Through binoculars one could see our troops going across the bridge over the Western Dvina and engineers and NKVD officers in crimson-blue caps being busy nearby.

The tanks thoroughly, without haste, but at the same time, almost without moving forward, were firing unmasked mortars and trucks with mines. Within a quarter of an hour three trucks and four mortars had been destroyed. The dead and wounded lay near the explosion craters. There were no nurses, no bombshells, there were only mines in one truck. Two platoons of paratroopers were gone.

Destroying the enemy tanks did not work out. Survivors realised it was all a waste of time and unnecessary losses. A young boy, squadron deputy commander, ran closer to the commander and loudly shouted in his ear, "Fyodor! We should go back. It's a waste, we can't wait any longer, the road to the river has been already occupied!"

"We must not!" the lieutenant interrupted him straight away. "Are you mad? We still have bombshells!"

It firmly entered the consciousness of Astakhov even during his training and fighting in Finland: the commander, a "staff officer" is not like everyone else and certainly not like a simple civil or political worker. He could not leave the field of battle, if there was anything to fight with. He could not surrender. For failure to comply with the order there would be execution. And the captain's order was simple – to stop the tanks. Not to fight them because they had nothing, but to stop, to allow our troops to cross to the right bank. Maybe that was what his deputy didn't understand.

They needed to hold on for another few minutes. They had no connection, there were no instructions from their superiors. Sashka, their messenger from the squadron commander, was wounded. It had been half an hour since he crawled to them. He was sitting in the trench, covered in blood and trying to bandage his arm. Luckily, he was not heavily wounded, but he had lost a lot of blood. He was repeating all the time, "Don't let them through, don't let them through. Captain ordered to wait for the bridge to be exploded. Wait for the signal."

"I know," Astakhov said to himself and thought how vulnerable and fragile the governance in the army was, especially during the action operation. For Sashka could have said a different thing...

The screeching of the flying mines sounded more rarely now. They only had two whole mortars. Fyodor glanced at Sashka, who nodded in response. Then Astakhov sent his deputy, along with five wounded soldiers to go across the river and find the captain or the battalion commander and report everything to them.

They were left alone, the lieutenant and Sashka. They understood each other perfectly. They quickly dug small holes for the base plates so that the mortar barrels were standing in the land at a very acute angle.

"We are not going to calculate the angle," Astakhov quickly said, getting the mines ready.

"It's useless."

"We'll shoot from both mortars at random in that direction!"

"Hope we'll make it," Sashka said to himself and then he turned to the lieutenant and added loudly, "When we run out of mines we'll catch up with them!"

"Whatever happens, the enemy must be destroyed. If you can't do now, do it later. If you can't kill the enemies, frighten them, deceive them at least. But you've got to do something! The enemy must feel resistance all the time and suffer losses. Otherwise it will be impossible to stop them." Fyodor invented this theory back in the Finnish war and taught it to his soldiers. Of course, a mortar is nothing for the German tank T-3 and the newer tank T-4. But you can break the track with an explosion or if you're lucky, set fire to the vehicle.

Mines were densely laying in front of tanks. Some mines, unable to shoot properly, exploded nearby. For some time they managed to stop the powerful rush of the German tanks. It seemed to have been for hours. But no, it had only been for twenty minutes. Some mines hit the target.

"Look, they don't like it!"

"Have some more!" Sashka was shooting the tank men jumping out of the tank.

The tank men, a minute before sticking baldly out of the towers of the tanks in black jumpsuits, somehow clumsily crawled down under the tracks of their own tanks. Several vehicles were smoking. The others stopped. Then they started turning around. But not backwards. No, they were trying to move in different directions. They were going around the bushes and the remains of the prison building.

"Sashka, you go left and I will go right!"

"Aye, left!"

"They won't go into the centre now," Astakhov thought. To shoot the tanks of this "toy" when they bypassed the flanks of the bushes and trees almost without seeing them, was very nasty. Such an "abuse" took another ten minutes.

"That's it! That's the end!" Sashka shouted somehow cheerfully, pulling the last box out of the truck. "Another ten shots and that's that!"

"We're leaving! Put the mortars into the truck!"

There were no more mines left. There were only him and Sashka left from the landing troops squadron, a year ago participated in com-

bat operations in Finland and then in Bessarabia, and also the platoon deputy commander with five wounded soldiers. They needed to make it to the other bank of the river. All mortars, except for two that were already in the truck body, were crushed; nearby there were fresh funnels, bloodied and mangled bodies of our soldiers. For the two hours of the battle they had become accustomed to it and did not try to pick up documents or personal weapons. However, Astakhov managed to take a few ebony capsules and together with the documents of Val-ka Sokolov he put them into his briefcase. They jumped into the truck cabin. The engine was already on. "Sashka is great! When did he do it?" Astakhov thought staring at the bridge. Sashka was holding the steering wheel with his wounded hand, and pulling the gear lever with the other one. The German tanks had approached the bridge.

"Damn! We can't do anything now! Why are the sappers taking so long?" Astakhov thought to himself. "We should have shot. I didn't think right. Then we would have killed our soldiers..."

Somewhere on the bridge they heard loud humming of the engine, white smoke shot up high into the air and a small train of five carriages filled with wounded Red Army soldiers, quickly, almost without knocking the wheels on the rail joints, slipped to the other side of the bridge.

"The last ones have left," Fyodor said.

"Not for us," Sashka muttered with clear regret. "That's it. We are alone now."

"Look!" Astakhov shouted. In front of them, over the river, they could see but not hear a visible explosion. To Fyodor it looked somehow unexpectedly small and unconvincing. It could not be a signal. He was waiting for another one... The bridge swayed and shuddered. The metal fence flew off it and the middle of the rails raised high. It was damaged but was still there. In his brain, for a split second there flashed, "Why could I not hear the explosion? Has it actually happened? Have we fulfilled the order now? Maybe not? They have managed to ruin the bridge, and the last train has passed... The Germans will not be able to move to the other side now... Tonya and Valerka are there... But there was no order to retreat. There is no one to retreat..."

The stream of his thoughts was suddenly interrupted and all the questions were at once resolved. A moment before a tank shell directly hit and shattered the truck.

... A Soviet officer of the guard of the bridge (across the Dvina River, near Dvinsk – B.K.), taken prisoner, admitted, "I did not have orders to blow up the bridge. Without orders, I would not go for it. And there was nobody to ask, everyone had left".

(Manstein E. Lost Victories. M., 1999)

Strictly confidential

To People's Commissar of Defence of the USSR

Reporting position of troops of the North-Western Front.

The enemy continues entrapping Libau...

8th Army, 12th Mechanized Corps and 5th Tank Division, are behind enemy lines without fuel. Commander of the 3rd Mechanized Corps openly denounced on 26.06.41, "Help, we are trapped"... On the night of June 27, he will begin to withdraw... to the north bank of the Western Dvina...

11th Army – Headquarters and the Army Military Council, on a number of data, are captured or killed. The Germans captured code-document. It is known what state the 5th, 33rd, 188th, 128th infantry divisions are in or where they are. Many straggled and ran away, or kept by the enemy in the direction of Dvinsk. A lot of weapons left.

Air Force of the front suffered heavy losses due to the small number of airports. At the moment they are not able to effectively support, cover ground troops and attack the enemy. 75% crews have been saved. Loss of equipment is 80%...

Enemy tanks occupied Dvinsk...

(From the report of the commander of the North-Western front about the situation at the front by 20.35 on June 26, 1941)

Confidential

To Commander of the 8th Army (Major General) Sobennikov

*To Member of the Military Council of the Army
(divisional commissioner) Shabalov*

To Army Chief of Staff (Major General) Larionov

You criminally left the troops to fend for themselves and you are harbouring your own skin. For a responsible operation like a withdrawal of the entire army, it was necessary to make a plan and withdraw the troops from line to line and manage the withdrawal of each unit.

I demand you do it immediately. Task Force of the headquarters should return to Jelgava and manage withdrawal. Direct immediately the left-

front line 11th Infantry Division to Jekabpils. Consider the arrangement of crossings via all the possibilities, that can be found in the centre of your front... Present the plan of action via the General lieutenant Safronov... Keep the radio link with the headquarters of the front. You are avoiding contact apparently with the intention because you do not know anything and do not want to know about their troops.

On 28.06.41 and 29.06.41 carry on with withdrawal, finish on 30.06.41, withdraw all the units. Cheer up the troops. Keep their combat effectiveness and wait in Riga. On the main itinerary organize strong air defence, for which the 6th Composite Air Division arrived at your submission, and the airport in Riga...

*Commander of the North-Western Front, Colonel-General Kuznetsov
Member of the Military Council of the front, Corps commissar Dibrova*

*Chief of Staff of the front, Lieutenant-General Klenov
29.06.41 18.10*

(From Directive of the commander of the North-Western Front)

It was the last order, full of powerlessness and despair, of the first commander of the North-Western Front. Reporting the situation to the top, he tried to look a good executive commander. He lied and embellished. Allegedly Dvinsk, under the order from Moscow, had been returned, and all retreating units had crossed to the right bank... Only a little later they still had to report that out of nowhere a cloud of German tanks appeared, and again, they said, they drove them out of the city. And so forth and so on.

Three days later he was replaced. Strange though it may seem, based on the text of the previous document, he was replaced by the commander of the 8th Army Sobennikov. A month later another change would be made, this time it would be taken from another front. Major General Kurochkin would distinguish himself near Smolensk, and they would appoint him. Why not? Smolensk had been abandoned to the enemy a month before. So it was high time!

Two weeks later the Northern Front would be turned into Karelia and Leningrad fronts. The Leningrad front would be led by the former commander of the Leningrad Special district Popov. It was probably easier. A day or two later he would be replaced as well. Now Voroshilov would become the chief for a fortnight...

The 27th, 11th and 34th armies would be surrounded outside Velikiye Luki. The front commander Sobennikov would be sentenced to five years, and the commander of the 34th Army and his deputy for artillery would be shot. I guess, that was right. In this army from the 10th to the 26th of August half of its personnel, nearly 20 thousand people, 748 guns, 628 mortars and 74 tanks of the available 83 had been irretrievably lost. But what would the unprecedented personnel leapfrog in July and August 1941 become for the front? Will it be the reason of great losses or their consequence?..

It would take several years until the great leaders of the country understood that to manage war was a great skill and art. They would understand that they could not do without professionals. Creative, initiative professionals, who are able to take risks. There were not many of them left after 1937...

Whenever one needs to control something – a plant, a country or a war – the first person, depending on his personal characteristics, will have to use a particular style. A directive, totalitarian style of management involves complete absence of choice freedom in the downstream head and the strictest control from above downwards. This, in turn, “washes away” the initiative and creative individuals from the management of the nomenclature environment, and on the contrary introduces and reinforces executive and fearful on every occasion opportunists, well analysing the changing power. Crisis always requires drastic measures.

We must pay tribute to Stalin, who despite the notorious suddenness, had converted calm and saturated with the bureaucratic spirit military districts into the fighting fronts three days before the start of the war. Difficult as it may have been for him, but he knew a week after the beginning of the war that, along with the introduction of rigid unity of command, though in the face of the State Defence Committee, for the first time he really needed to share his unlimited power. He appointed a deputy. He chose him from the trampled, cut, very rare and only locally preserved population of initiative, dissentient and creative commanders. But at the same time he found the person, the same as himself, hard and intolerant. Gradually, not immediately, but it became clear even to him that it was better to take the risk and appoint such a person than in two weeks to replace four of the previous teams. Those worked “well” in peacetime, when he was allowed to

experiment, to remove ministers and appoint team leaders in their places. In the wartime the result of this “management” was felt too fast and too painfully.

CAPTIVITY

Astakhov recovered consciousness. He was on the earthen floor of a huge leaky, completely empty barn. Dull pain in the head and sharp pain in his arm just above the elbow, forced him to switch on. “How long has it been? I see, I am wounded in my head and wounded in my arm. I can still think straight. That’s good. Where is Sashka? I can’t hear anyone.” His right arm was motionless and bandaged. His head was covered in dry blood. It was hurting on the right under his eye. It had been wounded with a shatter and was now unbearable painful. Fyodor was dying for a drink. His eyes couldn’t see well and could hardly open. “Metal dust must have got in after the explosion,” Astakhov thought when he saw himself through lids, stuck with blood and dirt. “No service shirt... No documents!” flashed through his mind. “No briefcase, watch or compass. The only distinction sign is the breeches. The gun?! Confiscated as well... They must have dragged me away, they knew I was a commander. They pulled me to the barn, bandaged... and left. It’s difficult to get out of the trap with the wounded. But who’s done that? Everyone alive had left before.”

A German in black uniform, without a helmet, blond, slim, with a small red moustache was standing in front of Astakhov and poking a gun in his stomach. “Does he want me to stand up?” Fyodor thought. “And raise my arms? I can’t. And he can finish me off.” Two more Germans came up to him. They were obviously tank men, they had black shoulder straps with some bright trim. Either red or pink. One of them, with three tracks on the sleeve, was telling something for a long time. “Maybe this sergeant major saw me yesterday in the battle?” flashed through Astakhov’s mind. “Then why would he be talking so long?” He understood just one word – “communist”. Astakhov did not yet know that a few days before the onset the German troops were ordered to immediately shoot all captured political commissars of the Red Army and the Communists, “the carriers of Bolshevik ideology”¹⁸.

Fyodor looked at his boots and thought, “Surprisingly, they haven’t taken them off”. Then, in the early days of the war, the Germans did not know that the Russians could and would escape from captivity. Only in late August, they would understand that if they picked their boots, they supposedly would not escape barefoot. But the boots could be taken off by the Russians as well.

Then he pronounced loudly and distinctly, “ Well, we were... sort of... repairing the road. As soon as we repaired it, you planes ruined it so we had to do it again...”

The tank men didn’t talk any more. They must have said enough. They didn’t beat him up, didn’t bully, they just took him by his arms, pulled out of the barn and threw him into the cart. There were already two wounded soldiers and one lieutenant there. Gunners. They were driven along the houses of some village.

“It’s Malinovka,” one of the soldiers said quietly. “Yesterday we barely escaped from the Germans here. It must have been a whole regiment trying to leave. Half of them were beaten, wounded, bandaged, we had a whole wagon of cannon sights.”

After fulfilling the requirements of the headquarters, the 5th Airborne Corps was unsuccessfully trying to dislodge the Germans from Dvinsk for two days, the situation had deteriorated further. The general retreat to the northern bank of the Western Dvina slowed down. Many people were not able to cross over and were taken captive. It was not better to be on this side of the river. They retreated in haste, leaving the wounded and equipment.

The horse harnessed to a cart, was transporting them to the same station that until recently had been full of people waiting to be sent to the rear. Everywhere there were tanks and columns of German soldiers. At the station there were only scattered suitcases and clothes. The dead and wounded had been removed. “That was quick,” Astakhov thought. Actually it had been four days since the first bombing. They were taken to some house. Around were Germans with machine guns, not tank men. Once inside, Fyodor was surprised the first time, “They are prisoners. Here we are! So many of them. Why were they taken captive? How? They are quite unscathed. Not a single person I know. Hence, our people all died. Maybe these are not prisoners? Some of them are wearing civilian clothes. Silly me, who else could they be? No! We all are now traitors! No one said the wounded are allowed to be taken captives.”

In the beginning of the war there were such instructions. A pilot, for example, even if his plane was shot down, before he was to leave, had to unscrew the clock from the front of the cockpit and then jump out. That would be a proof that you didn't leave the plane out of fear. However, Astakhov knew that pilots did not really like to leave their stricken plane. Instead of jumping out of it, it was better to try and land it. There were similar instructions for the gunners. They had to remove the sights from the broken guns. And it was also proof that you left the weapon not because of being a coward, but under a hail of bullets and shells, understanding the responsibility for its warhead material, you carefully removed the sight from the broken gun.

"My watch has been taken by someone from our side. That's one problem less," Fyodor tried to joke. "the main thing is to get stronger and try to escape. With someone. But who with?"

Why escape? Why not stay? What happens, happens. Astakhov didn't even think like that. He didn't think like that just because he knew what they did to the Red army soldiers freed from the Finnish captivity after the Finnish war.

...out of the 5465 war prisoners, sent by Finland to the Soviet Union after the Winter War of 1939–1940, 158 people were killed, 4354 were sentenced to imprisonment for a term of 5 to 8 years by the Special Meeting of the NKVD.

(Frolov D.D. From the history of the winter War 1939 – 1940. Petrozavodsk, 1999)

He did not think like that also because despite all the mess in the first days of the war, in his mind there remained for years of service the truth: an officer, a commander must in all circumstances be able to organize military operations against the enemy. There was another thing... He simply promised his wife to come back.

They had not been given any food for three days. To be fair, they didn't make them work, either. It looked like there were no prisoners of war. Then they transferred them into the ancient Dvina fortress. Some man, not wounded, it seemed he was a nurse, bandaged Fyodor's arm with something. "You have to bandage it every day or it'll fester and you'll die," he said. Astakhov was still very weak from the loss of blood and did not talk to him about the escape. The last

few days in the fortress people were sitting on the stone floor in groups and talking quietly.

"I can't talk to them. They have definitely made up their mind. They don't need me. Especially when I am wounded," Fyodor thought.

Two days later, they all were seated on the decks for the transport of sand. There were nearly twenty decks of prisoners. At the end of each deck in the corners there were Germans with guns. The train moved to the west...

16.06.1941 with clarifications 08.09.1941

Confidential

A Soviet soldier taken prisoner, however harmless he might look, will take any opportunity to vent his hatred to everything German. We should keep in mind that prisoners received appropriate guidance on their behaviour in captivity. Towards them Germans need to exercise extreme vigilance, greatest care and acute distrust.

Guard teams are given the following basic guidelines:

1) Merciless punishment at the slightest sign of protest and disobedience. To suppress their resistance, ruthlessly use weapons. Shoot on sight the prisoners of war who escaped with the firm intention to hit the target.

2) Any communication with the prisoners of war, as well as during the march to and from work, except for the impact of service teams, is prohibited. Prevent any communication of prisoners of war and civilians, in case of need use weapons, including using it against civilians...

<...>

5) With all the rigour and hardness for the strict implementation of the orders to the German soldiers it is prohibited to torture or bully: using truncheons, whips, etc. It demeans the dignity of a German soldier as a carrier of weapons...

(Memo of the General Staff of the Wehrmacht "On the Treatment of Soviet Prisoners of War")

PART 2

CHOICE

C H O I C E

DEATH IS AN ALTERNATIVE

The train was going in the direction of Kaunas. It had been raining for a long time. It was slanting and cold rain. The guards raised their hoods and wrapped themselves in capes. The prisoners were lying side by side, covering with what they could find. None of them knew that by the end of June, Army Group "North" had crossed the Western Dvina River all the way from Riga to Dvinsk. Breaking into the manoeuvre room, on July 6, the Germans occupied the town of Ostrov, and on the 9th, almost without a fight, following closely the running in panic 118th and 111th divisions, entered Pskov.

Without knowing all that, the people on the decks were talking quietly, "They will occupy Moscow and Leningrad and let us go. There will be work for everyone. They will bring us to Kaunas and feed there..."

Astakhov was watching a guy who was somehow different from the others. He couldn't understand why but he was drawn to him. He was slim and silent. He was looking at everyone not with hatred, no, that was something inner, deep and calm. He was not wounded... The guy had moved closer to Astakhov and was obviously waiting for something. Astakhov broke down first and whispered, "Do you want to try?" Still looking at him, he shook his head in the direction of the woods along the railway. The guy sighed with a relief and nodded, "Yeah. But how?"

How scary it is to open your heart to another person in such terrible conditions, where almost everyone dreams only of the defeat in the war and a hunk of bread! The guy spoke with complete abandon. He told Astakhov everything about himself. That he was not married yet. That until recently, before he was called up, he had worked as

chairman of a collective farm. He was called Sergei. Sergei Prokhorov. He had been captured outside Zarusai.

"You are not wounded," Fyodor whispered with jealousy in a quiet voice so that the other people couldn't hear them. There was no question in his voice. He was hoping for an explanation.

"What's the point of shooting or banging the head against a brick wall? They didn't even give us cartridges. The tanks didn't even shoot, they just surrounded us and knocked down..."

"Did many get taken captive?" Fyodor didn't argue, he just directed Sergei's outpour. He didn't say anything about himself. The words he said in whisper were enough.

"Everyone did. We didn't even have time to lie down with those long guns without bullets or get out of the trucks. What a position to be in! No trench, no hill, no trees! They shouldn't even have taken us out of the trucks. Could have taken us to the Germans like that. As soon as the trucks stopped there were no squadron or platoon commanders. No one at all. I don't know whether they had been killed or run away... there were only tanks around us. How did we even manage to get into the middle of them? I have no clue."

"Maybe, they took you for a ride?"

"Who? No one knew the Germans were already on the other side of the Dvina," Sergei chattered loudly.

"Shh! Be quiet!" Fyodor whispered. "Anyone could have done. This situation is just the right time for traitors and spies."

They travelled for another half hour watching the people around them. They tried to feel the danger from their side. But no one was interested in them. They all were lying on the floor, wet and hungry. No one was even whispering. They were waiting to arrive at the station. Waiting to be fed and for the rain to stop at last.

Before Kaunas the train went up the hill and slowed down. The nearest guard's face had long been hidden with a hood, and they could not see whether he had fallen asleep or was still watching over all.

"Do you think he's asleep?" Astakhov asked pointing at the German in the end of the carriage.

"It doesn't matter. Even if he sees us, he won't have time to do anything," Sergei answered.

"Now! After that post. Jumping out. We'll just roll down the deck," Fyodor said quickly and confidently grabbing Sergei's arm.

"Hope we don't get caught under the wheels," Sergei said very carefully.

"Damn! What's that?" Fyodor nearly screamed. Near the railway there were stacked sleepers. After the next post there were rail tracks. Then sleepers again. As if someone had done it on purpose to stop people escaping. It was much easier to jump off the plane. Another ten minutes had passed. Kaunas was getting very close. Later it would be much more difficult.

Suddenly Astakhov realized the guy could not jump off. Even he was scared, never mention Sergei... As the Major-infantryman who had to make just one jump a year, and he would not let the bar on the wing, and no power on earth could budge him... But how would he find his way to his side on his own? He wouldn't survive! He took Sergei's arm firmly again and began to slowly crawl along with him along the edge of the carriage, away from the rear wheels.

"That's it! Now," Astakhov said again, "it will be much more difficult to escape from the camp."

Fyodor pushed Sergei but the edge of the deck was in the way.

"I can't, I'll fall to my death," the guy was frantically clinging to the side with his hands and resisting. Another pile of sleepers and rails was approaching.

"Straight after them. Come on!" Astakhov was begging him. His rapid pulse strongly echoed in his head and his right arm gripping Sergei just above the wrist. Fyodor got scared. He suddenly thought anyone could hear that crazy knock. He opened his hand and in his head the ringing silence exploded. Time stopped. As if from above, painfully clearly, he saw himself lying face down on the wet wooden floor of the deck... Two men pinned his arms and legs.

"Where are you going?" one of them asked through his clenched teeth. "You are quick!"

"He needs a beating, he won't do it again!" the second man added. "Germans will start shooting – everyone will be dead. And we want to stay alive."

"Are you with him, little shit?" the second man asked Prokhorov coarsely.

"I am on my own," Sergei answered and turned away.

"Why are you sticking to him then? Crawl away from here!"

"You, buddy, are too quick, I can see," the second Red army soldier

continued squeezing Fyodor's wounded arm hard, "we need to give you in or you'll want to escape again. If we do, it'll do us good."

They pinned Fyodor to the floor even harder...

Astakhov looked enviously at the dark forest that stretched along the rail road tracks, and saw their train of prisoners quietly come to the station, slide, reluctantly creaking wheels by the passenger platforms and stop at a distance, near the depot. On the ground along the entire train there were Germans. Dogs were barking. From the depot along the station area there was barbed wire everywhere. The prisoners were jumping straight to the ground from the first five decks and falling. They were being beaten and pushed behind the barbed wire. The rest of them stayed where they were and got taken further away. Those two who had caught Fyodor, tried to point him out to the Germans. But every time they were not taken notice of. A minute or two later they got divided by a crowd. Fyodor got into the first wooden hut, and the two men further on, in a brick boiler house. Fyodor couldn't see where Sergei was placed.

They didn't get any food. Day after day.

Astakhov didn't remember the first night in Kaunas. But he could clearly remember the following day.

...It is morning. Everyone who was in the first barracks, about fifty people, are led out of town toward the woods...

"Are they going to shoot us?" Fyodor thought. "Why did they bring us here then?"

...There, in a clearing in the trenches and between them there are lying tens and hundreds of our killed soldiers. The air stinks. This is what's left here from the 2nd Army after the first battles near Kaunas. The exhausted prisoners are forced to carry the bodies into the trench and bury them. If they fall, they are immediately killed and also dumped into the trench.

Fyodor has experienced the "communication" with the prisoners, and tries to work alone, without a partner. From time to time he glances towards the woods. It's a couple hundred metres to it. Too far. On the side of the forest the machine gunners are standing. There is a road on the other side. It's very close. There are two trucks, in which the guards arrived, a little further there is a passenger car. Next to it there is an officer in the black uniform. He is on his own and is watching them work, covering his face with a hankie.

In the first minute, finding himself in a clearing among the dead, Astakhov sees a pistol in the bent hand of the killed combat commander. Are there bullets in it? Would he be able to run to the car? If only no one saw the weapon! The Germans must have already collected everything on the first day and left the corpses. Only on the fifth time Fyodor comes to this commander, bends down, takes the pistol and pulls the body to the pit. In the few seconds until he puts his gun in his belt of his breeches, he tries to understand the weight of the "TT", whether there are bullets in it. Without avail. Everything the wounded, weak and hungry Astakhov touches seems very heavy to him...

Sitting around the side platform of the train approaching Kaunas, Fyodor feels this terrible slow motion movie is coming to its end.

An hour has passed, then another one, another five. No breaks, no food. Many prisoners are so thirsty that their feet stumble, and they fall and immediately get shot by the guards. Only fifteen people remain alive out of fifty. It feels like the Germans want all the prisoners to die and someone last will bury them. He has no strength any more. A little more, and he just will not be able to run. Carefully getting up closer and closer to the officer, Astakhov finally turns around and runs to the car. He can only shoot once from his pistol. The officer in black falls down. There are no more bullets in the pistol. At the same moment, a string of burst gets Fyodor through and he, having already run to the passenger car, dumps on its bonnet... and hears the sounds of wheels.

He is on the deck again. The time came back. His consciousness has cleared. Astakhov smoothly slid off the carriage, his back hit the ground and he rolled under the mound. He heard machine gun fire. Bullets flew over his head, knocking the rain drops off the high grass, not mown for long time. The train was going. Its wheels pounded quieter, it was taking the lost people and Sergei into captivity.

TONYA AND VALERKA

Antonina was cuddling her little son, covered in the big black fur-coat. The carriage of the freight train was full of cracks and it was blowing from all sides. Valerka was crying all the time. A few minutes after

the train left Dvinsk, they heard the roar of planes and bomb blasts. The station was being bombed.

"Where is daddy?" Antonina talked to her little boy. "He always said Germans would be stopped. They will not go far. So we've got to get to the village. You nan lives there." But they had been travelling for several hours and couldn't see a single Russian soldier. The train was passing the station Moloskovitsy without stopping. It was very close to the village of Khotnezha, about thirty kilometres from it. There was no one around. The train slowed down and Antonina, clutching Valerka, carefully jumped from the steps of the car. They got to Khotnezha at night. From Moloskovitsy to Izvoz they got a lift on a military truck, then they walked for twelve kilometres.

In Khotnezha Tonya lived for a week. Valerka became stronger. But it was becoming uneasy. They could hear the same terrible roar, as there had been in Dvinsk. Fyodor's mother got her cousin Yegor to walk Antonina with her son to the district centre Volosovo. Then they could get on the train to Leningrad.

The train Tonya and her son were travelling by from Volosovo, was just two weeks ahead of the advancing German troops. The train, safe and sound, somehow miraculously rushed through the front line, which practically didn't exist because there was virtually no line of defence. They only started to form it in July at the turn of the Luga River. By morning, the train had arrived at the Warsaw station. She thought, "That's fun for the saboteurs. They can come right to Leningrad and blow anything they want." She instantly wanted to share her thoughts with the military people. There were a lot of them at the platform, all different, moving busily in different directions. But she changed her mind just in time and walked towards the Kirov plant, Turbinnaya street...

FROM VALYA PAVLOVA'S MEMOIRS:

I remember this day very well – the 22nd of June. A lot of nervous and emotional people would pop in to our home in Turbinnaya street. Everyone was trying to think and decide how to act in such a situation. They brought me chocolates, perhaps, for me to remember my drifting away sweet childhood.

Everyone would black out windows with paper crosswise and have alarm drills. My mum and I would hide in the toilet, away from the win-

dows. In the early days of the war the children from our yard used to walk in the hospital garden and carefully peer into the basement windows of the hospital hoping to see saboteurs and hold them. They understood they needed to be vigilant and protect the homeland...

In early July Tonya and baby Lerik returned to Leningrad. She was very thin, hungry, in a ragged dress, and he was quite weak and couldn't hold his little head. She was telling us about the Germans bombing Dvinsk and them barely escaping out of the burning town. They had left everything: clothes, furniture... Fyodor managed to put them on a leaving freight train and ran to "hold defence". She didn't know anything else about him.

It was obvious that the Germans were already very close to Leningrad. On the streets were barricades, tanks and patrols. The neighbours from number 26 had left. So had the people from the downstairs. They left us their keys. On the 10th July they tried to evacuate children to Novgorod from Vitebsk station and a neighbour who lived below the floor, sent her eighteen-month daughter away. But on the 15th July she had to meet the return train at Bologoye. The Germans were coming to Novgorod and the children had to immediately return to Leningrad. She said they were bombing the station badly and she had been waiting for the train all day and hiding in craters from explosions. The train was not stopping. The little arms were stretching out of the carriages. It was very difficult to find the children. She did.

A week later, they began evacuating military wives with children of pre-school age. At the station, a train was waiting for us – a small steam locomotive and old, odd carriages. In pairs, holding hands, we got in the carriage. Soon we were all in and the train left. Tonya, Valerik and grandma Lena – Tonya's mum – were with us. It was good to be together.

The German planes appeared in the sky twice. They roared terribly and bombed. The train would begin to toot loudly and intermittently, as if scaring off the planes, then it would always stop. Many people would run out of the carriage. Antonina was poorly so she was lying all the time, and grandma would grab Lerik with one hand and the heavy sewing machine "Zinger" with her other hand and run out of the train, lie on the ground and cover her grandson with her body. It was strange – grandma tried to rescue the German machine from the German bombs. We didn't know what was better to do – to stay in the carriage or run out during bombing.

A day later we arrived at the station Neya in the Yaroslavl region. Local residents came to look at us, dreadful and scared. Then we were taken to the village of Sivtsevo by horses. They gave us a tiny room with a kitchen. There was only one little bed for Lerik. In the morning the grown-ups would go to work in the collective farm and I would look after my cousin.

A month passed. I heard the grown-ups say, "Fedya went missing."

Tonya went to the military commissariat. She came back in tears. There she was handed a document stating that her husband had been killed in the battle of the Dvina and her child was entitled to a pension of 255 roubles a month. Rocking Lerik, Tonya was sobbing and repeating, "You are my little orphan."

All of a sudden, she said confidently, "Your dad is alive, I know he is. He promised to come back."

REJOINING HIS UNIT

There were very few moments like that in Fyodor's life. He was filled with joy. He was free, nearly well, he could walk! He sat up, looked at whether someone was there along the mound. Had Sergei jumped off? There was no one. To be on the safe side, he crawled a little on the wet grass, then confidently stood up and walked towards the woods. An hour later it was already dark.

He had a long way ahead of him. Almost all of Lithuania, Latvia, Pskov region, Luga, Leningrad. He made up his mind he would walk only at night and sleep in the day climbing on a tree. He used to do it in his childhood when he tended the village cattle. There were less mosquitoes like that and dogs couldn't smell him. He needed to walk around big settlements. He would have to walk a lot but this way the risk to get caught was less. It was around five hundred kilometres to Leningrad on the road. This way it would be at least seven hundred. The next day he understood he had to walk straight to Leningrad. It was obvious that the Germans were already far in the east. Their bombers were daily flying towards Leningrad. In the Lithuanian villages there paced hefty well-fed blokes with guns and armbands with the inscription "Policija". On the top of some houses there were flags

with swastika. It had passed a week since Fyodor had something to eat apart from the forest berries, acorns and stolen unripe cucumbers. He had a bad bellyache of such food. He was running out of strength. In the evening in the woods, Astakhov came across a delicate stream, all covered with twigs of alder, densely growing on both sides. It was winding and narrow, just as they had at the farm. Astakhov gently lay on the ground and lowered his face in the cold water. It made his teeth ache. His head and arms got covered in mosquitoes which he had not noticed before. For the first time in ten days Fyodor drank plenty of clean running water. Washing the wound on his arm, he looked around. Ahead of him there were impenetrable bushes and behind them there glowed a glade. There was a clearing to his left. On the right, behind the curve of the shore something glistened under the water. He crept through the undergrowth of ferns to that place. At the bottom of the creek there was a large aluminium can. After removing the small lid sticking out above the water, Fyodor saw cream. A lot of fat cream, which was formed at the top of the can of milk, if it was put in the cold. They used to do it in his village. He began to scoop the thick white mass directly with the lid and eat it. He had been eating for a long time until he was full.

He got much stronger. He lay on the grass and dreamed, "Tonya and Valerka must be already at home. It's been ten days. She must find it very hard to be on her own with the baby." He didn't want to think of bad things. Early in the morning, imagining them in the village at his mother's lying on the warm stove and drinking milk, he did not notice falling asleep.

Fyodor woke up because someone was quietly pushing him in the shoulder. He flinched, woke up and saw a girl of about ten or twelve. She was blond, with almost white eyelashes and, as it seemed to Fyodor, with someone else's eyes. She was sputtering something in Lithuanian and all the time calling him and pointing in the same direction.

"What an idiot I am! Fallen asleep on the ground. What is she doing in the woods on her own?" Astakhov thought. "Is there a village nearby? Did something happen?" The girl continued to shake him. Fyodor stood up, tried to ask her, but she didn't understand him. She grabbed his arm and pulled him somewhere along the path. Twenty minutes later they came to a marge. In the middle of the glade there

was an old wooden house and two big sheds. A whole household. He couldn't see any people there.

Fyodor again tried to find out from the girl what she wanted, but she suddenly burst into tears and began to drag him to the house. Astakhov felt something wrong, he pricked up his ears and despite the best efforts of the blonde girl, he began to slowly move back to the edge of the glade. Then he was deafened by a sharp scream of the girl. She was shouting so loudly that Fyodor was taken aback by surprise. In the last two days he had got used to the quietness. Immediately in the glade, as if out of the ground, three blokes turned up. They were running to Fyodor. Each of them had a rifle and an arm band. They jumped out so quickly as if they had long been waiting for him to appear. After a few seconds Fyodor was already lying on the grass, beaten with their boots. They were beating him up for a long time. In his stomach, face, back. He could hear the blokes' shouts and... the girl's laughter and hand clapping. Then they tied him up, threw him into the shed, all in blood, and locked the door.

When Astakhov woke up, it was already dark. All his body was aching. His arms and legs were numb. They had been tied with a thick rope for several hours. There were no voices to be heard. "They must be asleep," Fyodor thought, "or have gone to get the Germans. Tomorrow morning they will pull me to the commandant. That's the end of me! Why was I a softie? They must be paying them for catching the Russians... Maybe that was their can in the brook? It doesn't matter. Things couldn't be worse."

It was dark in the shed. "Those sheds are my bad luck," Fyodor remembered Malinovka and the German tank men. "At least those didn't beat me up." He began to roll on the ground in the hope to find something. It was silly really. But he couldn't do anything else. It was fortunate that the barn was full of hay or he would have rolled all night. He couldn't remember how much time had passed. But during those tricks he managed to feel a long stick at the wall, and then a blade of the scythe. His heart was immediately relieved. It was a matter of technique. He laid his body on the scythe, felt the blade with his hands and began to move, pushing the heels on the wall, bending and straightening his knees. His palms were cut up, warm blood was flowing along his hands, but he managed to remove the rope. Now he needed to find a crack in the wall. He found one, but it was impossible to do some-

thing with it. He would have been heard. Then he decided to dig a hole under the wall. When Fyodor was looking for a shovel or an axe in the dark, he found a torn jacket and a huge heavy coat of sheepskin. They came handy because nights were becoming cold and since he was captured by the Germans, he only had a shirt, breeches and boots and a bandaged arm.

It was not very difficult to dig a hole. He tied his cut hands with some cloth and with the blade of the scythe and his hands he quickly dug a hole under the wall of the barn. "Shall I set fire to their barn?" was the first thing he thought of when he got outside. "But I have nothing. I'd better leave as soon as possible and forget all this as a nightmare." He now had a scythe blade and a weighty stick. It must have been an axe handle.

REJOINING HIS UNIT

(continued)

Astakhov tried to walk all night without stopping. He feared the chase and so walked right by the creek, where the day before he had found a can of cream. He stopped several times, only to wash and bandage his hands and to drink. Dawn started. The forest ended and the stream continued to flow through a large field under the bridge that connected the country road. On the bank, there was a newly-built shed of fresh, rough boards. It was right next to a small bridge, which could be passed through by trucks. "It must be a post. Those stinkers are quick," Fyodor thought. There was no light inside the booth but someone was smoking there and singing a familiar German tune. Astakhov crept up and leaned against the window. Immediately a fat bloke in the German uniform got out of the door. "He's not wearing a helmet," without thinking a second longer, Astakhov struck him on the head with his stick. The German quietly fell on the ground. There was no gun in the booth. What role did that stag have? He found only a pistol and a magazine, half a loaf of brown bread, a jar of some canned food, a spoon and a pot. He waited in the bushes for half an hour. What if another one comes! He might have a gun and a grenade. He really needed at least one grenade. But no one came. He had to be pleased with what he had.

Amazingly, he didn't see anyone when he was walking along the road through the forest. No Germans, no local police goons, no Russians. He didn't look for anyone. Time was precious. As he understood, anyone could be dangerous. Even a Russian, going out of the trap, could do anything out of fear.

A month had passed since he escaped. September came. He had walked through Latvia, towns of Opochna and Pskov. He had to make a big circle to walk around them invisibly. In small villages he looked for police goons, openly entered the house and threatening with a pistol, he demanded for food, bread, potatoes, suet from them. Then he quickly left. Nobody chased him. They were happy he had not killed them.

Thirty kilometres from Pskov, he kept watching for a long time in the bush near a country road. He was waiting for someone to come. There was no one. There was an autumn forest, yellow leaves, no birds to be heard. Something rattled behind the turn. After a few seconds a brand new motorbike with two Germans in helmets and glasses appeared from behind the bushes. A gun was attached to the carriage. "What luck!" Astakhov thought, "Now I must make sure not to miss." He easily shot both of them, then he got out of the bushes to take their guns. Joy filled him, quickly aroused a vivid picture of the future sabotage and battles with the Germans in his imagination. At that moment, a large van drove from behind the road turn and stopped, and the soldiers began to jump out of it. He heard the commands of officers and soldiers began to shoot. "Quick! Back! What an idiot! I should have checked first. There is nothing free in this world," Fyodor thought. He didn't have time to arm himself properly. Then, dodging for five kilometres, he ran with all his might. Thank god, they missed. He could hear the gunfire for a long time, but the Germans did not snoop in the woods. For the first time he clearly understood that on his own, without any cover, in such situations he could do nothing serious.

At last he reached the river Luga. Tolmachevo was somewhere nearby. He walked along the bank for a long time, until he came across a puny raft. On both sides of the river there were dense woods. No people. He got to the other side with great difficulty. It was pretty stupid to row with two poles connected with detached sleeves of a shirt, but he had to. There were still no Russian troops.

Already on this bank of the river two men came to him. Supposedly they had escaped. They looked like they had done. They were all torn, ripped, hungry and disarmed. But they were not wounded. Why did they approach him and not vice versa? He had a pistol! For two days they walked along a narrow forest path, almost without stopping, it was quite obvious that soon there will be the front line.

Suddenly something fell on them. They didn't even understand anything. Five people jumped out at them from three different sides. They knocked them down, wrung their hands and dragged them back somewhere to the side, loudly swearing.

"Here they are, at last," Astakhov said to himself with a strange feeling. Finally his three-month ordeal and anxiety of the unknown ended. Hang on, why the "unknown"? It was actually known. Fyodor knew very well how he could be met. He knew his suffering could continue. He was not stupid. The thought of it had just not bothered to visit him. Yet brought-up reflexes of personnel officers were stronger than natural human reflexes.

16 August 1941

...It is known that some commanders and political workers by their behaviour at the front not only show examples of the Red Army courage, fortitude, and love for the country, but rather hide in crevices, potter in the offices, do not see and do not observe the battlefield, at the first serious difficulties in the battle they give up, tear off their insignia, desert from the battlefield.

Can we tolerate cowards, deserters to the enemy and captured or surrendering such pusillanimous chiefs who at the first hitch on the front rip off their insignia and desert in the rear in the ranks of the Red Army? No, we can't! If you give free rein to these cowards and deserters, they will ruin our army and our country in the short term. We need to destroy cowards and deserters...

I order:

1. To consider commanders and political workers, during the battle ripping off their insignia and deserting in the rear or surrendering to the enemy, as malicious deserters whose families are subject for arrest as families of people having violated the oath and deserters betraying their homeland.

To require all higher commanders and commissars to shoot those deserters from the command personnel on the spot.

2. Once in the surrounding of the enemy, units and subunits should fight to the last, taking care of the material as the apple of the eye, on their way to the enemy's rear, defeating the fascists.

3. To require each soldier, regardless of his position, to demand from the superior, if his unit is surrounded, to fight to the end to get through to his troops, and if the chief or a part of the Red Army troop instead of organizing resistance to the enemy would prefer to surrender, to destroy them by all means, both land and air, and deprive families of captured Soviet soldiers who surrendered, from the public benefits and assistance...

To read the order in all squadrons, batteries, teams and headquarters.

Headquarters of the Supreme High Command of the Red Army:

Chairman of the State Defence Committee J. Stalin

Deputy Chairman of the State Defence Committee V. Molotov

Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Budenny

Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Timoshenko

Marshal of the Soviet Union K. Voroshilov

Marshal of the Soviet Union B. Shaposhnikov

General of the Army G. Zhukov

(From the order No. 270 of the Supreme Command of the Red Army)

DEFENSIVE SQUADS

It was a special unit¹⁹. They checked everyone who walked in the direction of Leningrad and got caught by them. They took the German pistol from Astakhov. "Damn! What a shame! It was so handy! Now they are going to say I am a German because I had a German pistol. It's a joke."

Fyodor was brought to the senior officer. He could hear one of his companions say pointing at Astakhov, "...he was walking on his own, allegedly a parachutist. We don't believe him. He said they used to pay him money for skydiving, and even more for jumps with a gun. This can't happen in our army. Plus he's got a German pistol."

"Good set-up," Astakhov thought. "There are two of them against me. Why did I gossip with them? I was missing people." He was sent to the headquarters which were just a hundred steps away. There he was checked thoroughly. The main person was the captain, short,

stocky, his head completely bald. He was sitting on a fallen tree, looking down, picking the ground with a twig, and asking questions in the same steady voice.

"What theatres and cinemas are there in Leningrad? What is there in Pushkin? What monument is there near St. Isaac's Cathedral?" Then he lifted his head sharply, looked at Astakhov and shouted, "Answer my questions!"

Fyodor didn't really know monuments or theatres. He and Tonya had only been to the cinema once.

"I only know one. I think it's called 'Titan'. We watched 'Chapayev' there," Astakhov answered. "In Pushkin there is a cemetery of parachutists..."

"You know what? Stop messing around and answer my questions!" the captain kept shouting. "We don't have much time. What the hell are you talking about? What cemetery of parachutists? I asked you about Pushkin's school, not about cemeteries. You, dickhead, want as many cemeteries as possible. Dream on! We've got you now!"

Whatever Fyodor answered, was against him and caused astonishment, mistrust and anger.

"Yeah, right," the captain continued, "They paid money for every jump with a gun. What a liar!" He looked at his team with either jealousy or surprise at Astakhov's arrogance, then he spread his arms dramatically, almost caved in the whole body forwards, stared into Fyodor's eyes, "How about that? You haven't prepared well enough, have you? Shitty spy!" Without waiting for the answer, the captain pointed his arm calmly in the direction of a thick birch-tree, all on its own in the glade, and quietly said to someone, "Take him!"

"That's the joy of coming back," Fyodor thought. "They must have seen lots of villains. And they've got all the rights they want. They can easily kill me. At least now I know they are our troops."

Astakhov was taken to the tree. A little distance from him was a soldier with a rifle.

"I can smell gunpowder. This is much worse than the barns in Lithuania or Malinovka. These don't need prisoners. I've got to do it now!" Fyodor was thinking fast. He sat on the grass and with a shard from a broken bottle started ripping the lining at the back of his boot. It was hard to do – the lining was sewn very tight. At last he pulled out a thin package wrapped in the silk of the parachute...

In the army, it was thought that such important things as an expensive car, a plane or sabotage behind enemy lines required special trust. There were in fact no commissars or political instructors. On the plane, there was often room only for one, and the paratrooper between the heaven and earth had no one to ask for advice, it was awkward, anyway, to ask if he was doing the right thing. He could in fact do a bad thing, land a little bit further and join the enemy. And the pilot could fly away and not return. There was only one way out: they had to feel their responsibility. At that time they thought if they joined the All-Union communist party of Bolsheviks there would be no problem. It involved both their responsibility and love to Motherland...

However, after the first battles, feeling the power of the enemy and helplessness of their command, some people threw away their membership cards. Especially if they were surrounded or in captivity. If the Germans or police goons found the card it meant immediate death. Why would they want to keep it in captivity, anyway? It meant nothing. You couldn't be a communist in captivity. You were a traitor! According to all Soviet rules and laws.

Astakhov got his Communist card and still sitting on the grass handed it in to the captain. The latter came up, took it and examined the card thoroughly. Then the card was passed from hand to hand and read by syllables, like children.

"Well!" the main man pronounced significantly, as if he had just finished a complicated investigation. "What those two companions of you said is not confirmed. The card says clearly, 'issued in the town of Pushkin', it's signed by a brigade commissar."

"I just don't get why he lied about the cemetery and money," the lieutenant interrupted, the one who had listened to Astakhov's companions and brought him to the captain. "Why did you lie to us?"

"I'm not lying," Fyodor tried to justify himself. "I've been walking since July and I always have one hundred roubles on me, that was the money they used to give us for jumps."

"That's not proof!" the lieutenant carried on looking at the pile of notes lying on the unfolded cape.

"Okay, let him go," the main officer summarized, giving the card back to Astakhov. "We have other things to do. The cover of the card is shabby and ripped up. You should look after your communist card."

"What about the pistol?" Fyodor asked.

"You'll have to do without it," the captain said sharply. "There are only Russians up to Leningrad. And there they will deal with you."

"Go this way," an old sergeant explained sympathetically. "In about fifteen kilometres there will be railway. Wait for the train. If you are lucky, it will take you nearly to Leningrad or to the fortified region in Krasnogvardeisk. They will stop you there, check you and along you go!"

"I see how they've changed now," Fyodor thought, "But they still haven't given me the pistol, bastards!" He didn't even remember about the money.

Germans would capture Volosovo and Big Sabask two days later, Kingisepp a week later. They would cut off the road to Leningrad between Krasnogvardeisk and Krasnoye Selo in twenty days.

RETURNING TO HIS UNIT

(continued)

The day was just starting. Astakhov was left on his own. Last night he escaped his death again.

Five hours passed. He came out of the woods and went to the railway. It was the road "Veimarn – Volosovo – Krasnogvardeisk – Leningrad". All the land up to the mound was covered with yellow birch leaves. Swallows were flying low, right above the track. There was no one around. After half an hour he heard the noise of the approaching train. It was gradually getting louder. Anxious feelings were filling Astakhov, his heartbeat quickened. The noise of the wheels gradually merged with the frequency of his heartbeat. He had no thoughts in his head. All he felt was anxiety. Pushing it away from him, Fyodor ran along the mound along the carriage with the doors open, trying to somehow cling to the rungs of the going carriage.

He was picked up by his arms and dragged into the carriage which was smoky all through and full of soldiers. The heat from the stove and the smell of bread made Fyodor relax and forget about everything. None of them asked him about anything, and he immediately fell asleep in the corner of the carriage.

After the terrible night in the interrogation of the special squad, Astakhov slept like a log. There was no longer than an hour to Kras-

nogvardeisk. He slept, and his consciousness itself, without any guidance from above, as if by inertia, continued to spin in the reverse order everything he had seen and experienced in recent months. The recent events were introduced to him in a very different way. They somehow twisted in a special way in his mind and started "talking" to him in a very clear language.

...Here Astakhov is sitting together with other men, as if he sees himself sleeping in the car among the wounded Red Army soldiers. An hour passed and he wakes up. The train comes to Krasnogvardeisky fortified area... Soldiers, civilians, women and children jump out of the carriages. Fyodor is going to leave the station with them. Suddenly everyone stops. The soldiers line up in rows, the military commanders come forward and pass through the gate in platoons... The "explosive mixture" of his torn jacket and breeches of the commander inevitably led to his detention. Astakhov is arrested... now he is in the office with the gridded windows.

"Don't show me your card!" the KGB sergeant says steadily and loudly, as if a hammer hammering a nail. "You are not on a tram. Where is your squadron? Where is your gun? Your documents? Have you burnt them, scum-bag?" He throws Astakhov's card into the waste paper bin filled with crumpled sheets of paper and continues, "Hang on, we'll check your arm. You think you're clever, don't you? We quickly catch those self-harms. If you have a bullet there, we won't even ask you anything else. You'll feel better straight away."

"It's not July and we are not in the woods!" a fat man in civilian clothes started shouting, he had just entered the room of the investigator. "I can see all those bandages. Why are you quiet?"

In a short sharp punch in the stomach, he knocks Astakhov from his chair, pulls off his jacket and tears the dirty bandage on his hand with a knife. The wound has not healed yet and is bleeding, but everyone understands that this opening could be caused only by a shell fragment. Getting even more angry at the examination or at himself, the civilian kicks repeatedly Astakhov lying on the floor, directly over the open wound. Fyodor loses consciousness...

...Near the window there is a military officer. He looks out of the window and says nothing. Then he turns around and comes up to Astakhov. He is holding the German pistol which has been taken from Fyodor in the defensive squads.

"I keep telling you, Fyodor, and you're not listening to me," Astakhov tried to understand who it was. The voice sounded familiar to him, but his face... He had seen him somewhere. Recently. "Why has he got my pistol?"

"We don't need things like that," the captain says calmly. "So you say you were willing to start fighting? But I won't let you. You need to deserve this right. I could arrest your platoon so easily and I will quietly wait for clarification why you have got such an unusual colour of breeches. Also, you have been in captivity, Fyodor. That's it. You don't belong to us now. You are so dirty that everyone should avoid you. Including me."

All of a sudden Astakhov recognizes his brother's voice. "But who is the captain? That's not Alexey," Fyodor thought quickly. "Who is he? I've got it! It's the bastard who arrested the whole squadron and Bogdanov on the road outside Dvinsk. Oh, my God! I am mad."

"You are not a spy, are you, Fyodor?" the captain goes on. "How many times do I need to tell you? Even your friends, prisoners, clearly told you what to do. But no! You escaped and did the same thing again! I have sent special people to help you. They explained to you everything... But no! You don't understand the party's policy and the new German rules. We did explain everything to you properly..."

...Astakhov comes to his senses. He is lifted up, sat on a chair and poured half a bottle of water on his head. There is no captain in the room now... Fyodor is not allowed to say anything. The investigators don't care what he can say. They've got an order. He is either a deserter or a spy. There are no other options. The others are in the army, at the turn of Luga. If he is not a self-harmer or a deserter, he is a spy. Two soldiers come in and drag Astakhov out of the room somewhere along the corridor.

"What a dream," Astakhov wakes up sweaty in the crowded carriage, "What the hell?" he thinks and falls into some abyss again where bright colours and incomprehensible images begin to surround him from everywhere.

...In the cell dozens of angry eyes look at Fyodor, some of them being the same as he, lost, left behind, and perhaps wilfully having left their units. There is nothing to bandage his arm with. There is no water in the cell. He has to rip what is left from his shirt with his teeth in order to tighten his arm and stop the bleeding. Only now he finally

spits out the bloody fragments of his two broken teeth. His liver is aching. He throws his head back to stop nose bleeding, and suddenly he seems to awake again and see today's investigators... Only instead of them those are huge ruffled birds that sit in their chairs and croak. Being in harmful environment, all the while breathing the air of real or imaginary enemies, they have turned into such creatures. It is not a fact that they can think or speak in a human language somewhere in a queue, at work or in a trench. Any words of explanation, any experiences for them are like talking to a brick wall. They only need what they want. And they want firstly to authorize their place in the chair, not in the trenches. That means all their life they have got to "identify" and "identify". The more the better. No limits. Even if it's all the rest, including their family and supervisors, senior politicians or a very inconspicuous farmer and mechanic at the factory... It is war, after all. If one size fit all before the war, what's the point of making it different now?..

The following day he is brought to the investigator again. Tonya is sitting on a chair in the corner of the room. Her right ear is blue, beneath it there is a bright spot of dried blood turning brown. She sits helplessly and looks at the wall right in front of herself. When Fyodor is led in she lifts her head and starts sobbing.

"Stop putting on an act! When did you see him last?" the civilian asks her pointing at Fyodor.

"I've already told you."

"Answer my question!" the investigator shouts.

"On the 24th of June in Dvinsk."

"How did you manage to get out of there? And you've been living in Leningrad for over a month? Stop lying! You've never been there. And your husband has been working with the Germans, since after the Finnish campaign."

"You can ask my neighbours. They will confirm," Tonya says quickly and stops, frightened. Suddenly she realizes what will happen to the neighbours when they are delivered here.

"They will confirm," the investigator says teasing Antonina, "They would confirm anything, there is no doubt about that."

Astakhov tries to to escape and runs to Antonina. He wants to comfort, hug her, to tell her not to believe all that. But he is held by two guards. One of them is pressing against the wound on his arm. The investigator doesn't ask him any questions at all... A minute later Tonya

is taken out of the room. She just has enough time to take a glance at her husband. There is so much terror in her eyes that Fyodor startles, "Where is Valerka?" Scary thoughts come to his mind.

"Have you got it, Astakhov?" the investigator is calm. "You'd better tell us everything. Be quick. We've got so many of you. Anyway, we are going to send you away today... Far away... To the rear. You will be working there if the tribunal allows. If it doesn't, that's the end of you. They won't kill your wife of course. But she will be sent to the rear, to tree-cutting. That's good, Astakhov. No bombing, no shooting. Just work tirelessly. Your kid has been taken care of already. So appreciate my kindness and come clean while I am still waiting. That's betrayal of motherland, scum-bag!"

At night he is taken from the cell and led to the questioning again. "Why? Why are they leading me somewhere downstairs? Maybe, it's the tribunal there?" there is no one in the long corridor of the cellar. There are puddles of water on the floor. The old plaster on the walls and ceiling reveals uneven red brick. "No, it can't be the tribunal," Fyodor thinks.

...Astakhov opened his eyes. He was not looking at anybody and didn't see anyone. Before him there was just a gaping hole in the wall of the carriage and quickly flashing pictures of already bare birch trees. He quickly got up from the floor, squeezed between the smoking soldiers near the open door and without thinking jumped out of the train.

Fyodor fell right on his wounded arm and lay still under the mound until he came to himself when he heard a loud rumble of German planes. Ten minutes later, from the direction of Krasnogvardeisk he heard intermittent beeps of the locomotive of the left echelon and bombs exploding...

UNCLE YEGOR

Very often in the most difficult times of crisis, people can not "figure out" all possible consequences of the decision taken. On the contrary, Astakhov usually considered long, thorough, peasant-thinking moves, in extreme situations he quickly found the only true solution, irreversibly determining all his chosen future course of events. That was

what happened at the train station in Dvinsk, before the bombing, when he sensed and "found" those very dirty and old carriages that in a minute for some reason moved to the east, taking his wife and son away from the war. The other people were waiting. Waiting for something usual, comforting. That was what happened in the train with prisoners. Fyodor did not fight his fate, no. He just changed his position. He did it at the most important moment. It would have been too late a moment later. The others waited to see what happened. The train either took them from the trouble or the trouble caught up with them and he would leave the train of Fate. And every time something told him an irrational decision. The sound of wheels, heartbeat... Or complete silence.

That was exactly what happened now. Only this time, the secondary, introduced reflexes faded away. Other reflexes started to gradually replace them, common to all mankind. There was another thing – awareness of the reality and the belief that the decision was correct. Many people in such circumstances often voluntarily are captured with their inflexibility, as a result, dooming themselves in an even bigger trouble. It is not about cowardice or its justification. Sometimes it is better to have a belief in something, rather than conviction. After all, faith without doubt is dead faith. Especially because people tend to believe what they wish for. They believe in what they fear even more than what they crave for. Conviction is not a set of actions and beautiful beliefs. It is just the way people apply to their own actions and beliefs. Here, in this regard, their self-righteousness is manifested.

Astakhov clearly understood that up there they did not need people like him. They were stained by big bosses' mistakes. They were living witnesses of those failures. It does not matter that they accidentally managed to survive in the mess and return into the ranks. Those too independent, wise, successful people were never in need. They were too dangerous to have. In villages, towns and the army. This layer was superfluous people. Nobody likes their dirty drawers to be shoved in their face all the time. Especially people of power. New, young, funny people, not burdened with unnecessary knowledge, will come. It is their turn, with a running start and without hesitation, to jump into a huge "power" grinder.

Fyodor was walking fast. He had a clear goal ahead of him. It was rushing him. He had to walk around the station of Moloskovitsy. There

were Germans there. There were tanks, trucks, refuelling units, trains with black tanks. "I will need to pay a visit here first of all," Astakhov thought. "And it's not far." Another thirty kilometres and he was in the village of Krasny Mayak.

Just as he thought. Policemen with rifles and armbands were pacing up and down the village. How did they do it so quickly?! It was some power that common people couldn't resist.

The village old men were shaving wood. Probably for a bridge. Definitely not for themselves. There was a police goon watching them. Fyodor crawled from the ravine through the nettles and thistles, quietly pulled the axe, carelessly left by someone.

Now he was heading towards Luga, to the woods, to the village behind the church in Khotnezha. Passing by the bank of the Lemovzha, Astakhov looked at his own house. It was safe and sound. He could not see any Germans. He could see no one at all. Had they killed them all? Or taken somewhere? No, he could see smoke coming out of the chimneys in three houses. "I am not going to mother's!" he thought. "She will talk me into staying with her. I will sort out everything first. Here is the familiar steep hill leading to the Luga..."

For the next two days Fyodor made a dugout of logs, covered it with branches, built a simple stove made of stones, covered it with clay. His arm started aching again.

The splinter in his right arm made itself felt. He still managed to pull a long log to the dugout. It was meant to lie between the bushes with the dugout and the forest path. He would walk along it in winter in order to not leave his foot prints. Whatever he did, the result was still only the dugout. He had been taught! Three or four people could get inside and sleep in the warmth. The main thing was it was not seen from anywhere. No one would find it in the thick wood.

Astakhov remembered the same small bathhouse in Finland. Twenty people got into it then. They were all frozen, in boots and foot cloths. It was forty degrees below zero. That was exactly what the Finnish guerillas were waiting for. One mortar bang – and there was no bathhouse. They made a few shots from automatic rifles and skied back to the forest. Everything had been planned and prepared. That was where a mortar was good!

What would he do about the weapon? He knew he had to go to Gostyatino, to his father's brother. He was around seventy and he had

had a rifle since the Civil war. "I am sure he hasn't handed it in. Besides, I will find out everything from him," Fyodor decided.

He had got there by night. He walked around the village. The neighbours' dogs seemed to be asleep. He could turn up in the house. Fyodor knocked on the window. After a minute a kerosene lamp was lit in the house and shone through the window.

"Who is it hanging around there at night?"

"It's me."

"Who's that?"

Astakhov recognized uncle Yegor's coarse voice.

"It's me, Fyodor. I am on my own, uncle Yegor, open the door." He pressed his face against the window.

"Is it you, Fedka? Look at you! So skinny. Where from? Come in, be quiet. The neighbour has got dogs."

"Yeah, I know."

They hugged at the porch and went inside. It was warm, heated up. Fyodor could smell warm boiled potatoes in the pot in the stove. He mellowed from this flavour, before even drinking his uncle's moonshine. Then they talked all night in the dark without turning on the light.

What had Astakhov learned?

His mother was safe and sound. Tonya and their little son had been there for a week and taken to Volosovo by uncle Yegor. Germans had marched towards Leningrad a month before. There were a lot of police goons around. There was no radio, no newspapers. Sometimes Germans paid a visit. They checked the villagers, got drunk, shot some people.

"There is power of course," uncle Yegor was saying steadily, carefully swallowing pieces of hot boiled potatoes. He hardly had any teeth left so he tried to mash food with his lips. "Police and village chiefs are at their best. They sniff and report everything. People are frightened of them. There are no rich here, as you know. There used to be the rich at the collective farms, then everyone equated. The dispossessed have not declared. So there are hardly any changes," the relative was reporting, smacking his lips. "Vsevolod Klyonov from Sabsk is the chief police goon."

"What? Klyonov? He is a party member."

"He is the most spiteful. He shot some people in person. They were either guerillas, or just lost. Who knows? I saw him do it." Uncle Yegor

pursed his lips and shook his head, as if confirming what he just said.
 “Do you remember the mill near the river?”

“Opposite the red rocks?”

“In short, if someone went there, they did it at night. Nobody knows whether they were guerillas or not. Anyway, they milled a sack of flour and fled. Then the Germans came. So they shot the miller.

“How did they know?”

“Someone reported. In general, there are not a lot of them here, guerillas. If there were employees of district committees or Soviet workers, they are somewhere far away in the woods hiding and you can’t really find them. But they did turn up. They would take some food, maybe, a cow, some bread and leave. Watch their smoke.” The old man put two more potatoes on each plate, poured the drink into their glasses, patted his long grey hair and continued, “After that the police and their services start sniffing around. Where? From where? That’s how it goes. The way it must be on the occupied territory,” uncle Yegor ended considerably.

Astakhov thought, “He is talking business. I need to deal with Klyonov. I can’t understand what happened for him to join the Germans. Mind you, what’s so strange about it?”

“A peasant likes the order,” uncle Yegor said again, as if he heard what Fyodor thought about. “He measures everything in rows or furrows: potatoes, bread and his own land. It’s not that important whose order it is. He who is strong has the power. First there was a nobleman, then Red, White, and Red army again, then a collective farm. Now there are Germans. Has anything changed outside? Nothing. We used to see the landlord seldom, now we hardly see Germans. We are not allowed to go anywhere. There are so many bosses as well! We have them now. This Klyonov used to be not just a peasant. He managed to collect only what sticks to the authorities and will not exchange this for some kind of patriotism.

Uncle Yegor again poured the brew into glasses, cleared his throat, without saying anything or clinking glasses, gulped it down, picked up a handful of sauerkraut, raised it to his mouth, took a deep breath and smelled it and continued, “Have you decided to do something?”

“Yes, I have, uncle Yegor. I am going to stay here.”

“What for?”

“To collect a group, find reliable people, weapons...”

“And then?”

“We’ll beat up the Germans and police goons...”

“So you are not going to look for your troops?”

“No, I won’t. I tried to. But they are not waiting for me... Even if they are it’s for a different reason. I know it for sure. I’ve been taught. I am not in a rush to find them. At least, not now. I’ll see how it goes. I have things to do here.”

“I see.”

“I’ve been in captivity, uncle Yegor. Not for a long time, I was lucky to escape. I don’t want Tonya to know about it, she’ll get into trouble. I am going to fight here. Over there all the commandants are mad. All they do is looking for saboteurs and those who got in captivity in the very beginning. They think if they shoot everyone no one will get into captivity. To be short, they are all mad. If everything goes okay, I will go to Leningrad later. Not now,” Fyodor stopped, calmed down and changed his tone from confident to begging and dreaming. “I really want to form a group. At least five people. Would you help me? We would do things. These scum-bags need to be killed,” Astakhov shook his head in the direction of the neighbour’s house where a police goon lived.

They didn’t talk about the Germans or their rules. It was not important what they were like. It was clear anyway. What was important was they were Germans. The most rotten people from the village were the best people for Germans...

The problem was in the village people. Those who were gone, left everyone to the enemy and even after that were not going to change.

“What if they ask you later?”

“Ask me about what? Why I started killing nearly Soviet people without asking them?”

“Maybe. And why ‘nearly’? Those are Russian people. They live under the German regime at the moment. They make them work. In police as well. Our army left them, didn’t it?.. We fed it but it left us.”

“Let them come back first. Even if they do...”

“I don’t understand you, Fedka. Those are scum bags, these are bad...”

“It’s hard to understand, uncle Yegor. I don’t understand everything myself at the moment. But I know one thing for sure. It’s stupid to die either on this side or that one. This is what waits for me on both

sides.” Fyodor thought again, poured vodka into glasses, and said, as if toasting to someone missing, “I’ve been caught in the middle. Between heaven and earth...”

“It’s a question of time. You won’t be able to do it for a long time. You’ll burn and break your neck. Listen to me,” the old man said significantly, “it just so happened in this country immediately after the revolution. We began to build a happy life and we still are doing so. That’s why in a hurry we treat everyone the same. It’s easier.”

“Exactly. We dispossessed the kulaks, we looked for the enemies of the people and now we treat the prisoners the same.”

“The police goons are the same,” uncle Yegor interrupted him. “All the young are in the police. What else can they do? They would be killed otherwise. A piece of bread as well. So how can you find reliable guys now? You’ve got to think before you start to act. On the contrary you can easily turn everything over,” uncle Yegor added, “you’ll set up all locals against yourself. Too many people are in the police, Fyodor. All the youth and all blokes, in fact.”

“Does that mean I’ll have to both pick and kill? There’s no one else?”

“Look what a judge you are!”

They talked about it for a long time. But neither Fyodor, nor wise uncle Yegor could answer a simple question. They knew what made Astakhov fly in that long “free fall”. But they didn’t know what would let him survive in that state, between heaven and earth... They came to a deadlock.

On the one hand, he could not live here, gazing everything from outside. Neither because of his character, nor because of the aggravated reflexes of an officer in the absence of subordinates. On the other hand, no high ideas here would help if you were not a blind fanatic. Ideological or recent self-assurance in recent months was rubbing and washing out by reality. It was being replaced by a different feeling.

What feeling was that? Perhaps that was the confidence in what he was doing. Even in the heart of this concept there is quite another word – not “trouble”, but “faith”. Revenge is not an ordinary state of mind that is capable to sustain breathing in a discharged space with the Russians. From Monte Cristo’s revenge there’s left only something in common, not private. What would the revenge be for? Many acts of the local blokes could be explained. Many, but not all of them!

Hence, there is something beyond the bounds of understanding and forgiveness. However, these are only the boundaries of morality and ethics of Fyodor Astakhov.

By morning, they had parted. There was no rifle indoors of course. They agreed that the following day uncle Yegor would go to Khotnezha and bring it in the cart with hay. There were only five bullets. Uncle would look closely to the young in order to talk to them heart to heart. He would look closely to scum bags as well...

“Here we are. I’ve already got intelligence,” Fyodor thought walking fast to his dugout to get there before dawn. “Now I will get weapons. I don’t want to turn up at my mother’s tattered, hungry and unarmed.”

The next day, the Germans suddenly turned up and uncle Yegor on his way to Khotnezha threw the rifle in the grass to be on the safe side. Astakhov had to look for it for a long time afterwards. When he found it he felt better straight away. He felt like a man who was able to change something at least here, in his home village.

LINE-UP. ENEMY’S REAR AREA . OCCUPATION REGIME

In the occupied territory new power was created: a hierarchy of powerful, police, intelligence and other structures that sought to stifle in the bud any resemblance of the guerilla movement. In a number of medium-sized Russian towns the main enemy agents were from five to fifteen hundred people.

If we take into account the secret agents recruited from the local population, these figures are increased by many times. In villages the appointed wardens held all the power. Supervision of compliance with the order was perpetuated by civil and military commandant offices of the Gestapo, field police, criminal police detectives, consisting of German police.

Having occupied a village or a town, the Nazis appointed a steward or a warden and issued orders in Russian. They paid a reward of up to 100 roubles for assistance in the fight against the guerillas, for “thorough information” about them. The functions of the Field Police

were gathering the food and things from civilians, capturing those hostile to the occupation regime, protecting military facilities, factories, public gathering on various forced labour. The “volunteers”’s salary ranged from 30 to 47 marks a month, which corresponded to the amount of 327 to 525 roubles.

Villagers were required to have a passport and a certificate from the village warden with the confirmation that a citizen was indeed a resident of such and such rural village. To move from village to village they also had to have a certificate issued by the warden. The route, purpose and exact date of arrival were specified in the certificate. The movement of the locals in the village was allowed from 6 am. to 5 pm. Violators were arrested or shot on the spot. Those who walked off-road or showed up at night in the woods, were shot without warning. Those who hung around scruffy, dressed in a cotton wadded jacket and ragged clothes, were considered “spies”. If something prohibited happened in the village, for instance someone unknown came, and got food, something got blown up or someone from the new power was killed, then punishment followed immediately. The village was burnt together with its residents without any investigation.

Strictest penalties will be prosecuted not only for the direct assistance and aiding guerillas, bandits, but also for deviation from the general civic duty to inform the authorities of all known about these robbers. In particular, each finder of Soviet newspapers, leaflets and other propaganda material of the Soviet origin should immediately hand them in to the closest German authorities.

(From Order of the military commandant of Luga)

The population of the occupied areas were forbidden to get engaged in any political activity, to store and use “Russian flags and symbols of the state sovereignty” (including those of the imperial times), to sing “songs of political content”. Meetings and processions were permitted only on the occasion of the funeral.

The reports of the NKVD of Leningrad and Leningrad region in this period noted that under the influence of extremely harsh conditions, the population began to show “negative spirits, sometimes developing into opposition”. As a result of undermining the authority of the Soviet government during the period of heavy defeats of the first

phase of the war, sharp criticism of pre-war domestic policy of the USSR and especially collectivization was demonstrated. Documents show the situation prevailing during the occupation of the north-western regions of Russia. The reports of commanders of guerilla groups, for example, often contained complaints that the fight against the invaders was prevented by a large number of traitors collaborating with the Germans.

In the areas of Kingisepp, Oranienbaum and outside Peterghof, it said in a report dated November 23, 1941, the Germans were assisted by a significant part of the population, among which there were many Soviet citizens of Estonian and Finnish nationality, as well as those who had been subjected to repression by the Soviet authorities, including former kulaks.

In November 1942, the commandant of the rear area of the German 18th Army at the meeting where the heads of Volosovsky, Krasnogvardeisky and Kingisepp districts were invited, noted that after the introduction of the occupation authorities and local self-liquidation of the collective farms, “almost universally the will and desire to cooperate with us are expressed”.

In Soviet historiography in the analysis of the German occupation policy, the issues related to economic plunder of the occupied territories and the extermination of the population were truly put forward. Indeed, during the period of occupation since the autumn of 1941 to the summer of 1944, in the part of the Leningrad region, which was captured by the Germans, there had been almost completely destroyed 20 towns and 3,135 villages and other settlements, 90% of all industrial enterprises, 70% of collective farm machinery and equipment, 60% of collective farm rooms for cattle, poultry and techniques placement. 43% of the collective farm livestock was stolen or hijacked. More than 404 thousand people were driven to work in Germany. By the end of the occupation the population in the areas captured by the Germans in the Leningrad region was less than one-third of the pre-war level (1,380 thousand in 1940, 442 thousand in March 1944). According to data published in the newspaper “Leningradskaya Pravda” on December 28, 1945, for the period of occupation by the German invaders in the Leningrad region 172 thousand people were shot, hanged, burned alive or killed by other means. However, other phenomena associated with the German occupation policy, were not looked at for

ideological reasons. Usually nothing was said about the cooperation of the invaders with the population of the occupied areas. Only isolated cases of such cooperation were mentioned and presented as something out of the ordinary and uniquely qualified as treason. Especially in the beginning of the war, the Wehrmacht and economic authorities occupation efforts to establish contacts with the Russian population contradicted the original position of Hitler, Himmler, Bormann and other Nazi leaders and ideologists and they were presented only as a promising alternative to the policy of conquest and destruction. However, after the failure of the blitzkrieg, not immediately, but in August 1942, the German High Command of the Army still issued a "Decree on local auxiliary forces in the East". It was signed by Chief of Staff Land Forces F. Halder and began with the words, "The dimensions of the eastern space and an urgent need to use sparingly German men forced to put the forces conquered in the east, as well as prisoners of war, at the service of the Wehrmacht (primarily active army) and the war economy in various fields.

That is to say, it was quite difficult for the aggressor to take and destroy everything and everyone in the vast territory from the Neman to the Volga. The original order was not quite correct. They had to change tactics. Defeating these Russians was possible only with their own means. That's if they wanted, of course... That's how the war for the soul started. In addition to toughened destroying of any form of resistance to the enemy, they began to spend time and money on the promotion of traitors, explanation of the anti-people essence of the Soviet regime, the promotion of the new order, etc. This gave the results.

After the war in 1946 for collaborating with the occupiers 32,859 people were arrested, in 1948 – 21,912, in 1949 – 19,567, in 1950 – 16,634, in 1951 – 14,447, in 1952 – 3,630, in 1953 – 2,136.

(Mozokhin O.B. Right to Repression: Extra-judicial Powers of State Security Bodies (1918–1953) M., 2006)

TARGET SETTING

Living in a village, people get used to doing everything themselves from their childhood – carefully, neatly and to last long. Fyodor knew all the hillocks in the glade near the farm house where his father and he used to mow the grass. He remembered every log when they transported their house from the farm to the village, on the bank of the Lemovzha... The nature only accepts people who belong to it. It doesn't tolerate others and rejects them.

The wheels of the state are different. They are usually there to change the nature. There are many people, a lot of factories and big goals. People have to do everything in an unfounded way. If there are planes to be built, everyone must do it! If there is collectivization, every third person is accused of being wealthy. Every third person was accused of being a public enemy. If we were retreating, everyone was a panic-monger and coward, if there was captivity, everyone was a traitor. This machinery couldn't do differently... But Astakhov was on his own. He had no boss, no orders, no subordinates, no tribunal or power. He was cut off from everything that could bring him good news, hope and self-confidence. Try to figure it out! What was to be done?

He knew what to do with the Germans. He had to act quietly and without showing off. It was war time and no villager would be curious, "Who is the hero who blew up the bridge or commandants office?" It was a usual thing. But everyone would be interested if one of them, who had always been living with them but had betrayed them, were punished rightly. For them it would be a triumph of justice. After that the other people, weak, faint-hearted and misguided, but not scums, as that one, would take thought.

So, all in good time. In a military way, Fyodor abruptly began to summarize the first three days that he had spent here in his home village. "I've got a rifle and a few bullets. A place to stay is prepared and masked. I've got the first information from my uncle. Three villages have been seen. The situation is clear. Now what about the people? I've started to pick out people, I know many of them. After all, in the early thirties, we used to go together to the dance. The younger son of the local village council chairman Leshka is too young. He must be only sixteen. I need to find out if Petrov is here. He might have left with our troops. I need sensible and independent people. I am looking

for like-minded people, not performers. I'll need performers later, when we increase in the number. What else? The main goals for diversions. First of all it's the butter factory near Bolshoi Sabsk. It's working to its full as far as I understand. I've got to set fire to it! I can't do it on my own. The next thing is the station of Moloskovitsy. There is an important railway junction there. I will need at least two more people and weapons or at least tools. Uncle Yegor doesn't count. It's too far for him. The third thing is police goons and wardens. I can do that on my own very nicely... I urgently need two more people. Reliable people."

It seemed clear. But Fyodor was plagued by doubts after his night conversation with uncle Yegor. He had new questions in his head. To start with, those were the questions to himself. He had some questions on the surface and some questions deep down.

Was he ready to be living and hiding in a dugout in the woods all on his own for months? He couldn't afford to get ill. Or be wounded. No one would help him. He couldn't stay in his parents' house even if his mother had tried to persuade him. They would know, sense, inform. How could he get about? Police patrols were hanging about the villages and checking passes. How could he look for assistants and soul mates? That was probably the most difficult part. They couldn't disappear even temporarily to commit sabotage. If they disappeared, their family would be killed. To leave with the family? But where?

The complicated thing was – could he offer anything to the villagers for them to choose to go with him? Apart from the call of duty. The Red Army had gone and left them. The leaflets thrown down from the planes saying the Red Army would return soon had a reverse effect. The new power was already there and it was acting roughly. The Germans were near, in Bolshoi Sabsk, just half an hour travel. They could arrive unexpectedly any time. Those were not just wandering in the village. They would pull everyone to the glade near the church and then search the houses in case someone was hiding. If they had a tiny suspicion, they would kill the whole family or even burn the village.

Everyone who lived there was entitled to think, "What if this country has lost the war, like Europe did? We were having Mongol-Tatar Yoke for a few centuries..." Later, after many years, this phenomenon would be given a scientific name. In the meantime, that was simple force subjection and non-resistance, a type of conscience when people started digesting easily an external force command. This being said, it

doesn't matter what force it was, ours or foreign. People were just following its will. I must say that in this sense the people in the villages were convenient material. Peasants used to follow the instructions, which were often far from their own interests. The main virtue for them had always been humility and diligence, and the main fault was independence and disobedience. But as soon as people began to realize that the government was gradually losing its power, they immediately lost that "authoritarian" conscience and no longer obeyed what yesterday intimidated them. If only everything were so simple! Alas! That filthy external force immediately wants to stain in mud anyone who has already agreed to comply. Just to dilute its responsibility for crimes committed. If you put on a bandage, you can now kill. You killed, now you can betray your dearest. And so forth and so on, deeper and further...

What could he oppose to that? Only actions! Active actions against that external force. Again and again he had to answer the same question, "On my own or in a team?"

As soon as Fyodor returned to that question, a pile of other problems would spout up like mushrooms after rain. "Shall I look for guerillas or besieged troops? Shall I wander around the woods and wait for them? No! I have walked so long and never met any guerillas. I wouldn't just join any of them, anyway. I learned my lesson. I've seen a lot of them, wandering around..."

The circumstances demanded him acting on his own, without counting on any help for a long time.

That was what Fyodor had to decide for himself immediately. As a human being, he realized that instead of the army, with its special departments, first it would be good to war as a partisan. That would be a way out. An intermediate step. If in the army they would just shoot him as a saboteur or a deserter, in the guerilla's group almost everyone was like him. They, too, were hiding and working underground. But it was hard to find them. So he had to form a group himself.

What was the next thing? It was clear that no open acts were possible. He would then have to take to the woods his elders: his mother and uncle. The same way would be prepared for all those whom he would recruit. And that was a burden, rather than help. They wouldn't be able to fight, really. The conditions required a skill to act alone without relying on anyone's help for a long time.

What did the locals need, the locals whose children and husbands were already in the police and serving Germans? What did policemen need? They were all so different. He had to look for what separated them. Some of them needed just to survive. For others it was food. For people like Klyonov it was a chance of doing a favour to the new regime, becoming rich and having power over people... But some people hated the Soviets so much they saw Germans as their saviors. In his village there were no people like that. Now he had to make them realize that if they became scums they would be killed. They had to know punishment would follow everyone.

Why did they need to know that? Will he become a rebel with them or what? Firstly, he didn't know what he would need to do. Secondly, it was impossible to kill the fear of imminent punishment for helping the Germans in the destruction of local residents, for extortion, for meanness. In a situation where no one knew anything about the main thing – where the Germans were at the moment, whether they took Moscow and Leningrad. One thing was clear. People should not break down. If they did they wouldn't be able to come back to normal...

Why do they need to come back to normal? After all, one way or another, some people more, some less, but they all knew about the tragedies that had haunted our country in the last ten to fifteen years. Our leaders and military commanders ruled the country and the army, to put it mildly, in a strange way... To get literacy, Dnieper Hydroelectric Station, planes and tanks, they had to trample the culture and initiative, to kill and starve people, to kill again, and then roughly, easily to throw millions of people into the abyss of the first months of the war. Then, without even thinking about them, they would get the next human formation...

Nevertheless, Astakhov was confident that the main words “enemy” and “meanness” still had to be kept in mind. At any cost. Not the enemy, who had recently been called the enemy of the people. Today everyone, including the enemies of the people, too, had one common enemy. No meanness of big heads, turning everything upside down and being ready for one purpose to destroy all those for whom that was the goal, but the human meanness, eternal meanness when you grew up and survived at the expense of another person's life.

Astakhov seemed to willingly become both a judge and an executioner. Who allowed him to switch on his personal value system to

evaluate the meanness of another person? Who authorized him? Him, who had been captured and just escaped and nearly being shot by the insiders?

What could he do? Moral values always determine human behaviour. This becomes possible not because it is profitable or pleasant to take into account in your decisions and actions. These values influence the will of man, and therefore are beyond him. You can fool others, you can be silent about something uncontrolled. But it is impossible to deceive your own conscience: it is a witness who is always with you. Its quiet but insistent voice sounds in a person when there is no external control. Conscience does not listen to the arguments, wordy objections and ornate evidence. It blames silently but relentlessly. It makes people tell themselves the truth and eventually commit the act.

But is our conscience always right? After all, there is also such conscience that distorts, transforms evil into good and vice versa. In these cases, there is always a question: do you serve the right ideals? Here conscience inevitably returns to the mind, without which one can not make the right choice.

All of a sudden Fyodor felt a clarity of mind, free from any ideological waste, army instructions and reflexes, everything casual and introduced. He was to report to his own conscience. Today he had to kill enemies. How well did his country do it? Did it love him or reject him? It was certainly important. But he tried not to take any notice of that. The most important thing was to drive the enemy out of his land. To drive as much as he could. To kill, harm and interfere. In doing so he would be helping... his family, his wife, little son, mother... saving their own idea of justice. To save in order to help people to recover their lost sense of faith in it. So that they felt their almost extinct feeling of bitter awareness of reality returning to them, and forgotten by them fear for their deeds. Later on, people's memory would start working. It would extract all details of betrayal and untruth from the past. Their imagination would form those details into living forms... After that their conscience would wake up. Not the false conscience of a slave who had lost his personality but the true one, which made people think, take decisions and act.

ALIGNMENT OF FORCES. ENEMY'S REAR AREA. GUERILLAS

Guerilla warfare behind the German lines began with the first days of the war. By the end of 1941 in the rear of the enemy there were 18 underground regional committees, more than 260 district and town committees and other underground party organizations. However, this struggle had acquired the scale of the known from the literature and movies not straight away. The reason was that in 1937–1939, all trained and prepared, as they were called, staffing Soviet saboteurs were destroyed. All special guerilla units were disbanded, and caches of weapons, ammunition and mine-explosive devices were dismantled. The very terms “diversion”, “sabotage”, “saboteur” began to be used exclusively in a negative sense, and only in relation to the enemy. Further development of the airborne troops went through capacity to conduct combat operations behind enemy lines only in the form of combined arms combat during the Red Army offensive operations.

Very negative attitude of senior military and political leadership of the country to the fate of soldiers who were captured, the reluctance to take steps for their release, allowed the German command to contain many hundreds of thousands of soldiers, officers and generals of the Red Army in the camps in the occupied Soviet territory. The task of the release of their prisoners of war in violation of the traditions of the Russian army was not considered as a task of the armed forces. Thus, the strong potential for the deployment of guerilla warfare was not used at all.

Many staff commanders got confused having found themselves surrounded. They were not used on their own to make difficult decisions that went beyond statutory requirements, were not able to command without the approval or consent of the superior command.

Over the past five months in 1941 in the front-line and rear areas of the Leningrad region 278 guerilla groups were formed and sent to the front line. Subsequently, connection through messengers was established with only 24 of them. By January 1942, due to the difficult situation in the enemy's rear, lack of food and weapons, a significant part of the guerilla groups had gone into the Soviet rear. By that time, 4 partisan brigades, 41 guerilla groups had been destroyed by the Ger-

mans, dozens of underground organizations and groups had been eliminated. Throughout the country, only 7% of people survived in the guerilla groups formed in the beginning of the war and transferred to the rear of the enemy. A year after the war began only 37 guerilla groups had radio contact with the central command. Only on 6th September 1942, the post of Commander of the guerilla movement was established, but two months later the post was abolished. Finally, the Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement as the military-operational body of the party were established and reported directly to the General Headquarters. However, on March 7th, 1943 they were disbanded as well. So great was the temptation up there to rob someone and take all the guerilla agents to themselves. Only in May 1943, the Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement were restored... In fact, two years of war had been without control.

*Regulation of the State Defence Committee 83cc
Strictly confidentially 10 July 1941*

To Chief Commanders and Commanders of the Directions K.E. Voroshilov, S.K. Timoshenko, S.M. Budenny, Commanders of Districts, Fronts and Armies, Chairmen of the Council of People's Commissars and Secretaries of the Central Committee of the Union Republics.

To oblige commanders to often throw from airplanes behind the German lines small leaflets signed by them, with an appeal to the people to smash the rear of the German armies, tear bridges, unscrew the rails, set fire to the forest, go to the guerillas, always trouble the German oppressors. Indicate in the appeal that the Red Army will soon come and liberate them from German oppression.

(Popov A.Y. NKVD and Guerilla Movement. M., 2003)

In addition to these directives – the obvious manifestations of helplessness – it is enough just to cite only one fact, which generally permanently halted all efforts to deploy underground and guerilla movement in the Leningrad Region and the North-West of the country. In July 1941, in an airplane which made an emergency landing, the Germans captured an unencrypted report of Chief of the political propaganda of the North-Western Front to the Deputy of People's Defence Committee Mekhlis. It reported on the number, organization, areas of action, tasks, and armed personnel of guerilla groups in the area of

North-Western Front. It was after this document was captured that the German High Command issued an order that equated partisans to bandits and directed their merciless and total annihilation.

Of course, the state security bodies sent their agents into the rear of enemy, but they were too often ill-prepared, unfamiliar with local conditions and had a job only of military-intelligence nature. In the rear there was no basis for their legalization and communication support. All this led to frequent revelations or sending our agents not to the German intelligence school, but to the POW camps.

Even greater difficulties were faced by Party and Soviet workers, who did not know the features of partisan work, and in general often had no military training. Organization of guerilla warfare in the rear of the German troops by the Soviet political leaders at the outbreak of the war was seen largely not as a task of the armed forces, but as one of the tasks of the party and government bodies. From the point of view of the organization of armed resistance in the enemy rear the directive of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) on June 29, 1941 was, although very necessary, but just a slogan. That was because no leadership party or state structure designed to "foment guerilla warfare", previously had not been established.

From the report of the Chief of General Staff of the German Army, Colonel-General F. Halner

1 September 1941

On the supply situation on the Eastern Front

...It is everywhere quite satisfactory. Railway work exceeded our expectations. Performing immediate operational tasks logistically is well secured...Just between the 1st and 16th August 340 trains with ammunition had been delivered to the troops, that is the quantity of ammunition, which was provided by "Barbarossa" plan... Guerilla warfare on the roads of the enemy is not observed although the basic mass of the German heavy-duty vehicles is still engaged in the transportation of ammunition and other supplies from the border to the Dnieper.

From the reference of the main railway Directorate of Army Group "Centre"

The number of guerilla attacks on objects of railway transport in the first half of 1942 amounted to: January – 5, February – 6, March –

27, April – 65, May – 145; number of locomotives tripped on mines amounted to: February – 5 (2 in repair), March – 5 (2), April – 13 (6), May – 25 (13); the number of severely damaged or completely decommissioned carriages: January – 0, February – 0, March – 57, April – 45, May – 166. Since the second half of January 1942, the rail transfer of Germany provided on 300 trains daily to the East.

(Halner F. Military Diary. Daily Notes of the General Staff Chief of the Army 1939–1942. M., 1968–1971)

In terms of a month it is about 9,000 trains. If we take the basis of the data of Soviet Military Encyclopedia, in the first year of the war the guerillas made a monthly average of 40 wrecks, and in the second half of 1942 the number increased to 300. Clearly, this was only 0.44% and 3.3% from everything that was directed by the Wehrmacht to the Eastern Front in the first two years of the war.

Such was the situation in the entire occupied territory, including where Fyodor Astakhov was. He certainly did not know it then.

PART 3

BOTH THE JUDGE
B O T H T H E J U D G E

AND EXECUTIONER
A N D E X E C U T I O N E R

“SHOULD HAVE KILLED ALL OF THEM”

From the order of the NKVD No. 001683, 12 December 1941

“On operational KGB service of the areas liberated from the enemy troops”

...through agents, informants and partisans, as well as honest Soviet citizens to establish and arrest the traitors and provocateurs at the service of the German occupation authorities, as well as contributing to them in the conduct of anti-Soviet activities and the persecution of the party and Soviet activists and honest Soviet citizens... To identify persons involved in the anti-Soviet activity, immediately to arrest and bring to justice.

(Popov A.Y. NKVD and Guerilla Movement. Petrozavodsk, 1999)

11 September 1943

Strictly confidential

To the People's Commissars of Internal Affairs of the union and autonomous republics,

To Heads of the Department of the NKVD territories and regions,

To People's Commissars of State Security of the Union and autonomous republics...

To Head of the Department of the NKVD troops of protection of the rear of the Red Army (list)

In addition to the earlier guidance regarding the arrests of police, village chiefs and headmen and accomplices of invaders in areas liberated from the Nazi invaders, it is suggested the following as guidelines:

1. Out of the persons in the service of the police... and other similar organizations created by the Nazi invaders in the occupied territories – continue to arrest:

a) overhead and command personnel of the police...

b) rank and file police officers and ordinary members of the above organizations who participated in the punitive expeditions against guerrillas and Soviet patriots or took an active part in carrying out their duties imposed on them by occupiers;

c) former soldiers of the Red Army, having changed sides, or voluntarily surrendered, betrayed their Motherland, and then entered the service of the police... and other similar organizations created by the Nazi invaders...

2. Out of village chiefs those are subject of arrest in respect of whom the facts are established of actively aiding the invaders: connection with punitive or enemy intelligence agencies, the issuance of the Soviet patriots to the occupants, oppression and extortion of the population, etc.

3. Persons of military age who worked under the Germans as village wardens, enlisted policemen, as well as being members of the “People's Guards”, the “People's Militia”, Russian Liberation Army, “National Legions” and other similar organizations, including former soldiers of the Red Army, if in respect of them there is no data on the treacherous and treasonous work, are subject to sending to special NKVD camps for filtering in the manner prescribed for those who emerged from the encirclement and or were held captive by the Germans.

The People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR, the Commissioner-General of the State Security L. Beria

The People's Commissar of State Security of the USSR, State Security Commissioner of the 1st rank V. Merkulov

(From Joint Directive of the NKVD and NKGB USSR No. 494/94)

Neither these documents nor the joint directive of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) on 29 June 1941 on “instigating the guerrilla warfare” behind enemy lines then were not known. Not to Fyodor Astakhov or anyone else at fifty miles around. At that time all men who remained in the villages and who did not go away or were not going away, almost all were in police. In the five neighbouring villages there were only two young guys Fyodor knew who did not yet serve in the police.

One of them was Vitka Likhachev, twenty-five years old, the son of the chairman of the village council. But his father lived on his own far away somewhere near Tolmachevo. Vitka had always lived with

her grandmother and worked in Khotnezha. A fallen tree at timber harvesting broke his arm. Since then it didn't fully move. They didn't take Likhachev into the army. Nor into the police probably. What happened to his parents? Who would know about them? What did he think about all that? Fyodor would better ask him... Would he ask him and reveal himself? He had to take a chance. What if he didn't agree? That would mean surrendering to the police. Would he have to kill him then?

There was also Petka Lukin. Fyodor had been watching him for a fortnight. He came from a poor family, was a good lad. They used to go to the dance together. He was always active, conscientious, thinking about other people. He was a farm machinery operator. They probably had not called him up for military service. Everyone was in the police but he was not. Fyodor decided to see him the next day but when he saw him Petka was already wearing a police armband...

Years would have passed and an investigator from Liteiny, 4 would say about policemen, "We should have killed all of them then. Now we've got to sort them out, look for proof..."

KLENOVS

Klenovs moved to Bolshoi Sabsk from somewhere outside Kharkov in the summer of 1930. They were a father, a mother and two sons. The elder son was called Vsevolod. He was tall, with curly and dark hair and big dark eyes. The younger son was called Petka. He was different – blond and he was five years younger. The village people were gossiping he had a different father. The family settled in an old ruined barn on the edge of the village. The parents joined the collective farm. They worked every day on the fields, preparing food for the collective herd of cows for the winter. Vsevolod immediately came to the youth group and asked to be an agitator of collectivization in the surrounding villages. Together with the other guys he used to go to other villages, called the poor to unite their property in the community. He knew what hunger was and could clearly draw an impressive picture of poverty which he had often seen in his homeland. He was quickly noticed and became involved in the dispossession.

That was a completely different thing. They did not need to persuade anyone. There they needed a sense for wealth and a sense of justice, or rather – deprivation. Vsevolod had both of them in excess. Together with Petka, like no one else, they would easily find hidden grain and jewellery. No wonder – there, in the Ukraine, in order to survive, they used to get into abandoned houses and barns in the hope of finding anything edible, wander through the woods, trying different tricks to catch a bird or an animal. They often dreamed of having a good munch at a large table full of tasty things. But all they could think of was hot millet porridge with milk and a big piece of brown bread with suet.

Everything taken from the dispossessed, they brought into a common barn and recorded. Then the board decided what went where. There was there a guy from Khotnezha, Petrov by name. He often argued with his superiors when ordered the eviction of local "rich". He tried to say something good about them, even to protect. Nobody approved this mood, and soon Petrov was removed from this work. Klenov was appointed head of the unit instead of him. The key personnel was formed – both Klenovs, vociferous Nikitin from Krasny Mayak and a young boy sent from some plant. The plan was always carried out. They withdrew as much bread as was needed. Everything went smoothly. Two years later Vsevolod was given a job in the village council. The Klenov moved into one of dispossessed houses. They owned a cow now. In winter, he travelled from village to village in a sleigh, and in the summer in a horse cab. Governor! In 1939 he was accepted as a candidate for the Communist party. In the Finnish war Vsevolod was not subject for mobilization, and in 1941 they just did not start it.

When the Germans came, for both Klenovs nothing changed. They just changed the immediate supervisor. Indeed, they could not lose power and all their belongings and leave again for somewhere. Enough! The ones who came to power were so strong and organized that they will definitely need his skill to be a boss. Without a moment's hesitation, on the first day he went up to the German military commander in Sabsk and told in detail about who was left for the underground work and where in the forest the weapons were buried. He said he was not a party member but just a candidate, otherwise he would have been sacked.

Senior Klenov was checked up, they were satisfied with the course of verification and appointed him a chief police officer and then a warden in 1942. He was joined by Nikitin, Klenov-junior, and a dozen of other men left in the neighbouring villages. A new life under the new order began. Sitting in his small office, drinking moonshine and eating crisp salty milk mushrooms, Vsevolod Klenov would proudly say to his next present-carrier, "Everyone needs people like me. I am a professor in this business and always sense bosses."

ILL-DISGUISED JOY

The winter of 1941–1942 turned out to be cold. However, the Lemovzha marsh had not frozen in places. In early January, when Astakhov was hunting down the parish warden and his brother, he accidentally wandered into the moss covered in thin ice, fell into a bog, struggled to get out of there and after he finally did, he had to walk, wet to his bones. In fact, he was not looking for the chief police goon, Vsevolod Klyonov, but his younger brother Petka, who had shot two people, not locals, from the loft of his house. The people he shot were either guerillas or paratroopers. They wore helmets and overalls. They didn't see any Germans in the village and wandered around the village asking for food. Like small children, honestly!

After that misfortune Fyodor got a chill, he was shivering. With a high temperature he turned up at his mother's. He couldn't wait any more, he came to her for healing and getting warm. He had hot milk and butter, got changed and lay under a heavy quilt, wearing wool socks, black "smart" trousers, a nearly new grey shirt and a blazer. There were no other clothes for him in the house. He covered his mouth with a rag to conceal his endless cough. After the hot milk he was dripping with sweat.

Suddenly Germans arrived at the village. They came on bikes and cars. There were quite a lot of them, they came to find out where the guerillas had come from the week before. Fyodor jumped down the cellar just in time. He hid in the potato hole in his best clothes. The edges of the hole were fixed with boards. He carefully sprinkled sand on the lid. He felt the pain in the wound in his arm straight away. The shard had moved and caused a rare but sharp pain.

Several Germans came into the house with a sheep-dog and sat at the table. One of them climbed down the cellar and shone a flash light. He rustled around the sand with a rake, he even got under the floor of the big room to the place where the potato hole was. He had to crouch down. Over there he couldn't really handle a rake. So five minutes later he got out holding a jar of gherkins and joined his fellows cheering and drinking at the table.

Fyodor had prepared that hole in advance, in October, for his mother to hide if they were going to burn the house. There she could have saved herself from the fire and waited. In the foundation of the house from the river side he had begun to make a hole, he had already taken several stones from there and covered it with a sheet of rusty iron. It was not visible when there was snow and in the summer it was covered with growing nettle. You could crawl out of there without being noticed. But the manhole was still not ready. He needed to take a couple of stones from the foundation.

In the morning the Germans left the house. Half-dead Fyodor got out of the cellar, his face white and swollen. Even the dog had not sensed him.

The Germans had left the village. They took some people with them, burned everything in the neighbouring village, including the farms. To teach the villagers a lesson – not to help anyone. The local police goons, Klyonov-junior and Osipov, demonstrated their agility, they caught a Gypsy boy wandering in the village, an orphan, pulled him out of the village and wounded in his stomach. He was crying and screaming of pain. The boy was only twelve. Outside the village they finished him off and threw him in a ravine.

"I am going to kill those skunks!" Astakhov promised himself. "For sure and in the first place. The parish warden will have to wait. All the village has seen those villains," Astakhov promised himself.

After the ill-fated home treatment Fyodor could not visit his parents' house. He only went there once and finished the hole in the foundation. He also took half a sack of flour and a piece of lamb to his mother, he got them from the shed of a policeman who lived outside of Moloskovitsy. As soon as he handed them to her, he rushed back to the woods, to his dugout.

He gradually got used to his new routine. In the morning he would sleep until ten. Then, while it was still warm from the stove, he could

cook porridge in one pot and grated frozen lamb in another. That was his breakfast and lunch. He didn't cook every day, he would cook enough for a couple of days. The most difficult thing was to hide his food from a fox that got into the habit of coming into his dugout. It had already eaten all of Fyodor's stocks twice.

Once a week he would wash his clothes in the water boiled in a pail on the stove, he also cut his hair and shaved with a razor-sharp knife. He had taken the pail, his favourite penknife, soap, salt and pots from his house the first time he went there. In the day, when the stove went out, he would pile fir branches on his dugout and throw some snow on the top. Then he would overturn a long log and carefully go across it to the bushes to the pathway, overturn the log again with the icy side up. After that he would go to the village. He needed to find out the latest news and get to uncle Yegor's house. There he could learn the news about the butter-making factory, about the Klenov, Germans and also about the guys who hadn't joined the police goons yet.

In the afternoon, Astakhov climbed the red rock and stared at the landscape he had known from childhood: his village, river bend, bridge and church's domes. The village was hardly alive. He could see two policemen in new black overcoats walk from the post-office. One seemed to be Basov but he couldn't recognize the other one. They were popping into the houses and writing something down into a big white notepad. Then he saw Verka Ignatieva walking towards them to school and carrying a big can of milk. At school there were headquarters of policemen from five neighbouring villages. Fyodor's mother was walking towards Krasny Mayak with a can. She was ordered to bring fresh milk every day to the butter-making factory for the guards. She had to walk seven kilometres. She could hardly walk, she had bad legs...

Fyodor remembered himself coming to his mother's on the second day after his visit to uncle Yegor's. She was crying and cheering up when she saw her son alive. She closed the curtains and locked the door. She put Fyodor's big sheepskin fur coat he had worn walking for over five hundred kilometres into the hot Russian stove. The fur coat immediately became white of fried lice. She burned his blazer, shirt and breeches in a pot belly stove and got him some hot water. Fyodor washed the best he could straight there, in the room. His mother cleaned his arm wound with moonshine and bandaged it with a clean

white towel. She got an old warm jumper, trousers and huge felt boots with rubbers, belonging to his father, from the attic. Fyodor ate cabbage soup without meat. He felt really good... His mother agreed with what he had decided to do here, in his native land...

Standing on the rock, Fyodor could see his mum meet Dmitrievna, who lived on her own but policemen would often call for moonshine. Sometimes they would drink it in her house and carry on. While they were drinking, they would chat about their business, about who had got a promotion, who had been hung, who had been sent somewhere and who was the boss. That sort of thing. Every time mother met Dmitrievna, she stopped, said hello to her and waited for her to pour her heart out and show off her knowledge.

Near the church there stood an open carriage with a horse. People of Khotnezha and Koriacha were making their way there. There would be an announcement for them. "I wonder who has come. It's not Klyonov, is it?" Fyodor was dreaming. That one didn't go anywhere without guards. Last time when the Germans had come and shot the miller near the church, they gathered everyone as well. But then there were only Klyonov-junior and Osipov, also from Sabsk.

Two hours later everyone left. It was quiet again. He could walk along the road, come up to a house of a police goon in the village and feel what sort of person he was. Usually none of them slept until 2 o'clock in the morning. They all seemed to be waiting for something. Then he took his time checking the route from one village to another, back ways and getaways. To track down the head policemen, he had to know quite a lot. Where did they go? Why and when? What weapons did they have? Did they have guards? The butter-making factory was a different story. Fyodor had already found out how to get there and how to set it afire. Now he needed to figure out what guards there were, where they were and how many barrels of oil there were at the warehouse. Besides, not far from there, in Sabsk, there was a German unit. It would be a good idea to get some information about it.

Around 2 o'clock in the morning or even later Fyodor usually returned to his dugout. He would fire up the stove, warm up his food and go to bed. This time he went to bed earlier than usual. The next day, or the same day to be exact, he would have a difficult day. He found out that in the morning policeman Osipov would walk to his family along the river Luga. He didn't know whether he would go on

his own or with his mate Petka Klyonov. But he knew Osipov never walked on his own. He always had two or three guards with him.

Over the tops of the pine-trees there hung a huge lead canopy of the sky. There were no stars... Another minute – and the woods and the sky ran into one another. The night came. Snowflakes were falling on his face and melting. Fyodor stopped. It was quiet. No sound, no rustle. A tree creaked about somewhere. Then it was quiet again. Astakhov didn't feel comfortable in that ear-piercing silence. He was carefully walking forward, towards the road. The snow was betraying him with its crunching but the woods were extinguishing all the sounds.

About twenty metres from the place where he stopped, two people with guns, in warm sheepskin jackets and fur hats were walking along the snowy road-side. Those were Klyonov and Osipov who had shot two guerillas and then pulled the wounded Gypsy boy in view of the villagers and killed him. Next to and behind them there were three other people with guns.

If only those creatures had known how long he had been looking for them! He had been preparing, watching for hours but they would be walking a different route! Then he would have had to run across the deep snow another ten kilometres to capture them in a different place. He needed them to be together and far away from the village to avoid suspecting the locals...

...Walking across the deep snow in the tracks, both policemen were walking in single file. In silence the shot sounded very loud. Klyonov fell on the ground straight away and went quiet, but the second one must have been just wounded. The three guards obviously lost courage and fussed. Two of them, that had been behind, rushed to flee without shouting. The third man lay down and without aiming started shooting in the woods where Astakhov was hiding. A minute later he grasped something, jumped up and ran after the other two towards the nearest village. Fyodor didn't recognize any of them. He waited for the three guards to run further away, then he came up closer to the road. Osipov was half-sitting and half-lying unnaturally and trying to rack the slide of his gun.

"So, it's our people," he muttered when he recognized Astakhov.

"Oh, yes," Fyodor said harshly and finished him off with the gun-butt. He didn't say and didn't explain anything. Just finished him off! He didn't feel anything apart from a squeamish sensation of touching a rotten skunk.

Then he took the guns and pulled the bodies of the policemen to the river. He didn't want them to be found. But they were. The jacket of one of them swelled from an air-hole. When the Germans and policemen looked for them, it was the jacket they found them by. After that they arranged a funeral with honours and fireworks. Some high-ranked Germans came. They buried the two bastards at the Khotnezhka cemetery. They must have appreciated their hard work. They didn't touch any locals. They just walked in line into the woods around the nearest villages. Not far. Just five kilometres deep into the woods.

His mother said that the women she met in the country road, Dmitrievna and Verka Ignatieva, shared their impressions of that event, meaningfully showed their heads somewhere up. Their faces expressed both fear and joy, which they couldn't hide.

THE TWO OF THEM

We only believe those who believe in themselves.

(Tarle Y.V. Talleyrand. M., 1962)

By the spring Astakhov was preparing the butter factory arson. The snow would just melt and the footprints could not be seen. The factory was quite small but as far as he understood from uncle Yegor's words, they kept a lot of steel barrels with engine oil and stored them near the factory, in the barn. The barn was long and full of those barrels. If they were set on fire, it would be quite a thing for the factory. All that was guarded by five police goons from Bolshoi Sabsk and Krasny Mayak. The barrels had not been removed for a month. So he had to hurry up. It was time to pay a visit to Likhachev's.

In late February, he finally managed to come across him. Vitka's grandmother stayed the night with a friend on the other side of the Lemovzha. Fyodor came to Likhachev's house at night with a rifle over his shoulder, he opened the door, quietly walked into the room and stopped in the middle of it. Through the window, the nearly full moon was shining like a spotlight. Its light reflected from the shiny metal gate and barrel of the rifle. On the floor there were a dozen of books lying around. Vitka was standing in the corner, between the stove and

the window. He was tall, slim, black-haired. In the darkness Fyodor could see the outline of his thin face. Calm, as he usually was, he was looking at Astakhov and waiting. Fyodor asked him quietly, "Hello, mate. Why did you not join the police?"

Without paying attention at the question, Vitka said, "Whew! Fedka! Where did you come from?" He waited for the answer but didn't get it and asked again, "So was it you who has recently killed those bastards, Klenov and Osipov?"

"There were enough people willing to do that," Astakhov answered uncertainly.

"So where are you? What do you know? Where are the Germans now?"

"Hang on a minute! I asked you why you were not in the police. Did they not want you?"

"I didn't ask. There are enough people there. I couldn't join the army and these ones don't like cripples either. Why are you asking? I can't leave for the woods, they would kill my nan straight away."

This answer suited Astakhov. It was obvious that Vitka had thought a lot about how not to wear out the seat of his trousers. Then Fyodor lied for some reason that he was specially sent here to create a partisan detachment. He didn't say a word about his dugout.

"The hardest part is this," Astakhov went on confidently as if the decision had been made somewhere at the top, "you've got to join the police, Victor."

"What shall I do there?"

"The same as everyone else, you'll know everything they are up to. You'll know how to get to the butter factory, to the warden Vsevolod Klenov. How did he change so quickly? Do you know?"

"Everyone knows about him. It's a long story but it was going to end like that. Will you give me a gun?"

"I've already told you – you'll join the police and get everything – an overcoat, a rifle and an armband. You'll earn their trust and get information."

"What if they make me kill someone from our side?"

"I don't think they will."

"What if they do?"

"You must be able to see that not all of them are bastards if they are in the police."

"Even if they are not, later on they will be treated as if they are. Who is going to confirm I have joined the police in order to help you? What if you are killed? Who will say I am not one of them?" Victor shook his head in the direction of the village council where the police-commandant was.

"Don't worry about that. I will write a paper for you. We'll find someone else. You just need to hide it in a safe place."

"So do it!" Victor calmed down and took thought.

"I will do. But you've got to go to the police tomorrow," Fyodor said. "The sooner you join them, the sooner you'll be able to openly walk between the villages. Everything will be much quicker. You have no idea how difficult these new rules are for me."

"Listen, Fedka, don't rush me. I've got to think it over. It's not like we're going on a hike, is it?" Likhachev said sharply. "That's enough for the first time. I understand everything you've just told me. Let's meet in three days in the morning behind the church and decide everything, OK? Auf wiedersehen!" Vitka turned away from Fyodor and began to pick up the books from the floor.

"There won't be another time, Vitya. You'd better tell me now if you do it or not. If you do, then when?"

"What if I don't go to the police? Is there anything else left?" Likhachev continued picking up the books and putting them in a pile on the windowsill. Some of them were quite big and in German.

"There is nothing else left. You said you couldn't go into the woods. There is only one way. Mind you, there is another one..."

"Don't get wound up, Fyodor, it's not like we're going to the dance."

"It's easy to say not to get wound up. Why do you think I came here? I've been watching everything for nearly four months. Believe me, I've been watching them closely. Vitka, you'd better say you agree. The only thing I don't know is what I would do if you didn't agree."

"Here we go. Are you going to kill me?"

"Don't talk rubbish!"

"Exactly!"

"There's certainly risk," Astakhov said harshly. "There is always risk in things like that. There is a chance of getting a bullet from both sides."

"Exactly, they could come back and ask me, 'Why did you join the police, voluntarily as well?' And so forth and so on. I won't be able to wriggle out. Remember how it was before the war? Anyone

could get the blame then. Now it's even worth – a police goon! Everyone could say they did it on purpose to help the Motherland.”

“So we've got to hurry up and do things!”

“I don't like all this rushing...”

They both gradually calmed down. Their doubts diminished. In the end they decided Likhachev would go to the police two days later. And the next day he would hang around near the former village council, ask the people about what they were getting there. It would look as if he had thought about everything and in the end made up his mind. That was reliable and safe. Vitka was right.

Before Fyodor left, they agreed of the ways of communication using a niche in the ruined brick left wall of the church.

Having got to the dugout, Astakhov finally felt a huge relief. He was not alone. It would be much easier now. “Hang on, it's not a fact!” Fyodor thought. “Vitka could say anything! I've got to check him first... Actually, who knows for sure what is the right thing to do! Maybe, we just need to kill Germans, that's all.”

From the list of tasks, the 2nd Division (03.09.1941) and then the 4th administration (18.01.1942) NKVD of the USSR:

...implementation of proven agents into the anti-Soviet organizations, intelligence... administrative bodies, created by the enemy in the occupied territories...

...disruption of rail transport, incapacitating military and industrial facilities... ammunition storage... fuels...

...identification of enemy agents, left in the rear of the Soviet troops after the retreat of the German Army...

...dissolution of the parts formed from... forcibly mobilized residents of the occupied territories...

(ASMAZ. From Brigade Task to “Pennon”. 1941–1981. M., 2001)

POLICE GOON OR GUERILLA?

A week later Likhachev was walking along the village with a gun and an armband and for the first time Fyodor was pleased with that. But neither his mother nor uncle Yegor knew anything about it. Neither

did Vitka about them. By this time the new police goon knew who the factory guards were and where it would be better to throw a bottle with kerosene.

On the last day of February, about four o'clock in the morning, they came to the factory from the direction of Krasny Mayak. They each had a bottle of kerosene with a rag in the neck. They expected for the guards to be asleep. If the guards started shooting and they had to leave, they were to walk only along a country road. They didn't want to leave any foot prints. Everything went without a hitch. They got to the warehouse unnoticed. Only one of the guards was walking along the long stone wall, the rest were probably somewhere asleep.

They threw two bottles into the room full of barrels at the same time. They immediately ran back thirty meters and hid behind the trees. At the sound of breaking bottles five people ran out of the factory buildings. First they fled in different directions, then they gathered and their senior began to show something in the forest. There was no firing...

A minute passed. Astakhov saw two of them run through the forest to the road without shooting, and the rest go inside the premises of the factory. At that moment, a huge glow quietly lit the black sky: flames began to break out of the windows of the barn and the factory building. Only now explosions of barrels, the sound of bursting window panes and loud siren could be heard. They could see three men run out of the windows and fall in the snow rolling from side to side to put out the fire on their clothing. Immediately they heard irregular rifle shots and gunfire. Germans must have shown up by then. They had to leave. A few more minutes and all escape route would be blocked...

Directly in front of Fyodor, suddenly a police goon turned up. His face was brightly lit by the fire of the burning warehouse. “That's Nikitin from Mayak,” flashed through Astakhov's mind... Two more men in the long overcoats were running up to him. The police goon, aiming straight at him, cried, “Come, hands up and throw down the gun! Quickly or I'll blow your legs off.”

“Exactly! No one else in the area has such a loud voice,” Fyodor thought. He waved his hands, sharply repulsed towards the muzzle of a rifle aimed at him, fell on the snow and simultaneously fired. The police goon fell. “Is he wounded?” Astakhov thought. “Then he'll recog-

nized me.” He had no time to finish him off. Two Germans were approaching fast firing everything around them. Luckily Fyodor had covered his mouth and nose with a scarf. The woods were so light from the high and bright flame that it was not difficult to recognize him. Away from the factory! They were chasing them.

“They will not catch me, but if they stopped and shot at me, they would get me.” As soon as he thought that, a bullet from automatic fire burned his left shoulder. “Through and through,” Astakhov thought while he was still running. “Where is Vitka?” On the other side of the factory they were firing, too. But there were no response shots.

Vitka had done well! As soon as he threw his bottle, he immediately ran away, not waiting for the result. Fyodor heard his two plangent whistles far away, probably a kilometre away from that place. Then they struggled up the steep slope on the opposite bank of the Lemovzha and met in the woods near the cemetery behind the church.

Likhachev was out of breath, with a sweaty face and a wide smile. He was brushing twigs and needles off his coat and hat. On seeing blood on Fyodor’s arm, Vitka took out a small bottle of the cloudy moonshine, busily unbuttoned his black overcoat, pulled a large piece of sheet from behind his belt and handed it all Astakhov.

“Wounded?”

“Yeah, through and through. It’s bleeding quite heavily now.”

Vitka pulled Fyodor’s wadded jacket and blazer off. His shirt was soaking wet with blood. Standing near the church, he poured the moonshine from his bottle on the wound and began to tightly wrap Fyodor’s arm and shoulder with the pieces of the white sheet. It turned out something huge and white and red.

“Later on you’ve got to clean it with the moonshine and bandage again.”

“I already know things like this,” Fyodor said, “my head is spinning and I can hear nothing.”

“There is nothing to hear. There is silence around. It’s not even five o’clock yet. Everyone chasing us is on the other bank of the river. They didn’t take chances to run far. They must have thought there were at least ten of us. The flame was enormous...”

“That’s it. Now we’ve got to go home,” the weakening Fyodor said and checked if there was any blood on the snow.

So with hastily bandaged arm, pieces of the sheet and a rifle on his shoulder, he walked to the woods to his dugout.

And Likhachev, with an armband and a gun, began to carefully wade along the bank to his house. Only near the porch, he straightened and feeling confident, walked into his house. Anyone watching him would not understand whether he was proud of himself as a police goon, or as a partisan who had just finished his job. His nan was still asleep. He didn’t want her to worry about anything.

RETRIBUTION

Nearly everything went wrong with station Moloskovitsy. Lots of risk and not much use. They failed to let the train derail. Before the anniversary of the start of the war, on Saturday night, they left for Moloskovitsy. Vitka had to come back home in the afternoon. They took kerosene, keys, all kinds of tools and a rope with them. It was impossible to approach the station. They came to the railway track ten kilometres from the station. In spite of the night, it was as bright as daytime. Fyodor quickly began to unscrew the rusty bolts that secured the rails to the sleepers. It had taken him at least an hour. He tied the rails with a rope, covered its end with sand and dragged it quietly to the grass down the slope to the bush. During this time, Vitka thickly poured kerosene on the five meters of rails and covered the mound with dry grass soaked in kerosene. This grass track went straight into the bushes where Astakhov had to wait for the train.

They hadn’t found out the timetable of the trains. What else could they do? They didn’t want to break a couple of rails for no reason. That would have been silly. He knew a rail car would ride first and check everything before the train. So he had to wait for the train and to pull the unscrewed rail. As they had decided, Vitka left for Khotnezh.

Three hours passed. At around midday a rail car with Germans passed by. Five minutes later, Fyodor could hear the approaching train. It was going slowly, as luck would have it. Fyodor did not know what the train was carrying, but he knew exactly that it was not empty. It sounded very heavy. When the locomotive approached the rails

drenched in kerosene, Fyodor set fire to the grass. The locomotive continued to move through the burning rails and in about ten seconds caught up with the unscrewed rails. After the first right wheels had gone on the tracks, Astakhov pulled the ropes with all his might. The following wheels derailed and crashed into the mound. The locomotive banked but did not fall. The cars following it remained on the tracks, some of their wheels fell into the mound because the track was curved in fire. Two carriages caught fire. Nobody ran out of the train and no one fired. The fire in the carriages was quickly extinguished. The locomotive made a few lingering hooters. Ten minutes later, a technical and two rail cars with the Germans drove from the station. They quickly surrounded the place of the crash. When they arrived, Astakhov was already far away.

This time Astakhov was chased professionally. They blocked all roads and chased with dogs. But Fyodor had long grown out of a habit of using roads. Only through the woods and by river. He went in the direction of Luga by the river Vruda, away from his home village.

After this sortie at the station of Moloskovitsy, the situation changed radically. Germans began to frequently pay visits to the nearby villages, they called and questioned their residents. They were looking for those who had relatives behind the front line. They were bothering Fyodor's mother a lot then. Where were her sons and daughters? When did they leave, where? They would come to her house and search it. Why did it start after Moloskovitsy? How and where did he leave marks? The danger was threatening him but he still had to do the most important job – the parish warden.

A week later Klenov was instructing his people, about thirty police goons from the neighbourhood.

"Is everyone here? Who's not here?" Vsevolod Klenov started confidently. "Likhachev, I ordered you to gather everyone. Why did no one come from Gostyatino?"

"I have told everyone in person, mister warden. I will find out and report to you," Vitka answered obligingly.

"You surely will. And you will be responsible for Gostyatino. Now, Basov, why did you not give me the list of houses owning a cow? Do you want to conceal the information? The Germans are going to send all the cattle to their rear and you are not helping. By the end of the meeting I've got to have the list on my desk. Go and do it!"

Basov ran out of the room and rushed to the neighbouring villages to find out what cattle and poultry they had.

The warden read aloud the order: from whom to take the cattle and how much. Then he informed the people that two days later he was going to Luga on the ferry to report to the Germans and to take the lists of people to be sent to Germany and to be taken the cattle from.

"Likhachev, Basov and Menshova, a representative from women, will come with me. Also a couple of police goons. Likhachev, you can appoint them. Bear in mind – there will be a lieutenant from Sabbsk commandants office and a few other Germans."

Then Klenov asked in details everyone who had seen or heard anything suspicious. Especially in connection with the diversion at the station of Moloskovitsy. The Germans then had had to repair the rails for two days. "Every little detail you can think of," he liked to say, "I believe in intuition." Anything suspicious – they would get there straight away, take the whole family, search their house, take away their stuff and only then they tried to find out what had really happened. That was if something had happened at all.

Uncle Yegor told Astakhov about that meeting. He had his informants. And Vitka later told him everything in detail.

Two days later, the whole team located on the ferry. They all dressed smartly. They were going to the Germans for a report after all. There were Vsevolod Klenov, a German officer, a couple of soldiers, Basov, a representative of the district women, two wardens from Sabbsk that had shot the Red army soldiers' relatives a month before. Vitka picked them up on purpose. In general, there were nine people.

In the morning Astakhov took a comfortable position on the left bank of the Luga, away from the villages. He took three rifles with him, placed them in different places to shoot. "Here they are, coming this way," he thought joyfully, "I don't even need to chase them. I can see them all perfectly well." The ferry was gliding quietly in the middle of the river. "This is where I am going to meet you, Vitka can't help me here, he's got another role, a more complicated one. If we do what we've planned, he will go far..."

"So, Klenov first... For sure!" Astakhov calmly pressed the trigger. "Now wardens... The Germans – only to wound or they will burn the villages." There could be heard five loud shots over the river. He didn't

touch the woman and Basov. What for? They only did it because they were poor, to get a piece of bread... Fyodor waved his arm to them indicating to jump into the water. Basov and the woman did. Vitka lay down behind Klenov who was motionless, fired several shots in the direction of Fyodor and stayed on the ferry next to the wounded German officer.

And Astakhov ran to the other rifle and took a few shots at the ferry. Then with a sense of satisfaction from the job done, he stood up and waved again, saying to carry on, not to be afraid. The non-controlled ferry sailed down the Luga towards Kingisepp. Astakhov was walking along the bank for a long time. "I hope Vitka will figure it out. There are weapons there. The German officer surely has a pistol. Damn! I can't shout to him across the river!" Astakhov waved his arm and turned to the woods.

"...MEDIUM HEIGHT, BLUE EYES..."

Later on, his mettle caught up with him. Why did he have to stand up? They could see him. He felt sorry for them but they later told the commandant everything in detail. Vitka had to try his best to describe Astakhov. What he looked like, what he wore... Two days later in two villages on the houses there was an announcement on the letterhead of the German commandant. Like, a criminal wanted: a man of about thirty, with dark hair, medium height, blue eyes, wearing a quilted jacket, boots, with a rifle, familiar with the area. They certainly made it up about his eyes. They could not really see his eyes from the middle of the river. Why didn't they just write, "Astakhov Fyodor"? Thank God, they didn't have his photo. Astakhov was such a good conspirator but he couldn't miss the opportunity to show off. Of course, to kill the bastard, senior warden, was worth it. He had been looking for him for three months, he had asked his mother about him many times, he had sent her to her neighbours to get some information. Vitka had taken a risk, too, finding out about him. In the end, Fyodor had lost his boots because of Klenov. He hid them in the grass when he had to run barefoot to the place where the warden was to turn up. Then he couldn't find them. What a shame... He couldn't help showing his joy:

all of the local German authorities came to the cemetery to bury their favourites.

No repression followed. Apparently they thought it had been the action of guerillas. Since the guerillas had not been to the villages, then the locals were not to blame. It was said that the four had been shot in the head, and a German officer and two soldiers had been wounded. Astakhov remembered the first five shots had been made from uncle Yegor's rifle. He had aimed in their stomachs to be on the safe side but the butt must have moved after he finished off a police goon in February.

On the left bank of the Luga Germans carried out a military operation. There was mostly a swamp, there had never been any people. A week later they came to the village again. They sensed where they had to look for. Fyodor's mother was impossible to suspect. Her stamina and self-control did not give them the slightest reason.

In these difficult days Vitka's nan died. She wasn't ill, she was just old. She died in her sleep.

After the Germans left, Astakhov paid a few visits to uncle Yegor's. He tried to look into himself so he needed advice. There was still no information on the situation at the front. There was a lot of gossip after what Fyodor had done. As on a conveyor, Germans casually buried their most important assistants with honours. But if earlier he had used different tricks to put them on the wrong track, now the circle of search for the "culprits" narrowed. Only the locals had been killed, the ones who lived in the nearest three villages. It was getting dangerous. It was dangerous to act the way he did before. He needed to change something. The doubts in the correctness of the chosen path were following him.

"It's much easier to burn something," Fyodor thought. "This suggests that there are some regular units or groups to help them. They understand the value of an object at the front and therefore destroy it. But if a warden or rank and file police officers are killed, even though they are villains, there is clearly someone else..."

"Yes, for the front it wouldn't be enough but for the locals it's just right," uncle Yegor confirmed Fyodor's fears. "It was not the burgomaster you killed."

"Are you saying I've got to kill a burgomaster for purposes of secrecy?"

"God forbid!" uncle Yegor waved his hands. "You had been looking for those for months so you would be looking for the burgomaster until the end of the war. If there is the end of the war."

"Maybe, not... Who knows? There is no news from the Russians. I wish they blew up something. Mind you... I wouldn't want to stay with them. I would still go into the woods and kill those bastards. What else can I do?"

"On the other hand," Fyodor's uncle was dreaming, "just imagine, the Russians will come and say you had no right to kill anyone. They could have left someone for the police. And you killed him without asking."

"Go away! I will not come out then... It's hard, uncle Yegor. I can't do it any more. I can't form a group, I need to find other people."

"Did you not find anyone?"

"No. I wish someone turned up. Are they doing anything there, at the top? It's been two years already. I wish they would let us know. I've got to find people."

They drank all the moonshine. His head and heart were still confused and full of uncertainty.

FROM VALYA PAVLOVA'S MEMOIRS:

In the spring of 1942 my mum was given a job in an orphanage No.4 at the 49th junction where there lived children of the parents convicted before the war, while Tonya with Leric and grandmother Lena worked in a boarding school for children evacuated from Leningrad. So we had to go to different directions. It was not far, but we saw each other less and less...

In the summer I was taken to live with Tonya. There was a school there, too. At lunch time, the nurse of the boarding school Antonina Potapovna would come into the canteen. She divided all portions of butter into two and gave out first one and then, a little later, asked, "Who has got an extra ration?" Everyone, as one man, raised their hands to get "extra" five grams of butter. We thought that was really good. Leric was three years at the time. Once a week, he would go into the medical room and sputter with a stammer, "Tonina Potapovna, there is something... scratched... on my hand," and with his big brown eyes he would look at the shelf with medicines where his mother left her piece of sugar for him.

We often went to watch the passing trains with small Valerka. We waved our hands and hoped that our fathers could see us. And once we saw a train carrying German prisoners. We got scared and ran away.

It was summer... Leric loved to lie on the warm sand near the river and drag his sandal, grunting loudly like an engine. That was his tank. Then we dug a hole together with the hope to get to America. All the grown-ups were talking about then was the second front...

The summer ended. School began. Mum changed her lisle stockings for a very shabby briefcase for me. I would put my books and text-books in it. Other children had sacks instead. We were given exercise-books, used by senior students. We would overturn them so the lines were visible, counted all clear spaces in the exercise-book, comparing who had more. First of all we would draw with a stick or finger on the ground, rub it off with a foot and draw again. Only after that we would write in the exercise-book.

For November 7th, the teacher got us to prepare a concert. My grandma made dresses for all the girls. Tonya dyed some gauze with green disinfectant and manganese and tied it to the window of isolation ward. Valerka was proudly sitting on a stool in the medical office. On his head he had a large paper military hat with a red star.

Then on the stage we sang the song "The Sacred War". Everyone was crying when we sang it.

LINE-UP. IMMUNITY AGAINST FEAR

On what kind of person it is, how he is fixed, how many little things he sees, depends ultimately the result of his choice. Someone cannot physically make a decision, unsuccessfully trying to take everything into account and analyse. But the lack of information makes him sink in the abundance of small factors influencing the situation. "Little things" tear his mind to pieces. In every rustle, every smile or shout he will feel a charge of immense power, capable to explode everything. It is very difficult to sustain. Another person feels the situation with his skin. His body would not even calculate all the options but would find some indirect signals for action. He instantly and intuitively takes the right decision. It certainly doesn't always happen this way. But often this is what saves the person from trouble. Astakhov was one of these people.

The closer to the end, the more difficult it became. More difficult in all aspects. Likhachev feared working for the police. Mother and uncle

Yegor, seeing the Germans checking everything around and looking for “guerillas”, began to clearly understand what was waiting for them: burnt homes and death. And Fyodor being in obscurity, without getting the necessary moral support, gradually, bit by bit, lost his immunity. Immunity against fear and against any suddenly appearing problems. Whether it was his mother’s questioning by the Gestapo or his inability to appear in the village, or his doubts about the correctness and usefulness of what they were doing. He lacked self-confidence.

He had no doubt that physically he would be able to live like that for a long time and fight the enemy. If he had to, he would go further away into the woods. If he needed, he could be all on his own. Another thing depressed him. On his own he would not be able to do anything worthwhile. To kill the bastards? He had already destroyed them all. To look for them in other places? He didn’t know anyone there and wouldn’t have his family support. Likhachev wouldn’t be able to disappear from the village. Fyodor couldn’t find a way out.

He probably wanted everyone to know about him. He wanted to “share” the responsibility for his decisions, whether they were deeds or lynching. There was a lot of responsibility, of course. Yes, it was easy to understand those who was lost in the first months of the war, and did not find themselves. They wished there was any boss at all, even a small one. He would be responsible for Fyodor’s decisions. But there was no one.

To preserve Astakhov’s confidence, the successful results of his actions were not so important as their subjective positive assessment by the relevant people. Along with his own skills and abilities it was the assessment of other people that determined the courage to formulate new goals and objectives.

The moment of fullness clearly came. It was time when the continuation of once well-conceived schemes became impossible. Due to external and internal causes. Drastic changes in order, in the means to achieve them, and finally in his place and role in all this were required. And not just his place and role. That was always difficult. Especially when he was not sure everything he had done before was right. Often people can’t maintain such a state. During the interrogation, they begin to confess, in captivity they throw themselves on the barbed wire with current, at home they start neuroses, and they gradually go crazy, at the front they lose morale and their general decomposition begins.

He had to decide something. To leave for the woods with his mother? To join a guerilla group? To start Likhachev’s risky game with the Germans? To do it all at once? There were no answers to any of those questions. Each of them needed some new information. They also needed the internal state of readiness for such steps in different directions. There were problems and dangers in each direction. They would not probably survive in the woods, guerillas would probably not believe them, Vitka could screw up... Besides, there was another important factor that kept the main vector of his reasoning – his clear conscience! Whatever happened, he needed to beat the Germans and not to sit passively waiting for the Russians. The first thing was fighting in encircling and underground and the second thing was desertion.

Clear conscience is the consciousness of the fact that you deal with your moral duties, and there are no derogations from your moral compass. If you have sudden reasons to doubt the correctness of a particular act, your detecting conscience will instantly work. This will happen even before the reflection, before the thought “something is wrong”. But where there is no such basis in reality, to invent sufferings is no use. Conscientiousness should not become a disease or masochistic passion. In this case, people can get so much carried away by pangs of conscience that they forget about real life, which is going on and reminds of itself more and more.

Another thing is important. In condemning yourself there was a clearly expressed regret about the failure of the action and the intention to do more and more. And this is the resistance of the person in the line of duty, contrary to natural hesitation, doubt, scepticism and despondency.

ALL IN

After the incidents with the ferry and at the station of Moloskovitsy, Likhachev was several times summoned to Volosovo. He was questioned by the Gestapo. Who were his parents? Why did they not live together? Who of the villagers did he know? He was the only of those people on the ferry who was shooting the guerillas and trying to protect the wounded officer. When the ferry was caught, the lieutenant

had already told them everything. The soldiers confirmed. Three days later they were sent to a hospital in the Baltics.

Vitka honestly told them about his life. Especially about his father. He felt they believed him. Then he was brought to the village Izvara that was ten kilometres from Volosovo, to talk to someone very important. The unnoticeable building near the homestead of the Roerich was guarded by the Germans.

He was taken into a spacious office. Along the two walls there were cabinets full of books. Opposite the large window with thick curtains, stood a massive table. On the right and left on the table there lay smooth piles of some documents. An elderly intelligent-looking man of about sixty or seventy, with round glasses in a thin gold frame was sitting in the arm-chair. Vitka had never seen him before.

This boss seemed to know everyone. He thoroughly listed all former local Soviet leaders, then collectivization activists, communists and Komsomol members. He messed up the names of some of the dispossessed. He wanted to determine Vitka's social circle. Then the two German soldiers left, and they were alone in the office. Likhachev immediately realized that it was viewing. He tried to look quite informed and careful in his judgements, politely corrected the man when he made mistakes in surnames. The conversation had been lasting already for about an hour. Gradually, they moved to a more complex subject.

"Victor Afanasievich, why did you come to work for the police? Excuse me, but as far as I know, you had not been taken before because of your disability."

"Your Honour, first of all, I can not sit idly."

"Why didn't you join the guerillas? You must agree it is logical for you, being a successor of your father."

"I will do it if you order."

"Even so! Do you know why you are here?"

"I think they want to put me on Klenov's post."

"Maybe. But you still haven't answered my question about the reason of coming to the police. Did you not like the Soviet power? Everyone says that. Or did you get disappointed in it when you saw the power of the German army?"

"Neither. Sorry, your Honour, let me explain myself and you can decide afterwards."

"OK, that's what I want." There was a long pause, then Victor took a deep breath, as before jumping into the water, and continued, "The thing is, I specially came to work for the police. Do you understand what I mean? Well, I was ordered."

"Well, well," the office owner said. There was no slightest surprise on his face.

"I had a meeting with the commander in February 1942," Likhachev continued. "I didn't know that person but he showed me his document, he said he was from my father and he gave me a mandate in case guerillas came. I was set a goal – to win the trust of the occupation authorities and to lead the police district."

"I see..."

"That's the first stage. Then I need to get a promotion... and to wait. I have this mandate and passwords. Now, the main thing. Recently, after the incident with the ferry, I suddenly realized I could use that. So could you please help me, your honour. Sorry I have stated it in a simple way. I do realize it's a risk for me. But at the moment I am not guilty in front of either side..."

"You're talking very interestingly. As for being not guilty, it's easy to change, as you must understand."

"Then neither you, nor I would be able to do big things. Do you agree, your honour? I feel I lack something. I have a Russian mandate to go to the Germans, but I haven't got such a mandate from the Germans."

"You know what? You are either an idiot and a liar or just impudent. I don't recommend to joke like that. I am not going to teach idiots and I sort out impudent men straight away. It's true – if you rely on assistants you'll get a present. What a warden they've found! It's a joke! You'll be left in isolation for a while and I will think what to do with you."

"Don't! Your honour, don't take anyone's advice. It's better if only you and I knew about that. It gives us more opportunities. If it's a success, it's yours as well. If I fail somewhere, you didn't know anything... Why not? They checked me in Gestapo, didn't they? If I have been brought here, everything was fine. It's their responsibility now."

Vitka was talking calmly and confidently, pronouncing each word distinctly. But the burgomaster had already called two assistants from the reception. They took Likhachev to the cellar of the building. There, on both sides of the corridor, were rooms. Judging by the expensive

wooden doors, they were not cells. He was taken into one of them and locked in. The room looked like a hotel room.

"He is an adventurous lad, but smart and considerable," the old man thought. He really liked the latest fact.

GAMBLE

Two months passed. Vitka's gamble worked. He passed all the German checks and was being prepared for a new post. He worked diligently and took part in searching the bandits who had killed three wardens, set the butter factory on fire, broke the railway near the station of Moloskovitsy and disrupted the schedule of military cargo. The announcement of wanted criminals became more distinct and overgrew with facts. No matter how hard you tried, the area of work for the group was becoming clear even to a fool. They had to change their tactics. Astakhov had to be hiding in the woods all that time.

At this time some people with guns started turning up in the villages. They would appear there, find something out and leave. It was too late for the encircled. There were talks those were police goons from outside Volosovo who had left the Germans. The situation in the war must have changed so they ran away in different directions. Or it could be the German provocations like in 1941. Astakhov wouldn't have joined any of them. He didn't acknowledge them. Because they were stray or specially created by the Germans or something else. Some of them blew up the bridge over the Lemovzha near the house of the Astakhov, just to show off. Why would they do it? There had never been any troops there.

When they met next time, Vitka told Fyodor everything about how he had been checked in Volosovo, by Gestapo, about his risky conversation in Izvara with some German chief and their second meeting, where everything had been decided.

It was clear that by agreeing to Vitka's game, the German risked nothing. On the contrary, now Likhachev was probably watched by his men. They were just waiting for the contacts to identify the chain of communication with the centre, or if you were lucky, the entire chain. In addition, they had to find the people who had been recently doing harm to the German authorities there in the county. So far, leaf-

lets of searching the criminals did not help, the local hidden German agents were also silent. So it would be silly not to use a chance of loyalty of the "double".

"You need to play along, to try and hand in something," Fyodor thought, "but at the moment we haven't got anything."

"He'll sense a dummy straight away. It won't be difficult for him to check it," Likhachev added. "He is a considerable old man and he is not doing it for a small gamble."

"So, he will identify your opportunities for the arrest, and just to know about them. We, or rather, you are to interest him so much that he wouldn't come to a simple arrest. If he is not a German he has to clearly understand what to expect after the arrival of the Russians, and what exactly it will not be prosecuted for and what he would be able to live happily for in some other place... That's what I think," Astakhov concluded. "Do you agree with me?"

"Yes, I do. He is not Gestapo, after all. Only I don't know what he is."

"We'll deal with that," Fyodor said and took thought. He was trying to remember something. He even moved a little away from Vitka. "You know what? Recently, some office has appeared in Volosovo. I know everything around Izvara was obscured with wire. What did you see when they were taking you there?"

"Didn't see anything. I was taken there in an ambulance, there were no windows there."

"What did you see later?"

"Then I caught a glimpse. "It was Izvara, like I said. And it was at least ten kilometres," Likhachev said. Fyodor kept going back and forth, briefly throwing questioning glances at Vitka. He obviously sensed something.

"Vitka, I think their intelligence service is there. "Abwehr" in their language. They are not stupid there, they see right through. And this man must be the boss there if he's got that office. We got into trouble, Vitka!.. I don't think it's simple. You won't get away with just a post. You'd better tell me if you thought that man was a big figure for the Germans or not. What I mean is do you think they will take him with them if they had to run away?"

"How would I know, Fedka? I am glad I even got as high as him. And you are talking about sending him to Europe. He is a valuable person for them here. He knows all the locals. What's he in a strange

place? Who knows? He's kind of like a German judging by his manners... He must have lived here long before the war. I told you before, in our second conversation he asked me harshly about all the locals. Including you, your brother and Petrov – do you remember him? He was expelled from the dispossessing squad in 1931."

"Do you think he can sense something or does he go through the list?"
"Who knows?"

"That's interesting!" Fyodor flared up. "Why did you talk to him? I think I will have to pay him a visit, too. I'll tell him I'm from the centre and it all comes from me and my group and I was sent to contact him. He will be ready now. It's time we do more. Our goal is for him to appoint you here and later on, when they retreat, to take you with him. You know German, don't you? Let him introduce you to others. You've nearly saved one of them..."

"We'll all be trapped."

"Calm down. Stop figure out and analyse everything... Hardly anything depends on you and me here. The main thing is to get into their boat and then we'll see where it will sail."

"What do you mean?"

"If the real guerillas come then all police goons will leave the Germans, I know it for sure. You've got to be with them. Later on we'll sort it out. Let them think everything over. And you will try your best and run away from them. You can bring some old information about the guerilla group."

"If I return they will appoint me the warden."

"Not necessarily. He might have other plans for you. You are so loyal and clever, not like Klenov..."

"If they appoint me now, I can't leave with everyone else," Likhachev doubted. "Guerillas won't want me. They can kill me straight away."

"They can."

"Here we go... I knew that!"

"Calm down," Astakhov said. "This is what we'll do. Organize my meeting with him. He can come with his guards. I don't mind. They can search me. The meeting will be in the building of the school. Or the post office near the church. You will take everyone away from there beforehand. I will come quietly from the direction of the woods. Leave me a note whether you have arranged it all in the special place. Do you agree?"

"This is so risky and dangerous," Likhachev said, "I don't know whether it's worth it."

"You'd better stop it, Vitka. You are not in a finance office. I can feel it's worth it. That's it. Leaving now," Astakhov waved his arm and disappeared quickly.

Likhachev stared after him and, shaking his head, muttered, "You are nuts, Fedka! It's such a gamble! The Russians will come soon..."

Coming down the hill, he saw two men behind the post-office, they were not locals and wearing good jackets and hats. They were smoking and talking loudly. On seeing Likhachev, they turned around and went away. "Here we go. Did they see Astakhov as well?" Victor thought. "I need to meet that bloke Cherkasov urgently, which is not that easy."

During the next week the guerillas did come several times to neighbouring villages. Those were real. They fought the German troop located in Bolshoi Sabsk. At that time Astakhov was just on the outskirts of the village and from a very comfortable position he was watching the Germans. He wanted to find out when the big part of the guards were leaving. Then he could break in and throw bottles with kerosene in the commandant's office window. Vitka told him there they kept everything: lists of people, who and when to take and personal files of the police goons.

When a German machine gun from the building of the commandant opened fire on the advancing partisans, Fyodor simply killed the machine gunner. The guerillas didn't do a lot then. But they did shoot a lot of Germans. Then the detachment moved somewhere not far away, along the Luga River towards the village Gostyatino. Astakhov also quietly went to the forest past Khotnezha in the hope that those would not go away and come back. "I need to see Vitka's man soon," he thought climbing through the bushes in the woods. "If I sort out Likhachev, I could join the guerillas."

MEETING

—He had been waiting for three hours on the second floor of the ruined church sitting on the rotten wet floor of the utility room. Two rifles were in the corner of the room. It had been foggy since morning and

he couldn't see anything from the window. But now, when the sun rose higher and became a little warmer, on the grass, on the "crystal" spider web, there were glistening dewdrops. There was a good view from the top of the post-office, sandy road through Khotnezha, small village houses with weak smoke from the chimneys and a blushing bare cliff on the other side of the river. All this simple natural beauty was framed with a "gold frame" of yellowing autumn forest that surrounded the village.

Yesterday Astakhov got Likhachev's note. The meeting was to take place today at midday in Khotnezha, in the building of the post-office. Fyodor's mother left her house early in the morning and headed for the village of Krasny Mayak. "I am in pain with my joints. I need some ointment," she told her curious neighbours sitting on the benches near their houses. She had to walk slowly towards the church and then quickly leave towards their old farm.

There was nobody at the post-office and at school. Vitka tried to send all police goons to Krasny Mayak for a meeting on actions against guerillas. At night Astakhov dressed smartly. He wanted to look confident and wealthy. His mother had cleaned and ironed the blazer and trousers he had worn lying in the hole when he was hiding from Germans. He put them on, as well as a pair of big shiny black boots of his elder brother. Instead of a shirt he was wearing a cranberry-coloured top he used to wear in his youth when he ran to the dance. He was shaven and his hair was brushed. There was an hour left until the meeting.

Fyodor saw three men with rifles walking to the church along the edge of the forest. They were definitely not guerillas. One of them went into the church and settled in near the wide doorway. He smelt of tobacco. "Disorder," Astakhov thought.

Two other men walked around the post-office and stayed somewhere behind it. "I've been waiting for you. Hopefully you didn't come here to get me. Let them guard their master. It would look suspicious if he travelled without guard."

Twenty minutes later a black car, dusty from the village road, drove from Izvara to Khotnezha. The driver got out of the car, slowly walked around it and opened the back right door. An elderly man heavily climbed out of the car leaning on the driver's arm. Hunching, in small steps, he quickly trotted to the porch. Fyodor saw something painfully familiar in his figure and gait. One of the people hiding behind the build-

ding ran up to the boss and reported. The elderly man turned sharply... "Dokukin! It's him! For God's sake!" Astakhov said to himself breathing deeply, shocked.

At first he felt at ease, then apathy and he didn't want to do anything. At the end he felt something similar to what he had felt towards Klenov, Nikitin, Osipov... "But that's Dokukin! He must be different," Astakhov wanted but couldn't pronounce the word "good". "So I've got to go and see him! I will be open and straight-forward."

Astakhov climbed out of the window. Carefully, trying not to make any noise or get dirty, he climbed down the broken wall offset. He walked around the church and quietly got into the post-office through the side wooden mud room. Near the window there was a smartly dressed and slightly humping old man in round glasses.

"Are things really that bad that you have to go and get you mail yourself, Pyotr Mikhailovich?" Astakhov asked him loudly with a smile. Dokukin's feelings and thoughts were changing so fast that he could say or express nothing. Instead of showing surprise, joy, fear or sorrow, he just said one word, which he pronounced by syllables, "Fyo-dor".

They hugged each other and then stood like that for a long time, looking at each other and not trying to speak. Dokukin's eyes were filled with tears.

The guards knocked on the window. Dokukin waved his arm showing he was fine. Fyodor stood behind the counter and invited Dokukin to have a sit. On the both sides of the wide table for mail sorting there were two big chairs which they sat down on. They both looked around the room as if they had just entered it and had not seen it before. They both were silent and didn't know how to start talking.

The conversation gradually began.

They talked about everything – health, family... Fyodor couldn't ask the main question: why Dokukin was with the Germans. Dokukin in turn was scared to ask why the postman had called him after so many years. He, a very influential person in the team of Abwehr, the counsellor of the school head. They both had answers to those difficult questions. But neither of them wanted to ask the questions in fear to hear the wrong answer. The older man started first.

"So, Fyodor," Dokukin said and looked at Astakhov seriously, "Where do you live, what do you do?"

"Here. I do the same thing as I did when I was a child. I try to bring people news. Good news preferably." Fyodor again tried to joke and somehow smooth the direct question of Pyotr Mikhailovich.

"What are you talking about, Fyodor? What news?"

Fyodor got to the point, "About the Klenovs, about the butter factory..."

"So it was you..." Dokukin said with some regret. Then he nodded his head and added, "They were bastards..."

"But they helped you. Or you helped them, which is the same."

"It's not the same!"

"It doesn't happen without a good reason, Pyotr Mikhailovich."

"It doesn't. Someone had to try their best."

Their conversation was clearly aggravating. But this was what they met for. When you talk about the weather or health, the real problem gets hidden. Of course, each of them had thought about this conversation, got ready for it. But neither of them had expected this to happen. In these unexpected conditions it was impossible to talk of business straight away. It doesn't happen in life. They had a lot of personal matters to talk about. They needed to understand what had happened to them. It wasn't for nostalgia they took a chance. Before telling each other the main thing they had to hurt each other, be ironic and rude... They had to be frank and that was the only way to get it.

"Are you saying you were forced to do it? And you didn't want it?"

"I did want but I was also forced."

"What do you mean?"

"Fyodor, are you alluding to the conscience? Be straight-forward with me. Do you want to know the news?" Dokukin asked him. "OK. But I am not sure you will tell the others about it."

"I'll try."

"I'm not going to talk about my personal trouble, about my family and about how the Soviet power treated me. I'm not saying what you're hoping to hear from me, 'Let's work together against the Nazis.' I've heard this many times, not just from Likhachev. I'll tell you something different," Dokukin paused trying to point out the importance of the subject. "What are those five or six bastards you killed worth? This country handed in hundreds of thousands, millions prisoners of war to the enemy. Many of them became the same as those Klenovs."

"Not many..."

"It depends on who counts, Fyodor," Dokukin said calmly and confidently. "But even before that this country cut out half of the best commanders of its army. I saw them. Do you like this news? Is it good? Or do you think nobody should know it?"

"That wasn't the country who gave them in!"

"Then who was it? Oh, yes, I know what you think. It was those ignorant people with the proletariat anger who had been at the top since the twenties! Doesn't make any difference! The country was singing anthems to them and treated them nicely."

"That's their fault."

"That's the trouble, Fedya. Everyone is always guilty. Which means no one! It turns out it's our fault we didn't see the real enemy just outside our house! We have the army for that. We have been feeding, dressing it... all the world has seen it but we haven't. Maybe they have the same perverse logic as yours? Only this way you can understand their pathological need to destroy their people, because they are to blame themselves."

They both fell silent. Astakhov had not heard things like that before. In his heart he agreed with everything Dokukin was saying. He had seen it all with his own eyes and had already experienced it the hard way. He just couldn't understand one thing. Even if they all at the top were bad, even if Stalin... Even if all the people allowed it to happen and were suffering... It still didn't mean they had to greet any strangers coming to their land to improve life in our house and at the same time to lay all their hands and kill disabled. It had already happened about fifteen years before. Then it was Russians who asked to get rid of the Bolsheviks. They had organized the coup.

"Maybe, it's all much simpler," Fyodor went on. "Strength, order and civilization came. They quickly got rid of the gullible and naive. Immediately those who were more educated and who love the order turned up... What was their choice? It's always better with the strong and educated."

"What a word – educated! They burnt and hanged people!"

"So why? Why are you not with them? Why Cherkasov?"

"It's complicated, Fyodor! It's mine. It's about my present and past and my ancestry's past. They were Germans, strange as it may seem."

"No way! So you are..."

"Oh, no! I am Russian. Only one of my grandfathers was a German. Another one, even though being a baron, was a Russian. It was his

surname that I took in 1941 when the Germans came. I showed you his grave, remember?"

"I remember something else. "If an unbidden stranger came, drive him out to teach him a lesson." These were your words."

"Do you want to say I am responsible for you?"

"No. But in the latest three years I have lost a lot of things I was seeking for. I haven't even lost them but left them and try not to notice. These words are probably the only thing I have kept."

"Well, you must have stayed in that party."

"I have."

"See? Life is ruling everything. I don't believe you haven't seen all that nightmare, mess and conceit over there, at the top."

"Yet... The enemy is the enemy. The country can be good or bad, poor or rich, silly or clever, unfair but..."

"Listen to me, Fyodor. The outside enemy is nothing for Russia. It's all clear. And when it's clear, the Russian people can win anyone. Russians can be defeated only by Russians, when there is ideological confusion. They are too spiritual. Today the emphasis is exactly that. The Germans changed their policy in relation to the population. After the failed quick victory it is important for them to make people an ally. There is the perfect base for that. As soon as they mention collectivization, hundreds and thousands of disgruntled join their ranks. As soon as they mention repressions of the thirties, thousands of assistants of the new regime appear. I don't even mention prisoners... It's dozens of armies ready to gnaw the throat of those who disowned them first and then called them traitors and are even torturing their families. But this is not the main thing."

Dokukin was trying to find clear words for Fyodor.

"This is what's important. Russia will win this war. It's clear. It means that the former regime will only strengthen, and it can't be knocked over. I think it will take at least half a century until all the "great" die, until everything is forgotten... That's when, as in the revolution, any next bright stupidity of the authorities will decide everything. Only I am not to see all that. Force can't decide anything now. Everything will depend on what the German authorities are engaged with in the occupied territories. The decomposition of the unity of the nation..." Dokukin stopped, satisfied, looked at Fyodor and added, "This is where you and Likhachev are right. You've done the right thing destroying

the infection in human souls. But is this a great contribution? A hundred people in our native villages will remember about the universal values. I am exaggerating. Can you change a lot in the whole country? We should remember family, home, love, motherland, this very village. It cannot be generalized to the skies. You can't say your motherland is all the country. It's not yours!" Dokukin paused, stared at Fyodor and went on, "These are not my words... Do you know how your brother died?"

Astakhov broke into a sweat. The news of Alexey hit him. His brother was much older than him and they had not seen each other very often. But when they did, everything Alexey said, was indisputable truth. He had been outside the family most of the time. In early thirties no one knew anything about him. When Fyodor returned from the Finnish war, he tried to find out anything about his brother. He was only told he was the State Security Captain.

Fyodor was thinking, "So, Dokukin was imprisoned in 1937 together with the governors he had painted. And my brother... What was he doing there? I don't know. He couldn't have been a guard..."

"So, in July, nearly a month after the war started, your brother paid me a visit. He came to the transit prison in Kingisepp to suggest I go to Germans and work for the Russians."

Dokukin's words struck Fyodor. This coincidence was just providence. Everything mixed in his head. Everything he wanted of Dokukin went away. What was more important for him was that he was doing what his elder brother had started. And not just his brother – he was a representative of the state, the state he had not seen or heard of for two years. They had left each other and only fragile confidence in their rightness joined them. It felt like an air breath when swimming under the water. It gave strength.

Astakhov intensely thought in silence.

"I nearly agreed with him," Dokukin continued, "it was he who said simple words, "Don't mix or generalize everything. You have received in full from your motherland: fifteen years of prison for nothing. You are right to hate it. But maybe motherland is something else for you? Without Stalin, Voroshilov and the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station... It's certainly not in the Bavarian Alps or Lapland. Find it, Dokukin"... I remember thinking, "Wow, it's like a hair of the dog after a big booze night. They start to think sensibly, see the obvious and not invented in a drunken stupor..."

But then everything went upside down, the captain, your brother, was killed the same day, straight after our first frank talk.”

“Did you see it?” Fyodor asked. “Did you see him die? He might have been wounded or imprisoned.”

“I saw it. They tried to take us away to the rear and gathered us in a van with two gunmen. And your brother and three other guys were shooting from their pistols at the time... Then the van driver was killed as well. So when the Germans came the van with the prisoners was in the prison yard.

Your brother had not had any time to pass anything to me. And I had not had time to agree...”

“Everything was like with Likhachev,” Fyodor suddenly said after a long silence. Our side has called for and the enemy would be good “to make friends with”. When we just started, Victor said, “What if the police make me kill Russians?” You know what, you can pretend as much as you want but there is a limit behind which...”

“I know. You can do evil from a variety of motives... even the noble motives. Anyway, I have always tried not to cross that line. It didn’t always work... That’s probably why I agreed with your guy. By the way, he said the same thing. He said he hadn’t done anything bad to either side.

On the other hand, just like your brother wanted, I have become an important person with the Germans... When Likhachev surprised me a month ago, I first thought it was continuation of the same conversation. But then I decided it was unlikely, so much time had passed.”

“You know what, Pyotr Mikhailovich?” Astakhov said quietly. “For both you and me it’s better to think it’s continuation of the same conversation. Do you agree?”

“Of course, if you are really from over there,” Dokukin jerked his head toward the east. But he didn’t need the answer.

It was not a question and Fyodor moved briskly to reality without dwelling on this subject, “Partisans will certainly come here in a few days.”

“Our base by this time will be moved from Izvara to Estonia.”

“Likhachev and I and another seven or eight police goons will join them. Later on Victor will return and with your help he will hand in some information about the group and myself. That will be his second deed. You’ll need to raise him. He’ll have connection. He’ll be able to

work for Germans and help Russians. That’s it. As you have pointed out, the main thing is not to cross the line.”

“I know what we’ll need to do. We’ll deal with those who is left here after retreat. We’ll try. By the way, they are going to reward Likhachev for saving the German officer... Anyway, we’ll try. You know, Fyodor, even before I met Likhachev I had felt it was you who had been doing all that. Or rather, I had hoped it was you... It could have only been a local. Plus, I was always thinking about your brother. To tell you the truth, I haven’t changed my attitude towards the NKVD, but I have always thought about him.”

“I am pleased our past has helped...”

“What helped was everything that has been surrounding us since childhood. Innate desire of man to nature as the only way of life. Our countryman said very well about this, “Everything drives us to nature: spiritual consciousness, aesthetic requirements, and our body...”

They were sitting at the table for a long time looking at each other. Each of them was thinking about his own things. Dokukin thought that after so many ordeals, he had finally found his way. He was just in the beginning of it... and Astakhov...

“I know that at the time up they will not have faith in us,” suddenly said Fyodor. “It must be earned. They will check us over and over again. I have experienced it. In some ways our fate is the same. As a former prisoner, I must prove that I am not a traitor. And you... You know it very well it would be best to do things being somewhere far away...”

They parted. This time for ever.

Dokukin got in the car and it drove him towards Volosovo. He had been absent for over five hours. And Fyodor stayed in the post-office for quite a long time looking at Leshka’s shiny black boots. He had no thoughts. There was no anxiety. The following day he would be able to join the guerillas with a sense of accomplishment. He was hungry.

"...PURGING"

« Б Л Б Е Т И Е »

COMMANDER OF POLICE GOONS

Two days later Fyodor learnt from his mother that there were people he knew in the guerilla group that had been fighting in Bolshoi Sabsk. They were Alekhin, the former chairman of the village council, and Oreshkin, the former commissar of the town of Osmino. Those people could be trusted. He took his mother, a cow and three rifles and they went to the group. Some old women got out of their houses and started sighing, "It's Fyodor! That's who has been here. Who could have thought!" Uncle Yegor stayed at home in his village of Gostyatino. For the guerillas he was too old and if Germans came, he was not a close relative to Fyodor Astakhov.

As they had arranged before, Likhachev and some other local police goons also joined the group.

That's how they came to the partisan group. There were police goons and ex-Vlasovites who had escaped from the Germans recently. In general, the unit consisted of incoherent public. It consisted of more than a hundred people. But the commissar was familiar, Alekhin. Astakhov had known him well before the war. The group leader was Beliayev, from Leningrad, sent there on purpose. He was a simple guy, a hard worker. And a dedicated person. If something went wrong, he would shoot immediately. "Is he in our group? He has given the tank in!" He had learnt that from someone and the man was shot the same day. He was ruthless and truthful. He treated Fyodor very well. He would always remember the battle in Sabsk. Only he knew about Vitka. Astakhov wrote twenty pages of paper then about him, about Dokukin and about his brother. Everything he knew and everything they had done since February 1942. He had never in his life written so much. Neither before that, nor after.

Later, after breaking the siege, when the group came to Leningrad, Astakhov as a chief of staff gave the order for the presentation of awards. He got to see his personnel records in the headquarters of the Leningrad guerilla movement. There opposite the name "Astakhov Fyodor Nickolayevich, born in 1913" in the column "From where, when and from what post came to the guerilla group" it was written, "from the village of Khotnezha of Osminsky district, Leningrad region. In the guerilla group since the 1st October, 1941, in illegal hiding, engaged in the extermination of traitors..." The records were signed by the commander of the 10th Partisan Detachment, of the 9th Leningrad partisan brigade.

Fyodor was appointed the head of the 25-man squad. Most of them were former police goons. "Who else could lead them if not you? Who knows them better than you? If you haven't killed them, they are not bastards. We can leave them in the group and we'll see what they are like," the group commissar explained to him. And the former police goons would often joke about Basov and Vitka Likhachev, "You need to find a bucket of the moonshine for Astakhov because he felt sorry for you and didn't kill you on the ferry."

The commander reported to the headquarters about Likhachev and Dokukin immediately with confidential communication. In another three weeks Vitka disappeared from the group. They were saying he must have gone to Germans. "He probably liked it there," the former police goons said, "You should have killed him then." Belyaev gave Astakhov a reprimand for oversight in front of the unit formation.

Much later, in 1944, in Leningrad, immediately after the dissolution of guerilla groups, in the Big House again they told him to sign an already familiar to him paper of non-disclosure. This time it was about Cherkasov-Dokukin and Likhachev.

LEARNING TO BE HAPPY

FROM VALYA PAVLOVA'S MEMOIRS:

...In January of 1944 the siege of Leningrad was lifted. For Leningraders it is a big difference: "broke" or "lifted". In summer we all returned home to Turbinnaya street. A wood stove and firewood appeared

in Tonya's room. We got a big empty American tin, tied a rope handle to it. I would go to fetch water in it. We only had one water pump on the street. We had bread ration cards and we could get it in the bakery in Stachek avenue, 11. We couldn't get it in a different shop. The house where in the first days of the war we tried to find saboteurs, had been destroyed. On its walls there was visible different wallpaper and in a room without windows and walls there was untouched furniture. Opposite my school No.384 built in the shape of a hammer and sickle there were still barricades against German tanks. There were few children in the city. The boys played the war. They decided by toss: who was going to be Germans in that game. There were only ten girls in our form. Three of them were the survivors of the siege. One of them had been chubby during the siege and her mum hadn't let her leave the home. She was scared someone would kidnap her and eat. Another girl had lost her legs. Her mum would bring her home on her back.

Everyone had different fates. However, the trouble had made people kinder to each other. We were learning to live in new and unusual conditions. We were learning to be happy and to be friends.

The German prisoners were restoring the kindergarten where we had left for evacuation. They were so miserable, hungry and ragged. Once I saw one of them holding a nice money box in the shape of a little house. I got a jacket potato and swapped it for the money-box. Valerik and I used to put coins in it. Three, two kopecks, five... When his dad returned he would buy him a wooden rocking horse and a sword.

After they found out that uncle Fyodor was alive and had joined a guerilla group, they stopped Antonina's benefit for her husband and began to deduct from her wages what had been paid for more than two years...

A new life began for Astakhov. It used to be so familiar and happy. He was in the army again. He had bosses and orders, he could openly command, organize and conduct combat operations, he didn't have to be afraid of them, either for himself or for the locals. They had terrible fights outside the station of Plyussa, blasted a three-kilometre railroad tracks near the station of Moloskovitsy, captured bridges over the Luga and, finally, took part in lifting the siege of Leningrad...

But in his memory he had all those "small" matters when they had worked together with Vitka, uncle Yegor and his mum. Those things seemed to him more vivid, sharp, arrogant, and therefore probably

closer. And in May 1944, the Leningrad headquarters of the partisan movement were disbanded. The detachment, where Fyodor was Chief of Staff, came to Leningrad.

Astakhov was presenting documents for awarding the most distinguished partisans. The commander of the detachment sent documents on him – an idea for the award of the Order of the Red Banner and medal "Partizan of the Patriotic War" of the 1st degree.

Waiting for the instructor of the Political Department of the Army, Fyodor saw on the edge of his desk two huge piles of documents – representations to various rewards. They were almost identical. On the top sheet of the left pack diagonally across it something was written in bright colours and big letters. It caught his attention and he read from a distance, "Was in captivity. Expiated his guilt." "No way," Astakhov thought, "I thought they would have sobered up by now."

Again, as in the beginning, he remembered about Dokukin's words, his arguments on the state machine, big tasks and about himself. He remembered how little they had done in their motherland in those difficult times. Very few, even in comparison with what their partisan detachment had done in 1943–1944. And what about the years 1941 and 1942? When large numbers of acts were negative. Four and a half million prisoners of war. No guerillas. Tens of thousands of police goons. German terror in the occupied territories...

It is then when the "grains of sand" that first slowed down, prevented and eventually stopped the unwinding flywheel of the trouble were very important. It gradually, with great difficulty, began to rotate in the opposite direction, involving in this saving whirlwind more and more of people...

...Those were his, Astakhov's, award documents.

LINE-UP. SECOND FRONT

After the Battle of Kursk in 1943, ending in the defeat of the Wehrmacht, on August 20 in Quebec Chiefs of Staff of the US and the UK gathered, as well as Churchill and Roosevelt. On the agenda was the question of the possible withdrawal of the United States and Britain from the anti-Hitler coalition and joining the alliance with Nazi generals for a joint war against the Soviet Union. It was necessary to

“detain these Russian barbarians” as far in the east as possible. If not to break the Soviet Union, then at least ultimately weaken it. To do it with the hands of Germans. That was their goal. Churchill developed this idea in 1919. “The Americans, British and French fail and can’t suppress the Soviet Russia,” he said. “We need to entrust this task to the Japanese and Germans.” In a similar way, Churchill instructed in 1930 the first secretary of the German Embassy in London, “Germans behaved in the World War I as idiots,” he claimed. “Instead of concentrating on destroying Russia, they started a war on two fronts. If they dealt only with Russia, England would have neutralized France.”

That is, when talking about different options of the war with Nazi Germany, we should not forget about different attitudes to the philosophy of the Alliance, to the commitments that were taken by Britain and the United States to Moscow. Promises were without obligation or – even worse – for misleading the Soviet partner.

It was such a tactic that frustrated negotiations of the USSR, Britain and France in August 1939, when it was still possible to do something to deter the Nazi aggression. This was what England did when Germany in September 1939 invaded Poland, an ally of the United Kingdom. London declared war on Berlin, but made no serious move to really help Warsaw.

This time connection, event connection existed during the war. It gave food for thought. These thoughts were not very optimistic. The allies openly waited whether Moscow survived, whether the Red Army stood up. In 1941 they waited, when the capital of the Soviet Union would fall, in 1942 not only Turkey and Japan, but also the United States, waited to see if Stalingrad surrendered to decide on a review of their policies.

The leadership of the Soviet Union, of course, had substantial grounds to look as far as its allies knew how to fight, whether they wanted to fight and how much they were willing to promote their main plan for the implementation of operations on the continent – the plan that was called “Ranking”²⁰. It was this plan that called for the establishment of the Anglo-American control over the whole of Germany, of all the countries of Eastern Europe, in order not to let the Soviet Union there.

In this sense, the end of 1944 – the beginning of 1945 was the moment of truth. The war was not on both fronts – Eastern and Western,

but in two directions. Formally, the allies were fighting which was very important for us, some of the German troops were definitely tied down.

But their main scheme was to stop the Soviet Union.

The situation for the USSR was so complicated, contradictory and dangerous throughout the war until its victory salute. And sometimes making a decision was so difficult. The West did not just lead by the nose its ally, but it went on and on just to put it at risk. So why was the Allied landing planned for 1944? Meanwhile, the date was chosen not by accident. The West took into account that at Stalingrad, we lost a huge number of soldiers and officers, military equipment. Enormous sacrifices were at Kursk as well... We lost more tanks than the Germans did. In 1944 in the country seventeen-year-old boys were called. Villages were almost empty...

American and British intelligence assessed the outlook and agreed on the fact that in the spring of 1944 the offensive potential of the Soviet Union would expire. Manpower would be fully expended and the Soviet Union would not be able to give the Wehrmacht a blow comparable with Moscow, Stalingrad and Kursk battles. So, by the time of the Allied landings, stuck in confrontation with the Nazis, we would give the US and England the strategic initiative.

The plot against Hitler was timed at exactly that moment. The generals in power in the Reich were to dissolve the Western Front and open the entrance for the Americans and British to occupy Germany and the “liberation” of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Austria... The Red Army was to be stopped within the 1939 borders.

The second front had existed for only 336 days. Of these, only 29 percent of the time was for battles. On the Soviet-German front, all the 1,418 days and nights were fierce battles. The Red Army defeated 607 Nazi divisions, the Anglo-American troops did only 176.

“...FIND YOUR MOTHERLAND”

The last few months consisted of so many events that Victor Likhachev would have enough of them for three years of his past life. That was what he thought. Everything that was happening to him was com-

pressed in time and followed one after another, like falling dominoes. In October, there was an escape from the guerilla unit. Then there was the appointment of the warden in Volosovo, participating in the “defeat” of the detachment, which had already managed to leave the place of its location. In June, he was transferred to Dokukin’s to do technical work with the recruited Russians remaining on the territory liberated by the Red Army. He was given new documents for the name of Langhoff and he worked under the command of some captain. Victor became a lieutenant of the Abwehr. And Izvara school was relocated to Estonia. Then in the bustle and confusion, Likhachev managed to steal a box of personal cards of all police goons from seven cities in the Leningrad region and hid them in the church, in the old cache of Astakhov. Astakhov didn’t know anything about it but he knew the hiding place. During the retreat of the Germans it could come in handy.

That was exactly what happened. Three months after Likhachev left, an officer showed up in their group from Leningrad and forced Fyodor to describe in detail their hiding place for communication. Later on this cache with the documents was found, copied and returned.

In late January of 1944, when the siege of Leningrad was lifted, the Germans pushed away a hundred kilometres. It took another two months, and regular units of Wehrmacht had to retreat to Kurland. And Likhachev was ordered to wade to Petsamo area in northern Finland from Estonia with Dokukin.

There the German command planned to focus the troops for the defence of nickel mines. In the summer of 1943 it began to build such plans for possible separate peace between Finland and the Soviet Union. Throughout the winter before, the Germans had improved the roads between Norway and Finland and placed there their warehouses. The Karelian Front²¹ wanted information about what of special equipment and archives was taken out of the ports of Finland to Norway or Sweden. And who was doing that – Germans or Finnish?

Dokukin and Likhachev had only one desperate step left: by boat to move to Finland to Vyborg and then through Kuasamo to the north.

Near the island of Bjerke, near Koivisto, their boat was sunk by the Russians. They had to stay afloat in the spring water of the Gulf of Finland until they were dragged out by the Finnish sailors. Dokukin

very sick for a few days and they were placed in the town Lutheran church. The German doctor managed to cure the old man. However, Pyotr Mikhailovich got very weak and could only move very slowly. When coughing, he would cover his mouth with a handkerchief. Later there were traces of blood on it.

Once Dokukin got a little stronger, he often visited a doctor. He would sit in the Finnish hospital for a long time and ask the doctor about the locals and about the pastor of the church, he made several trips to a small, historic village of Mannola that was five kilometres from Koivisto. There he had seen his son for the first time twenty years before. For the five years of the war with Russia, the Finnish population had become accustomed to the fact that if the land was remained to the enemy then everyone left. That was what happened that time. Everyone left in May. And in early June Russians launched an offensive. The Finnish army was then retreating everywhere and in fact it was hard to say who it was for. Germans were gradually becoming its enemies.

While Vyborg was still Finnish, they needed to move further. Until the twentieth of June Dokukin and Likhachev had just moved from Vyborg to Helsinki. And from there they moved to the north with the Germans troops. First to Kuusamo and then to the border with Norway, to Petsamo.

They had had no connection already for three months. The information of carried equipment and German troop movements from Petsamo to Norway had been collected. Dokukin got it through his old Swedish friend’s son. Citizens of neutral Sweden²² could afford to travel back and forth, not particularly caring about their trip legends. Especially when that son, as an offspring of many other noble families, was a diplomat. Then the Finnish army, fulfilling the conditions of the armistice, was expelling the Germans from its territory and began to demobilize. And Sweden, a neutral country, for several years having actively helped the German economy, urgently changed the vector of its political orientation. So it was not difficult for the young diplomat using the Finnish War Department officials to obtain detailed documentation on all goods carried on Finnish roads. He didn’t even ask who needed that information. It was enough that the Germans were no longer the same, and that the requested information was for his father’s old friend.

In the thick folder there were a lot of important materials. Of particular interest was the fact that the very next day after the signing of the Soviet-Finnish armistice on the 19th September 1944 a small Swedish steamer "Mainiki" moored to the quay wall of the port in the small town of Nempnes and on the 21st of September two steamers "Osma" and "Georg" successfully sailed from Sweden. A large number of goods were delivered to the port in army trucks and then the people and the documentation and equipment were loaded on three steamers, that soon successfully passed the German and Soviet submarines in the Gulf of Bothnia, and stood under unloading in the Swedish port of Herilsand.

This was the main part of the operation "Stella Polaris". Finland intended to take to Sweden all the radio equipment of its crypto-analytical service.

After it became clear that the Soviet Union was not going to occupy Finland, the Finnish radio intelligence personnel and their families was returned to Finland. However, most of the documentation and equipment stayed in Sweden. Fifteen crypto-analysts and specialists in radio interception were taken to serve in the Swedish investigation FRA, six specialists entered the service of the French intelligence, and a few more in the English MI-6. Many officers had been demobilized and dispersed in Finland. There had been a complete destruction of cryptographic and cryptanalytic Service of Finland.

They didn't believe it in Russia. And they did the right thing. Indeed, part of the secret documents had been destroyed, but most of them got to the West, including some Soviet codes decrypted by Finns. Paris was demanded to the requirement to give away the Finnish officers. The answer was usual in such cases, "The persons specified have already left France..."

The problem was that the Allies tried to outrun each other. Who would get the metallurgical equipment? Who would get the remaining in Norway new electrolysis of heavy water production technology, the archives of the Finnish intelligence service?

It was necessary to urgently forward the received documents. But how? Would they return to Vyborg or go to Murmansk? In early October, Hitler ordered the commander of the 20th mountain army Colonel General Rendulic to retreat to Norway. That solved the problem. The group, where Dokukin and Likhachev were, rushed to the border.

There boss was killed on the second day, in a shoot-out with the Finns. This made their task simpler. Likhachev changed his German uniform of a lieutenant to the usual suit and with Dokukin went first to the south, to the town of Rovaniemi, and then towards neutral Sweden. After they had passed the completely destroyed by Germans capital of Lapland, Dokukin somehow became nervous, but continued confidently to show Victor the road to the border. After two hours of driving fast on the good, newly built by the Germans road they were in the village of Turtola. Behind the river there was Sweden.

On the shore, near the forest itself, stood a big log one-storey house. A twisting narrow path was leading from the road to the house. There were meter-high snowdrifts around the house, on the roof too there was a big white snow hawk casually falling on the wall. White smoke was rushing out of the chimney. It was disappearing fast in the starry trans-polar sky. In one of the windows there was warm yellow light.

Dokukin knocked on the door. It opened. There stood a man of thirty, in the Finnish uniform without insignia, in a fur hat and felt boots. He looked questioningly at the intruders.

"Excuse me," Dokukin said in German, "thirty years ago a family of Koskinen used to live here..."

"Who are you?" the man asked in German.

"Don't worry, we are not Germans. We are looking for Ainikki Koskinen..."

At this moment the door of the light and well-heated room opened. A slim short grey-haired woman in her sixties appeared. She was standing with her arms down, looking at Dokukin with her big blue tired eyes and weeping.

"Pyotr," she said quietly as if she was whispering, "you have come at last. You're alive..." She couldn't say anything else. Dokukin hugged her. They were standing hugging each other without looking at each other's eyes. When the woman calmed down, she turned around and told the man who opened the door, in Russian, "Toivo, it's your father!"

Dokukin was sitting next to Aynikki for a long time and, holding her small palms in his hands. They talked quietly. Sometimes the woman sobbed looking at Dokukin with her loving, wet with tears eyes. On her dress there gleamed a large oval brooch with amber set in silver, a gift of Dokukin thirty years before.

At this time, Likhachev and Toivo were walking back and forth along the road near the house, and telling each other about themselves. Victor learned that Dokukin's son in October had been discharged from the Finnish Army, where he had served in the Department of cryptographers maintenance. Their unit had completely disappeared immediately after signing the armistice with the Soviet Union. It vanished as if it had never existed. Toivo immediately went to Lapland, the home of his grandmother. Far away from the capital, from Russians and Germans. Since summer his mother had been living in that house, abandoned and uncomfortable after his grandmother's death. As other locals, she had left Koivisto and her father's grave, and now she was living in the house where she had been born fifty five years before. Toivo couldn't remember his father. He had only seen him once, when he was really small. But his mother would often tell him about him. Now, that the war was ending, Dokukin's son was dreaming of going back to his labour of love – maths.

Likhachev realized that the materials he collected for the Russian command were directly connected with the former work of Koskinen. But he didn't know how to use that. He was just drawn to this Finn. He felt that they could do a lot if they worked together. Toivo didn't have to know who he was working for.

Two hours had passed. They returned into the house. The husband and wife were still sitting hugging each other at the dinner table with a clean white cloth on it.

"What a man," Likhachev thought, "he's got friends and relatives everywhere. You can go through the whole of Europe without stopping this way. No wonder he was relied on by Russians at the beginning of the war, and in 1943, too. Fedka must have second sight, he kept telling me about Europe."

Dokukin decided to stay.

"That's it, enough for me," he said confidently to Likhachev. "This is where my family is and my home.

Do you have to wait for a third of the century to deserve happiness? Sorry, Victor, but I am staying here. If I have done something wrong in this life, I have redeemed myself now."

Likhachev was silent. He understood Dokukin.

"Toivo will see you out to Sweden," Pyotr Mikhailovich went on. "He offered that himself. They help allies more than the Germans there.

So that's the shortest way. At the moment it's dangerous to go to Murmansk or Kirkenes²³, or to the south, to Helsinki. There are too many people, especially military people around. I think that once you're on the other side of the river, in Overkalix, you'll be able to contact Russians. It's next to the Finnish border."

Likhachev nodded his head.

The following morning Dokukin said goodbye to Victor. He embraced him in a fatherly way and said, "Tell Fyodor about all this later. If it hadn't been for him..."

Likhachev-Langhoff and Toivo Koskinen set out for the border. They successfully passed the Finnish post on the bridge and were now walking along forest paths. It was not long until Overkalix.

WITHOUT A NAME

"Your name?"

"Langhoff."

"You rank?"

"Lieutenant."

"How did you get to Sweden?"

"After the onset of the Russians our unit retreated from Petersburg to the Baltic, and then by sea to Finland. Later we were moved to the north into the Petsamo area. After Finland withdrew from the war, I with a group of officers moved to Sweden."

"How is Toivo Koskinen related to you? Did he serve in the Abwehr?"

"No. I have met him recently. He is Finnish. His relatives live somewhere nearby. We asked him to show us the way to town. He brought us to you."

The US captain had been interrogating the German officers and civilians who had fled from Finland for five hours. He had arrived in Sweden from London a week before as a specialist with knowledge of the German language and he still was not used to the German prisoners willing to cooperate. He needed to check them all thoroughly.

He felt that this man with a wounded arm, according to the documents a lieutenant, was not like the others. He didn't try to look loyal.

According to his testimony, from June 1943, he had worked in a special group of the Abwehr, dealing with Russians serving in the occupied territories as village chiefs, police goons and members of "People Guard", "People Militia", Russian Liberation Army, "National Legions" and other suchlike organizations. He knew a lot and was obviously useful.

"Can you name the people who have stayed in the Soviet territory?" the captain asked.

"I only remember around ten people, not more. All the information is left in the cache in Russia."

"Where is that? Show the place on the map," the captain fetched a pile of maps from the bookcase and got one out. "Here you are. Detailed maps of Luga, Volosovo, Kingisepp..."

Langhoff pointed at the church in the village of Khotnezh. "The niche is in the left ruined wall. There is a metal box with registration cards there."

"Here's paper for you. Sit down at the desk and write everything you about the ten people you remember. Names, descriptions, addresses... You know what I mean."

Langhoff sat at the desk next to the window and started thinking. The captain was sorting out some documents and pretended to be busy. Through the window Victor could see the yard and two small wooden newly built barracks. The one on the left had a plate with letter "A" on it. There they had been keeping Toivo, Langhoff and another five people – Germans as well. He didn't know who was in the other barracks. He just knew there were not many prisoners there. He understood it when he saw a cart with only one small pot of food delivered there.

"This is everything I remember," Langhoff handed the captain the sheets with small even handwriting on them. He stood in front of him waiting for any further questions. "I am glad he is an American. A German would have found a lot of mistakes."

The American looked through the notes, made some comments in the margins and put them in a separate file. "Okay, that's enough for today," he said and called for the convoy.

"Good, I can see they need me," Likhachev thought after the first interrogation, "now I can continue the game."

...When they arrived at Overkalix, Likhachev and Koskinen were very surprised. The town looked like an oasis in the half-ruined Eu-

rope in the flames of the war: in its streets there were smartly dressed people, a cinema house, a restaurant and bakeries were working. There were no food rations and the people were short only of ... coffee. Only front-line reports of newspapers and radio and stacks of firewood in the town streets reminded of the war.

In Sweden everywhere there was an atmosphere of information and misinformation, double play and double standards that characterized the diplomatic game between the various factions. Intelligence was led not only by the warring states; suspicion and mistrust affected the attitude of the British and Americans, on the one hand, and Russians, on the other hand.

This intelligence games had covered many places in Sweden especially those which were located near the Finnish and Norwegian borders. It was from there that the flows of Abwehr officers, specialists working at the equipment factories in Petsamo and engineers from "Nord-Hydro" in Vemark – the world's top producer of heavy water – rushed.

Toivo fairly quickly found out who of the allies ran the business there with the permission of the authorities. He was shown a small house with green military vehicles at the entrance to the town centre – it was Russians, outside, near the river there was a company, something English or American. No one really knew anything. But there they often brought people dressed in civil and in German uniforms. Nobody saw them leaving later.

Thank God, they had already passed the collected information and documents about the equipment. A car with a Russian flag on the wing was passing through the town. It stopped. A man in civilian clothes came out and went to the town's only hotel. The driver was smoking with the car window lowered. Passing by, Toivo threw the folder in the car and quickly disappeared. Then he and Likhachev watched the passenger return, gently take the folder, open it, look at the papers, quickly close it and tell the driver to drive off, to the town centre. On the reverse side of the folder there was written one word in large letters, "Accountant", and the date "20 October 1944" and in small letters the name of the English company outside the town. "Accountant" was Likhachev-Langhoff's callsign.

Yesterday they learned the Russians were already in Kirkenes. "What shall I do?" Likhachev thought. "To return home? It would be more difficult than to stay with Americans. They obviously want to

use me. I am glad the Finnish killed the captain. They won't know a lot about me. Now I am all on my own. They should let Toivo go. Why would they need him? Unless they find out his military speciality. Well, I will offer them all I can and all I know. And I know only the archive that was in Khotnezh. Russians know about it as well. They must do. And that casual meeting with an expert in cryptography. Here is the field for work for me. We'll see. What a life Fedka offered me! I have to crawl between the shards."

A week later Likhachev's questioning continued.

"Mister Langhoff, are your people able to provide information about the potential of the Russian army in the Baltic States and Finland? Can they do anything at all? Or are they just saboteurs?"

"No, they can't have this information. They are all focused now in the rear of the Red Army in the district of St. Petersburg. Yes, they are mostly people to sabotage the work, but they can also be used for technical measures in the implementation of intelligence operations."

"I get it. Soon we'll receive your archive and return to these issues."

"Will you? From Russians?"

"Not from Russians. We've already got it."

Likhachev didn't know what to say. Of course, it was a bluff on the part of the captain. They wouldn't have done it for a week.

"That's fine. I don't care now. This is why I pointed out the place to you. I wanted..."

Vitka was interrupted by the confident voice of the American, "Mister Langhoff, we decided to send you to London," the captain paused and looked at Likhachev, who was impervious. "Together with this Finn. What's his name?" – Likhachev was silent. – "Koskinen," the American pretended to have just remembered. "He is useful to us as well. Specialists will work with you there and I think you will be able to redeem yourself to the allied forces, and to be useful to us. You didn't participate in punitive actions in Russia, did you?"

"No, I didn't."

"I believe you don't have relatives in Germany..."

"No. Both my mother and sister were killed by the bombing in Munich."

"That's good. I mean it's not good. Anyway," the captain rang the bell and a sergeant entered the office. "Take this gentleman into block B..."

IN THE ARMY

The right wing of the 1st Baltic Front, where senior lieutenant Astakhov was sent after the dissolution of guerilla groups, moved to the north-west. Retreating from Leningrad, German troops were pressed to the coast of the Gulf of Finland. Many of them used boats and barges and tried to move to the Finnish coast.

He was in Dvinsk again. He was wounded again. The same arm. Hospital. Reserve. So Fyodor didn't get a chance to release this town. Then there was Kenigsberg. A medal and his first order. Order of the "Patriotic War" of the second degree.

Another month or two and the war would end.

In August another war began. A dart to Manchuria²⁴.

A week before the commander of the 37th regiment with his order dismissed the battalion commander-3 "for cowardice" and then he had been walking along the line of defence with the chief of staff of the battalion Astakhov for three hours. He asked him about being imprisoned, about the guerillas, how he had had to survive in the occupied territory, about his family, about the first years of service... The war was ending and the Colonel did not want to make a mistake at the end, and undo everything he had passed and earned over the past four years.

As a result of these "conversations" the separate battalion with attached artillery and tanks under the command of senior lieutenant Astakhov was sent to the rear of the Kwantung Army over the ridge of the Greater Khingan...

Prairie, sand... It had been raining heavily. Medley. Trucks couldn't pass through it. The gunners had to pull the guns on themselves. The tanks were nearly rolling over the steep slopes. The nights were cold and they needed to get warm but there was nothing to light a fire with. There were a lot of Japanese abandoned cars around. The soldiers found huge bales with Japanese money in them. They were probably taken from the banks when hastily leaving Manchuria. It was good to stoke the fire with these "pieces of paper". Some drivers collected the money and hid it in the cars. Later on they would exchange it with a profit.

A couple of times the intelligence of the battalion found Japanese observers buried up their heads in the sand. During interrogations,

they would stand at attention with their head held high. When shouted at, they just pulled their heads stubbornly, and stretched even more in front of the enemy. It was impossible to make them talk. Astakhov respected those and ordered not to shoot them, even though it was difficult and risky to drag them along.

From the top, they saw a large plateau filled with the Japanese military units. It was time to release the line of attack. The battalion deployed guns, gave the first blizzards. Other advanced parts attacked from both sides down from the mountains. The main forces began the action from the front at the same time. The idea was simple and effective. As a result, they managed to prevent flooding and explosions of Mukden arsenal, Anshan Iron and Steel plant, a powerhouse, Fushun coal mines. A large group of American and British soldiers, officers and generals was released from a concentration camp not far from Mukden. By the end of August, the entire territory of Manchuria with a population of nearly fifty million people had been completely released. The Japanese army was defeated, many Japanese were taken prisoners.

MEETING THE MARSHAL

“Senior lieutenant, what order do you want – the Red Banner or Suvorov?”

“Suvorov²⁵, comrade marshal,” Fyodor snapped without a moment’s hesitation. They have once tried to give me the Red Banner’s²⁶.”

“I know,” the marshal said, turning away after a short pause. “I know everything about you. Your operation did look like Suvorov’s at the Alps, Astakhov. Only he was a generalissimo and you are a senior lieutenant, that’s the difference,” he said and laughed. “Well done. You are a real career officer. What are you planning to do now?”

For Fyodor the words “career officer” were the highest appreciation. He felt very emotional. He remembered everything: his imprisonment, escape, ordeals in his native land, Vitka Likhachev... and he choked out, “In 1941, I was held captive for seven days, Comrade Marshal... In Leningrad I was told I was non-party now... The army needs heroes with a heroic biography. People like me will be checked

many times and all this time we are not trustworthy. In the war everything gets checked quickly but in peacetime it’s difficult to wait and prove. So I am going to leave military service, that’s enough for me.”

“It’s up to you,” Malinovsky²⁷ said turning to two officers in his room, “Such a shame when people like him are leaving. He’s militant, independent. You must be right, Astakhov... We’ll have to go through it,” he added thinking about something. “Listen to me, Astakhov. Thank you. Thank you for everything. For your endurance, confidence, right decisions...” He stopped for a minute, then smiled and said quietly and genuinely, “No one will thank you apart from me, will they?”

The marshal suddenly became very serious, “This is the last task for you, Astakhov. The division commander, of course, will call you for the order. It’s important for you to realize it is very difficult, it doesn’t matter it’s not a combat mission. You’ve got to deliver the echelon to Moscow, after that you are free. Why are you not asking what echelon it is?”

“I know you’re going to tell me, comrade marshal.”

“The winners need to be brought back home. The whole division. The wars have ended, now everyone is a hero, they all have got medals and orders, they’ve got vodka and they shoot everyone. Do you realize what you can expect from them?”

“Yes, sir. I can imagine.”

“Can you handle it? We are looking for people like you, there will be many echelons.”

“I kind of love echelons, comrade marshal. In this war it’s going to be my fourth echelon.”

“That’s good. I trust you,” the officers standing nearby smiled.

This train was just pure hell! It was impossible to change anything in its “way of life”. In the confined space of the carriage titles meant something. But not at the stops! Everyone would get out of the carriage, wander around the station, go into town... There were only two stops altogether. But those were crazy stops! It was impossible to describe what was happening at the stations. What could a special platoon of machine gunners do then? Those perhaps only sober guys would jump out of the train on the move and try to cover all possible and impossible exits. They had to quietly remove the sick and wounded in the fighting as well... Just like with the prisoners, but those were armed.

Any sudden changes in lifestyle are initially always accompanied by uncertainty and uncontrollability. It is at this time that the crowd spontaneously pushes to the surface its leaders. They had to find one of them in each carriage, one who would be followed in the chaos of universal pandemonium. Including the commanders. They had to work together with these leaders, so that they understood, realized, and continued to drink for a long time in an organized carriage. It was better than trying to catch soldiers, drunk of their sudden freedom, power and happiness.

At the stations there were hundreds of people with flowers. They cheered the winners... The same way the blast extinguishes fire, these sincere feelings of welcoming people stopped and sobered the fighters.

Two weeks later early in the morning in Moscow Astakhov handed in his train of forty carriages. The commandant of the station and his escort walked through the train, looked into each carriage, looked at the papers, busily signed the documents and said, "The loss is two percent. It's a norm."

The echelon with sleeping side by side soldiers, tired after the unrestrained violence of the past two weeks, stood quietly at the station on a siding. When will they remember about it?

And his train was leaving for Leningrad, home, to his family. All the wars had ended for Fyodor. The train wheels pounded rhythmically. Astakhov was very tired.

EPILOGUE

Е Б Т Г О Е Н Е

At least half a century has passed. Astakhov received the badge "50 years in the CPSU"²⁸. Now, when he was seventy six, he could be treated in a good clinic in Krestovsky island without a queue and buy scarce medicines on his veteran's pension. They didn't give any benefits for the orders even though they had promised during the war... In another eighteen months the party stopped operating²⁹. It had disappeared, along with all its bright posters and illuminated signs on the houses, money and printing houses, palaces and health centres, regional and district committee buildings. The country he had lived and worked in and fought for stopped existing as well. The other European participants in the main tragedy of the twentieth century had changed. A lot of things that used to separate them had now gone. There were left only the dotted lines on the map.

They met when they both were eighty. Toivo, professor of the Department of Logistics, University of Tartu, brought his grandchildren to Petersburg to see the celebrations of the Town Day, place where his parents spent their youth. Together with Fyodor they visited the village of Khotnezha and sitting on the bank of the river, they were talking for a long time. Fyodor talked about Dokukin and his motherland. Koskinen talked about his parents who had lived together for five years and died within a year. Then he talked about Langhoff who his father had introduced him to. The English sent him and Likhachev-Langhoff from Sweden to London and later they implemented them in a group of Nazis in hiding. They got into Argentina before it declared war on Germany in March, 1945. Then they went to Brazil. Five years later Toivo returned to Finland. Likhachev stayed in Brazil. He was a big businessman. No one knew who he worked for there... He died in September 1973 in Santiago under the Pinochet coup bombs defending President Allende in the palace of La Moneda³⁰. Later in Langley

they took time comparing the documents in the name of Denis Max Rise which he had with the cards of Langhoff that they had.

What really thin “lace patterned cover” of human destinies is!

Then, in 1941, it was he, Fyodor Astakhov, who was responsible for leading the people who believed in him. He led them not only to fight but to the death, as millions did, fulfilling orders. There were no orders. They had chosen for themselves this not always obvious and almost always invisible way.

It was a choice of messenger Sashka when wounded, he stayed with Astakhov to stop German tanks. It was a personal decision of Seryoga Prokhorov, a good guy in captivity. What about Vitka Likhachev? The reserved village guy believed him and deliberately went to work for the enemy to pass the whole of Europe and even being on the other side of the world to... always be himself. Dokukin was the most complicated person with the most difficult fate. Who led who and where? It's not so simple to answer. He, having met Astakhov once, and walking along the chosen path, broke almost all the clutter of his problems... and found his happiness at last. And his son?

Much of what Fyodor Astakhov did in his youth, now has become fashionable to paint in black tones. It was subject to doubt, condemnation or neglect. Collectivization, “his” wars in Finland, Bessarabia and the Baltic overnight had become unfair, police goons had become “defenders from Bolshevism”, Leningrad, as it turned out, was necessary to hand over to the Germans, as it was done in a civilized way with Paris by the French... One size fit all again. But vice versa. Whichever way you twist the country, the power is the same. It is simpler this way.

Some veterans then broke down. They saw this as a sentence. What a powerful life force was Astakhov, if as a very old man, he watched with sincere interest his children and grandchildren live and grow in strange for him conditions. Despite all the surgeries he had had, he still was smart and kept mode. Even in the hospital after a serious illness it was impossible to find him in the ward. He would walk up the stairs from floor to floor and “instruct” the same old people, veterans and disabled veterans... how to cook soup. At home, on his balcony, there always lay a usual set of all those who survived the war – soap, matches and salt, wrapped in polythene.

On Victory Day Fyodor was always visited by his children and grandchildren. Once, on that day, when he was in the hospital of

the war veterans, then Mayor of St. Petersburg Anatoly Sobchak visited him. They had a long talk... Their meeting was later shown on TV. Each year Astakhov would come to his home village, where the old residents and young people knew and respected him. Students from Volosovo usually called him to the monument to the partisans, built near the church in the village of Khotnezha. He always found more and more new words about that time.

He didn't care how newspapers and textbooks then evaluated that time. It was his life, it was often without selfless heroism and colourful fireworks. This was required by that difficult time. A power of changes is just such people. It is about confident and not convinced people.

Despite everything what happened in the postwar years, today in the village almost nothing has changed. There is the same church on the hill, school, post office, bend and a “cross-section of time”. Only the colour of the rocks has become a bit different. It is not so red now...

Village of Khotnezha (Volosov region) –
Primorsk-Loivisto (Vyborg region) –
Florianopolis (Brazil)
2008–2009

¹ Reparations plan for Germany, developed by an international committee of experts, chaired by the American banker Ch. Dawes (Dawes Plan), was approved on August 16, 1924 at the London Conference of the representatives of the victorious powers in World War I and accepted by Germany. The plan was to ensure the continuation of payment of reparations by Germany to the victorious powers, to facilitate the penetration of American capital into Germany to capture the key sectors of the German economy. For the right to control the German railways and banks, the United States gave the Weimar Republic the first loan of \$ 200 million for economic recovery, followed by other loans. Germany began to increase sharply commercial and industrial revolutions and the beginning of the implementation of the Dawes Plan the future of Germany appeared stable. And in the Versailles system there was the first serious tear. Bundestag deputies adopted the plan, the big industrialists saw it as a good opportunity to settle accounts with the reparations debt and hold a series of frauds. In general, the Dawes Plan was aimed at restoring the military-industrial potential of Germany and the strengthening of economic and political position of German imperialism, which was meant to play an important role in the fight against the Soviet Union. The industrial production in Germany in 1927 had already reached the pre-war level.

In 1929 the United States for fear of cancellation of the Dawes Plan by Germany's unilateral act, took the initiative in the development of the next agreement between Germany and its creditors. In June 1929, the Hague Conference on Reparations replaced Dawes directives with the plan of the American financier Owen D. Young (Young Plan). However, Young was taking another post – the head of “General Electric”, not counting posts in the Federal Reserve Bank and “General Motors”. The new plan cancelled all kinds of official international control of the German economy. The Germans were again able to use of the Reichsbank and the Imperial railways. The plan provided a reduction in the annual payment rates, the abolition of the tax on the repair industry, reducing the taxation of transport, the elimination of foreign supervisory bodies. One of the major consequences of the adoption of the Young plan was early withdrawal of occupation forces from the Rhineland. The Young plan was officially abolished in 1932, a year before the victory of the National Socialists in the elections to the Bundestag.

² The formation of an independent Polish state – 966. Association with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into the confederate state of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – 1569. Separation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the three sections into three parts: Russian, Prussian and Austrian – 1772–1795. Formation of Duchy of Warsaw, being a French protectorate under the auspices of the King of Saxony – 1807.

Entering the most part of the Duchy of the Russian Empire as an autonomous Kingdom of Poland – 1815. Formation of the independent republic – 1918. Loss of independence at the beginning of the Second World War II, the partition of Poland between Germany and the USSR in accordance with the provisions of the Molotov – Ribbentrop Pact – 1939. Poland's liberation from Nazi occupation by the troops of the Red Army – 1944–1945. Transformation of Polish People's Republic into the Republic of Poland – 1989.

³ “Mein Kampf” (My fight). The first volume was published on July 18, 1925. The second volume – “National Socialist Movement” was published in 1926. Initially the book was called “4.5 years of struggle against lies, stupidity and treachery”. Hitler dictated the text of the book to Emil Maurice during his imprisonment at Landsberg and later, in July 1924, to Rudolf Hess.

“My fight” clearly expresses the racist ideology that separates people by birth. Hitler claimed that the Aryan race with blond hair and blue eyes stands on the top of human development. Jews, Black and Gypsies were considered as the “lowest races”. He called to fight for the purity of the Aryan race and discrimination against the others.

Hitler spoke of the need for the conquest of the “living space in the East”, “We, National Socialists, quite deliberately put an end to all German foreign policy before the war. We want to return to the point at which our old development was interrupted 600 years ago. We want to stop the eternal German striving to the south and west of Europe and are definitely pointing at the areas located to the east. We finally end the colonial and trade policy of the pre-war period and consciously shift to a policy of conquest of new lands in Europe. When we talk about the conquest of new lands in Europe, we can of course bear in mind in the first place only Russia and those border states that are subdued.”

⁴ In 1932 the occupation of Manchuria by Japanese troops ended. In the occupied territory there was created puppet state Manchou-go.

The conflict started with the requirements of the Japanese side on the recognition of Khalkhin Gol the boundary between the Manchou-go and Mongolia (the old border of the nineteenth century according to the maps was 20–25 kilometres to the east). On March 12, 1936 the Soviet Union and Mongolia signed “Protocol on mutual assistance”. Since 1937, in accordance with the protocol the Red Army troops were located in Mongolia. By the end

of 1939 the Kwantung Army Headquarters had developed a plan for a new border operation. Japanese troops were to cross the river Khalkhin Gol and break through the defences of the Red Army at the operational front. The onset of the Soviet-Mongolian troops, which began on August 20, was a complete surprise for the Japanese high command.

The repeated attempts of the Japanese command to counter-attacks and unlock the group surrounded in the area of Khalkhin Gol failed. After fighting on August 24–26, the command of the Kwantung Army until the end of the operation on the Khalkhin Goal did not try any more to relieve their encircled troops, resigning to the inevitability of their death.

The Red Army captured about 200 guns, 100 vehicles, 400 guns and 12,000 rifles as trophies. By the morning of August 31, the territory of the Mongolian People's Republic had been completely cleared of the Japanese troops. On September 15, 1939 an agreement was signed between the Soviet Union, Mongolia and Japan on Cessation of Hostilities in Khalkhin-Gol. The conflict ended in 1942, in May, by signing the final settlement agreement. It was a compromise, largely in favour of the Japanese settlement – based on the old map. For the Red Army, which suffered defeats on the Soviet-German front, there was a fairly complex situation. Therefore, the settlement was Japanese. But it lasted only until 1945.

⁵ The German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact (also known as the Pact of Pilsudski-Hitler) was signed on January 26, 1934. The text of the agreement was that it did not nullify the commitments made by previous governments of Germany and Poland to the third countries. To further reassure its Western allies, Poland immediately extended the Polish-Soviet non-aggression pact, which expired in more than a year. However, over the following years, the government of Pilsudski considered the Soviet threat as more serious and consistently blocked the attempts to create a Soviet-Polish-Czechoslovak anti-German block. Pact conservation in force was provided in the case of entry into war with third countries by one of the contracting parties. Hitler unilaterally broke the 1934 pact on April 28, 1939 on the ground that Poland refused to give German citizens the right of non-visa transit to Koenigsberg through Danzig.

Before signing the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, immediately after obtaining the consent of Stalin on August 19, Hitler appointed Berchtesgaden meeting on the 22nd of August for the higher ranks of the Wehrmacht. At the meeting, he announced the date of the attack on Poland in accordance with the plan “Weiss” – August 26, 1939. However, on August 25, the German Fuhrer received the news of the Polish-British alliance and at the same time of the refusal of Benito Mussolini of Italy's participation in the war. After that, the earlier decision to attack Poland was cancelled. Nevertheless, Hitler returned to it on August 30 and set a new date – September 1, 1939.

On August 31, Hitler signed a secret directive No.1 on the conduct of war, which stated, “The attack on Poland is to be carried out in accordance with the plan “Weiss”.”

In an effort to justify the treacherous attack on Poland to the world community and the German people, by Hitler's orders, Nazi military intelligence and counter-intelligence, headed by Admiral Canaris, developed jointly with the Gestapo operation “Himmler”. The attack of SS and criminals, specially selected in German prisons and dressed in Polish uniforms, on the radio station of the German border town of Gleiwitz had been carefully prepared. This provocation was needed for Hitler's generals and diplomats to lay on Poland, the victim of aggression, the responsibility for the war.

⁶ Heavy bomber designed by Tupolev. Flight weight of TB-3 manufactured in 1935 with engines M-34 NGF was 1,887 kg, the maximum speed of 288 km/h. Was in service from 1932 to 1939. Was also used later, including for landing parachutists. Accommodated up to 30 people.

⁷ In 1939 – early 1940 by the decision of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) for the political work in the Red Army several thousand members of the party were called. Most of them had been primarily responsible for the Party, Soviet and economic work. Special short courses on military training were organized for them. In early 1941 1,500 Communists were sent to the political work in the Red Army by the local party organizations, and on June 17 the Central Committee decided to mobilize 3,700 Communists more.

⁸ Fokker is a low-wing monoplane with an enclosed cockpit and fixed hooded landing gear. D.XXI was created in close cooperation with Rolls-Royce Ltd in England. Planned armament was small calibre machine guns or 20 mm cannons in the wings and fuselage. Initial calculations of flight performance gave a top speed of 410 km/h at an altitude of 4250 m, the range of 888 km and top limit of 10,000 m. D.XXI first showed itself in action, when Soviet troops on November 30, 1939 invaded Finland. In addition to the seven vehicles purchased from the parent company, Finnish Air Force was delivered 38 aircrafts (FR-83 – FR-120) of license construction. During the Winter War, which ended on March 12, 1940 by the surrender of Finland, the fighters D.XXI won the respect of the Soviet pilots and love of the Finns. Only 12 planes, correctly described by the Finns as “Ukkomokkeri” (Mocker old man) were lost during the fighting, six of them not in combat.

⁹ Commissars in the Red army had rights and privileges: commissars of divisions could and were obliged to participate in the development, discussion and adoption of plans of operations, and their rights in respect of the unit did not concede the commander's rights. At suspicion of disloyalty of a non-party unit commander, the commissar was entitled to take command, removing the commander of the post, and if necessary to arrest him. On the one hand, such extensive powers were necessary because a significant part of

command positions in the Red Army were occupied by the former officers of the Russian army or people voluntarily entering the service, or forced to it by taking hostage relatives (the so-called military experts). The state leadership needed assurance that these commanders would not be able to turn their weapons against the Soviet regime. On the other hand, in many cases the actual dual power led to negative consequences, as commissars, usually without any special military training, simply prevented commanders from controlling units.

In 1919 in the Red Army a post of a political instructor appeared – a deputy commander for political affairs. Political instructors served as commissars in the lower echelons of the army control at the level of squadrons and below, and didn't have as many rights as commissars of units. In fact, the political instructors served as junior commanders of units, leading political and educational work and completing part of the administrative functions.

Since 1925, the position of a commissar was abolished in those units and formations, commanded by the Communist commanders. These commanders were considered commissars and the commander had an assistant commander of the political part. As the number of non-party commanders was reducing steadily, the number of commissars was also becoming smaller.

In 1935, when recovering the system of military ranks, there were introduced special ranks for political workers: "junior political instructor", "political instructor" and "senior political instructor", corresponding to the total ranks of "lieutenant", "senior lieutenant" and "captain". Senior political workers had special titles with the word "commissar": "battalion commissar" (major), "regimental commissar" (colonel), "divisional commissar" (division commander) and so on (in brackets are the equivalent ranks of general military titles). Those political workers, despite the presence of the word "commissar" in the rank, often held positions political assistant, i.e. were not commissioners as such.

In May 1937, Institute of commissars was restored in the Red Army in full, obviously to save the army manageability during the political purges. This time, the position of commissar lasted until 1940, after which it was replaced with the position of a political assistant again.

The last post of a military commissar was introduced in the Red Army with the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, July 16, 1941. The position existed a year and a half and after that, on October 19, 1942, was cancelled completely. At the same time the position of deputy commander for political affairs was introduced. Political officers had no authority of commissars, their functions were limited to political work among staff. Organizationally, they did not occupy a special position, were considered one of the deputy commander and fully obeying him. Mostly after replacing the positions, commissars of units would automatically become political officers. Those of them

who had a special rank, were assigned to combined arms military rank (usually a step below the previous special title). For some time political officers continued to be called "commissars", but over time it withered away.

The role of political workers during the Great Patriotic War is estimated differently. In some publications, they are shown as extremely destructive force, stressing their political and supervisory functions and claiming that they only prevented commanders from leading units. In other publications they state a large role in rallying the military commissars and organization of units. Objectively, during this war most of the political officers had special, including military, education, often in combat, they would set an example to soldiers, took over command in case of death of the commander. Losses of political workers were no less than other categories of officers that completely refutes the opinion suggesting that "the commissars stayed in the dugout while the rest of the people went into battle".

Of the Red Army Field Manual (PU-39) (Moscow, 1939):

"Tasks of the Workers 'and Peasants' Red Army are international, they have an international, world-historical significance..."

The Red Army will enter the territory of the enemy attacked as the liberator of the oppressed and enslaved...

Attraction of the masses of the enemy army and population of the theatre of war to the side of the proletariat is an important task of the Red Army. This is achieved with political work in the army and outside led by commanders, military commissars and political officers of the Red Army.

...Formidable in battle, our army is a friend and protector of the working masses of the attacking country, protecting their lives, homes and properties".

¹⁰ The task of collectivisation of agriculture was set in late 1929 by Stalin, quite accurately expressing the characteristic feature of unfolding processes: introduction of a new organization of production into peasantry from above. Lenin's cooperative plan offered a different procedure: natural escalation of the simplest forms of cooperation into more complex.

The difference was fundamental. Lenin proceeded from the voluntary cooperation and therefore relied on raising the level of culture and consciousness of the workers. This required from the state to create prerequisites that were "to make our population so "civilized" that it understood the benefits of everybody participating in the co-operation and organizing this participation". Stalin thought it possible to do without the intermediate stages. "Imposition" of collective farms from the top plus "forcing" their organization logically led to violence.

Leninist principle of voluntariness was broken. Those who did not want to join the collective farm, were declared kulaks or pro-kulaks. The punishment for both types was the same – disenfranchisement and dispossession, i.e. the confiscation of property and imprisonment. This affected several mil-

lion people. By those means in the first three months of 1930 they managed to increase the number of people in the collective farms nearly three times more, bringing coverage to 60%.

All this angered farmers. In the country once again there was a wave of armed uprisings of peasants. During the first three months of 1930 there were more than two thousand of them.

The concerned party leadership decides to stop the “race” of collectivization. On March 2, in newspaper “Pravda” an article by Stalin “Dizzy with Success” appeared, where such indication was given publicly. However, the article was full of omissions and contradictions. All the blame for the incident was taken on local workers. Contrary to logic, Stalin made demands “to fix” the level of collectivization achieved by then.

The Central Committee of the CPSU(b) published in mid-March 1930 a decree “On the Fight Against Distortions of the Party Line in the collective motion”. Excesses temporarily stopped. Everyone who was drafted in the collective against their will, left them. Farm movement was slowly beginning to grow on a voluntary basis. However, farmers continued to defend their right to be masters in their cooperatives and dispose of at least part of their products. Giving a significant part of their production to the state at fixed prices, the collective farms were interested in the fact that they could offset the costs at the market at least partially. Such permission was granted in 1932.

These spontaneous attempts to rebuild relations with the state on the basis of self-support were interpreted by Stalin as a manifestation of the class struggle of the kulaks finding their way into collective and state farms. In the same spirit, occasional setbacks, failures in the activities of state and collective farms, due to lack of experience, limited skills of their managers, were explained. In 1933, Stalin again under the guise of development of the theory expressed one of the fundamental positions of his belief system: as the success of socialism, the class struggle supposedly inevitably escalates. These findings became a kind of instruction for created at the same time in MTS and collective political divisions – emergency bodies, connecting in the hands party and administrative authority, the source of local information (circulation newspaper) and investigative functions (each political department was provided with deputy head of the political department of the State Political Administration). The situation in the country deteriorated again. Thousands of chairmen of collective farms, state farms and machine and tractor stations, managers, foremen and engineers, agronomists and ordinary farmers in 1932–1934 were without good reason accused of sabotage and arrested.

In parallel, changes in the position of the collective farms continued. In 1933 mandatory collective supply produce to the state at low prices were introduced. Machine and tractor stations received payment in kind for processing fields of the collective farms in large quantities. The farmers were

no longer actually the masters of their products. Principles of collective democracy were violated. Thus, the collective farms in comparison with the years of pre-complete collectivization permanently lost their most important rights, and in fact were statized. In 1940, the collective farms united virtually all Soviet peasantry – 96.9% peasant households. Failure to use the economic potential of a peasant family by a collective farm turned them into mechanical associations. In late 1932 a passport system was introduced in the USSR. Passports were issued to citizens of 16 years and older in all the cities, workers’ settlements, regional centres, towns, state farms, machine and transport stations, as well as 100-kilometre area along the border of the European USSR and in several suburban areas. In all other areas the population, farmers did not get passports and were taken into account on the lists of the village councils. This deprived the collective farmers the possibility of free change of residence and attached them administratively to the collective farms.

This situation existed until the 1960s.

¹¹ Symbolism is one of the biggest trends in art (literature, music and painting) that emerged in France in 1870–1880’s and reached its greatest development at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, especially in France, Belgium and Russia. Symbolists radically changed not only the arts, but also the attitude towards them. Their experimentation character, commitment to innovation, cosmopolitanism and a vast range of influences became a model for most modern art movements. By that time, there was another term, “decadence”, which critics called new forms of poetry. “Symbolism” was the first theoretical attempt of decadents, so no sharp distinctions or more aesthetic confrontation between decadence and symbolism were established. In Russia in 1890, after the first Russian decadent works, these terms became opposite: symbolism was seen as the ideals and spirituality and accordingly was so manifested, and decadence was thought as lack of will and immorality. In the European and Russian art of 1870–1910 symbolism was focused primarily on artistic expression by the symbol intuit essences and ideas, vague, often subtle feelings and visions. Philosophical and aesthetic principles of symbolism go back to the works of A. Schopenhauer, E. Gartman, Nietzsche, Wagner’s creativity. In an effort to penetrate the mysteries of existence and consciousness, see the visible reality through supratemporal ideal real essence of the world (“from the real to the realest”) and its “imperishable”, or transcendental beauty, symbolists expressed opposition to the bourgeois and positivism, a longing for spiritual freedom, tragic premonition of the world’s socio-historical shifts. In Russia, the symbolism is often conceived as “creative life” – a sacred act that goes beyond art. The main representatives of symbolism in literature are P. Verlen, P. Valeri, A. Rimbaud, S. Mallarme, M. Maeterlinck, A.A. Blok, A. Bely, Vyach, I. Ivanov, F.K. Sologub; in the visual arts – E. Munch, G. Moreau, M.K. Chyurlenis, M.A. Vrubel, V.E. Borisov-

Musatov; close to the symbolism is creativity of P. Gauguin and masters of the group “Les Nabis”, graphics of O. Beardsley, the works of many artists of Art Nouveau.

¹² Lutheran church for 1,800 seats was inaugurated in Koivisto December 18, 1904. Construction of a new granite temple instead of a small wooden church began in 1902. The height of the bell tower of the new church was almost 60 metres.

The building was built by architect J. Stenback (1854–1929), he was also the author of the church in Terijoki (Zelenogorsk). Stenback retained in the project neo-gothic features, such as a steeple tower and added to them a simple expression of the medieval forms of input and window arches, as well as the efforts of the local character of the building, using a granite facing facades.

Some time after the completion of the church, Tsar Nicholas II paid a visit to Koivisto with a large retinue and household. The tsar presented the parish with a significant amount of money which was used to order a 31-register organ in Kangasalo. The fate of the organ is unknown, but it is certain that after the war it had been in the church for a while. According to the stories of old residents, the organ was taken to Kronstadt or melted on shipping (Koivisto was a fishing village), but no eyewitness of the events has been found.

Projecting the church with an unusual shape lancet windows, reminiscent of stylized leaves of birch, Stenback could think of using here stained glass. However, only in 1928, the famous Finnish artist Lennart Segerstrale (1892–1975) performed magnificent stained-glass on the biblical theme of “Christ and Four Angels” in the western facade window. It was the largest (46 square metres) stained glass window of Finland.

As the church in Koivisto was erected in honour of Mary Magdalene, on the altar window was depicted the moment of Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene. In the centre of the composition there is the figure of Christ in full length, his height is twice greater than the other figures’. He presses a crown of thorns to his chest with his left hand and with his right hand he scatters roses in the outstretched arms of weeping Mary Magdalene sitting at his feet.

¹³ The national movement for independence in the Grand Duchy of Finland was developed in the course of the First World War, with the support of Imperial Germany, which thus tended to weaken the Russian Empire, which was comprised in the anti-German coalition.

Soon after the October Revolution – November 23 (December 6), 1917 – the Finnish Seim declared Finland an independent state. On the 31 (18) December, 1917 the Soviet government recognized the independence of Finland.

On January 18, 1918 radical Social Democrats together with other left-wing forces led by Otto Kuusinen organized the Red Guards and proclaimed the Finnish Socialist Workers Republic.

On March, 1 FSWR and RSFSR established diplomatic relations and concluded a treaty of friendship and cooperation.

The White Government of Finland disappeared in the north, where the leader of the Conservative Party, Baron Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim formed White Guard troops (Civil Guards) to prevent the spread of the revolutionary movement. Civil war broke out between the white and the red, aided by Russian troops staying in the country. Germany sent a division to help the Finns to set a pro-German regime. The red could not resist the well-armed Kaiser’s troops, who soon overtook Tampere and Helsinki. The last bastion of the red, Vyborg, fell in April 1918. The Seim was convened to form the government, and Pehr Evind Svinhufvud was appointed the acting head of state.

In areas with a mixed Russian-Finnish population, especially in Terijoki (now Zelenogorsk) and Viipuri first groups of Finnish “volunteers”, and then groups the Civil Guards, staged ethnic purges, destroying servicemen of the Russian origin (including officers, who did not have any relation to the red) and forcing the Russian population to emigrate to the Soviet Russia. The number of people in prisons and concentration camps reached 90 thousand, 8.3 thousand people were executed, about 12 thousand people died in the concentration camps in the summer of 1918 (during the fighting the white lost 3,178, and the red – 3,463 people). The civilian population of Russian origin was subjected to destruction. All this caused a negative international reaction, as for example in Sweden the Committee against the Finnish White Terror was established.

After the civil war, under the influence of pro-German forces in the autumn of 1918, Kingdom of Finland was created for a short time. In late 1918, Finland became a republic.

The agreement of RSFSR and Finland was signed on October 14, 1920 in Tartu after four months of talks. The Finnish-Soviet border was established by the agreement.

The agreement ended the first Soviet-Finnish war of 1918–1920, during which the Finnish army invaded the Russian territory in Eastern Karelia and the Arctic (which had never been part of the Swedish-Finnish state and the Grand Duchy of Finland). The treaty defined the new Finnish-Soviet border and fixed territorial concessions in favour of Finland. The state of war ceased upon the entry of the treaty into force (that was, from December 31, 1920, 2.5 months after its conclusion – an unprecedented fact in the history of international agreements).

The border on the Karelian Isthmus was set by the Gulf of Finland on the river Sister (Sisterback, Rajajoki) and then went to the north line of the old

Russian-Finnish border separating the Grand Duchy of Finland from the actual Russian provinces. So, according to the agreement, Finland withdrew all Vyborg province.

¹⁴ Annexation of the Baltic states is a process of inclusion of independent Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and most of the territory of modern Lithuania – in the Soviet Union, carried out, according to some researchers, as a result of signing by the USSR and Germany in August 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Treaty of friendship and the border, whose secret protocols recorded delineation of the interests of the two nations in Eastern Europe. The official position of the Russian Foreign Ministry is that the accession of the Baltic states to the Soviet Union complies with all the rules of international law as of 1940, and that the entry of these countries into the Soviet Union was officially recognized internationally. This position is based on the de facto recognition of the integrity of the borders of the USSR in June 1941 at the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences of party states of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and on the recognition in 1975 of the inviolability of the borders by the European Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

¹⁵ By the resolution of the Central Executive Committee and Council of People's Commissars on July 10, 1937, the staff of the State Security was transferred to the system insignia adopted by the Red Army. Pursuant to this decision of the NKVD on July 15, 1937, the order No.278 was issued, according to which the following changes were introduced in the form of clothing: a light blue cap instead of blue; at the former colour of the shirt, the collar and cuffs of sleeves were trimmed with crimson piping; instead of the jacket, a woollen khaki jacket was introduced with breast pockets and six buttoned clasps, on the collar and cuffs of the sleeves there was a crimson edge; the pants were now khaki, not dark blue. The order also introduced insignia on the lapels, similar to those in the Red Army – covered with red enamel diamond shapes, rectangles and squares. The colour of buttonholes and border remained the same, only the longitudinal strip in the centre disappeared. A captain wore three bars in his buttonholes, as well as the Red Army lieutenant colonel. This form of clothing and insignia lasted until February 18, 1943, when by the order of the NKVD No.126 new form, insignia and shoulder straps were introduced.

Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on February 9, 1943 changed the system of special ranks in the NKVD: the title of senior major of the State Security was abolished, new ranks appeared: Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel and the Commissioner of the State Security. Therefore, all who had the rank of a major of state security and senior KGB Major new titles were given with NKVD orders. As a rule, the Majors of state security became colonels and senior major of state security and state security commissars and

partially commissar of State Security of the 3rd rank. Starting with the captain of State Security and lower ranks, with the Order of the NKVD No.102 on February 11, 1943 there was provided the following scheme of transition to the new title: all the captains of the State Security were awarded the rank of Lieutenant Colonel of State Security, Senior Lieutenants of State Security – Majors of State Security, Lieutenants of State Security – Captains of State Security, Junior lieutenants of State Security – senior lieutenants of State Security, sergeants of State security who were awarded the title before January 1, 1942 – Lieutenants of State Security, those who were awarded later – junior lieutenant of State Security. In August 1937 by the Decision of the Central Executive Committee and Council of People's Commissars for those junior officers and command staff who had completed special short courses the ranks of lieutenant, junior political officer and junior military technician were introduced. Resolution of the 4th session of the Supreme Soviet on September 1, 1939 established the military rank of lieutenant colonel and senior battalion commissar. A Colonel began to wear four rectangles in his buttonholes, and a Lieutenant Colonel – three.

¹⁶ In 1918, Romania declared to West European states that it did not exclude the annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina. At that time, Moldavian Democratic Republic was headed by Sfatul Tzerii, loyal to Romania. Taking advantage of the Russian Civil War and anarchy, the Romanian troops crossed the Danube and the Prut and reached the Dniester in January of that year. This violated the agreement with the Russian Federation, signed earlier that year. There was signed a merger agreement on Bessarabia and Romania with Sfatul Iorrii. The new frontier in the Ukrainian SSR and the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the USSR until 1940, had passed through the Dniester. It was not recognized by the Soviet government. RSFSR also categorically refused to recognize these territories as Romanian. In response, the Romanian authorities on October 28, 1920 in Paris, signed the Bessarabian protocol. Romania signed it on one side, and the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Japan – on the other. Based on the protocol, the annexation of Bessarabia by Romanians was recognized and considered a legitimate Reunion of Romania and Bessarabia. The Russian Federation did not take part in signing the protocol, and the Romanian authorities refused to hold a plebiscite in the region. France ratified it in 1924 and Italy did in 1927. Japan did not ratify the protocol, with the result that it did not come into force. On November 1, 1920 the Governments of USSR and RSFSR declared the Government of Romania, Italy, France and Britain that they could not recognize the protocol having any effect, since it had been taken without their participation. This was later confirmed at numerous international conferences.

The annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR (also Bessarabia operation, Bessarabian campaign, Prut campaign in 1940, join-

ing of Northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union) – transfer of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina from Romania to the USSR in 1940 – was planned by the Soviet side as military intervention in Romania, but a few hours before the operation the Romanian King Carol II accepted an ultimatum note of the Soviet side and handed Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The operation of the Soviet troops occupying the territory lasted six days. The paratroopers and aircrafts TB-3 were used in the operation. In particular, to prevent the export of property to Romania, over 500 paratroopers were parachuted into the area of Izmail.

¹⁷ Pz.Kpfw.IV (or T-4, as it is often called in Russia) was the most popular German Wehrmacht tank. Initially, it was adopted as a machine for tank battalion commanders. It was the only German tank that was in mass production throughout the second world war. It was manufactured by Krupp, Vomag, Niebelungenwerke. From 1937 to 1945, over 8,500 tanks were made. Pz.Kpfw.IV took part in all military operations, beginning with the capture of the Sudetenland and ending with the Battle of Berlin. On 10 April 1945, the field troops owned 505 tanks, 130 more of these machines were in the army of reserve.

¹⁸ *Wehrmacht High Command, Headquarters operational management, the Department of National Defence L IV/Qu No. 44822/41*

Strictly confidential

Home Fuehrer's Headquarters

6.6.41 (For Command only)

Pass via officer only

In an annex to the decree of the Fuehrer from 14.5 on the application of military jurisdiction in the area of "Barbarossa" here are the "Instructions on the treatment of political commissars".

In the fight against Bolshevism we cannot count on the compliance with the principles of humanity or international law by the enemy! Especially cruel and dictated by hatred anti-human treatment of our prisoners of war should be expected from any kind of commissars, these genuine resistance carriers.

Troops should be aware of the following:

1. In the present war mercy to these elements and compliance with regard to their international rules are inappropriate. They are a threat to our security and to rapid release of population in the occupied areas.

2. The political commissars are the initiators of the barbaric Asian warfare. Therefore we should act against them immediately and without any delay with all the ruthlessness. If they have an armed resistance, immediately remove them by force of arms.

For the rest, the following provisions operate:

I. In front line areas.

1. Treat political commissars acting against our troops according to the "Decree of the military jurisdiction in the area of "Barbarossa". The same applies

to the commissars and all kinds of positions, even only suspected of resistance, sabotage or incitement to them.

2. To identify political commissars as hostile bodies can be by special insignia – a red star with weaved sickle and hammer on the sleeve. They must be immediately, that is right on the battlefield, separated from all other prisoners of war. This is necessary to deprive them of any chance to influence the captured soldiers. Commissars are not recognized as soldiers; no international legal protection applies to them.

After their selection they must be destroyed.

3. Political commissars who are not guilty of any enemy action or are only suspected of them, initially should not be destroyed. Only in the further advancing inland, the question of whether they should be left in place or be passed into the hands of the Sonderkommando, can be resolved. Those should aim to conduct the inquiry themselves. When deciding on the "guilt or innocence" in principle the personal impression counts more than unprovable offence.

4. All of the above measures should not delay the conduct of operations. Therefore, to prohibit the field forces systematic searches and purge.

II. In the rear of the front. Commissars captured in the rear with the front-line behaviour of doubt should be passed to the Einsatzgruppen of security. Please send this only to the commanders of armies and air fleets, and introduce this to the rest of the team commanders orally.

¹⁹ On September 17, 1941 the Military Council of the Leningrad front send the Military Councils of 42nd and 55th armies, which retreated under the onslaught of the Germans, the known order No.0064 with these words, "For leaving without a written order of the Military Council of the front and the army, all commanders, political workers and fighters are subject to immediate execution." In accordance with the order, the barrage detachments were created, they detained soldiers and commanders who had left the front or lost their units. In just two days of September – 18 and 19 – the commandant of Leningrad detained about four and a half thousand soldiers and commanders, who for various reasons were in the rear rather than the front. About 400 people were transferred to the investigating authorities. Many of them were shot.

Behind the scenes this order had effect in other armies of the Leningrad Front. Barrage detachments caught all those who in the heat of battle under the blows of German tanks and infantry retreated to Leningrad. For example, in the battle of Mga the armoured vehicle B-20 of sergeant major Vasily Chentsov was shot down. The crew were killed. Shell-shocked and not understanding anything, he struggled out from under the burning wreckage and crawled to the rear. He couldn't remember how long for. He came to the barrage detachment where he was arrested, taken into the headquarters of some unit, at first they imitated the shooting down and then sent to Lenin-

grad for investigations. There he found himself in detention facility “Kres-ty” together with thieves, people without registration and other socially harmful elements. Without a trial the sergeant was transferred by barge across the Lake Ladoga to Volkhov, and then by rail boxcar to Tomsk-2. It took a month to get to Tomsk, then they kept in the Tomsk prison for two months. When he was released he looked like a scrag.

Since the war began until October 1941 specific departments and detachments of the NKVD detained 657,364 soldiers, stragglers from their units and fleeing from the front. In this mass there were found and exposed 1,505 spies and 308 saboteurs. As for December 1941, the special department arrested 46,473,325 traitors, 3,325 cowards and alarmists, 13,887 deserters, 4,295 distributors of provocative rumours, 4,214 people for banditry and looting.

²⁰ Even during the war, many realized that the issue of opening a second front was dictated not only by military necessity. It was a touchstone, which had mutual trust of the Allies. In preparation for the meeting with Roosevelt in December 1941, Churchill said that if the allies acted vigorously and consistently, the war with Germany could end in late 1942 – early 1943. During the conversation of Molotov, Roosevelt and Churchill in June 1942 it was stated that it would be able to bring Hitler to his knees in 1943. These findings were not pointless, they came out of the assessment of the German armed forces after the defeat at Moscow. Germany had to move on to the trench warfare and it did not have a chance to win it.

But the allies missed that point. The Battle of Stalingrad substantially changed the nature and course of the Second World War: if in 1941–1942 the allies reasoned that they needed to divert German troops from the Eastern Front, and to help the Soviet Union, which would weaken Germany, then after Stalingrad, the question would have been removed from the agenda. There were other issues: were the Russians not matured, was it not time to think about how to save Germany – the main barrier against the penetration of Russians far to Europe.

1943. The USSR is basically fighting Germany on its own. What was more, before the battle of Kursk Churchill sends to Moscow strategic disinformation that the Germans have rolled up preparations for an advance to Kursk. The further the worse. On August, 20 in Quebec City at a meeting of the leaders of the US and Britain, they discuss the question that the Germans should hold Russia as long as possible in the east. At that meeting, two plans are adopted: “Overlord”, which the Soviet side will be informed of in October 1943 in Tehran, and a top-secret plan “Rankin”, according to which the Germans enter into an agreement with the Western powers, release the Western Front, provide support during the landing in Normandy and provide rapid advance of the allies through France and Germany, holding the line of the Soviet troops. In this case, Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, Bucha-

rest, Sofia, Vienna and Belgrade fall under the control of the United States and England and the German forces in the west move to the east in an organized move to strengthen the German defence line...

In the West they took into account that at Stalingrad, the Kursk Bulge and in subsequent battles we suffered huge losses. The allies agreed that by mid-1944 the offensive potential of the USSR would be virtually exhausted and manpower spent. So, by the time of the Allied landings, stuck in confrontation with the Germans, we would give up the strategic initiative to the United States and England who did not even take care of the preparations for the autumn and winter, scheduling the landing for June 6, 1944. Hitler took advantage of this, he struck a blow in the Ardennes, even without removing the troops from the Eastern Front. The allies rushed for help of Stalin, and he rescued them by starting ahead of time the Vistula-Oder operation. Eisenhower in his memoirs admits that the second front at the end of February 1945 was almost non-existent. In early April, Churchill gives his headquarters the order to prepare the operation “Rankin (Unthinkable)”: involving the United States, England, Canada, Polish Corps and 10–12 German divisions, to start fighting against the Soviet Union. The third world war was to start on July 1, 1945! By the way, London had been denying the existence of such a plan for a long time, but a few years ago the British declassified part of their archives, and among the documents were papers relating to the plan “Unthinkable”. If it had not been for the storming of Berlin, World War III could have begun in Churchill’s designated period of time. But Stalin insisted on conducting the Berlin operation and demonstrated the impact fire-power of our armed forces so that neither Churchill or Eisenhower, nor anyone else would have a desire to fight the USSR.

The delay in opening a second front was also due to the interests of big business in the US. It was not satisfied with the rapid end of the war and the reduction of income. The fact that the Soviet people were having at the time colossal sacrifices, and the peoples of Europe groaned under the yoke of the German occupation, for American business was a secondary matter. By the way, our country every two weeks before the opening of a second front had lost more people than the allies lost in all the years of the war in Europe.

The discussion about the “historical and decisive” Allied victory during the Second World War in general, and amphibious operations in the north of France in particular does not stop until now. But we have got to witness historically: the second front, promised in 1942, was only opened on June 6, 1944, when it became obvious that the Red Army on its own could make the complete defeat of Nazi Germany.

²¹ Karelian Front existed longer than all other fronts of the Great Patriotic War – from 23 August 1941 to 15 November 1944. It had the largest length among all fronts – up to 1,600 km in 1943. It was the only one of the fronts,

which had a particularly difficult northern climatic characteristics and that did not send to the rear of the country military equipment and weapons to repair. The repair works were done in special units and enterprises of Karelia and the Murmansk region. At Victory Parade the combined regiment of the Karelian Front marched first. Since then traditionally at Victory Day parade the banner of the Karelian front is the first among the front banners. This was the only front on one of the sites of which (in the Murmansk region) the Nazi troops were unable to break the state border of the USSR. On November 15, 1944, after the release of Finland from the Second World War, the front was disbanded.

²² At the beginning of the Second World War it was declared of neutrality of Sweden. The Soviet-Finnish war deeply hurt the feelings of the Swedish people, in connection with which there were organized various kinds of assistance to Finland. Through the territory of Sweden there existed transit of weapons for German units in the north. Generally, in 1940–1941 Sweden experienced strong pressure from Germany. It had to provide all sorts of privileges and concessions to Germany.

Sweden received large military orders after the Second World War started. They were mostly orders for Hitler's Germany. Suffice it to say that in 1943, out of 10.8 million tonnes of mined iron 10.3 million tons were sent from Sweden to Germany. Therefore, one of the main tasks of the Navy ships of the Soviet Union, who fought in the Baltic, was not only struggle against the fascist ships, but also the destruction of neutral Sweden vessels transporting cargo to the Nazis.

The Swedes stopped their profitable trade with the Nazis only in the autumn of 1944, when the close collapse of the Third Reich was already apparent to all. The government became loyal to the various types of requests from representatives of allied forces, including the line of intelligence activities against Germany. Soviet foreign intelligence work in Sweden was given special attention. In addition to the general tasks of identifying the Swedish management plans in relation to the USSR, the Soviet foreign intelligence task was to create an illegal residency in case of rupture of diplomatic relations between the two countries. There was also a task of conducting intelligence operations against Germany, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and establishing illegal residency in these countries. On the territory of Sweden, scientific and technical intelligence of the USSR tried to keep track of the ongoing work in Nazi Germany on building new weapons and traffic flows with strategic goods.

²³ Kirkenes is a town in the north-eastern part of Norway, about 8 km away from the Norwegian-Russian border. Its population is 9.7 thousand people. During the Second World War, it was subjected to massive bomb attacks, 320 bombings were carried out over the town.

Petsamo-Kirkenes operation is strategic offensive forces of the 14th Army of the Karelian Front on 7 October 1944 in the direction of Luostari and Petsamo (Pechenga) in order to defeat the main forces of the German 19th Mountain Corps in the Finnish polar region and further advance on Kirkenes in Northern Norway. The Germans continued to occupy part of the Soviet and Finnish territories. Germany sought to retain this area of the Arctic, which was an important source of strategic raw materials (copper, nickel, molybden) and had ice-free seaports, where forces of the German Navy were based.

In the area of Lapland "granite shaft" in difficult mountainous and forested terrain with lots of rocks, rivers, lakes and wetlands, in three years there had been created a strong defence, consisting of three bands to a depth of 150 km. The Petsamo-Kirkenes enemy force had 53,000 soldiers and officers, 160 air crafts and 200 ships, 770 guns and mortars.

On October, 25 the advanced Soviet troops broke into Kirkenes. Retreating Germans blew up all port facilities and destroyed administrative buildings. Along with Kirkenes the towns of Tarnet, Svanvik, Sturbukt, Bernevann, Neiden and others were released.

Taking into account that the German units were scattered in small groups and retreated deep into Norwegian territory, as well as the onset of winter, the command of the Karelian Front felt it inappropriate to further advance deep into Norway.

²⁴ The danger of war of the Soviet Union and Japan existed since the second half of the 1930s. In 1938, there were clashes at the Lake Khasan, and in 1939 the battle of Khalkhin Gol, on the border of Mongolia and Manchukuo. In 1940, the Far Eastern Front was formed that points to the real risk of the outbreak of war. However, the deterioration of the situation on the western borders forced the USSR to seek a compromise with Japan. The latter, in turn, choosing between the options of aggression to the north (against the USSR) and to the south (against the USA and Great Britain), more and more inclined to the latter option, and sought to protect itself from the Soviet Union. The result of a temporary political accord between the two countries resulted in signing the Neutrality Pact on April 13, 1941. In April 1945, the agreement was denounced by the Soviet Union.

In 1941, Hitler coalition countries, except Japan, declared war on the Soviet Union (Great Patriotic war), and in the same year, Japan attacked the US, going to war in the Pacific.

In February 1945, at the Yalta Conference, Stalin promised the allies to declare war on Japan after 2–3 months after the end of hostilities in Europe. At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the Allies issued a joint declaration demanding the unconditional surrender of Japan. That same summer, Japan tried to conduct separate peace negotiations with the Soviet Union, but to no avail.

The war, as promised to the allies, was declared exactly three months after the victory in Europe – on August 8, 1945, two days after the first use of nuclear weapons by the USA against Japan (Hiroshima) on the eve of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. The commander in chief was Marshal of the Soviet Union A.M. Vasilevsky. 3 fronts were operating: Trans-Baikal Front, 1st Far Eastern and 2nd Far Eastern (commanders R.Ya. Malinovsky, K.A. Meretskov and M.A. Purkaev), total number of about 1.5 million people. They were opposed by the Japanese Kwantung Army, commanded by General Otsudzo Yamada.

The composition of the Kwantung Army: about 1 million people, 6,260 guns and mortars, 1,150 tanks, 1,500 air crafts.

At dawn on August 9, 1945, the Soviet troops launched a ground operation. The 6th Guards Tank Army of General Kravchenko came from Mongolia to the centre of Manchuria. There were cases of hot resistance in the bands of the Trans-Baikal and the 2nd Far Eastern fronts. The Japanese army mounted numerous counter attacks. On August 17, 1945 in Mukden, the Soviet troops captured the emperor of Manchukuo Pu Yi.

On August 14, the Japanese command made a proposal to conclude a truce. But the fighting of the Japanese side did not stop. Only three days later, the Kwantung Army was ordered to surrender by its command, which began on August 20. But it did not immediately reached to all, and in some places the Japanese acted contrary to the orders.

On August 18, landing on the most northerly of the Kuril Islands was launched, although the joint decision of the Allied, the Kuril Islands, South Sakhalin and Port Arthur clearly shifted to the USSR. On the same day, August 18, Chief of Soviet forces in the Far East, Marshal Vasilevsky ordered the occupation of the Japanese island of Hokkaido by two infantry divisions. This landing was not performed due to the delay of promotion of the Soviet troops in southern Sakhalin, and then postponed until the Headquarters instructions.

The Soviet troops occupied the southern part of Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, Manchuria and part of Korea. The major combat operations on the continent were taken for 12 days, until the 20th of August. However, separate clashes continued until September 10, which became the day of the complete surrender and capture of the Kwantung Army. Fighting on the islands completely ended on September 1st.

Japanese Instrument of Surrender was signed on September 2, 1945 on board the battleship "Missouri" in Tokyo Bay.

As a result, the million strong Kwantung Army was completely destroyed. According to the Soviet data, its losses amounted to 84,000 killed people and 600 thousand were captured. Irrecoverable losses of the Red Army were 12 thousand people.

Manchurian operation was of great political and military importance. So, on August, 9 at an emergency meeting of the Supreme Council for the management of the war, Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki said, "The Soviet Union joining the war this morning finally puts us in an impossible position and makes it impossible to continue the war". US Secretary of State E. Stettinius claimed the following, "On the eve of the Crimean Conference the American Chiefs of Staff convinced Roosevelt that Japan would surrender only in 1947 or later, and its defeat may cost America a million soldiers".

²⁵ This is the first order of the USSR, which had three degrees, and senior of the orders, having the name of a commander. It was established by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on 29 July 1942 together with the Order of Kutuzov, which had then two degrees, and the Order of Alexander Nevsky. The decision to establish special orders for rewarding warlords was adopted in June 1942, in the days of heavy fighting in the south of the Soviet Union, when the Soviet troops under the blows of the Germans retreated to the Don and Volga, and besieged Sevastopol was already doomed. The future success of the Red Army had to be encouraged, so they decided to move away from the traditional system of awarding in the USSR, according to which anyone nominated for a reward (a Red Army soldier, a commander, a Marshal or a civilian) could be awarded any order. New orders could be obtained only by taking an appropriate position. 1st degree order of Suvorov was awarded to the front and army commanders, their deputies, chiefs of staff, chiefs of operations and operational divisions and the chiefs of the troops (of artillery, aircraft, armoured forces and mortar forces) of the fronts and armies "for well-organized and carried out, or front-line military operation to defeat the enemy with less forces", "for... a manoeuvre to encircle the numerically superior enemy; the complete destruction of its manpower and seizure of weapons and equipment", "for... the choice of main attack" and its striking, etc. 2nd degree order of Suvorov was awarded to the commanders of corps, divisions and brigades, their deputies and chiefs of staff for the defeat "of the enemy's corps or division... with a smaller force", "for the break of the enemy's defensive zone, the development of breakthrough... and the enemy destruction organization", "for... the breakout and preservation of the combat capability of their units, their weapons and equipment", "for armoured formations deep raid behind enemy lines... ensuring successful execution of military operations". 3rd degree Order was awarded to the commanders of regiments, battalions, regiments chiefs of staff and commanders of squadrons "for fight organization and initiative in choosing the time for bold and swift attack of the enemy, superior by force" and destroying it, "for perseverance and complete opposition to attack by superior enemy forces in keeping the occupied lines, skilful juxtaposition of all available means of fighting and a decisive shift in the attack".

2nd degree Order of Suvorov was awarded 2863 times, including 676 units and formations of the Red Army. 3rd degree Order of Suvorov was handed 4012 times, including to 849 units and formations. The total number of Order of Suvorov awards during the war was 7,266, including 1,528 units and institutions of the Red Army.

²⁶ The Order of the Red Banner was established on September 16, 1918 during the Civil War, with the Central Executive Committee decree. It was originally called the Order of the Red Banner. During the Civil War, similar orders were also established in other Soviet republics. On August 1, 1924 all of the Orders of the Soviet republics were converted into one for the entire USSR "Order of the Red Banner". Statute of the Order was approved by the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR on January 11, 1932 (on 19 June 1943 and 16 December 1947 this Regulation was amended by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR). The latest revision of the statute of the Order was approved by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on the 28th of March 1980. Last rewarding – 1991. The number of awards – 581,300.

²⁷ Rodion Yakovlevich Malinovsky was born on November 23, 1898 in Odessa. Brought up by his mother. In 1911 finished a parochial school. He left family and tramped and wandered for several years. In 1914 he persuaded the soldiers going to the front of the First World War, to take him to the troop train, after which he was enlisted as a volunteer in a machine-gun teams of the Infantry Regiment. In October 1915, he was wounded and received the first combat award – the Cross of St. George of the 4th degree. In 1916, as part of the Russian Expeditionary Corps, he was sent to France, fought on the Western Front, was again wounded and received the French award. In 1917 he took part in the uprising of the Russian soldiers in the camp of La Courtine, during which he was wounded.

On returning to Russia in 1919, he joined the Red Army, participated in the Civil War on the Eastern Front against the forces of Admiral Kolchak.

After the Civil War, he graduated from a high school of junior command personnel, was appointed commander of machine-gun platoon, then was Head of machine-gun team, assistant commander and commander of the infantry battalion. He graduated from the Frunze Military Academy in 1930. Since then, he was Chief of Staff Cavalry Regiment, a staff officer of the North Caucasus and the Belorussian Military District, chief of staff of the cavalry corps. In 1937–1938, Colonel Malinovsky was in Spain as a military adviser during the Spanish Civil War (his nickname was General Malino), where he was awarded two Orders. On July 15, 1938 he was promoted to the rank of a brigade commander. From 1939 he was a teacher of the Military Academy of Frunze, Major-General (4th of June 1940). From March 1941 he was the commander of the 48th Infantry Corps in the Odessa Military District.

Malinovsky started the war as commander of the 48th Infantry Corps, located in the Moldovan city of Balti. At the beginning of the war, despite the retreat, he managed to keep the main force of his corps and showed good commanding skills. Since August 1941, he commanded the 6th Army, and in December 1941 he was appointed commander of the Southern Front. Lieutenant general (9 November 1941). In January 1942, South and South-Western Fronts flung the German front 100 km back in the Kharkov region during Barvenkovsky-Lozovsky operation. However, in May 1942 in the same area both fronts suffered a crushing defeat, known as the Kharkov disaster. Then the enemy flung Malinovsky's troops from Kharkov to the Don with heavy losses.

In July 1942, Malinovsky was removed from his post and was appointed commander of the 66th Army in the north of Stalingrad. Since October 1942, he was deputy commander of the Voronezh Front. Since November 1942 – commander of the 2nd Guards Army. In this position, he again showed his best side: army troops were put forward at the Rostov area when the strike group of General Manstein attacked from the south in the direction of Stalingrad, having a mission to break through the Soviet encirclement of the 6th Army of Paulus. While General A.M. Vasilevsky was trying to prove to Joseph Stalin the need to bring the army of Malinovsky in order to repel the German attack, Malinovsky on his own initiative stopped his army and turned it into battle formations. Initiatives of Malinovsky and heroism of his army played a major role in the victory in Kotelnikovo operation and, as a result, in the victory in the Battle of Stalingrad.

As a result, Stalin returned Malinovsky to the post of the commander of the Southern Front. In this role, he managed to free Rostov-on-Don. Colonel-general (12 February 1943). Since March 1943 he commanded the troops of the South-western Front, renamed the 3rd Ukrainian Front in October, 1943. In this role, on his own or in conjunction with other fronts in the period from August 1943 to April 1944, he held Donbass, the Lower Dnieper, Zaporozhsk, Nikopol-Krivoy Rog, Bereznegovatoe-Snegirevsky, Odessa offensive operations. As a result, Donbass and the whole Southern Ukraine were released. In April 1944, he happened to release his home town of Odessa. General of the Army (29 April 1943).

In May 1944, Malinovsky was appointed the commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, which together with the 3rd Ukrainian Front (under the command of Tolbukhin) went on the offensive in the south, defeating the forces of the German Army Group "South Ukraine" during the Iasi-Kishinev strategic operation. After that Romania withdrew from the alliance with Germany and declared war. On September 10, 1944, on the proposal of S.K. Timoshenko to Stalin, Malinovsky was awarded the rank of "Marshal of the Soviet Union". In October 1944, Malinovsky inflicted a se-

vere defeat enemy secondary in eastern Hungary during the Battle of Debrecen and went on near the outskirts of Budapest. However, the extremely fierce battle for Budapest lasted nearly five months. Although it was possible to surround and then destroy nearly 200,000 strong group of the enemy, the victory was achieved at a great cost and valuable time had been lost. In the spring of 1945, in cooperation with the troops of F.I. Tolbuhin, the front of Malinovsky successfully conducted the Operation of Vienna, essentially eliminating the German front in Austria and having connected to the Allied forces. For the complete destruction of enemy forces in this operation Malinovsky was awarded the highest Soviet generalship Order of Victory.

Finishing the Great Patriotic War in Austria and Czechoslovakia, Malinovsky was transferred to the Far East, where in the Soviet-Japanese War, he commanded the Trans-Baikal Front: The Front unexpectedly for the Japanese command broke through the Gobi Desert in the central part of Manchuria, completed the encirclement and the total destruction of the Japanese forces. Malinovsky was awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union.

From March 1956 – First Deputy Minister of Defence and the Commander of the Land Forces. In October 1957 R.Ya. Malinovsky was appointed Minister of Defence. In that position he remained until the end of his life, spending a lot of work to strengthen the defence power of the state and increase the power of its armed forces. He died on March 31, 1967.

²⁸ Badge of honour “50 years in the Communist Party” was established by the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1981. It was issued by order of the District Party Committee (where registration cards of members or candidate members of the CPSU are kept). It was handed over to a member of the Communist Party with continuous service stay in the party for at least 50 years.

²⁹ Presidential Decree of 23 August 1991 suspended the activities of the Communist Party RSFSR, and the Decree of 6 November 1991 stopped the activity of the CPSU and the Communist Party of the RSFSR on the territory of Russia; Decree of August 23, 1991 instructed the Interior Ministry to ensure the safety of the property of the Communist party of the RSFSR, the Central Bank of the Russian Federation to suspend operations on the accounts of organizations of the Communist party of the RSFSR, and decrees of 25 August and 6 November 1991 provided a number of security measures in relation to the property of the Communist Party of the USSR and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation on the territory of the Russian Federation, which was declared state-owned, and therefore the state authorities transferred the right to use this property.

The measures provided for in respect of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation in the decrees of 23 and 25 August 1991, were developed in the Decree of 6 November 1991, which according to its legal consequences mainly absorbed the pre-

vious two. The basis for the consideration of the case was the discovered uncertainty in the matter of compliance with the goals and activities of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation to the Constitution.

The preamble of the Decree of the President of 6 November 1991 “On the activity of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation” the nature of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as a political party is denied. At the same time, the question of the constitutionality of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation is closely related to the question of their legal nature, which is the starting point for assessing the constitutionality of the measures taken against them under verifiable decrees.

Therefore, the Constitutional Court joined the petition on the constitutionality of the three named presidential decrees and petition to review the constitutionality of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, regarding the last question attendant.

The case on the constitutionality of Presidential Decree No.79 of 23 August 1991 “Suspending the activities of the Communist Party of the RSFSR”, No.90 of 25 August 1991 “On the property of the CPSU and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation” and No.169 of 6 November 1991 “On the activity of the CPSU and the Communist party of the RSFSR” as well as on the constitutionality of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

The case was heard on May 26, 6–15 July, 20 July – 4 August, 14 September – 23 October, 28 October – 30 November 1992. Court decision No.9-II of November 30, 1992:

The Constitutional Court ruled:

According to the Decree of 23 August “Suspending the activities of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation” declare unconstitutional in paragraph 1 the prescription to the Minister of the Interior and the Prosecutor’s Office “to investigate the facts of anti-constitutional activities of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation”.

Instructions to the prosecutor’s office to investigate materials to the judiciary (clause 1) and to provide supervision of the execution of the decree (clause 5) declared null and void, as it is the duty of the prosecution.

Clause 6 – the entry of the decree in force on the date of signing – not considered as conforming to the principle of law, according to which the act of restricting the rights of citizens, shall enter into force only after the official publication.

The remaining paragraphs of this decree, which to resolve the issue of the constitutionality of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation in

the courts suspended the activities of bodies and organizations of the Russian Communist Party, its property was transferred to the preservation of public authorities and its assets were frozen, the Court found consistent with the Constitution.

By decree of August 25, "On the property of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation" items containing instructions to transfer the property of the Communist Party to the executive authorities, as in compliance with the Constitution in relation to that part of the property, which, though in the possession, use and disposal of the Communist Party, but were state or municipal.

The guidelines of the President of the Russian Federation to nationalize the part of the property that was either owned by the Communist Party, or was in its custody, although the owner's rights in general were not identified documented, were recognized unconstitutional.

³⁰ In 1969, Chile's political parties formed a unit "National Unity" and its candidate Salvador Allende won the presidential election of 1970. Allende's government nationalized enterprises owned by US monopolies, took steps to improve the material conditions of the workers and employees, carried out agrarian reforms, etc. Connections of Chile with the USSR acquired a new character, diplomatic relations with Cuba and other socialist countries were restored. But the government's reforms caused discontent of the middle class, the representatives of corporations and the US government. By the summer of 1973 the political forces of the country had been divided into two warring camps – supporters of Allende and his opponents. On September 11, 1973 in the Chilean capital Santiago a military coup was made by the army, which resulted in President Salvador Allende and the "National Unity" government were overthrown. All the political parties that were included in the block were banned and their members were subjected to brutal repression. Allende himself was killed during the assault on the presidential palace. Dictatorship government junta headed by General Augusto Pinochet was established in the country. The constitution was abolished, the National Congress was dissolved, all political and mass organizations were outlawed. More than 30,000 people were killed for the month of the "siege" imposed for a coup. The coup was prepared and carried out under the supervision and with the direct participation of the CIA.

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