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TWENTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RED ARMY

On February 23rd, 1944 the army of the Soviet Union celebrates its twenty-sixth birthday. This is an occasion for retrospective appraisal of the road travelled. The past twelve months were a most eventful period in the Red Army's life and, in the words of Marshal Stalin, have led to a fundamental turn in the tide of war.

This twelve-month period was ushered in by the great victories at Stalingrad, and its close was met by the salutes fired in Leningrad and the thunder of decisive battles for the Ukraine and its final liberation from the German invaders. And between these major events, between these two great battles, there were others of no less importance. Everywhere—at Kursk, Orel and Belgorod, at Kharkov and in the Donbas, at Briansk and Smolensk, Kiev and Leningrad, on the rivers Desna and Sozh, the Dnieper and the Volkhov,—everywhere the Red Army won brilliant victories. These victories were gained by the Soviet Union in single combat against the Hitler war machine for Germany still had her main forces on the Eastern front. By the beginning of the German offensive in July 1943, Hitler had concentrated against Russia two hundred and fifty-seven divisions, of which two hundred and seven were German. In the twenty-sixth year of its existence, the Red Army proved its ascendancy over the hitlerite army—a superiority which is being firmly held.

What was it that predetermined the Red Army's successes?

Modern warfare is multiform in nature and there are many factors—military, economic and moral-political, which decide its success. In a short article it is impossible to deal with them all and we shall dwell mainly on the growth of the Red Army from the military point of view.

An army consists of people armed with technical resources. There can be no modern army without powerful technical equipment. This alone, however, is not sufficient: there must be people who can handle it in battle. These people must be firm in morale, devoted to their country, and ready to give their lives for victory's sake.

The ultimate issue of the fight depends on the military skill of those people, especially that of their leaders—the generals and other officers. Thus, there are three mutually related factors which determine victory: equipment, people and military skill.

The battles of 1943 were clashes between huge quantities of armament. Never before have so many tanks, aircraft, artillery and other technical means of combat been launched into battle as in the past twelve months and this determined the specific character of the battles.

In preparing for the 1943 summer campaign, Hitler's command placed great hopes on the modernization of their war machine—tanks, aircraft, guns and mortars. German designers and industrialists made great efforts to solve this problem of modernization. They supplied the hitlerite army with new types of heavy tanks, "Tigers" and "Panthers", with a new class of self-propelled gun "Ferdinand", with a new reactive projectile apparatus, with a new type of fighter-plane Fokke-Wulf 190, etc. All this powerful and diverse equipment was flung into battle at Kursk in July 1943.

By means of this colossal war machine Hitler hoped to smash the Soviet defence and win a general victory—but these hopes were not justified. This time the German panzered spearhead came up against an insurmountable obstacle and was shattered. The Soviet defence proved stronger than the German offence. This was because the technical strength of the Soviet troops defending the Kursk salient was not inferior to that of the German panzered "breakthrough groups"

and the stamina of the Soviet fighters was greater than the offensive energy of the Germans. And today, the fields of battle north and south of Kursk are strewn with hundreds of wrecked and burned skeletons of German tanks.

The summer battles of 1943 were a stupendous test of Soviet artillery, tanks and aircraft against those of the Germans. This contest was won by the Red Army because it had received from Soviet industry the mightiest of modern arms in a sufficient and ever increasing quantity. Anglo-American shipment likewise played a definite part in the increasing technical armament of the Red Army. Thousands of tanks and aircraft and a substantial quantity of military-technical commodities delivered to the U.S.S.R. by the plucky sailors of the United States and Great Britain, were put to good use by Soviet soldiers for the common good of the United nations.

Owing to the productive capacity of the Soviet hinterland the most vital task of furnishing the Red Army with first-class armaments in ample quantities was accomplished. This was the foundation of the Soviet victories.

But if it is arms that serve as the foundation for victory, it is the stonemasons—the people—who raise the walls of the temple of victory.

The past year has also witnessed far-reaching changes in the growth and toughening of the personnel of the Red Army. History knows of cases where, in the course of protracted wars, an army which at first was strong and superbly drilled, gradually weakened and finally collapsed. Such was the fate of the Kaiser's army in World War I. But history knows of other cases too, when, in the course of war, despite all losses and hardships, armies grew up and hardened, and their officers and men acquired greater skill in warfare. This took place in the army of revolutionary France at the close of the XVIII century. As a rule it is those armies which fight for the genuine interests of their people, which base themselves on the people's unshakable will for victory, that strengthen and develop in the course of war. And it is those armies which are anti-national by their nature, armies which serve as instruments of violence, pillage and injustice, that perish and disintegrate. No initial successes or conquests can save such armies from stern retribution.

This was the case with Napoleon's army when Napoleon dropped by the board the progressive ideas and traditions, which inspired him in the nineties of the eighteenth century, and launched on a war—not of liberation but of aggression, and Bonaparte, the general of the revolutionary army became the Emperor Napoleon.

The strength of the Red Army lies in the unity and moral stamina of the Soviet people.

The Soviet state was able to marshal the multi-national peoples inhabiting our country into one united body and to build it up into an integral monolithic organism, into a single people inspired by a single idea—that of beating the enemy.

Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Georgians, Uzbeks, Kazakhs and the numerous other nationalities inhabiting the Soviet Union are fighting the hated enemy as one man. Every person in the Soviet Union knows, that in fighting the Germans he is defending both the common interests of his people and his personal freedom and his home and hearth, irrespective of what part of the country they may be in.

This strength and unity of the hinterland, the deep certainty in their rightness and the justness of the aims of the war against Germany, the universal hatred and contempt of the nazi invaders—all these thoughts and feelings of the people flow into the Red Army and, in a mighty current—from the army to the people. And beside it there flows a more tangible torrent carrying bread and other victuals which the collective farmers so generously give to their army. In the past year these close bonds between the people and the Army were particularly striking, as the Red Army was advancing through land which had been ravaged and defiled by the hunnish invaders. Millions of Soviet fighters saw for themselves what nazi slavery brings to the people. Hatred burned in them the hotter, it urged them on to feats of valour.

The hour of retribution for Hitler Germany draws rapidly nearer resulting in a marked fall in the morale and military qualities of its soldiers. The "total

Fritzes" of 1943 are quite different from those Germans who trampled the fields of Poland, Belgium, France and Yugoslavia in 1939—1941. Nor are they those hitlerite soldiers who at one time strained to reach Moscow and Stalingrad; these have been buried in Russian soil a long time ago. Today's German soldier is still fighting, he still obeys his officer, and stubbornly fights a defensive battle, but he has lost his erstwhile self-assurance, he is trained far worse and—the main thing—he is constantly beset by the alarming thought: what will this war lead Germany to?

At the same time, the morale of the Red Army soldiers leaves nothing to be desired. Retreating, the Soviet soldier fought with sublime self-sacrifice. Neither the great retreat of 1941 nor the ordeal of the Stalingrad defence in 1942 could break his battle spirit. On the contrary, it was tempered and toughened. But especially did he grow after November 19th, 1942—after that historical day when, having assumed the offensive at Stalingrad, the Red Army took the initiative into its own hands.

The victories of the Red Army in 1943 were not easily won. They were paid for by the blood and sweat of our soldiers, the heroes of Orel and Belgorod, the Dnieper and Leningrad. The enthusiasm of the men of the Red Army liberating their country from the invaders is magnificent.

But the Russian soldier was helped by the armed people—the partisans. Another notable feature of the past twelve months is that the tactics of partisan warfare—proclaimed by J. Stalin as early as July 3rd, 1941—have brought and are still bringing rich results. The partisans played no small part in our victories of 1943. They helped to capture the German springboard at Orel, by thousands of acts of sabotage behind the German lines they undermined the stamina of the nazi troops. The partisans were splendid in the battles for the Dnieper. It was the Ukrainian partisans who captured a number of crossings over the wide river, and in many cases the entrenchment of Red Army troops after crossing to the right bank was facilitated by pre-arranged coordinated blows dealt by partisan detachments behind the German lines.

The Red Army marks its twenty-sixth anniversary by brilliant examples of generalship; its officers and generals have forcefully proved their superb military skill. The battles of 1943 and of the beginning of 1944 have proved that Stalingrad was not merely a lucky sweepstake draw for the Red Army but the direct consequence of its skill in warfare.

The tactics and strategy of the Red Army fully justified themselves in the course of war, and proved better and more efficient than that of the nazi army. Our generals not only mastered the skill and art of defence and offence, but, as proved by the battles of Kursk, on the Dnieper and at Leningrad—in every way excelled the much-vaunted German military leaders.

The preceding, twenty-fifth, anniversary of the Red Army coincided with the end of the winter offensive. At the close of March the front line became stabilized, and remained unchanged for more than three months—up to July 5th. This period was typical of position warfare. From the Gulf of Finland to the Sea of Azov stretched a line of solid front fortified on either side by an intricate network of trenches, blockhouses, barbed wire and mined fields. The war seemed to have entered a stage of immobility—the antithesis of that notorious "blitzkrieg" which Hitler had lost in the East.

But this only seemed so.

Hitler began by launching his offensive against Kursk on July 5th, which he termed the "decisive" and "final" battle for the victory of Germany. The German offensive continued for seven days, and then petered out, without results. This was followed by the Soviet offensive, which has now been continuing for seven months, and which has pushed the front back hundreds of kilometres to the west.

The skilful and powerful blows dealt at Orel, Belgorod, in the Donbas and in the Smolensk direction were all links in a single plan effected by Stalin and his generals with iron determination. These blows shattered and dismembered the German front, which seemed to have been so stable and firm. By September these operations acquired the nature of pursuit—the Red Army began swiftly advancing towards the Dnieper.

The Hitler command had to quickly invent all sorts of fables about the "voluntary" withdrawal of the German troops and about such things as "elastic" defence, the very latest "achievement" of hitlerite strategy. At the same time they hastened to announce that the Soviet offensive would be stopped on the Sozh, Dnieper and Molochnaya line—a strong natural boundary beginning in the woods of Byelorussia and reaching down to the shores of the Sea of Azov near Melitopol.

The Germans reckoned on digging in and regaining their breath here. But in vain! Rivers which had been proclaimed "unassailable" were forced with extraordinary speed, and the battle was shifted to the western part of the Ukraine and began to spread still farther westward with menacing speed.

This battle resulted not only in the invaders being cleared out of a considerable part of Ukrainian land west of the Dnieper. A matter of no less importance was the fact that in the battles for the Ukraine the German army suffered new heavy defeats—despite Hitler's desperate orders not to yield one step back from the Dnieper, despite the frenzied attempts of the nazis to regain what they had lost. The encirclement and annihilation of ten German divisions north of Zvenigorodka and Shpola, the extermination of seven German divisions which had stubbornly held on to their Nikopol positions—are brilliant examples of the Red Army's military skill, new testimony to its strength and maturity.

Where were the Hitlerites' boastful declarations that the Ukraine was "forever" German? Where were those hysterical vociferations that they would never yield Kiev to the Russians? With the point of the bayonet the Red Army crossed out all the plans of Hitler and replaced them by its own slogan: "Forward, for the final expulsion of the invaders from Soviet soil, for the complete and speedy victory over nazi Germany!"

These victories of the Red Army are the results of its military skill, the results of the wide and far-seeing leadership of its Supreme Commander in Chief, Marshal Stalin.

The Red Army's activities have a direct influence on the international situation. Our friends appreciate the historical purport and the vast, international scale of these victories. The London *News Chronicle* gave a correct appreciation of this when, in its New Year article entitled *Russia*, it wrote that by its recent swift successes the Red Army has speeded up the realization of the Teheran programme. Without its triumphant campaign of 1943 the plans for final victory in 1944 would not be realizable. In all probability, wrote the *News Chronicle*, without these victories there could not have been a Teheran Conference.

Such was the contribution to the common cause of victory of freedom-loving mankind which the Red Army made in the twenty-sixth year of its existence.

The Soviet Army enters its twenty-seventh year confident that it will be a glorious year of a united offensive against Germany from the East, West and South, a year of final triumph of the ideas of democracy and justice over the sombre forces of pillage and violence.

LENINGRAD IN JANUARY

When Leningrad people greeted the New Year of 1944, they smiled knowingly at each other as they spoke of new happiness and new successes. By this they meant, first and foremost, the liberation of their city from the blockade and the defeat of the Germans at Leningrad. The long-drawn-out blockade with its endless, wearisome firing, the pitiful victims, made the Leningrad people work with a kind of frenzied energy to prepare the city for the decisive battle. No one knew when this would be, but all knew that it was near, all longed for it. Yet in the hustle and bustle of the day, in the press of work, nobody spoke openly about it. It is true that for Leningrad January was a very special month, for January of last year had been marked by the breaking of the blockade.

In January 1944, there was nothing in the appearance of the city to hint at any special preparations for a new

offensive against the Germans. But the intensity of the firing testified to the enemy's nervousness, showed that he was alarmed. In vain voices from Berlin yelled that the Leningrad ring of German defences were impregnable, that they could sleep in peace—Jerry did not sleep.

Prisoners captured by our patrols stated that orders had been received to strengthen the chain of fortifications along the forward lines, to construct two new blockhouses on the section held by each battalion, and to regroup the artillery.

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While the city was busy cleaning the streets of snow and scraping it off the tramlines, things were getting lively at the front where all could sense approaching events.

In schools and lecture halls one could sense that restrained impatience, always present in the face of expected events which by tacit agreement are not mentioned.

A general from another front heard a report on the German fortifications.

"Yes, that's a strong line," was all he said, "a very strong, very complicated line."

A tank fighter, when asked the difference between a "Tiger" and other heavy German tanks, glanced towards the enemy trenches and, after a moment's thought, replied with the confidence of one who knows:

"'Tigers' burn longer!"

But both soldiers and civilians looked askance at the weather. No sort of weather at all. Instead of a good firm frost, a kind of slush. And the unfrozen Neva, the puddles in the streets and the thin ice on the gulf made people frown darkly and growl out many a curse at the weather clerk.

At long last, in the dark groves beyond Oranienbaum, at the Pulkovo height, on the suburban plain round Pushkin—everywhere, the excitement could be felt. Officers and soldiers who had been sent into the city for one reason or another learned that they must return immediately to their units on the other side of the gulf.

But the gulf itself was a mixture of snow and ice. Small boats could not sail through it, and any attempt to cross on foot was very dangerous.

But nevertheless, men made the attempt. They walked over ice that rocked and slithered beneath their feet, they hurried along, determined to reach the other side, where their comrades were preparing to give battle. But they had to return. The gulf refused them a passage. I saw one officer, raging up and down between Lissyi Nos and the town, not knowing what to do. The only thing he did know was that he could not remain in Leningrad. For two and a half years he had been fighting on his armoured train, and the bare thought that it might go into battle without him drove him frantic. And there were many other daredevils like him who took that dangerous path over the ice. And great was their joy when they learned that they could get to their units—some by air, some in special boats. They left in the highest of spirits, they were hastening to battle as to a holiday.

There was a general feeling of excitement, and hearts beat high. I heard a young lieutenant say enthusiastically: "Nothing can stop us now. I am absolutely certain of it. I'll stake anything on it. As for me, you'll be hearing of me!"

The excitement spread to the front lines. Artillerymen and sappers, snipers and tankmen—all were preparing, testing their arms and equipment for the tenth and twentieth time. Under mortar fire generals inspected the whole line of the front. The men were all filled by the feeling of an offensive, it was amazing how it spread from one to another till it swept the whole front. It seemed as though it was impossible to endure the Germans near Leningrad for a moment longer. They were ripe for destruction. But they would not give up a single trench without stubborn resistance. It would be a trial of strength. But the men of Leningrad had to crush the strength of the enemy.

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Leningrad was startled by a mighty roar like a hurricane sweeping over the whole city. There had been plenty of firing during the siege but such a thunderous, menacing and growing roar had never yet been heard. Several pedestrians

in the streets began looking cautiously about to find out where the shells were falling. But there were no shells. And then everything was clear—it was we who were firing, it was our shells blowing the Germans fortifications sky-high.

A wave of excitement swept the city. People realized that what they had unceasingly dreamed about, had now begun. The voice of the Leningrad guns resounded along the whole front. Guns roared from the front lines, heavy guns blazed from further back, the ships thundered, the forts roared, Kronstadt gave tongue.

The explosions of German shells falling on the southern outskirts of the town were inaudible in the roar of that storm of vengeance. Tons of metal wrecked the German blockhouses, turned guns into scrap metal, cut up the infantry units, shattered dugouts, filled up the trenches. Scraps of barbed wire flew skywards. Minefields became a hell of explosions. Black smoke clouds spread right to the horizon.

The first chain of our tommy-gunners rose to the attack, while the smoke of our shells was still rolling over the ground before them, and they rushed forward at full height with such irresistible force that the Germans broke and fled.

Simonyak's Guards lived up to their reputation. The spirit of the heroes who broke the blockade was reborn in the men. Major-general Trubachov's troops who captured Shlisselburg and earlier thrashed the White-guard Finns at Vuoksa, Major-General Yakutovich's men, those under Major-General Fadeyev—all these tried and seasoned veterans of the Leningrad front engaged in this historic battle, this rout of the German hordes which no fortifications could stem.

The artillerymen received orders to move their guns forward, to the south, three, five, seven kilometres. For two years and a half these guns had stood along the same lines, moving only sideways, and on receiving this order the men felt that they could have carried the guns themselves so great was their pride and happiness.

There is something magical about that thin strip of No Man's Land between our positions and those of the Germans. It was only scouting parties who ever made their way across this stretch of land, dark and pitted with shellholes, studded with minefields and barbed wire. The enemy was right there, living in his dugouts as though he had stubbornly determined to stay for ever. And the silence of this hazardous space, always under fire, seemed to whisper that none could go upright, could walk as he wished, or cross this strip with one determined rush.

And then, suddenly, it happened. At once the mysterious enchantment of No Man's Land and the first enemy trenches was shattered. Grenades flew into enemy dugouts and when men peered through the smoke of the attack they saw that they had passed three lines of trenches. The fourth met the attackers with fierce fire.

Pulling themselves together, the Germans began to put up a furious fight, a fight to the finish. For that matter, there was nowhere for them to flee. Blows rained down on them from all sides. A glow appeared over Peterhof and Strelna. Our tanks had already appeared in Ropsha. Duderhof Height was just in front of us. The mighty battle of Leningrad thundered on.

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The sacred ruins of Peterhof, Pavlovsk, Pushkin, Gatchina rose before the victorious Leningrad warriors, the tragedy of their destruction, the gaping holes, their burnt and shattered walls calling aloud for vengeance. Even those who had never seen them in all their loveliness before the war could not restrain their rage at the sight of what the barbarians had done to these monuments of our past.

Felled trees lay in the ancient park like murdered giants. Fragments of old brocade, velvet and silk were blown about by the wind, amid the clouds of smoke. Pictures and china, trodden by hitlerite boots lay in the dirt of the walks. Headless statues lay in the bushes. Fire was consuming the remains of the houses. Everything was burning that could burn.

All around were German blockhouses, trenches, dugouts, machine-gun nests. But the depth of the defences held no more terror for the attackers. However

many kilometres this monstrous belt might extend, its fate was nevertheless sealed.

Day after day the battle extended further and further southward. The Germans attempted to bombard the city, but these were their last efforts for in an hour the heavy yellow muzzles would be silenced for ever. A few days later they would be seen in the Palace Square—silent, menacing, grim—prisoners of war.

At the same time regiments were moving on the other flank, a fresh bombardment had begun. In that terrible place, the area of continual fighting, among the unfrozen swamps, the peat ditches wreathed with the smoke of turf fires, began the storming of the German fortifications. Time was when the Leningrad people believed that with the fall of the impregnable Mga, all the trials of the blockade would be at an end. This little station, lost in the swamps, became a symbol of the fight for Leningrad. The blockade was broken in quite another way, but Mga has won a grim eternal fame for the fury and stubbornness of the fighting there. Thousands of Germans were drowned in its swamps. Hundreds of thousands of shells sliced through the swamp bushes and tore up the hillocks. The Moika, a small river of which nobody had ever heard before, ran red with blood during the autumn battles of last year.

Mga fell. All the blockhouses along the river Tosno shook and trembled, and the anti-tank ditches along the river bank saw how the Germans fled from the place where they had hung on, tooth and nail, to every hummock of earth. Later we shall learn the details of these battles, now it is enough to know that there are no more Germans along the Neva, none between Shlisselburg and Tosno and even further, while the battle is still going on, spreading westward, south-westward, southward.

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Further and further the battle retreated from Leningrad, fainter and fainter sounded the gun-fire, until at last it became entirely inaudible. And people of Leningrad heard the wireless announcing the Order of the Day to the troops of the Leningrad front. That was on January 27th. It is a day that will go down in the history of the city, in the history of the Great National War, in the history of the world's struggle against fascism.

The city of Leningrad was completely freed from the enemy blockade and the barbarous enemy artillery bombardment. At eight o'clock in the evening, crowds thronged the streets of Leningrad, the squares, the river banks. What words can express their emotions? Who could describe what that moment meant to them? There are no words. All the trials of these years, all they had lived through, rose again before them like terrible ghosts, gloomy, menacing, unbelievable. It all disappeared in the blinding flash of the rockets and the thunder of a historic salute. Three hundred and twenty-four guns thundered forth in honour of the great victory, of the great city.

People laughed and cried with joy, their eyes sparkled as they saw their unconquerable city illuminated by the salute. And the spire of the Peter and Paul fortress, the forts of the old citadel, the embankments, the Admiralty buildings, St. Isaac's Cathedral, the ships on the Neva, the Nevsky Prospect, the whole city was brilliant with these flashes of triumphant joy.

And from that hour, a new period begins in the life of the city when the historian takes his pen to set down the chronological events of this titanic epic. It has become a thing of the past, but yesterday this past still reeked with the smoke of battle, and the city bore fresh wounds and traces of this battle whose like history had never known.

The peace of restoration has set in. But ears still ring with the echoes of the endless firing, eyes hold the picture of unprecedented deeds, and hearts are wrung with the memory of dear ones who are no more, of fallen heroes, memories which inspire men to labour, to new feats for the sake of life, and of the further struggle for our final victory.

January 27th, 1944! This is a date never to be forgotten by the people of Leningrad. And however gloomy and lowering this winter day, for the people of the great city it will always glow brilliantly.

Now one recalls it all: the lines connecting Leningrad with the rest of the country all cut, ships with nowhere to sail, trains with nowhere to go.

But joys do not come singly. And the wave of our offensive is returning these roads to us, one after another. The Northern Railway is already cleared, and trains can come to Leningrad through Kirishi and Mga; the Neva is free, preparations can be made for the spring navigation season, ships can pass from Lake Ladoga to the Gulf of Finland with no thought of danger. And finally, there is the opening of that line whose very name fills the heart with triumph—the Moscow—Leningrad Railway.

This line is still torn up by explosions, its bridges lie in fragments, the stations are in ruins, the sleepers thrown down the embankments, the rails helping to make gun emplacements and anti-tank blocks. But all that does not matter. The line is free! The whistles fo engines will echo over the walls smelling of fresh wood, new rails will bend beneath the weight of heavy goods and passenger trains running along our own old, lovely road from the banks of the river Moskva, from the Moscow Sea to the banks of the Neva, the shores of the Baltic.

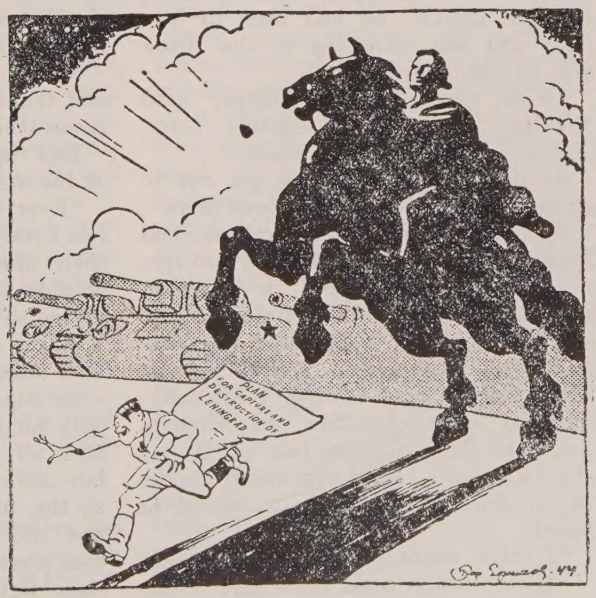
And what a day it will be for the people of Leningrad when they come to the October Station to greet the first through train from Moscow!

Friends will embrace like old comrades-in-arms. And in the streets on which no enemy has ever set foot Moscow and Leningrad people will walk together showing the world the great fraternal bonds tried and tested in the terrible days from which they emerged victorious.

And over the free, indomitable Neva, in the city of Lenin there will be on all lips the name of the friend and leader, victor over the nation's enemies, the liberator of the peoples—that great and beloved name—Stalin! That name will be pronounced with devotion and filial love by all the true sons of our country.

NIKOLAI TIKHONOV

LENINGRAD IS ON THE MARCH



Recall Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman"

Drawing by Boris Yefimov

IVAN NIKULIN, RUSSIAN SEAMAN

The Way

A seaman does not like travelling alone. In fact he cannot stand it. He feels dull when parted from the familiar sailor-blouses and round caps—with no one to swap yarns with of old friends in Kronstadt and Sevastopol or to talk about ships, or slam down the dominoes. . .

Nikulin went from end to end of his coach, but not one sailor could he see among the passengers. Sadly he took his corner seat again.

Hardly had the train slowed down at the station, when Nikulin had already jumped out onto the platform and was walking along beside the train in the secret hope of finding one of his own kind.

He was in luck. From far off he saw a blue-jacket.

"How do!"

"Ah, how do, mate! Where d'ye hail from and where are you bound?"

Sailors need little time to make acquaintance. In five minutes they know each other, in ten they are already old friends. Before the second bell had sounded, Nikulin knew all about his new acquaintance: he was called Vassili, surname Krylov, he had been in hospital and was returning to the Black Sea to the marines.

"Well, what about it, Vassya," said Nikulin. "Get your kit together, mate, and come along to my coach."

At the next station they got out to stretch their legs and met three more—Vassili Klevtsov, Philip Kharchenko and Zakhar Fomichov. And if there are five sailors playing dominoes in a coach, then all the others in the train are sure to find their way there. And that was just what happened. . . soon Nikolai Zhukov had joined the happy company, followed by Serebryakov and Konovalov, and then Nikulin lost count. At every station a round cap would appear in the doorway and a voice would be heard:

"Is this where our blue-jackets are?"

"Here!" would come the reply. "Come in and drop anchor."

And so anchors were dropped until half the coach was filled to bursting, and Nikulin shouted merrily:

"Mates, we could man a ship now!"

"We certainly could!" replied Fomichov. "Twenty-four of us, that's a full crew."

"No!" came Klevtsov's voice. "It's not enough. Twenty-five—that's a full crew. We're one short."

As though in reply to Klevtsov's remark, the door opened and he entered—the twenty-fifth sailor.

"Aha!" he said, when he saw all the sailor-blouses and round caps. "It was a fair wind that blew me here, I see. Had a hunch there were some of our fellows about. . "

He looked about fifty years of age, grey at the temples and silver about the mustache and beard. And as became his years, he had prepared for the journey thoroughly and carefully, not like a heedless lad, any old way, but with everything he was likely to need; in his right hand was a suitcase, in his left, a kettle as big as a bucket and on his back a snugly packed sack.

"Uff!" he said, taking his place on the lower berth beside Konovalov. "Been in a stew. . . How do, my sons!"

"How do, Dad," replied Nikulin, and the word came out so pat that the name stuck to the old sailor.

Dad opened his kettle and sniffed at the steam.

"Everything all right. I made tea before I started out. Let it brew, I thought, then when I get into the coach, I'll be able to have some at once. And now, my sons, hand up your mugs. . ."

When he had poured out the tea, Dad unfastened his sack and pulled out some sugar. First of all he took a piece only for himself, as thrift dictated. But after all, these were sailors sitting round him, his own kind! . . Dad looked round at the blue-jackets in indecision, and the old sailor's feeling for his own took precedence over thrift and everything else. Grunting, he pulled the whole packet out of his sack, emptied it

onto a newspaper and handed a piece to each of the sailors.

Nobody wanted to lag behind Dad, so all began opening their suitcases, sacks and bags. One brought out fat pork, another sausage, a third cheese, and a fourth biscuits. When they had finished tea, Nikulin tipped "Lux" cigarettes into a round tin—twenty-five of them for twenty-five men, so that nobody was left out.

And so they journeyed. By common assent Nikulin was leader, while Dad looked after the commissary. It turned out that he was a supply expert. He understood every kind of goods, and preferred buying wholesale—if it was fried fish, then all four gridles, if eggs—a hundred at a time, if apples or plums—a basketful together with the basket. Kharchenko and Konovalov, the quickest runners, had the job of getting boiling water at the stations.

Vassya Krylov had his assignment too—he was given all the tickets to take care of, and hand over in a bundle to the inspector.

This same Vassya deserves a few words to himself. He had an extraordinary gift for getting to know a girl in the twinkling of an eye. . . Hardly had the train stopped when Vassya was on the platform, and three minutes later he would be chatting merrily away with local girls who had come out to see the train. Within five, he would have his notebook and pencil out of his pocket and be writing down addresses. In seven minutes the bell would ring, the train would start. Vassya would spring onto the moving coach and stand waving his cap from the window until the train had passed the last signal.

The sailors laughed. Zhukov, full of jokes and mischief, teased him unmercifully: With mock sympathy he shook his head and said with a sigh:

"Ah, Vassya, Vassya, I'm sorry for you. You'll never be able to avoid alimony. . ."

"You're a fool and a son-of-a-bitch besides," said Krylov angrily. "It's not that at all. . ."

"What for, then?"

"I like getting letters, and I've no relations of my own. I shall write to these addresses from the front and they'll answer. Now do you understand?"

But Zhukov was not to be silenced.

"Eh, but if you start writing to all those addresses you'll need a special office!"

Then Dad interfered.

"Leave the lad alone, can't you! The fellow's an orphan, can't you get that? Showing your teeth like a grinning monkey. Don't take any notice. Vassya, you tell him where he can go. . ."

A few sharp words followed and with that the matter ended, for among seafaring folks one does not bandy words with one's elders.

The sailors had a great respect for their Dad. Indeed, how could they fail to respect a man who thirty years before had been serving in the squadron torpedo boat of Trubetskoy's flotilla, had approached the Anatolian shores and had a crack at the "Medjidie" and the "Breslau" and had seen with his own eyes the tragedy of the Black Sea fleet in Novorossiisk Bay. Dad told them how his father had served in the navy and how his grandfather, a sailor in a Guards crew, had received the St. George Cross in the defence of Sevastopol.

"It's from him, from Grandad, that we've got our name, Zakhozhev [1]," said Dad. "My grandad came back from the Crimean war with a cross on his chest and his discharge and a hundred rubles in his pocket and nowhere to take it all to. He was an orphan. He came into a village and stopped at the well, he wanted a drink. He looked—and there was a young woman with a bucket. A fine wench she was, with a white skin and dimples. Grandad was never backward with the girls, so 'Give me a drink from your bucket,' says he. Well, one word led to another. 'Where's your husband?' he asked. 'He's gone to the war. . . And he hasn't come back.' 'I'm sorry for you,' said Grandad. 'It's hard working the farm without a man in the house, and it's dull as well.'

"The young woman was all in tears by this time. 'Don't tell me! I lie worrying all night. I never close an eye till morning.' Then Grandad says to her, he says: 'Look here. I'm a homeless man, but at farming, well, I'm no worse than the next man. And as for anything else, you'll find me better at it. I've got my bounty money, a hundred

[1] From "zakhodit"—to come in.

rubles—enough for a couple of cows and maybe a horse as well. Take me along to help you with your farm.' And what with his brown eyes and dark whiskers and fair hair, and the cross shining on his chest and his ribbons fluttering—was there a woman born who could have resisted him? To cut the tale short, they agreed, and settled down together. And my grandad stayed in the village for the rest of his days. The neighbours called him the newcomer, and that's where my name came from—Zakhozhev."

The train whistled as it approached a station. This was the last station—all passenger traffic stopped here, only military trains went on. The sailors would have to make their way to the front as best they could.

The station, enveloped in darkness, was filled with military and naval men returning from hospital, from leave, or from special missions. They hurled themselves at every train making for the front. The whistling of the engine, the grinding of buffers, the stamping of hundreds of boots, shouting, threats and swearing all blended in the darkness into one discordant and excited roar. Nikulin looked, listened and shook his head.

"No, mates, we'll never get anywhere this way. If we try to get through each for himself, we'll sit here for three days. . . We must operate as a commando. . . Fall in!"

The men fell in and numbered off.

"Now listen," said Nikulin earnestly. "We're a unit, see? We're all from the same hospital. I'm the corporal. And now come to the transport officer and demand that we be sent on at once."

The trick worked. Seeing twenty-five young fellows in naval uniform the transport officer did not stop to argue.

"Dispatch these at once," he told his assistant.

A goods' train was being made up to be sent south. There were several empty trucks and the sailors immediately took possession of one of them.

"In general, we're not sending anyone in this train," said the assistant, "but as you're a unit we're making an exception. At the same time you can guard the train on the way. The only pity is that you're unarmed."

"That doesn't matter!" replied Nikulin cheerily. "We'll fight with our bare hands if need be!"

And little did he think how prophetic his words were destined to be. . .

To the Front! To the Front!

How fragrant is the Kuban steppe at night! Nikulin and Fomichov, sitting in the open door of the truck with their legs dangling, breathed deeply of this delicate, melancholy perfume of field flowers and drying grass. The other seamen had long since lain down to sleep.

"And there in the hospital I got a letter," Fomichov said speaking with some difficulty in a dull voice. "An ordinary envelope, just like any other, yet my heart sank. I was afraid to open it. I somehow felt there was something bad in it. . ."

"That happens," Nikulin agreed. "As though you could smell tears."

"Not tears, but blood," Fomichov corrected him sternly. "If it were only tears, I could have stood it. But. . . blood. . ."

He was silent for a moment, listening to the rapid beat of the wheels. Autumn stars were shining in the transparent dark heavens over the steppe, sometimes hidden by clouds of smoke from the engine.

"Blood!" repeated Fomichov, with hard emphasis. "In that letter my wife had written that the Germans had killed Kolya and Ksyusha, my two kiddies, and had mutilated her. She'll never be a real person again. And that's what was in that letter! . ."

They sat silently again. Something flashed by. . . perhaps a roadside halt, or some shed, it was impossible to tell in the darkness. A bridge rang sharply beneath the train, then the wheels resumed their former song.

"How do you mean to live now?" asked Nikulin.

"I don't know," replied Fomichov. "I'm all burning inside, till I can hardly stand it. Day and night it burns. I'm a strong fellow. I can throw three poods with one hand, but for all that, there was never a more peaceful chap than I was. Like a calf. . . Maybe some drunk would try something on, but I'd let him alone, get off to the side, although I could have knocked him out. But since I got that letter—I just don't

know myself. I've grown like a mad dog!"

"That's only natural," said Nikulin thoughtfully. "There are a lot of people like that nowadays. . ."

Leaning back on the truck and shielding himself from the wind with one shoulder, he lit a cigarette. The sparks whirled away and were extinguished in an instant.

"Now I have only one idea," Fomichov began again. "I can't think of anything but the front, to get to grips with them, the Germans. Eh, just at them! I've learned to understand all kinds of fighting tricks too. You know, it's surprising—before that letter I hadn't any skill at all. When I was in hospital there was an infantry captain, a fine fellow. He'd say to me: 'Fomichov, here's a tactical problem: those are the flanks, here are your firing points, there is a mill, and there, maybe a gulley. The enemy has a regiment, and you have two platoons, and you're attacking. What must you do, how will you begin?' And I'd stare and stare and not be able to think of a thing. But after that letter there was only one thing in my head—how to kill the Fritzes better. I'd lie there and think: 'I'm at the front. Three tanks, say, are making for me, and they've got a machine-gun firing from the side. To the right there's a hollow. . .' I'd shut my eyes, and I'd see it all as plain as though I were there! And like a flash I'd see what I had to do, so as not to let one of them get off alive. I couldn't count how many manoeuvres like that I've thought out. I'd lie there fighting tanks and motor-cycles and cavalry. Once I met the captain again in the garden, and he started off again with his problems: 'Work it out, Fomichov,' he says. And I worked it out and told him at once—he was struck all of a heap. 'Well, here's another.' And I got that one, too. He was just as surprised. 'That may not be according to all the rules of tactics,' says he, 'but it's a good wheeze. You should go to an officers' training course,' says he, 'you've got a natural gift for fighting.' He thought it was born in me, he didn't know that Fritzes taught it me when they buried Kolya and Ksyusha in the ground and mutilated my wife. That's what's tormenting me all the time! And now I'm going to the front with the one idea—to settle a hundred Fritzes. When I've got a hundred, then I can die, but I mustn't die till then. My count's a hundred!"

"That's right," Nikulin agreed. "A hundred—that's a good round figure."

"And what do you intend?" asked Fomichov.

"I?" laughed Nikulin. "My idea is that the more I settle accounts with, the better. Make them keep out of Russia for the rest of their lives and teach their children and grandchildren the same. But I'm not thinking of going under myself—I want to study after the war. I'm going to be a military engineer."

Fomichov in his turn approved of Nikulin's plan and after sitting there a little longer, lay down on the fresh straw beside Dad, further back in the truck. Left alone, Nikulin sat there letting the fresh breeze blow on his face, looking up into the sky with its autumn stars and faint shimmer of the Milky Way. His thoughts wandered, lucidly taking in everything—himself, Fomichov, and Russia. Russia, after all, was his own native country, not just the space of land lying between the Pacific and the Black Sea, but millions of lives past, millions of lives in the present and more millions in the future. There had been forefathers, and there would be descendants. Life, he felt, was a river, a flowing, unbroken current. This simple thought moved Nikulin deeply, because hidden within it was yet another thought—of his own immortality. He had received life from his father and would pass it on to his son—that meant, there was no break! . . A warm feeling of happiness flooded him. "That's how it is," he whispered. "Where is the break? There is none!" Then Nikulin's thoughts turned to the Germans, and he laughed in scorn. "They want to make an end of Russia. . . But how can they make an end of it, if even one man cannot be wiped off the earth—he lives in his children all the same!"

Dawn was already breaking in the east, a damp, misty dawn. Nikulin could feel the dew on the collar of his sailor-blouse. The nearby trees and bushes seemed dim and illusory and beyond them a swirling white mist swayed and eddied, like the sea itself. But in the lilac heavens a bright arc swung ever higher, and suddenly, piercing the fog, a blinding beam struck full in Nikulin's eyes. The

sun had risen. Nikulin even laughed, as he cried:

"How do, my friend, come at last, have you?"

Sensing the coming of morning, the other sailors woke up; stretching themselves, they came to the open door of the truck with loud yawns. A signal hut and a young girl holding a green flag standing at the crossing loomed up. The sailors shouted to her and waved their caps and she replied laughing with a wave of her flag. And when hut and girl had disappeared round the curve of the track, Zhukov, screwing up his black gipsy eyes, teased Krylov for a long time.

"What were you about, Vassya, letting a chance of an address go by? What a pity you didn't think in time to stop the train!"

Dad was the last to get up. As became a man of his years, a serious and businesslike individual, he regarded girls and other beauties of nature with some contempt, considering them useless foolishness, unworthy of his notice.

"If only we had some hot tea now," he said longingly. "Bustle, boys, get your sacks open, time for breakfast."

But at this moment something happened. With screaming brakes the train slowed down and stopped. Nikulin leaned out of the door.

"What's up?" he asked the guard hurrying past.

"They say, the line's torn up."

With a sudden movement Nikulin slammed the truck door to, leaving only a thin chink. When he turned to his comrades his face told them everything, without need of words.

"Germans?" asked Dad.

A burst of tommy-gun fire answered him. Yes, it was the Germans! Through the chink of the door Nikulin could see them running out of a copse, shouting and firing wildly.

The First Battle

Nikulin's eyes flashed over his comrades' faces, and he realized that if the bewildered numbness that had caught them continued for another half minute, they would all be lost.

The Germans were noisily busying themselves about the train.

"Lie down!" Nikulin commanded the sailors. "Not a sound! As soon as the door opens—make a jump at the swine, throttle 'em! Whoever's the first to grab a gun, get in front and go for the bastards!"

They all lay down and froze into immobility. The noise came nearer, separate words in German could already be distinguished. Suddenly Fomichov stood up.

"What's up with you?" whispered Nikulin.

"A trick!" replied Fomichov in an excited whisper. "I've thought of a trick. They should be enticed into the truck, we can deal with them better here!"

And he began swiftly covering the sailors with straw.

He finished just in time. Loud talk in German could be heard right beside the truck, then the door was flung open.

"Russ, surrender!" came a hateful, foreign voice. "Come out here!"

Not a sound in reply, not a rustle. Grunting, the Germans climbed up into the truck, first two, followed by another pair. The others waited on the line by the open door.

Right in front of him Nikulin saw the thick legs of a German in puttees and clumsy boots, their backs rusty looking and dirty. With a sharp movement he grabbed a leg and gave it a swift tug towards him. With a short cry, the German fell face downwards and the same instant his tommy-gun was in Krylov's hands. Fomichov jumped up and with a short drive from the shoulder his fist crashed onto the temple of the nearest German. Blood spurted from the fellow's nose and mouth and he collapsed, killed on the spot by that terrible blow. Zhukov and Serebryakov engaged the third German in a rough and tumble, while Dad got the fourth in a corner—jammed him against the wall and seized his tommy-gun with the left hand while with the right he hacked at him with a knife again and again. All this had happened in an instant and the next moment they were making for the Germans crowding confusedly round the truck. Flayed with lead from their own guns in the sailors' hand, the Germans fell back, melted away, while our lads poured out of the doors, a shouting, whistling, laughing torrent. Seeing the Russian sailors before them, those black devils, that striped death, the Germans took to their heels.

The sailors dashed to the dead bodies and grabbed their guns. Now the Germans found their own grenades, bursting among them. Heavy machine-guns began to rattle from the bushes and might have checked the daredevil attack had not Vassili Krylov, who had been delayed near the train, seen ten Germans dragging machine-guns into an open iron pullman in order to take the sailors in the rear. Grenade in hand Krylov made for the pullman. An explosion, a cloud of steel-coloured smoke. When it cleared away Krylov was standing in front of the machine-gun crew with two sub-machine-guns in his hands. Three of the Germans were already dead, and the rest raised their hands.

"Zhukov! Fomichov! Here, this way!"

The fight lasted for half an hour—an unprecedented fight of twenty-five unarmed sailors against a large German detachment armed to the teeth. Sixty-eight Germans were laid low, their marauding days over, twelve surrendered and the rest dispersed.

The sailors had not a single casualty in this fight, if we except Fomichov's thumb, which he put out in that tremendous shoulder drive at the German's temple. . .

In the Ravine

Once you've taken the helm, you have to steer, and if you've taken command during a battle, you have to keep it afterwards.

The guard in charge of the train came to Nikulin with the engine driver—a scowling old man with smoke grey whispers and a bandage on his bare arm, just above the elbow, visible under his greasy jacket.

"Comrade commander," said the guard, indicating the prisoners. "What shall we do with the train? Run it back?"

"Why back?" said Nikulin in surprise. "The front's waiting for shells, for cartridges, and you wanting to go back! You've got your orders, carry them out!"

"The line's up."

"It'll be repaired. How many have you in the train's crew?"

"Not many, they can't manage it."

"We'll get some more of our people. The collective farmers from the village'll help."

"That's good sense," said the driver, his whiskers moving like those of a cat. He was a broad-shouldered, thick-set man with a dark face that looked as though the coal dust had eaten into it for years.

"But it's eagles you've got, comrade commander!" he cried. "Not lads, but tigers! They'd drink nitrous acide, they'd eat the devil's flesh without winking! I'll never forget it to my dying day!"

The guard left for the village to collect peasants to help repair the track. Nikulin called Dad.

"Take two of the sailors, and search all the killed. All documents, letters and other papers bring to me. Collect all weapons, ammunition and instruments."

He had purposely addressed Dad formally, according to all the regulations in order to impress the driver. Dad understood, stood to attention, and repeated the order military style.

"Right! Take two sailors, search all the killed. All documents, letters and other papers to be brought to you. Collect all weapons, ammunition and instruments!"

"Carry on."

With the precision of an old serviceman Dad turned about, with a click of the heels.

Nikulin glanced at the driver out of the corner of his eye. The old man was impressed, he frowned, grunted and shook his head.

"A fine thing it is, when men have that sort of pluck and know their duty at the same time!" he said. "I understand it all, I was in the first German war myself, I've had military training and discipline. I was a NCO in the 12th Grenadier regiment."

He went to his engine, while Nikulin, looking after him, thought:

"A great thing, discipline! You can see how people notice everything!"

After sending part of the sailors off to help repair the track, Nikulin and Fomichov started interrogating the prisoners. Krylov had been in his second course of study and knew a little German, while luckily there was a German who could manage a few words of Russian.

Fomichov came up grey in the face, and looked at the Germans.

"Why are you here?" Nikulin cut him sternly. "Didn't you hear the order—to repair the track?"

The result of the interrogation radically changed Nikulin's plans. It appeared that the German detachment which had

attacked the train were paratroops with orders to cut our communications. The prisoner said that in a ravine not far from where they had landed, they had hidden parachutes, machine-guns and a radio transmitter. The remains of the detachment which had been dispersed, could make use of this equipment.

By midday the track was repaired, and the guard invited the sailors to take their seats.

"No," said Nikulin. "We shall be busy here for a while. You go on, and good luck to you!"

He gave the engine driver a short report to hand on to the transport officer in charge of the next station. They took leave of each other warmly. The driver even had tears in his eyes as he embraced all the sailors.

When the train was already far off and the sound of its wheels barely audible, the sailors heard three long-drawn-out whistles.

"A greeting from the old man," said Klevtsov, moved.

. . . The forest enfolded the sailors in a bright, luminous silence, filled with the fresh strong perfume of fallen leaves and damp, for rain had fallen recently. The mossy earth silently cushioned the passing foot. The oaks were still green, the maples had barely begun to redden, but the limes were a mass of gold and were generously strewing the earth with their leaves. The tomtits were practising their autumn notes, the tapping of the woodpecker spoke too of the fading year; in a dell, a mountain ash glowed crimson in the slanting sunrays, brought here to a strange land by some unknown chance. Starlings fussed and clamoured round it as they pecked the bitter berries.

The sailors had to make their way to the ravine through thick growths of hawthorns, spindle trees, briar and nut trees. At the very bottom, under some fallen branches, they found parachutes, cases of munitions, machine-guns, grenades, rockets, two portable transmitters and a bag of landing signals.

Nikulin pondered, pursing his lips.

"A hundred and six parachutists," he said. "You hear, Fomichov? Eight machine-guns. Fomichov, you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," replied Fomichov. He had busied himself with the wild rose bushes and had already eaten half the hips from one of them.

"Well, and what do you think about it?"

"Simple enough," replied Fomichov, popping hip after hip into his mouth. "There were a hundred and six men. We put an end to sixty-eight of them, took twelve prisoner, there are twenty-six left of them. That's all."

"I'm not asking you to do sums for me!" snapped Nikulin. "Got a professor of mathematics here, it seems! I could reckon that out without your help. Stop fooling around with those bushes, I'm talking seriously. I'm asking you about machine-guns!"

"And what about the machine-guns?"

"You dolt! How many are there here? Eight. And they had four there at the station. That makes twelve. A fair number for a hundred men—eh?"

"A lot," Fomichov agreed. "What's your idea, were there more of them? But if so, where are the other parachutes?"

"Blockhead!" said Nikulin. "There were a hundred and six of them, but there are going to be more. I fancy Fritzes are thinking of dropping another group, maybe more than one. . . What do you think they've got the landing signals for? Now do you get me?"

Fomichov's eyes glowed.

"Fine to get at them!"

"We shall get at them!"

There at the bottom of the ravine, Nikulin collected the sailors and outlined the situation.

"You see, mates, what we've run into! Maybe we've got some hard fighting ahead. We'd better organize our detachment properly. I take command, you, Klevtsov, are commissar, and I appoint Zakhar Fomichov chief of staff."

Fomichov took fright.

"You're crazy, comrade commander! How can I be chief of staff when I've never been near the staff? I'm an ordinary blue-jacket."

"And what am I?" replied Nikulin. "And what's Klevtsov? It's all in the day's work in war-time, lad. If necessary you may not only have to be chief of staff, but doctor or engineer, and you'll turn to and do it. Kindly take over your duties, Comrade Fomichov, without further discussion."

Amid general applause Nikulin appointed Dad treasurer and the commissary general. Fomichov immediately handed over to him a leather purse found in the ravine, stuffed with Soviet money.

Evidently pleased at the honour done him Dad nevertheless felt it only decent to grumble a little.

"Can't stand fussing with official funds," he growled. "Never anything but bother with it. How much is there here?"

"The devil alone knows," replied Fomichov carelessly. "Count it and report."

"Eh, no," said Dad, raising an admonitory finger. "I've never heard of such a thing, receiving official funds without counting them. If we were doing it properly, there should be a commission —you, me and two more members. And then an official paper should be made out," he added, anxious to impress the sailors with his knowledge of financial transactions. "One hands the money over and signs, another receives it and signs too, and the other members sign below. . ."

"Is that all you want?" Nikulin interrupted impatiently. "Maybe you'd like a fireproof safe, a typewriter and a couple of clerks?"

Offended, Dad went off sulkily with Fomichov and sat down to count the money. He counted it with a tedious slowness, checking every package, while Fomichov sighed, fidgeted, looked around him, but nevertheless stuck it. He had to do it, that was all there was to it.

Meanwhile Nikulin was discussing matters with his commissar. They decided that Klevtsov should remain in the ravine for the present, in case the Germans should come for their machine-guns, while Nikulin and three of the men went through the forest outskirts where the paratroops had landed to see how things were there.

"Quiet! A plane!" said Kharchenko. He raised himself on his elbow, his eyes starting out of his head.

"No, you're imagining it," Nikulin replied, listening.

"I had the best hearing of anyone on the ship," said Kharchenko. "I don't make mistakes like that. It's coming this way. . . Coming from the north."

And sure enough, Nikulin and the other sailors soon caught the faint sound of engines. And Kharchenko, tense as a spring, like a good pointer, seemed to be listening not only with his ears but with his whole body.

"A German!" he said confidently, firmly. „A scout. A Henschel. To our right, flying low."

Kharchenko had made no mistake, it really was a Henschel.

The scout swept in a wide circle over the outskirts of the forest, then over the forest itself.

Nikulin had a brain wave.

"The landing signals! Quick!" he commanded. "In two minutes!"

While the sailors were spreading out the landing signals, Nikulin was in a fever of impatience. Suppose the plane had gone off altogether, didn't come back, didn't see the signals? But once more the sound of engines approached and soon the shadow again swept swiftly over the slopes of the far hills— the scout had returned.

He dipped his wings to show that he had understood the signals, and after flying over twice more, swept off westwards, straight into the setting sun.

Junkers From the West!

"What do you think of that?" Nikulin asked his chief of staff.

"I think he's gone to fetch the others."

"Exactly. Pipe all hands on deck. Get all the German arms here from the ravine! Leave the parachutes where they are for the present."

Within a quarter of an hour Nikulin's orders had been carried out. He called the commissar and chief of staff.

"Anything may happen," he said. "They may drop paratroops, or they may send transport planes. If it's paratroops, attack them when they're still in the air. If it's planes, don't shoot until they land. The detachment will divide into four groups. I take command of the first, the second—Klevtsov, the third—Fomichov, and the fourth—Zhukov. Two machine-guns to each group. We'll encircle the whole area marked out by the landing signals. Test the machine-guns beforehand!"

With a swift step, almost running, he examined the ground, and gave each group its part. For himself he chose a position in some hayricks.

A faint distant hum was barely audible when Kharchenko, his eyes burning with excitement, reported:

"Transports, Junkers-52. Coming from the west."

. . . With a deep-throated roar the huge Junkers circled above the steppe. Lying by their machine-guns, the sailors waited.

The first plane landed, and with whirring propellor and swaying tail, taxied straight towards the ricks. Before it had halted, the second and third had also landed. In that same instant, eight machine-gun barrels poured a fiery stream at them from four different quarters. The bullets rattled on the machines, piercing the wings and fuselage, the petrol tanks, the engines. One of the Junkers, which had not yet had time to come to a stop, began to gather speed with the object of taking off again, but a long burst sought and found its engine, the very heart of the plane, and a reddish-yellow tongue of flame began to hover over the Junkers.

That was how the fight began.

Nikulin's group fired at point blank range from machine- and tommy-guns at the plane which had halted at the ricks, setting the engine and the fuselage alight. Wrapped in flames, the tommy-gunners sprang out, only to fall, mown down by the withering fire.

But there was one thing which the sailors had not anticipated: in addition to tommy-gunners, the Junkers were bringing light tanks by air.

Treads rattling, a low, flat, broad tank crawled out from under the plane and gathering speed, made straight for Nikulin's position, scorching the ricks with a hail of fire. Had Nikulin hesitated, lost his head or shown the slightest indecision, all would have been lost! But from the very moment he had assumed the command, his thoughts, feelings and will seemed to have taken on a new intensity, concentrated to the uttermost; he found the right course, took decisions instantaneously, as though someone were prompting him.

"If I'm killed, take over the command of the group," he told Krylov.

Swiftly, but calmly and without fumbling, he took two bundles of grenades and ran lightly forward to meet the tank. Bullets were singing their deadly song around him, but not the faintest shadow of fear touched him, he never felt even the slightest alarm for his own safety—on the contrary, his heart was so light that he might even have laughed aloud if in these seconds there had been one free for laughter.

With a mighty swing he hurled the bundle and immediately fell prone, to avoid splinters. One tread flew to all sides with the explosion, and the tank stuck, turning on its own axis, churning up the soil. The second bundle fell accurately in the tower and the tank ceased firing.

Gay and excited, cheeks burning as though he had just swallowed a good glass of spirits, Nikulin returned to the ricks.

Farewell, My Friends!

Klevtsov opened fire at the moment when the wheels of the second Junkers touched ground. Bullets riddled the body of the plane, the Junkers staggered, the right wing rearing into the air while the left ploughed deep furrows in the soil. The blow had been so deadly, that, as it afterwards turned out, the airmen had been killed on the spot and the tank suspended beneath the fuselage put out of commission.

But the tommy-gunners in the cabin were still unhurt. Several Germans jumped out and fell prone, firing to cover the others as they emerged. The commissar ordered Konovalov and Serebryakov to blow up plane and fascists together.

But the sailors could not crawl near enough. Konovalov was the first to slump to the ground, shot through the head, and then five paces from him Serebryakov was also killed. The commissar saw it all from his shelter.

"The swine!" he said through set teeth. "They've killed the lads. Grenades here!"

Flattened out, the commissar crawled between the hummocks towards the plane, met by a whining, hissing hail of bullets. His cap flew off, whisked away by a bullet, his field satchel was cut as though by a knife. Two bullets scorched his shoulder, two more lodged in his legs. Overcoming the pain and deadly weakness, the commissar crawled doggedly forward and forward. One more bullet in the side, a mortal wound. With his last strength, as his scalding blood poured out, soaking into the grass and soil, the commissar raised himself to his knees and hurled the grenades beneath the Junkers.

...The sailors were buried in the village churchyard, on a bare hillside whence the whole steppe could be seen for many miles around. It was a clear, cold day, with a gusty north wind whipping the rare willows, and whirling dead leaves in an autumn dance over the earth.

The sailors dug a deep grave for their comrades. The collective-farm carpenter made the coffins, and somewhere or other, Dad had found some scarlet cloth to cover the lids; he it was too who prepared the grave-stone—a large stone slab with an inscription chiselled out.

Many collective farmers attended the funeral, and the local teacher brought the school-children. The commander's speech was a short one:

"We are burying our comrades who started the battle together with us. In this battle we were the victors, although the enemy had incomparably superior numbers and arms. He had tommy-guns, machine-guns, grenades, tanks and aircraft. But we were victorious because we were fighting for the right, for our sacred cause, for the Soviet people, for our country! In the fight for honour and freedom, for the happiness of the people, our dear comrades Klevtsov, Konovalov and Serebryakov met their deaths. Eternal shall be their memory and their fame, while for the enemy there awaits vengeance and death! And you, children," turning to the school-children, "when you grow up, raise a fine memorial on this grave. They died for your happiness, for your future!"

He approached the bodies, and laid on the breast of each his cap, carefully arranging the ribbons.

"Fill in the graves!" he ordered.

Hammers rang, then clumps of earth thudded dully on the lids of the coffins. Swiftly the mound rose over the grave. The sailors erected the stone with its inscription and fired three volleys.

From the churchyard the seamen went straight to the nearest railway halt. Nikulin was in a hurry, for there were confused, alarming rumours from all sides. Carts were already passing along the roads laden with simple household goods and drawn by horses, oxen and sometimes by cows. In the villages through which they passed they would often see a cottage with windows and doors boarded up. Nikulin recognized this dismal picture; it meant that the enemy was near.

"There's one thought that's worrying me," he told his chief of staff, Fomichov. "Those air-borne troops smell suspicious to me. If it was simply a wrecking group, then why the tanks? What if they're driving a wedge into our front somewhere nearby?"

"I've been thinking the same thing," Fomichov admitted. "If they brought tanks, it wasn't for nothing."

"What for, then?"

"Well, comrade commander, let's think it out. Is the front line far off?"

"The devil alone knows where it runs. Maybe a hundred kilometres, and maybe thirty."

"And I think that it's more like thirty," said Fomichov. "Did you examine the transmitting sets there in the ravine? No? Well, I did, and I understand something about all that. Both of them were ultra-short-wave sets, for short distances. Not more than twenty-five or thirty kilometres. Now do you smell a rat?"

With a grim laugh, Fomichov added:

"We'll look nice if we walk right into Fritz's mouth."

"We shan't," replied Nikulin. "Their teeth aren't sharp enough to chew us up. When we get to the halt we'll have to find out how things are. We'll telegraph some headquarters or other."

"They told me at the collective farm," Fomichov recalled, "that there had been no trains for two days past."

Tikhon Spiridonovich

The halt was silent, deserted, empty—an ordinary steppe halt with a low earth platform and fence smothered in acacias. On every side stretched the grey steppe—the depressing autumn steppe, making the heart ache with its desolation.

"No, they weren't spinning yarns in the collective farm," said Fomichov, looking at the thin yellowish coating on the polished surface of the rails. "There hasn't been a train for a long time."

They found the station master in his office. He was a tall man, his freckled face unshaven, and some fragments of straw and feathers in his tousled red hair; and he was busy with a strange job, incongruous in these days—filling cartridges for a hunting gun.

"How do," said Nikulin politely. "May we come in?"

The station master assented gloomily.

Nikulin began the conversation tactfully, diplomatically.

"Tell me please, have you any news of the train which passed through here three days ago? The one the Germans attacked?"

"I have news," replied the station master. "And what has it to do with you?"

"We are those same sailors who defended it."

There was an immediate change\ the station master's gloom disappeared completely. He ran into the neighbouring room, brought out two chairs, shook hands with his guests heartily and made them sit down, at the same time introducing himself as Tikhon Spiridonovich Valkov.

He was a queer, amusing fellow, this Tikhon Spiridonovich Valkov, his whole face, neck and hands were so thickly covered with freckles that even in his light-grey eyes, around the pupil, Nikulin could see brown specks. He could not calm his joyful excitement about his visitors, and the whole time kept fussily moving about, now combing his hair, now ruffling it with his fingers again, cracking his finger joints, moving the inkwell, pulling the lobe of his ear or biting his lips. At the same time, he turned out to be a practical person, and answered the sailors' questions with military brevity and accuracy. Yes, the train which they had successfully defended from the Germans had passed through safely and one might assume that it had already arrived at its destination. Were there any trains running? No, none. Traffic had stopped two days previously. Connections had been severed in both directions simultaneously.

"They say that the line's cut both to the north and the south," said the station master. "That would look as though we're in pincers. Only I don't believe it," he hastened to add, just to be on the safe side.

"You're wrong not to believe it," remarked Nikulin. "If traffic has stopped and connections are cut in both directions that means that there's something wrong."

"Yes, of course... One can expect anything. And you see I'm getting ready." The station master nodded at the cartridges.

"You mean you are for the partisans?"

"Where else? Stop here to serve the Germans, disgrace myself that way? Stop here, and then after the war, what would I have to say for myself? I know my way about, I look ahead," the station master laughed. "I reckon out what I've got to do; look out for two years ahead."

Nikulin and Fomichov laughed with him.

Quite unexpectedly for himself, Nikulin decided, if anything happened, to take this tall, amusing red-head into his detachment.

The door opened and Kharchenko entered.

"Comrade commander, I can hear a kind of hum. Something like a train."

FD-1242

In an instant the sailors and the station master were out on the platform. Nikulin knelt down and laid his cheek to the cold rails. A distinct hum could be heard from distant wheels. There could be no doubt of it—a train was approaching. But who was in that train—their own people or the Germans?

"Bring up the machine-guns!" Nikulin ordered. "All to arms!"

The detachment took up its positions in the ditch near the track. Only the station master remained standing on the platform.

Five minutes later an engine dashed out of the deep cutting—alone, with no train. It was racing along at full speed, trailing a low-lying scarf of grey smoke. The station master ran to meet it, waving his red flag. The sailors also dashed out, running onto the track.

Blueish sparks spurted from beneath the brakeblocks as the engine halted before the station wreathed in clouds of steam, sweating, giving off a dry heat, its connecting rods and shafts shiny with oil. The boiler rumbled and shook with the force of the steam.

Nikulin, Fomichov and Tikhon Spiridonovich approached the engine. The driver jumped out to meet them—a fair-headed young fellow with an unfastened shirt, and smudges of coal dust and oil on his sunburnt face.

"Where are you from?"

"Got away from the Germans! Slipped right through their fingers!" replied the driver with a tense, excited gaiety. "I never hoped to escape—it was a miracle. Alyokha!" he shouted into the cabin. "Come out here!"

White teeth shining in his blackened face, the stoker Alyokha appeared, and unhurriedly descended the iron steps. He looked very much like a Kalmuk, with his black wiry hair, his slanting eyes set wide apart and his upturned nose.

The driver told the sailors that that morning air-borne German troops had captured a large depot fifty kilometres

south of the halt, and only this one engine, FD-1242, had managed to get away. Actually, it was Alyokha who was to thank for it, for scenting something brewing, he had not left the engine for two days, keeping steam up all the time. They had to stop twice on the way on account of a bullet hole through the tender and choked pipes, that was why they had come so late.

"We're three here, there's a passenger," said the driver. "Marussya, what are you sitting there for? Not shy, are you? See how many fine young men there are here!"

"Right away!" sounded a girl's voice from the cabin. "I'm filthy dirty—all coal dust."

"We picked her up on the way," the driver explained, lowering his voice. "We looked out and saw her running along the track carrying a bundle, getting away from the Germans. Well, we were sorry for her, and took her up onto the engine. She's called Marussya, her surname's Kryukova."

Just at that moment she looked out of the cabin. The sailors greeted her with good-humoured applause, and shouts of "Bravo, Marussya!" Confused, she blushed and began to tidy her hair.

Zhukov winked at Krylov, and nudged him.

"Don't miss a chance, Vassya! See what a girl we have here—a real princess!"

Marussya was really pretty enough, with her ash-coloured hair, saucily upturned nose and warm brown eyes under arched black brows. A dozen hands were immediately stretched out to her with cigarettes, sweets and apples. But there was no chance for much rivalry; the commander threw a stern glance around, and all fell silent.

Nikulin continued his conversation with the driver.

"Then you think that perhaps there may be a chance to slip through to the north?"

"I don't know. Can't answer for anything... We'll try, never any harm in trying, they say."

"Well, why not," said Nikulin. "Then we'll try it together with you."

"Good enough!" agreed the driver. "The more the merrier, especially if we have to fight our way through."

Hollow-cheeked and sad, Tikhon Spiridonovich approached Nikulin.

"Well, good-bye. And good luck. Give it the Germans!"

"And you?" asked Nikulin.

"I'm stopping here... I've no right to desert the station..."

Cut off!

Crazy, rocketing speed—Nikulin was reminded of a torpedo cutter. The heavy many-ton engine seemed hardly to touch the rails but rather to slide over them, borne along by its own momentum.

On the way the reason why the communications had been cut became clear—in several places the telegraph poles had been sawn through and torn down for several dozen yards—the work of the German paratroops.

A station came into sight; but here they could learn nothing. Further on, however, there was a building for men working on the line, and a man carrying a red flag came running out to meet the engine. He told them that he had heard the Germans were no more than fifteen kilometres away along this line. There was nobody else in the building, he said, all the men had gone, and he, a linesman, had been left there with his wife and three children. The youngest was ill—where could he go with a family like that?

They proceeded further, the driver going slowly, carefully, so as to be able to reverse at any moment. Nikulin stood on the iron steps, leaning out as far as he could, holding the handrail.

Four kilometres before the next station there came a sharp rise. The engine puffed and choked with the effort. First of all a water tower showed above the dark, frowning crest, then came the bare pole bearing the red and white shoulder of a semaphore, and finally Nikulin saw the station itself—a yellow building with white framed windows. The engine slowed down still more—now it was crawling almost silently, as though stealing along.

"Make a dash through or not?" asked the driver.

"Why, what's up?" replied Nikulin.

"If we go through, and the Germans block it, they'll have us in a sack. Then we'll be done for."

"No sign of them here, anyway," said Nikulin. "Better stop, all the same. We'll send out scouts just to be on the safe side."

But they did not need to send out scouts. Sharply, deafeningly, a machine-gun spoke up. Nikulin sprang into the front platform of the engine. He could see Germans running along the line towards it, and at the side, behind a pile of sleepers, a group of soldiers were busy bringing out a light anti-tank gun.

Nikulin gave orders to turn the machine-gun on the anti-tank gun, while ten tommy-guns pumped lead in the same direction, driving the gun crew from the sleepers and forcing them to hug the ground. Meanwhile, the driver had swung the lever over, and the engine was already running backward, steadily gathering speed.

"Behind! Look behind!" Nikulin heard the agitated voice of the driver, and turned. A chill seemed to pass over his whole body, to freeze his heart—five Germans holding grenades were running to cut off the engine. It was a matter of seconds—would the Germans get there in time or not? From the side platforms and the tender, the sailors were firing at them from their tommy-guns, but at such speed it was difficult to take aim.

"Lie down!" Nikulin ordered, his voice ringing out above the roar of wheels and the hissing of steam.

The Germans failed to reach their objective by fifteen metres, their grenades burst fifteen metres from the track, raising dark clouds of smoke, their splinters rattling against the sides of the tender. The gun roared, but the engine had already passed the semaphore, after that the slope began, and the saving hollow lay blue in the dusk.

Again the mad rush started. The Germans shifted their fire to the line, hoping to tear it up and block the engine. Probably they were in too great a hurry, for the shells fell wide, far from the track, and the engine dashed safely out of the danger zone.

"Phew! Got through!" said Fomichov, wiping the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. "Looked as though we were done for. Our luck was in!"

Marussya's Tears

A low reddish moon was already sending its rays through the mist enveloping the steppe when the engine drew up at the familiar halt, trailing its streamer of dark smoke. Tikhon Spiridonovich joyfully ran to meet Nikulin.

"Well, what have you heard there, along the line?"

"The line's cut. The Germans may be here any moment. Time to get out. What have you decided, comrades?" Nikulin turned to the engine driver and fireman. "Are you coming with us or stopping here?"

"Stop here? To be shamed, tortured?" said the driver. "Not I, I'm not staying. And you, Alyokha?"

"Me?" Alyokha was amazed and even rather offended. "That's a queer question. I haven't yet forgotten how to hold a rifle, thank God."

"Blow up the engine!" Nikulin concluded with swift decisiveness.

Marussya approached Nikulin. "Now here we are," he thought in some annoyance. "Take a wench with us in the detachment? Not on your life!"

"Comrade commander," she said. "I'm coming with you too. All right?"

"Well, you see..." Nikulin began stammering, coughing, falling over himself. "It'll be hard for you, you know. We'll have to fight our way through... Or we may be starving for days at a time. We'll have to sleep in the forests or in the fields..."

"Why are you telling me all that?" she asked, suddenly alert, hostility in her voice. "Don't you think I know all that myself?"

"I say it because it's better for you to stop here," said Nikulin decidedly, summoning up his courage.

"Stop here?" she repeated, her voice breaking. "Do you understand what you're saying? .. Me—stay here?"

"Well, and what about it?" said Nikulin quickly, only wanting to bring this difficult conversation to an end. "Will you be the only one? Not everyone can go away. And nobody'll blame you for it. If you like, I'll give you a paper saying that in view of the impossibility of taking you into the detachment..."

Without hearing him out, she hid her face in her hands and burst out sobbing.

"Don't cry, don't cry, now," said Nikulin, "there's nothing to cry about..."

He looked round, helplessly, but no one showed any signs of coming to his aid.

"You're going yourself and I can stay with the Germans," said Marussya through her sobs. "I, a Komsomol, a Soviet girl...

I who was on the board of honour every month... You go yourselves, and leave me with my head in the noose... And I thought... I thought... sailors..."

She sobbed still more bitterly. Nikulin could feel the disapproving eyes of his comrades boring through his back. His confusion grew into consternation—he was disarmed and defenceless before Marussya. He could hold out no longer.

"Stop crying, can't you!" he said, seizing Marussya by the shoulder and giving her a vigourous shake. "I was talking for your own good! But if you want to come, then come! But under the same conditions as everybody else!"

Kharchenko interrupted him:

"Quiet!"

For a long time he listened, catching some sound from the blue, moon-flooded expanses.

"I don't understand... Can't distinguish land noises... It's too fine for a train."

After listening again, Kharchenko added:

"Anyhow, it's coming this way—here."

One of the three lines converging at the halt was closed by the engine, and Nikulin gave orders to block the others with tables and benches from the waiting room. The detachment took up positions on both sides of the line—partly concealed themselves in the ditch, the remainder, headed by Nikulin, in the station buildings.

The rumble coming from the south approached nearer. The sailors listened striving to distinguish what it could be.

"It's a motor trolley!" came the engine driver's voice. "The Germans are probably running along to test the line."

Soon afterwards, a dark spot on the line announced the approach of the trolley. The barricade of tables and benches blocking its way was hidden by the shadow and the engine was not noticeable in the distance—the trolley driver nearly went headlong into it. Brakes screaming, the trolley slid along the rails and halted about five metres from the barricade.

Before the Germans had time to open the door of the cabin the sailors had surrounded the machine, tommy-guns at the ready.

"Get out! One at a time!" Nikulin ordered, and Krylov repeated the order in German. The first to emerge, hands raised, was the driver, a weakly, rickety looking fellow with light eyebrows and a long neck like a chicken. His legs were trembling under him and his teeth chattered with fright.

Nikulin decided to interrogate him first, considering, with justification, that this terrified man would not put up any particular resistance or lie.

"At'em, Fedya! Ram'em, Fedya!"

The interrogation took place in the station master's office by the dim light of a smoking lamp.

"Are you going to shoot me?" asked the trolley driver. His face had assumed a greenish pallor and he was shaken by a continual nervous hiccup.

"If you speak the truth you won't be shot," Nikulin replied through Krylov.

"Good," agreed the driver. "I'll speak the truth. There's a troop train following us, with two armoured platforms ahead of it. We were testing the line for it. There is a transmitter on the trolley, but we had no time to use it. We..."

"Clear!" Nikulin interrupted him, rising swiftly from his chair.

On the platform Nikulin briefly informed his men of the results of the interrogation.

"We'll flatten out those platforms like pancakes!"

He ordered the engine driver and the fireman to get up steam—as much as the machine would take.

Alyokha opened the door of the furnace, and an orange light played over his bow-legged, thick-set figure. He threw off his shirt, keeping on only his singlet, and one shovelfull of coal after the other flew into the furnace. The driver opened the ash pit, and the flames became blindingly white and roared in an angry bass.

And the fireman worked incessantly, indefatigably, now flinging in coal, now stirring the furnace with his long rake, his face, neck and bare arms shining with sweat.

"Keep it up! Keep it up!" Nikulin spurred him on.

"Nowhere to put any more," replied Alyokha from the cabin. "We've got twenty-four as it is. We'll blow up the boiler... Don't worry, comrade commander, our Fedya'll give us eighty kilometres, and the maximum's ninety."

Kharchenko had gone forward along the line, so that the hissing steam should not prevent him from hearing any sounds. And from there his voice sounded through the cold moonlit mist:

"It's coming!"

All fell silent.

"Kharchenko!" shouted Nikulin. "Tell me when it's four kilometres away."

The sailors waited silently without even whispering.

"It's time, comrade commander. Otherwise you won't have time to get up speed."

"Let her go!" Nikulin ordered the engine driver.

"Hey, Fedya, good-bye," said the driver, and his voice held a note of sadness. "My hand's sending you to your end... Well, do your job for the last time!"

He sharply swung the regulator round to full speed ahead.

The engine started and trembled, the wheels whirring round on the spot. The driver sprang out. The engine started to move, it gathered speed, it hurled itself forward, shaking the ground, coughing and panting angrily, as though it was not steam but scalding rage that throbbed with even beats through its iron funnel.

Shaking from head to foot, the driver called after the engine in a high tenor:

"Eh, Fedya! At'em, Fedya! Ram'em. Fedya! Come on, come on—ata-a-h!"

The night mists swallowed up the engine, nothing could be distinguished from down the line; and in the quiet hum of the lines two sounds merged—one of them even, measured, the second growing, increasing, developing into an iron scream.

There came a heavy, rumbling sound from the impact; a dull light rose, trembled, flared into the skies and died down. It was over. The German armoured platforms had ceased to exist, together with their crews. Judging by the force of the collision, the engine too had gone down the embankment, with all the coaches.

Through Villages and Hamlets

Nikulin was determined to hold his course firmly, realizing that with the small numbers at his disposal he could not allow himself to be tempted by casual operations of secondary importance, to be diverted by trifles or risk his men without absolute necessity.

To press forward and make his way through to his own people—probably, cut his way through—that was the objective he kept before him. And he had to conserve his forces for the probable fighting ahead.

He led his detachment along byroads and sometimes across the virgin steppe, carefully avoiding the mainroads.

The Germans had not yet penetrated into the heart of the steppe, and there were still untouched villages and hamlets. It was good to come upon some village hidden in a loamy valley in the cool of the morning. The cottage windows would send a welcoming glow from the reflected rays of the rising sun, while solid, homely columns of lilac smoke would rise from the clay chimneys above the thatched roofs and disperse, stained a transparent crimson. Ducks quacked and geese gobbled along the river, still wreathed in mist, while a piebald calf wandered dreamily under the black poplars waving a tail full of burdocks. Dogs barking on every note of the scale would form a morning orchestra.

The squat white cottages stood solidly within their fences, as though their roots had grown into the soil tended by fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers. Inside the cottages everything was clean, warm and comfortable, fragrant with dill, peppermint, and freshly baked bread, while beside the blazing stove a comfortable-looking Cossack woman, her skirt tucked well up, would be bustling about, distributing a generous portion of noisy slaps to children poking their inquisitive noses too closely into what was going on. This warmth and comfort, behind the steaming samovar, seemed to call for talk about peaceful village affairs, of the harvest and workdays[1], of the purchase of sheep or cows and approaching weddings. But the seamen heard nothing of all this—people had other things on their minds. The stations, villages and hamlets were in the grip of alarm and consternation and the sailors were bombarded with questions—were those cursed Germans near, when would they come and how would they treat peaceful industrious collec-

[1] Workday—unit by which work on the collective farm is calculated.

tive farmers? And with a sick feeling in their hearts the sailors had to reply that the Germans were near, they might appear any day, and that there was nothing good to be expected from them. The cottages seemed to have become on a sudden colder and darker. Drawing their dark brows together, old Cossacks would listen silently, while some of the women would cry, others, breathing with difficulty, would cross themselves before the dark faces of the ikons, faintly lighted by their oil lamps. But sigh as they might, or weep, or lament, on thinking of terrible days to come, still they had their Cossack pride, and let come what might, today their welcome guests must be entertained properly. And they stopped in very few cottages where gifts of all kinds were not pressed upon Dad with true Cossack openhearted generosity—eggs, pork fat, curds, salt meat, bread, pies, milk. Knowing the appetites of those under his care Dad refused nothing—all would come in handy on the way—pies, and pork, and curds.

"And what's your price for all this?" Dad would ask.

"What price are you talking about?" the peasant would ask. "The damned Germans take everything without paying and take our people as well—and then I'm to take money from our own folk? I've got my own three in General Kirichenko's Cossack Guards. . . Nay, not a kopek do I take."

"But I've no right to take it for nothing!" Dad argued. "Those are my instructions, to pay for everything."

But no arguments had any effect. The only answer he would get was: "My own three are in the army. Young fellows, like yours."

Meanwhile the housewife would be sobbing quietly, wiping her eyes on her sleeve. It was not a scrap of good talking to her about money.

"Listen, my good man," said Dad, loth to surrender. "It's the simplest thing: we're buying, you're selling."

"But I'm not selling," replied the good man calmly, puffing away at his pipe filled with strong home-grown tobacco. "This isn't a market, but my cottage."

"What shall I do, then?"

"Take it, and eat it with a good appetite."

What could Dad do more? He had to take it.

And then the commander was angry and told Dad in a dissatisfied tone:

"We're not Fritzes or Rumanians, to rob the peasants. If you take it, pay for it. Better pay too much, rather than take it for nothing!"

A Conversation During the Night

Soon after this, two Red Army men joined the detachment in a village, and two days later they were followed by a fighter-pilot brought down behind the German lines. Then came two sappers and another six infantrymen who emerged out of a copse to meet the detachment. In a hamlet they found a convalescent tankman, and took him along too.

Previously when they numbered off, Marussya Kryukova, the last one on the left flank, would call: "Thirteenth complete!" and she had not cared much for this, being somewhat superstitious in the depths of her heart. But now in a gay ringing voice she would call: "Twenty-second, incomplete!"

And so the detachment dubbed Marussya "incomplete", which suited her small stature.

Nikulin well knew that the detachment would continue to grow, and that this would bring a corresponding increase in the difficulties of managing and provisioning it, as well as making it harder to move inconspicuously, and to organize halts and day's marches.

It happened that early one morning the detachment halted for a rest in a shallow sloping hollow. Some ill wind brought a Messerschmitt along. Swooping down through the clouds, it flew quite low over the steppe, at about three hundred feet. One of the newcomers to the detachment, a Red Army man, a foolish hothead, must needs jump up and start firing into the skies with his tommy-gun. "Drop that!" shouted Nikulin, but it was too late. The pilot had seen the detachment and he attacked, firing into the hollow from both machine-guns.

After attacking twice, the aeroplane disappeared. The men began to rise, but four of them remained on the ground—the engine driver and three of the Red Army men, including the hot-head, now cooling and oozing blood from a German bullet hole.

That night, Nikulin lay, thinking, but

his thoughts had no clarity, they seemed to slip away from him in confusion, he could not catch and fix them in words. With an abrupt movement he rose, dropped his naked feet beside the bench and lighted a lamp.

In his notebook Nikulin had carefully preserved a portrait of our people's leader, wrapped in transparent cover. Moving the dim lamp nearer, Nikulin looked long into the features, familiar to the last wrinkle, of this man so far away yet always so near, with whom his whole life and destiny were so indissolubly bound up, all his joys and sorrows, his dreams and hopes. Moscow stood out clearly before Nikulin's eyes, and the Kremlin walls, behind which in a plainly furnished office Stalin was working. . .

Maybe Nikulin was dreaming, maybe he was lost in his thoughts, but in the mingle sounds of wind and rain he seemed to hear a far-off voice—very far, almost inaudible. Slowly and gradually it reached him, as though floating from the dark distances. And recognizing this voice, Nikulin trembled in every limb.

"Difficult?" he heard. "It's difficult for everybody, Nikulin. Do you think it's easy for me? You have fifty men, but I have two hundred million, and I am responsible for all of them. You have to hold out, Nikulin, you have to fight. After victory, you can rest."

"I understand all of that," replied Nikulin. "I shall hold out, I'm strong; but my trouble is that I'm not trained to be a commander. I've no experience and I'm afraid of making mistakes."

And again from the Kremlin, across thousands of kilometres of steppe and forest came the beloved, solicitous voice:

"Learn, Nikulin, and grow wise. Commanders are not born ready-made. Up to now you've fought the Germans and fought them well, you've wiped the floor with them. Why are you losing heart now? That's no good, Nikulin, you have to hold out, you have to have faith in your own strength and then everything will go right!"

"What are your orders, Comrade Stalin?" asked Nikulin, and he heard the reply:

"My orders are simple. Lie down now and sleep, get up early in the morning, and hold the reins tighter in your detachment. Lead your men as you have led them up to now. I believe in you, Nikulin, lead them! Don't get into any fighting unless it's necessary, don't forget that you're in the German rear. But if you have to fight, then act boldly, and I'll help you. . . Victory will be ours, Nikulin! . ."

The voice died away, and was silent, receded into the distance. The rain-filled wind howled and rattled the window-panes, the lamp smoked and flickered, shedding a weak light over the corners of the cottage, and in the corner behind the table sat Nikulin, his head on his arms.

Reconnoissance

When he awoke, light already streamed through the window. A cock was crowing hoarsely. Nikulin remembered the conversation of the night. "Of all the dreams!" he thought, laughing.

As they were drinking tea, he said to Fomichov:

"Up to now our family way of life has been all right, for there were only our own sailors in the detachment. But now new people have come in, and the family habits are no good any more. We must have military discipline, according to regulations. Here are my orders, Fomichov. Prepare a list of the men. Every morning they fall in for parade. All talking in the lines, which I have often noticed, must cease. Absence without permission prohibited. We shall appoint commanders for the sub-units and expect them to do their job."

As they drew nearer to the front the spirits of the sailors rose. More frequently now they met groups of enemy soldiers, motor-vehicles or supply columns on the steppe roads. The soldiers were left lying there on the roads, the cars and lorries went up in flames, staining the heavens with their black smoke and the sailors continued on their way, loaded up with captured grenades and cartridges.

They travelled parallel to the front in the enemy rear and Nikulin reckoned on making a break-through with a sudden blow at a comparatively quiet sector, held by weak enemy forces.

Nikulin had prepared everything for this blow, only one thing was still lacking—exact information about the enemy's disposition and the weak spots in his defences. And Nikulin waited, knowing that to act at random was im-

possible. The slightest miscalculation and the detachment would be inevitably lost.

It was a very difficult and dangerous reconnoissance job that lay ahead—one that needed a man who could be relied upon in every way.

"Krylov?" Nikulin thought aloud. "Too hot-headed, he'll go down. Zhukov? You can smell the sea on him ten paces away, his walk alone would give him away."

"Let me go myself, comrade commander," Fomichov suggested. "I'll be more certain. I've plenty of cunning in fighting, and that's just what's needed on reconnoissance."

And so it was decided. Without losing time, Fomichov exchanged his sailor blouse for an old jacket, put on a worn rabbit-skin cap, and was immediately transformed into the most ordinary collective farmer.

"A fine disguise!" said Nikulin approvingly. "A real black soil collective farmer, no sea water or salt left."

"The sea spirit's still there, comrade commander," smiled Fomichov. "One's spirit's not like a blouse to be stripped off or changed for a jacket."

"Well, hide it well away," Nikulin advised him, "or it may betray you."

"That won't betray me!" replied Fomichov confidently. "It's well trained—knows the service and discipline. I've made up my mind that if I find myself in a tight place I shan't try to hide or run. I shall go straight to the headman. 'Allow me to introduce myself, Sir. I'm a deserter from the Red Army. I was before a tribunal, but when the Reds retreated we were left in the confusion and got away as best we could. . .' If they ask my social origin—rich peasant. Father exiled, brother in prison. . . Pile it on so thick that it's seven miles high. In a word, expect me back tomorrow at this time."

"And if you don't come?"

"If I don't come, then you can hold a funeral for my sailor-soul."

After a moment's silence, he added quietly and seriously:

"If it should work out that way, write to my wife. Dad has her address."

"I'll write," Nikulin promised. "Well, good luck. Till tomorrow!"

"Till tomorrow, comrade commander!"

And Fomichov went—straight through the bushes, steering his course for the distant horizon beyond which the high-road lay. And like a memory of himself, he left a strange weight on Nikulin's heart, as though his bosom were filled with lead.

Betrayed by the Anchor

It was not for nothing that Nikulin was sad, and felt a foreboding of evil.

Fomichov was caught.

When he set out on his reconnoissance assignment, he had anticipated everything—except one little thing—the tattooing on his chest and arms. And this was what betrayed him to the Germans. Who would ever believe that a man could be a real farmer when his chest is adorned with a fine picture of a ship, with its guns belching torrents of smoke, and the right fore-arm bears an anchor fastened to a mighty chain?

And now, in the depths of the night, Zakhar Fomichov was sitting in a cold, dark bath-house, his shirt torn, barefoot and bareheaded, bruised and bleeding after his interrogation and listening to the footsteps and coughing of the sentry the other side of the door.

It was the anchor that had betrayed Fomichov. At first his scouting had been most successful. Besides the Germans, there had been Rumanians, Hungarians and Italians in the village, as well as some of the local people who had not managed to escape, and collective farmers who had been passing through when the Germans had taken their horses and oxen, leaving them stranded there. In this motley crowd Fomichov easily escaped notice and soon found out all that was needed without arousing the faintest suspicion. There were not more than two companies of Germans in the village, very few Rumanians and Hungarians, the remainder of the battalion being composed of Italians. The barn where the prisoners were confined was on the western outskirts of the village. Not far away was a petrol dump—evidently the invaders were expecting tanks to arrive in the near future. Fomichov had explored all the approaches to the village and was already starting on his way back when he felt thirsty and turned aside to the well. When he raised the heavy bucket and eagerly brought it to his lips, his jacket sleeve fell back, exposing the anchor. And just as bad luck would have it, some Rumanians

were near him, who evidently had vivid recollections of just such anchors from the days of Odessa and Sevastopol. The prattling Rumanians dragged Fomichov to the German officer in the commandant's office

Many times had Fomichov looked death straight in the face, but this time he was seriously alarmed. Right up to the last minute he had kept on hoping that he would find some way of extricating himself but when the door of the bath-house closed behind him, he realized that this was the end! . . So, this meant that the Black Sea sailor Zakhar Fomichov had gone down, and gone down for nothing, without doing any good by it, uselessly! Now nobody could make use of the information which he had collected, and his count of German heads would remain incomplete. He had aimed at a hundred, and only got fifteen. "You're in a bad way, Zakhar Fomichov," he thought, "you're in a very bad way! . ."

In the morning he was led off to a second interrogation. To all questions he opposed an impenetrable silence. But evidently the Germans had not yet lost hope of making him speak. Again he found himself in the bath-house, only with difficulty able to open his right eye. The left, swollen and blue, he could not open at all. He touched his forehead, scored by the lash, raised himself and sat down on the bench, trying to remember the end of the interrogation. They had started to beat him, that he remembered, and then—there was a gap in his memory, a sort of black fog. . . He wanted to lie down and groaned—every movement cost him agonizing pain throughout his whole body.

A yellowish, smoky beam of sunshine penetrated through the tiny window of the bath-house, and on the other side of the walls hens were clucking—there, outside, it was morning, a clear sunny morning, with a slight frost touching the edges of the thatched roofs. "The boys are waiting for me," thought Fomichov. "And they'll never see me however long they wait. . . Eh, comrade commander, it's good-bye, for we'll see each other no more!"

Guile in War

Fomichov was waiting for the third and last interrogation.

Screwing up his face in pain, he went to the window, beyond which he could see the threshing floor, two willows, already stripped of their leaves, and beyond them the golden autumn steppe stretching wide and boundlessly free to the very horizon. Not a soul to be seen moving on the steppe, neither horseman nor pedestrian. Fomichov's heart became still heavier—better not look at all!

At midday the sentry outside the bath-house was changed. Instead of the gloomy, low-browed Hungarian with a bandaged cheek swollen from a gumboil, there appeared an Italian soldier, a smart, handsome fellow with his pilot cap cocked rakishly to one side over large, velvet-brown eyes. After taking up his post and waiting for the captain of the guard to disappear, he began to smoke, looked into the window and ejected a stream of smoke in Fomichov's direction, then leaning against the wall and resting his fixed bayonet in the crook of his arm, pulled a small brush and a mirror from his pocket and busied himself smoothing and twisting his whiskers.

Suddenly he was on the alert—on the road which circled the bath-house he had seen a girl. She was walking along with bent head, looking neither to one side nor the other, and apparently noticing nothing around her.

In actual fact Marussya—for it was she—saw and noticed everything. She had chosen this road purposely, having learned from local Cossacks that it was here, in the dark bath-house, that the sailor caught the previous evening was confined. Marussya had as yet no definite plans—she had simply decided to look at this bath-house, and take note of its position for she had been sent out to learn the lay of the land. Perhaps, by some lucky chance, she might be able to give some encouraging sign to Fomichov. . .

As she walked along she noticed everything—the window in the wall, the huge lock on the door, the Italian soldier; his whiskers, his smile and his velvet eyes.

Everything that Marussya said and did from now on seemed as though it were done not by her at all; but by some other self, as though everything happened somehow without any volition on her part.

With a stolen glance to the side, to see if there was an officer anywhere about, the Italian sidled towards Marussya

"Oh!" cried Marussya's other self in mock alarm. "I didn't know. . . I'll go at once. . ."

"Don't be afraid!" said the Italian. "You mustn't be frightened. . ."

He smiled at Marussya giving her the glad eye, and she smiled in return. That is to say, it was not she herself who smiled, but that other self, she herself was thinking only of Fomichov and kept glancing at the tiny dim window in the bath-house wall. The Italian came closer to her and in avoiding him, she managed to stand so that the window was in front of her and behind the soldier.

"Don't!" she said, removing the soldier's arm from her shoulder. "Please don't!"

But at the same time she, herself, with all the force of her feelings was calling Fomichov, willing him to look out.

And it may be that Fomichov felt her calling him and responded.

The window became white instead of black—that was Fomichov's face. The next second their eyes had met. Marussya looked across the shoulder of the Italian soldier, who at that moment was stooping to examine a brooch she was wearing.

"I'm here," said Marussya's eyes.

"I see," said Fomichov's eyes in return.

Meanwhile the soldier was still looking at the brooch, then began to fumble at it, with a great deal more pressure than was necessary.

. . . Fomichov raged in the dark, cramped bath-house. Here she was, Marussya, beside him, and he could tell her nothing. So little he needed to say and his whole report would be in her hands. And then—let them shoot him! In his hour of death he, Zakhar Fomichov, would know that he was not dying uselessly, that his assignment had been carried out to the end.

But how tell Marussya with that damned soldier standing between them?

Suddenly the answer to the riddle flashed upon him. Guile in war! Here was where it would be useful!

Marussya suddenly heard Fomichov's voice. He was singing, and the words of his song were clearly audible.

Steppe and steppe around,
The road is very far,
In this barren steppe. . .

The sentry turned, and shook his fist at the prisoner.

"Not allowed!"

She even started when Fomichov began to coin his own words to the song.

An assignment gave
To his comrade true. . .

sang Fomichov.

And after that, the tune continued with quite different words, a very different song—a war song composed by Fomichov himself:

They are very few,
Just three hundred men,
Fifty Germans here,
Rabble all the rest;
Haven't any tanks. . .

Marussya listened eagerly, forgetting the soldier, who becoming bolder, was already reaching for her with his lips and mumbling something incomprehensible, his hot breath tickling her ear.

"This evening," whispered the soldier. "Eight o'clock. Don't be frightened, just come. Eight o'clock. . ."

The stranger within Marussya pretended not to understand, and the soldier began explaining all over again. And all the time Fomichov was singing, singing softly, but clearly.

"In the evening?" said Marussya, at last understanding. "At eight o'clock?"

She already knew everything! How many soldiers there were in the village and which they were, and the most convenient direction for the blow; she knew that there were no tanks, but that they were expected and the petrol had been prepared.

"Don't be afraid, you come!" whispered the soldier.

"Very well! I'll come!"

Raising her head, she gave the soldier such a look that he started back, amazed at such a sudden change.

"Eight o'clock!" he mumbled, smiling sweetly.

"I heard you! . . Very well, I'll come! You wait for me, Macaroni! . . Only don't complain afterwards! . ."

With a sharp movement she flung off the soldier's hand, turned and went.

The Attack

Flushed and panting, Marussya appeared in front of Nikulin, who was surprised and rather startled, not having expected such a swift return.

"What's happened?"

"Permit me to report, comrade commander—your orders have been carried out!"

She was beaming with pride and joy.

"Permit me to report the result of my reconnoissance."

She related everything that had happened to her in the village. Nikulin roared with laughter, it was a long time before he could control himself.

"So that's how it was! The Macaroni was caught nicely! I never thought you were such a vamp, quiet and modest as you look, and see there!—turned his head in a moment! Good kid! Thanks!"

Tikhon Spiridonovich whistled long and loud.

"Well, Marussya, you've done fine!"

"You'll do fine too, Tikhon Spiridonovich, your turn will come!" Marussya replied.

"I don't know about that. I'm one of those fellows that never have any luck."

But there was little time for talking and laughing. The commander gave orders to prepare for battle, to test their weapons.

The detachment was divdied into three groups. Nikulin took command of the first, the second was assigned to Krylov and the third to Zhukov.

"Comrade commander, which group shall I go with?" asked Marussya.

"You? Not with any."

"Why? Do you think I can't shoot?" He could sense the offence in her voice.

"Listen to me, Marussya—it's not worth tempting fate twice. You've done your part, now it's our turn. And please don't argue, submit to discipline!" he added angrily, seeing that Marussya was about to protest. . .

So Marussya was not able to share in this battle. She accompanied the detachment only as far as the ravine and stayed there while, as soon as the sun began to set, the men went on.

The sun was completely out of sight, and the bell tower was no longer to be seen. A cool night dampness made itself felt and a slight mist wreathed along the bottom of the ravine. And still there was no fighting, everything was quiet. Every moment seemed an hour to Marussya. If it would only start! . .

Suddenly two crimson rockets scared across the heavens, falling in a fiery shower. Nikulin had given the signal to attack. Marussya jumped up as she heard the first machine-gun round. Three dull explosions—that was grenades. Then everything merged into one roar—the battle had begun.

It did not last for long, however. The Germans, Rumanians, Hungarians and Italians, taken by surprise, dashed out of the cottages only to fall, mown down by bullets and grenade splinters. Meanwhile Zhukov and Krylov were advancing on the centre of the village from two sides, Nikulin had dashed to the stable where the prisoners were confined, had killed the guards, liberated the prisoners and ordered them to follow him, each one to get himself a weapon as best he could. There were over a hundred prisoners and within ten or fifteen minutes they were all armed, one with a tommy-gun, another with a rifle, a revolver or a grenade, and some simply with cutlasses. Swiftly Nikulin fought his way to the centre of the village where he joined up with Krylov.

But Zhukov was not there. From the direction in which he had made his attack, the sound of rifle and machine-gun fire could be heard.

"He's got stuck," said Nikulin in some alarm. "Go and help him out, Krylov."

But at this moment the mighty explosion of an anti-tank grenade shook the earth, the firing ceased, and ten minutes later Zhukov's men emerged from a side-street leading onto the square, driving before them a crowd of soldiers with hands raised.

Tikhon Spiridonovich's Feat

Before the figthing had ended, Marussya was in the village. The thought would not leave her that in the heat of battle Fomichov might be forgotten. But she need not have worried. She saw him at once on the square before the church. He was sitting beside Nikulin on the stone steps of the porch, while Dad carefully bandaged his wounded head.

"Ah! Here she is!" cried Fomichov, and rising he embraced Marussya and gave her a hearty kiss. "Thanks, little sister! You got me out! If it hadn't been for you, I'd have been a goner. . ."

A sudden cramp caught Marussya's throat, she sobbed and burst into tears on Fomichov's breast.

Nikulin grunted angrily as he turned away; he detested emotional scenes.

Meanwhile the men had spread through the cottages, dragging out the last of the

soldiers who had hidden themselves in cellars and attics. Very few of the Hitlerites succeeded in getting away from the village and concealing themselves in the steppe.

Marussya suddenly saw Tikhon Spiridonovich.

"Well, how did you fight, Tikhon Spiridonovich? Did you have any luck?" she said laughing, although her eyes were still wet.

"I had!" replied Spiridonovich, smiling in some confusion.

"You can congratulate him, Marussya," added Zhukov, who was standing alongside. "Pity, that there's no guardhouse here! I'd have sent him there for such heroism to cool off a bit! First I'd give him the 'For Valour' medal, then send him to the guardhouse for ten days!"

And he proceeded to tell her about Tikhon Spiridonovich's feat.

The detachment commanded by Zhukov had come right into the range of a group of Germans who had opened hurricane fire point blank at the sailors through cottage windows from dual machine-guns. The men had to hug the earth, and tightly at that—the Germans gave them no chance to so much as lift their heads. The situation was both difficult and dangerous and the sailors had lost their chief advantage—that of a surprise blow. At any moment the enemy soldiers might pull themselves together, dash out in an attack and crush the little detachment.

Then, in the midst of this solid rain of fire, Tikhon Spiridonovich rose from the ground. In the hazy light of dawn Zhukov immediately recognized his lanky, stooping figure in the dock-tailed coat with short flapping skirts. Lowering his head like a goat about to butt something, he made straight for the machine-guns, anti-tank grenade in hand. Zhukov's marrow froze—it was certain, inescapable destruction.

"Lie down!" he shouted in a stifled voice. "Lie down, you lanky devil!"

Tikhon Spiridonovich heard nothing. The machine-gun rattled angrily at him, lighting the dusk with its trembling, reddish-yellow flame, but still Tikhon Spiridonovich advanced. It was like a miracle to see him going forward under such fire and not falling, as though he were invulnerable. Probably the machine-gunner himself was frightened, but when he was about thirty paces from the cottage, Tikhon Spiridonovich turned, slipped up to the machine-gun with small sidling steps, swung the grenade over his head. . . Hurled it—and stopped.

"Lie down!" howled Zhukov. "Splinters! . ."

But before he could finish the terrible roar of the grenade cut him short. The machine-gun fell silent and the sailors hurled themselves forward.

Zhukov ran to Tikhon Spiridonovich.

"Not hurt?"

"Not hurt," replied Tikhon Spiridonovich, smiling ruefully.

Zhukov looked him over carefully.

"Not stopped a bullet?"

"No."

"And not touched by the splinters?"

"No, they didn't touch me. . ."

"Amazing!" said Zhukov. "Absolutely amazing!.. The first time I've ever seen such a thing. Well, Tikhon Spiridonovich, you'll surely live to be a hundred! . ."

Within an hour Nikulin's detachment, which had now been joined by the liberated war prisoners and about thirty of the local collective farmers, left the village for the steppe.

A full moon was shining brightly. Nikulin cast an eye over the column.

"A hundred and ninety-two men!" he said to Fomichov. "A force to reckon with!"

Our Troops Are Advancing

Now, with a hundred and ninety-two men under his command, a whole company, Nikulin could operate more boldly.

He decided not to delay any longer in the German rear. Time to put an end to the picnic. Enough is as good as a feast. Time to get back to their own people.

The detachment which up to then had been moving parallel to the front, now turned and made directly for the German forward positions—for the break-through.

But next day something happened to change fundamentally all Nikulin's plans and calculations. As dusk was settling over the village where the detachment was resting one of our Soviet aircraft cut through the low-lying clouds and dropped a flock of fluttering white leaflets. The wind caught them and scattered them over the roofs and trees, while the boys raced after them shouting. . . Within ten minutes, the village rang from end to

end with the joyful news: "Our troops are advancing!"

Yes—our forces had launched an offensive and were driving the Germans before them. The Soviet command was informing the inhabitants of the occupied regions and the partisans, calling upon them to assist the offensive, to strike the enemy in the rear, to cut off his lines of retreat, to blow up bridges and wreck roads. "We must not only drive the German enemy back, we must destroy him!" said the leaflets.

We were attacking! These were the words ringing through every yard and cottage. At last it had come, that moment which the people had dreamed of and longed for without ever losing faith in its arrival... An old Cossack, the master of the cottage where Nikulin was staying, slowly and solemnly knelt down before the ikons and bowed to the ground. Outside the wind was whipping the trees, driving raindrops against the window-panes, rustling the thatching and whistling in the chimney. The oil lamp before the ikons gave a faint red glow and in the semi-darkness the old man was barely visible, only his whispering could be heard, now ardent, now accusing, now filled with indignation. Nikulin remained motionless, unwilling to disturb this prayer, whose sincerity and sacredness he sensed in his heart... There were many old men and women praying before the ikons that memorable rainy evening, while those younger and stronger were hauling well-oiled rifles, grenades and machine-guns out of the ricks and piles of dried dung.

Nikulin gathered the sailors into his cottage for a special meeting.

"I congratulate you, comrades," he began. "The Red Army has gone over to the offensive. That means that the time has come for us to strike. Enough hiding from the Germans, avoiding them! Now we shall seek them out and thrash them wherever we find them. We shall stay here in the German rear—this is our place just now. Tomorrow I shall split the detachment into sub-units and appoint commanders. Tomorrow we shall send a letter to Moscow to Comrade Stalin from all the fighting men in the detachment."

When the sailors dispersed, Nikulin sat down to write his letter. For a long time he sat there, and every word he wrote seemed to lose its fervour, its living content, as soon as he saw it on paper. He crossed out, wrote, and again crossed out. It was already late when Nikulin finished his letter. Stumbling, excited, he read it aloud in a low voice, and again stood thinking, not certain whether he had finally found the real, ardent words.

"Let it stay as it is," Nikulin decided. "He will understand, he will know how it should be read!"

Sleep was far from Nikulin. He went out into the yard. The rain had stopped, and a light moon-filled mist hung over the earth. Everything was damp and silent, the wind sending only an occasional sigh. Suddenly Nikulin started and listened attentively, trying to catch a faint rumble; tense and motionless, he listened for a long time, but the rumble was not repeated. And so Nikulin could never be certain if it had been his fancy, or if the wind had really carried to him the distant sound of guns—the voice of our offensive.

The Oath

In the morning Nikulin paraded his men and walked along the ranks, looking earnestly into their faces.

"Comrades!" he said. "The Red Army is on the offensive, that we know. Our task is to strike the enemy in the rear, to cut off his path of retreat. And I must warn you that I shall lead you into the most dangerous jobs. I shall not consider for one moment the enemy's numbers or his arms. There will be fierce, unequal battles, and perhaps we are fated to go under. If any one of you feels himself weak, doubts himself, let him say so now, so as not to create a panic later in the fighting, or let his comrades down."

After taking a deep breath, he concluded:

"Here is my order! Those who doubt themselves, stand where you are. But those who are ready to fight to the death for Soviet power, for their country and for Stalin—one step forward!"

There was a movement, and the whole ranks stood one step nearer to Nikulin.

"That was what I expected, that my detachment would turn out real men," said Nikulin.

After splitting the detachment, Nikulin appointed the commanders—Fomichov, Zhukov, Dad, Krylov and Kharchenko had a company each. The sub-unit commanders were also all sailors.

The letter addressed to our country's leader was signed in order of seniority. First of all Nikulin signed, beginning with the right flank. Marussya Kryukova, on the left flank as ever, was the last to sign.

"Well, how do you feel, Marussya? Haven't thought better of it?" asked Nikulin. "If so, maybe we can send someone else with the letter, and you can stay here in the village and wait for ours to come. . ."

"No, I haven't thought better of it, comrade commander. If you won't take me into battle. . . Well, I'll take the letter through."

"Be cautious. . . and if anything goes wrong, if you get caught—then stand firm."

"Don't worry, comrade commander, I took the oath—to hold out to my last breath!"

"I believe you! Well, good-bye, Marussya!" He gave her a firm handgrip. "We'll be seeing each other soon! . ."

"Right—turn! Quick! . ."

Nikulin broke off in the middle of his command.

A distant rumble, the same as that which he had heard in the night was repeated several times. All the men could hear it plainly. There could no longer be any doubt of it—this was the rumble of our artillery, it was the first stuttering voice of our growing, irresistible offensive!

Nikulin led his detachment south-east, cutting across the route of the retreating German units.

And straight eastwards, straight towards this fierce voice of unprecedented battles, her face bright and her heart fearless, walked a young girl whose place had always been on the left flank—Marussya Kryukova.

After routing several small enemy units on their way, destroying hundreds of motor-vehicles and about fifteen tanks, Nikulin and his detachment came out upon a river, that same river where, rumour had it, the fascists were hastily preparing a crossing for their retreating troops. Nikulin's plan was simple and straight forward: to choose his moment, seize the approaches to the crossing and hold the fascists on the eastern bank until the arrival of the pursuing Red Army units.

This plan was unanimously approved by his commanders. As for the boldness of it, the risk, nothing was said about that. War is war.

Nikulin selected Fomichov to go and find out the lay of the land.

"I hardly think you'll get caught a second time," he said. "Once bitten. . ."

Fomichov awaited the fall of darkness and then set out on his scouting assignment, taking with him Tikhon Spiridonovich, his firm friend.

This friendship was of recent date—it had sprung up after that famous battle when Tikhon Spiridonovich had made straight for the enemy machine-guns, walking at his full height, an anti-tank grenade in his hand. For Fomichov, this feat was plain proof, on the one hand, of inexperience in battle, and on the other, of undoubted valour. Fomichov, himself a man of dauntless courage, valued this quality highly in others and for this reason felt himself drawn to Tikhon Spiridonovich.

Their relationship was not of absolute equality. Fomichov's attitude was slightly condescending, as that of a senior, while Tikhon Spiridonovich, far from taking offence, silently acknowledged his superiority.

"If only I'd got into the navy when I was young!" Tikhon Spiridonovich would sometimes say longingly. "My life would have been quite different then, and my character too."

"That's true," replied Fomichov in his weighty bass. "You've a land-lubber's soul. It's still a long way from the sea, from the salt water. But if we get through to our folks, we'll go to the sea together. I'll tell you where to go—I've my roots in every port. First you'll work ashore, then you'll go afloat. You'll get the taste of salt water, and you'll get your very soul soaked in it!"

Tikhon Spiridonovich was easily set alight, attracted by something new, and the idea of transforming his land-lubber's soul into a salt-water one attracted him amazingly.

When Fomichov asked him to come out on reconnoissance with him, Tikhon Spiridonovich glowed with pride—he saw this invitation as a great honour. For Fomichov could have taken any man there, and his choice showed that Tikhon Spiridonovich was already well on the way to changing his soul from a land-lubber's to a seaman's.

They walked all night. It was cold, and the grass, stiffened with frost, rustled under their feet. At dawn they saw a white ribbon of fog ahead of them.

"Stop!" said Fomichov. "The river."

The rising sun swiftly dispersed the fog, and a sharp curve met the scouts' eyes. Reed-bordered, the river stretched far beyond the hills, shining with a peaceful rosy glow. By the knolls the fascists were working, preparing a crossing. Through the binoculars it was easy to see the lines of pontoons, the piles of beams and boards and the lorries continually approaching the river.

"They're in a hurry," said Fomichov, handing the binoculars to Tikhon Spiridonovich. "Ours must be pressing them hard."

. . . They turned and started on their return journey, first moving along above the shoreline, then through hollows, ravines and gulleys, continually watching the horizon. It was very silent in the steppe, clouds floated overhead, their shadows sliding over the brown grass. In the heavens, its wings spread, hung a kite, resting on some invisible column of air.

The war soon made itself felt again.

Passing from one hollow to another, they came right up against German soldiers. Shots rang out from both sides almost simultaneously, but Fomichov's tommy-gun was a fraction of a second earlier, and this decided the outcome of the lightning clash. Two Germans fell, and a third, the last, slumped after them. The grenade which he was just swinging fell from his hand and exploded with a thunderous detonation, blowing his body to fragments. Tikhon Spiridonovich felt a heavy blow in his shoulder and another in his leg, and realized that he was wounded. Slowly he sank to the ground. Crimson shadows seemed to float before his eyes, while Fomichov's voice receded gradually far, far into the distance.

The Test

He did not come to himself immediately—the first thing he sensed was the smell and taste of spirits, then opening his eyes, he saw Fomichov bending over him holding a big black flask.

While he was bandaging Tikhon Spiridonovich, Fomichov laughed and joked, but his blue lips would twist with pain and his eyes shone with feverish light under the white bandage.

"Your wound's a fleabite," Fomichov consoled him. "It'll heal up in a fortnight under the bandage."

Tikhon Spiridonovich obediently stood up, but immediately everything once more swam before his eyes as though he were drunk. He staggered, and Fomichov caught him.

"No!" said Tikhon Spiridonovich. "I can't. . ."

Fomichov looked anxiously at him. It was no less than fifteen kilometres back to the detachment and midday was already approaching.

"Bite on it, brother! We'll get there somehow. We can't stop here right under the Germans' very noses."

Dragging his wounded leg, Tikhon Spiridonovich began walking. Fifteen minutes later he sat down on a damp hummock. Then he began to sit down more and more often—he was coming to the end of his strength. At last he lay down on the grass and said gloomily that he couldn't go any further, even if it meant his death.

"Eh, you! . ." said Fomichov in a condemnatory tone. "And wanted to be a sailor! . ."

Tikhon Spiridonovich turned his drawn, earthen face with the deep hollows under the eyes, and cried in a thin angry voice:

"I've no strength, don't you understand? I'd get up by myself, if I could, without you!"

He tried to rise, but could only sit up, and that not for long—again he collapsed onto the ground.

Fomichov stood up, thought for a moment, then taking another gulp from the flask, knelt down, his back to Tikhon Spiridonovich.

"Here, brother, get up."

"No, that's no good," said Tikhon Spiridonovich. "You go. . . Leave me."

"And what'll the commander say?" said Fomichov angrily. "And the boys? They'll say — deserted his wounded comrade. Come on, Tikhon, get up, don't be a fool."

To carry a weight of five poods is no laughing matter even for a husky fellow. Soon Fomichov felt an aching in his chest, everything began to swim before his eyes, and his breath came with difficulty, with a whistling sound. At first he made up his mind to rest for ten minutes after every kilometre, but after the first kilometre he was so exhausted that he lay prone for half an hour.

Tikhon Spiridonovich saw his comrade's difficulties and offered to go along somehow himself, but soon collapsed again. And again Fomichov had to heave him up on his back, though his legs were trembling and unsteady and the blood was pounding in his temples.

In the evening the low-lying sun cast its golden rays over the steppe, making it seem still vaster. Fomichov reckoned: he had come five kilometres, no more.

With a deep sigh he lowered Tikhon Spiridonovich to the ground and sat down. Immediately his shoulders and legs felt easier, his breath came more freely.

"We're in a bad way. You hear, Tikhon Spiridonovich?"

"I hear you."

"It's amazing. I only lost a little blood, but I'm so weak, I'm done for. . . I shan't be able to carry you back, Tikhon. I haven't the strength."

Tikhon Spiridonovich was silent. He was lying on his side, his face hidden in the crook of his elbow.

Looking at him askance, Fomichov continued:

"There's no sense in both of us staying here on the steppe. . ."

"That's what I told you," came Tikhon Spiridonovich's muffled voice from the ground. "I told you that back there. , ."

"I hoped I could manage it, but I was mistaken, It's my wound, I'd have made it in no time. . ."

There was a moment's pause.

"Alone I'll get there quick enough," Fomichov continued. "I'll report to the commander, take some men and a stretcher, and come back for you. Don't worry, you'll not die in a night!"

Raising himself on his elbow, Tikhon Spiridonovich looked at his friend and said:

"I understand. You go, Fomichov. . . You go."

Fomichov laughed awkwardly.

"You understand, I've not got the strength! . . If it weren't for the wound, of course, it would be another matter!"

"You go!" Tilkhon Spiridonovich repeated insistently. "Go, Fomichov. . ."

"Yes, it seems, I'll have to. No other way out. . ."

Fomichov broke off some branches, tore up some rushes and made a couch for Tikhon Spiridonovich.

"I'll leave you the coat, I'll be warm enough walking anyway. Here's the brandy for you, and here's the water bottle. Bread, a piece of pork fat. Tommy-gun, grenades; revolver in order?"

"Thanks, the revolver's in order all right."

"Well, good-bye!"

"Good-bye! . ."

For a moment Tikhon Spiridonovich held Fomichov's hand in his, sighed, and lay back silently on the couch.

He could hear the retreating footsteps, the rustling of dry grass and the crackling of trodden twigs; then silence reigned around and time stood still—Tikhon Spiridonovich was alone.

Over him deep clear heavens stretched so calm and peaceful that his heart at once lightened. It was all over; nothing more to trouble about, no hurry now. He lay there, looking into the sky, and felt himself softly merging into it, melting away into the blue mist, and all his life, all his thoughts and feelings gradually seemed to him like far-off memories which could never rend the heart, at the most only make it faintly ache.

"Well, and so let it be!" he thought. "And there's nothing terrible about it. . ."

And actually, he did not feel it terrible. He closed his eyes. A soft wind gently touched his face, cooling his cheeks.

Whether it was minutes or hours that passed by in oblivion, he did not know, but when he again opened his eyes, he no longer saw the peaceful transparent blue above him—the sky had become dark and lowering, it had lost all its transparency, and on the horizon long thin arrows of orange-coloured fire shot from lilac cloud.

Tikhon Spiridonovich felt thirsty, he found the flask and raised it to his lips. It was brandy but he drank it in long gulps like water, noticing neither its taste nor strength. Soon his head began to spin slightly, his thoughts clarified and seemed to flicker through his mind, extinguishing each other. He remembered Fomichov and laughed thickly. Tried to comfort him, had he, the silly devil! But a good fellow, all the same... He remembered Fomichov as one remembers a friend long dead or gone far away never to return—in a word, as one remembers one near and dear whom one will never see again. The memory of Nikulin, Zhukov and Dad seemed just as far away, and

when a misty picture of Marussya's face swam before him, his heart felt no pain of grief, no emotion of any kind.

It was one of those terrible moments in a person's life when the heart becomes old and cold, its beating slows, it becomes filled with the indifference of age as with cold ashes. Evidently, the stem upholding Tikhon Spiridonovich's life was never strong and now this stem was withering.

He drank some brandy and his senses, dulled by the liquour, slipped into a dark pit, void of thoughts, memory and sight.

He came to himself in the depths of the night. A gusty wind raced through the cold emptiness of the heavens, the stars flickered spasmodically and trembled, now bright, now dulled. They seemed to radiate an endless cold, it was unbearable, this icy starlight, and around was the impenetrable blackness and darkness. Tikhon Spiridonovich raised himself and looked around him, but could see nothing and felt that he had a mad look in his eyes. "Hoy!" he shouted in a weak, trembling voice, but the sound seemed to disappear in this tremendous star-filled coldness without leaving a trace. Then he understood that he was lost—understood it irrevocably, with unquestioning clarity, and succombed to terror. "Zakhar! Hoy, Zakhar! Fomichov!" he called, and wept, remembering that Fomichov had gone from him...

Everything seemed to him so terrible and hopeless, he felt such a boundless depression, felt himself so doomed, that he could no longer either think or reflect—he became numb with a heavy bemusement, weeping from sorrow and weakness. A thousand-pood weight hung over him ready to fall at any moment and there was nowhere to run or hide; his heart was caught in an icy clutch, he waited, fearing to raise his eyes to the stars. . .

He was already dead, although he still moved, sobbed and grasped the flask of brandy with trembling hands.

Tikhon Spiridonovich's Crime

Those same bright stars, trembling with their flickering, uneven light, now bright, now dulled were already shining on Zakhar Fomichov as he passed the last gulley and made his way to the blind byroad to his unit.

Fomichov's wound was more serious than he had at first realized. How he had got there he himself did not know.

"Oho!" said Nikulin, when in the light of his torch he saw the brown, dried blood on Fomichov's head and below it his hollow-cheeked haggard face with the sunken eyes, the cheekbones standing out sharply and the dry lips.

"All in order," Fomichov croaked. His voice whistled in his throat. "Completed the reconnoissance. . ."

"Where's Valkov?"

"He stayed there. . ."

Fomichov swayed, Dad gave him a mug of tea laced with a good portion of wine. He drank thirstily and at once sat down, right there on the ground. Nikulin gave orders to carry him to the command shelter.

"Bring the torch nearer," said Fomichov, when they were alone in the shelter. "Look here. . ." He pulled his notebook out of his pocket. "Here is their crossing, here are the trenches running along the shores on both sides, and the blockhouses along the rise."

"Maybe you'll rest first?" Nikulin suggested. "We'll sort it all out in the morning."

"No time to wait till morning," said Fomichov, and sighed, his breath rattling in his chest. "Here is one of their anti-aircraft batteries, here is the second. See—I marked it. . ."

He told everything in detail, forgetting nothing. He gave his notebook to the commander. Its cardboard cover was stickly with sweat.

"Now, commander, give me six men."

"What for?" Nikulin looked at Fomichov in disquiet: was he beginning to wander?

Fomichov was surprised in his turn.

"What do you mean—what for? How can I go alone? And who will carry him?"

Nikulin realized that it was the question of Tikhon Spiridonovich.

"You mean, he's alive? And I thought he was killed."

"He's alive. . . stayed there, in the bushes. I hadn't the strength to carry him."

"Ye-e-e-s," said Nikulin and rubbed his head hard. "Why aren't you eating? Maybe we'll heat it up?"

"Doesn't go down. Too tired. . ." Fomichov's eyes were glazed, and he forced himself to look at Nikulin without blinking. "Commander, you give me the men, the strongest. It's a long way, ten kilometres, or maybe twelve."

"Ye-e-e-s," repeated Nikulin, and laid his hand on Fomichov's forehead. "You're feverish. Your head's hot."

"I can feel that myself," agreed Fomichov. "And my mouth's dry. . . It's a pity we haven't a stretcher. Have to make do with rifles."

"And how do you think you're going?" said Nikulin. "You're just about collapsing now."

"That's true," Fomichov agreed again. "Weakness got the better of me. Don't know now myself how I got here. . ."

His face contorted with pain, he pulled some sacking nearer, lay down supporting himself on his elbow, and stretched out his legs, his boots scraping on the walls of the shed. His heavy eyelids at once sank—in an instant he was asleep.

But it was not he himself that slept, only his body, while his mind and will were still awake, guarding his honour as a warrior seamen—he sighed, started, and raising his head, said in a heavy, long drawn out, sleepy voice:

"Feel sleepy. . . But time won't wait. Give me the men, commander."

"Maybe they can find him without you?" asked Nikulin undecidedly.

"I shall go. . ."

"But I shan't give you six men, I shall give you twelve. Because they'll have to carry you both back."

"They probably will," Fomichov agreed. "Give me twelve—it'll be safer."

Who can gauge the limits of human strength and endurance? Looking at Fomichov, anybody would have said that he could not walk two hundred paces, but he walked two hundred, three hundred, four hundred, a kilometre, two, three. . .

On the way he was semi-conscious, semi-delirious, sometimes he could not feel his own self at all, there was only the steppe in the hazy light of a late moon. Then the feeling of reality would return, he would feel the weight of his body, a ringing in his ears, and hear the low tones of the men with him. He would look about him in alarm—had he lost the way? But strange as it might seem, he never missed a turning, never once confused the various hillocks, bushes and gulleys—some part of his brain was working sleeplessly and led him straight along the right path.

"Here," said Fomichov at last. The men stopped.

"Tikhon!" Fomichov called softly. Not a sound in reply. "Tikhon!" he repeated, and again nobody answered.

Staggering, parting the bushes with his hands, he went forward a few more steps. The hollow where he had left Tikhon Spiridonovich was filled with heavy shadows. Kneeling down, Fomichov took out his pocket torch and shielding its rays with his blouse, so that no German would notice its rays, switched it on. The sharp blueish beam shone on the dusty grey earth, covered with fallen leaves, slid over Tikhon Spiridonovich's boots, glinting on their hobnails, on his worn railwayman's greatcoat with its short sleeves, and halted, lighting up the thrown-back head, the face contorted in the death agony with its shining teeth and the revolver in the cold, bony hand.

A long time passed, night was giving way to morning, there was a nip in the air and hoar frost whitened the grass. The men fidgeted uneasily, coughed, but did not dare disturb Fomichov. And he continued gazing silently at the dead face of Tikhon Spiridonovich in the light of his pocket torch, overcome by a great feeling of sorrow and offence never before known.

"Tikhon!" he said loudly, challengingly. "Why did you do this to me, eh? How did I ever harm you, Tikhon? How could you think it, how dared you? . ."

And withdrawing his faith and friendship from Tikhon Spiridonovich, he concluded:

"No, it was not a seaman's soul you had, Tikhon! Not a seaman's soul! . ."

The Last Night

The commandant himself interrogated Marussya—a heavy, thick-set Rumanian with a suffused face, thick nose and sleepy dull protruding eyes. When she was searched, the letter had been found on her. He demanded that Marussya tell him the movements of the detachment and Nikulin's further plans and she replied that she knew nothing or simply refused to speak. The Rumanian raged, shouted, banged on the table with his revolver and snapped the catch; Marussya remained calm. She knew that the commandant would torment her, and she was bound to endure it—in a word, everything was transparently clear to her when she stood before the Rumanian, holding together the torn collar of her blouse.

Perhaps the Rumanian commandant was tired of daily torturing, of the sound of cries and groans, and of executions, perhaps he was hurrying away somewhere, or perhaps he simply realized from Marussya's eyes that he would get nothing out of her—be that as it may, this time he shirked his duty and said simply:

"As you wish, Mademoiselle, young partisan girl. Early tomorrow morning we shall hang you..."

After the interrogation she was pushed into a low, dark room—three paces in width, five in length. The window was bricked up leaving only a tiny aperture, barely a hand's breadth, at the top. The door closed. The bolt grated. Slowly Marussya's eyes swept the grey and greenish walls within which she was fated to pass the last hours of her life.

She neither deceived nor comforted herself with false hopes that just on this night our men would attack, drive the Rumanians from the village, release and save her. She knew that this often happens in books but almost never in real life.

There was neither chair nor stool in the room and as she did not want to sit on the cold cement floor she began walking from corner to corner, thinking of her comrades-in-arms whom she had left there (even in her thoughts she avoided naming the village), of Nikulin, Zhukov, Dad, Tikhon Spiridonovich; sometimes she would stop and read some inscription on the wall.

There were many inscriptions of all kinds here—long and short, some of them with full addresses and the request to inform the writers' families, others anonymous, signed only with an initial.

"I die a victor! Long live my country! Long live our victory!" she read aloud; under these two lines came the signature: "Partisan U." "Avenge me, avenge the blood of women and children! Death to the enemies of culture, progress and humanism! Sergei Nikiforov, village teacher, 63 years of age." And below: "Never forget. We demand of you who remain among the living that you pay in full measure for our torture and death. Raissa Golodayeva, agronomist." And still lower: "Dying, I see the dawn of victory! Farewell. I curse the Germans, and bless my own people. Live happily, joyfully and do not forget me. Dr. Stepan Ogaryov." Under all three signatures there was one address and date. "That means that all three—the teacher, the doctor and the agronomist—were from the same village; they were taken at the same time, they were shut up together in this room and they died together," Marussya began thinking about them.

Marussya was a merry girl, with a great desire to live—and so she tried to think about her death as little as possible, for such thoughts made her heart heavy and cold, made it contract with an unbearable pain. What was it, the fear of death? No, rather the longing for life, life which Marussya loved immeasurably.

Perhaps, if she had been in some other room, or had the walls of this one been freshly whitewashed, it would have been much harder for her to await her death in solitude and possibly her imminent death, obliterating all else, would have seemed a great event to her. But in this room Marussya could not think of her death as of some great event because the walls told of dozens of lives cut short, each one of which was, or so it seemed to her, much more valuable to the world than her plain little life. What was she, after all? The simple clerk Marussya Kryukova, with an incomplete secondary education who had as yet done nothing startling... And before her a doctor, an agronomist and a sixty-three-year-old teacher had died; perhaps some professor or famous artist had passed through this room and also died, an indomitable fighter for freedom and the honour of his native soil.

With her sharp little teeth she gnawed at her forefinger nail, which had grown long during the campaign, and thought—what should she scratch on the wall? She would have liked to begin her inscription with the words "Long live..." but she was shy of these high sounding words which were more suitable above the signature of Partisan U. but not a bit suitable above hers. For a little while longer she stood in frowning concentration, then scratched the words: "I said nothing. Farewell! Marussya Kryukova." She did not realize the greatness of her own moral strength any more than it would ever have entered her head to pride herself on her ability

to breath or to talk Russian. This strength was inherent in her and for this reason she never noticed it.

. . . Dusk gathered, the inscriptions merged with the greyish walls, the rays which had penetrated through the crack at the top of the window grew rosy; the sun was sinking, night was approaching. From the guardroom the other side of the wall, the voices of the Rumanian soldiers could be heard, their shouts and rough laughter. Marussya closed her eyes and swayed as though in a boat. She imagined a broad, smooth expanse of river with boulders, bushes hanging from the banks and the soft, caressing rustle of the breeze. And she was gliding, gliding, oars at rest, along the even, quiet current. . . She was drifting off into sleep.

In the depth of the night she was awakened by a trampling and laughter outside the door, the grating of the bolt, and the rattling of the key in the lock. The door opened, and in the meagre light of a pocket lamp she saw a horde of drunken Rumanian soldiers. She did not at once realize why they had come and when it dawned on her, she was frantic with horror—for this trial she had not been prepared, her pure mind had never conceived it.

The Execution of Marussya

Before dawn, when the Rumanian soldiers at last left, after enjoying themselves to the full, violating and tormenting Marussya, she remained sunk in unfathomable despair as in a bottomless pit. Fastidious about herself as she was, she realized with disgust how she had been defiled; she lay without moving so as not to feel her own body which had become a burden, revolting to her.

An hour passed, a second and a third, and the crack at the top of the window let in a cold, watery light. It became rosier, staining the upper corners and the ceiling.

And still Marussya lay there motionless, her shoulders no longer trembling. She had become calmer and in these hours of the last dawn she was to know she passed through a great, intense rebirth.

As though to recompense Marussya for all her trials and torments in this last hour of her life, she felt and realized all that a human being is capable of—the crushing burden of hopeless despair, the first faint flicker of inner strength, the growth of this flickering into a ray, a stream which finally flowed, as it were, into a shining ocean, in which the defilement of her body and her coming death sank without a trace, like a grain of powder, without a splash, without even raising a ripple.

It was with her spirit filled with this calm, glowing light that Marussya rose from the floor when they came to lead her away to her execution.

The moist, sweet breeze freshened her and made her a bit giddy after the stuffy, smelly cell. She smiled at the wind, at the sky, the clouds and the trees. She could smile because she knew the profound truth of her indivisible unity with the millions of Russian people who together are working for one great cause, some with arms, some with labour, some with patience and endurance, and some, like herself, with silence and faith and suffering. And this truth told her that in the end everyone dies, and that hence there was nothing to make those who die today more unhappy than those who died yesterday and those who will die tomorrow. The important thing was not how and where a man died, but, firstly, what he was dying for, and secondly, what of himself he was leaving behind him in the world.

Absorbed in the amazed and happy realization of the glowing light irradiating her spirit, Marussya barely noted the road—the cawing crows, the strange, wild glance cast at her by a woman with an infant in her arms, the reddish dog snapping at fleas in its shaggy fur. Marussya did not even see the soldiers escorting her, nor did she wish to see them—these were some of those soldiers from that other dark world, which she had left for ever today in the hours of dawn.

On the market place she saw two pillars with a transverse bar, and a thin rope, a long, narrow trestle and in front of it a thick log. "That's for me," she thought, using a very ordinary phrase but the idea contained in it was another—that all this was for her body. Approaching nearer, she saw that on the crossbar there were two more hooks, empty—that meant that they sometimes

hanged three at a time. She remembered the doctor, the woman agronomist and the village teacher of sixty-three. . . Her vacant, indifferent and almost unseeing gaze slid over the commandant standing by the gallows, and he, the same kind of criminal, brute as his soldiers, was filled with a furious hatred for her.

The Rumanians had driven the local population to the gallows, several women were weeping and turned away, while the soldiers, swearing coarsely, threatened them with their rifles, forcing them to look. "Why are they crying?" thought Marussya disapprovingly, and holding down her skirt as the wind caught it, she stepped onto the log and from the log to the trestle as though mounting stairs.

Now she was standing high up and could be seen by all. A Rumanian soldier, the hangman, followed her onto the platform and approached her, causing the boa d to bend under his weight—she could feel a slight springing under her feet. The hangman tore off her jacket, threw it down onto the ground and drawing Marussya's arms behind her back, bound them with rope. She looked the butcher full in the face and he answered her clear gaze with the dull, leaden, drunken looking eyes while his ears, with their tufts of hair, gilded by the sun's rays, became suffused with blood.

He waited, avoiding Marussya's glance. But the commandant delayed for some reason or other. The hangman breathed loudly and heavily and Marussya moved a little aside. She found the stench of bad liquour on his breath unpleasant. The hangman gave her a frowning look. He was one of those who had entered her cell at night, he had even been the first of them and there had been a torch burning, she had seen his face and should have remembered it but she did not remember, did not recognize him and felt not the slightest fear. All this was strange and incomprehensible to the hangman and like the soldiers of the escort he looked at her with amazement and fear. His hands trembled when at the commandant's signal he took up the noose.

"Don't cry!" Marussya called to the women, wanting to comfort them. "Ours are near, they're attacking!"

The commandant jerked his head at the hangman—shut her mouth! The Rumanian, grinning, struck her in the face with his fist, and the spurting blood choked her. Hastily he began to fit the noose on her neck, but the rope became tangled in his hands, and Marussya herself assisted him with movements of her head. After putting on the noose the hangman jumped down and, using both hands, with a harsh grunt, forcibly pulled the support from under her feet.

The Butchers Flee

All was over. The Rumanians had gone, the peasants had dispersed and hanging from the straight thin line of a rope, between the gallows posts, a stiffening body darkened terribly, cooled, swayed slightly in the breeze. At midday clouds gathered and raindrops began to fall, but in the evening the sky cleared again and the sunset was as peaceful, clear, and quietly solemn as though Marussya's bright spirit had spread over the heavens in a sea of gold.

As the last glow of the sunset was extinguished, a motor-cycle came racing along the road past the gallows and halted at the building where the commandant's office had been established. A liaison officer in a leather helmet with eyeglasses pushed up onto his forehead handed an urgent dispatch to the commandant. Five minutes later everything was in confusion in the office. The motor-cyclist had brought a report that the Red Army had made a breach in the second line of defence.

In such a case the commandant could act without delay! Drawers of desks flew upon with a crash, cupboard doors were flung wide, bonfires flamed in the courtyard. The soldiers flung packets of documents into the fires—denunciations, orders, reckonings, reports. The stream of battered retreating troops was already pouring into the village; guns, carts, lorries collided, jammed, crowded each other; the chuffing of motor-engines, the rattle of forged wheels, the neighing of horses, the gruff cries and shouts of drivers, carters, soldiers, the groans and curses of the wounded whom the sound soldiers threw out of the lorries right onto the roadside—all merged into one growing, agitated roar.

Suddenly all this roaring, shouting

din was dominated by a single despairing cry:

"Russian tanks on our flank!"

And everything seemed to tremble, everything mixed and merged, raced around, fell into utter confusion in the darkness of night, it was no longer possible to distinguish anything in this whirling chaos. Nobody listened to anybody else, nobody knew anything, all hurried, ran, shouted and screamed—it was the beginning of a panic.

. . . At dawn, driving the last of the Rumanian rear guard before them, one of our units entered the village.

With a soldier's practical, businesslike eye for the necessities of everyday life the men at once began to install themselves. Campfires sprang up everywhere in the village, stoves smoked, mess tins, saucepans and samovars boiled. Everywhere loud, hearty talk and laughter could be heard.

On the square, beside the gallows, three commanders were standing—a major with a tired, lined face, and two young lieutenants. Two of the men mounting the trestle, took Marussya's dead body down from the gallows, one of them raising it slightly while the other loosened the rope from her neck.

The date and the inscription which she had left in the cell, told them who she was and it also told them that she had said nothing.

"That means she knew something," said the major thoughtfully. "She knew, but didn't say. And appealed to the population. This girl is a hero, she must be buried fittingly."

She was buried in the village graveyard with military honours and a salute from ten rifles. On the board erected over her grave, the major wrote:

"Maria Kryukova. Tortured and hanged by the fascist villains. She died a hero, without betraying military secrets to the enemy, preserving them as a sacred trust, as becomes every fighter. Vengeance for her! Forward, against the enemy!"

Returning from the graveyard, the major said:

"We were just twelve hours too late, otherwise we could have saved her, yes, and caught the Rumanians too. And by this time they've crossed the river a long time since and are somewhere on the other bank."

With a swift step the major's adjutant came to meet him. Standing to attention, he reported:

"Comrade major, a report has come in. The Rumanian units are held up on the eastern bank. The crossing has been seized by some unknown partisan unit."

At the Crossing

Nikulin had captured the crossing with a sudden blow just before dawn, when the retreating Rumanian troops had begun to cross the bridge. Infantry, lorries, carts and guns were moving in a vague dark stream to the crossing, crawling from the narrow ravine, jammed between steep clay sides, descending the steep bank of the fog-swathed river, and pushing across the bridge.

Nikulin's blow was as fierce as it was unexpected. With yells, whistles and wild laughter his detachment dashed out upon the Rumanians, cut the dark moving ribbon in two and halted its advance. Howling and screaming, pushing one another into the water, the Rumanians already on the bridge rushed desperately for the western shore to escape the withering machine-gun crossfire which was raking them from all sides. The rest milled round on the eastern bank and the dark swirling throng poured back to the ravine, colliding with those behind and spreading panic and confusion in their ranks. Meanwhile Nikulin's men, according to instructions previously given (Fomichov's notebook had come in useful), had swiftly occupied the trenches, blockhouses and gun emplacements dealing well and truly with the few guards.

Within ten minutes the detachment had consolidated on the eastern approaches to the crossing. Nikulin himself, with the platoons commanded by Dad, Zhukov and Fomichov occupied the main position in the centre, at the exit from the ravine; the right flank with its trenches arching towards the river bank were occupied by Krylov, the left by Kharchenko.

"Neat, comrade commander!" said Fomichov who with his head bandaged was now well on the way to recovery. "Went through like clockwork!. ."

"Don't be in too much hurry to pat yourself on the back," Dad checked him grimly—Dad was superstitious, like all old sailors. "Don't you see the forces they'e got?"

They were standing in a deep trench, at the gaping dark entrance to the command point, well underground. Nikulin was silent. He felt slightly chilly from the nervous tension. The main contest was about to begin. He fully realized, of course, that engaging thousands with his two hundred men, the only object he could aim at was to gain time. Ten times over he asked himself whether he had gauged the moment correctly. Had he struck too soon, had he not engaged the enemy prematurely, would not the Rumanians still have time to wear out and destroy his detachment, and be able to break through to the bridge before our men arrived?

Zhukov, whom Nikulin had sent to examine the flanks, returned to report that everything was in order. Meanwhile those Rumanians who had succeeded in crossing the river began to recover and opened fire. The western bank also came to life and spoke up. By the flashes its outline, dully penetrating the fog, became visible. A bullet sang its thin, fierce song over Nikulin's head, a second, a machine-gun round rattled. Nikulin frowned and sat down on a bench hollowed in the wall of the trench to avoid some chance bullet.

In every life there comes a day when the great decision has to be made when, as it were, the balance sheet of all past actions, feelings and thoughts is drawn up. The day of examination, the great testing. For Nikulin, this day had come. Whether he would survive the battle or not, he never considered—this was a question of secondary importance compared with the main aim of holding up the trapped enemy and thrashing him to the finish! Concentrating his strength of mind and will to the utmost, Nikulin kept his mind on that one single thought only, everything else was pushed aside to make way for this dominating idea.

He ordered two more paired machine-guns from his reserve to be set up in the emplacement. The men rushed to carry out the order. At this moment the air was rent with a thunderous roar, and before the breastworks a shaggy black column rose, laced with sharp flames. Immediately following it came a second, evil-looking flashes piercing the dark smoke.

The Rumanians stemmed on the eastern bank had recovered themselves and brought their artillery into play.

The battle had begun.

Five minutes under fire... Seven minutes... Several times already, men had come running to Nikulin to report casualties... Ten minutes under fire and such fire that even seasoned fighters who could recall Odessa and Sevastopol shuddered in body and spirit. The Rumanians had evidently decided to finish the business with one blow. The firing became heavier and swifter, blinding and deafening the men, pelting them with lumps of frozen soil. The sun had barely risen and not yet touched the fog wreathing the river, but here, by the bridge, it began to disperse of itself, without the sun, from the furious cannonade which was shaking earth, water and air. It swayed as though in fear, thinned, and stained with the golden-red of sunrise, melted away leaving a clean break in its milky wall.

In this rending, roaring break the river gradually appeared, smooth at the edges, swiftly flowing in the middle, with white breakers at the pontoons. Further away, the solid low-lying western banks sown with small bushes loomed through the thinning mist. But to right and left the fog was still thick, limiting visibility.

Twelve minutes under fire, thirteen, fourteen—when was the attack coming? At the fifteenth minute a rocket soared up—the signal. Both banks simultaneously ceased artillery and mortar fire, the howling and roaring subsided, all that remained was the usual machine-guns and tommy-guns, but that seemed like silence. Nikulin pressed his chest to the cold frost-whitened slope of the trench. A hundred metres from him, in the low slanting transparent rays, a chain rose from the ground. A similar chain rose to right and left. The Rumanians were attacking.

"Fire!" commanded Nikulin; he was pale, his heart was beating, "Fire! Fire!" was repeated along the trench. "Fire!" came from the right and left flanks where Krylov and Kharchenko were stationed. And our fire blazed out against the Rumanians.

It was concentrated and devastatingly accurate. The Rumanians were not able to run fifteen paces before they were forced to the ground. Gradually, some

stooping, some crawling, they began to withdraw to their lines. His face fierce and grim, Fomichov was firing from his semi-automatic in a business-like way, coughing angrily when his bullet found its mark.

No, this had not yet been the attack—only a trial sortie. And more and more enemy units were ceaselessly approaching the crossing. Now no less than two regiments were concentrated before Nikulin, without reckoning those troops who had succeeded in crossing to the western bank. But the enemy's numbers did not occupy the smallest place in Nikulin's calculations. He was fighting to gain time.

He decided to balance his casualties by drawing his defence line in, keeping his men concentrated in a tight fist.

Fomichov approached.

"We've had a good many casualties," he said. "About thirty, I should say."

"Forty-four."

Fomichov gave a long-drawn out whistle.

"Hot work! And we haven't been at it an hour yet."

"An hour and twenty-two minutes," Nikulin corrected him, glancing at his watch. He liked accuracy.

An Uneven Fight

The storm began—the real thing this time. German units had been brought up to the crossing. As soon as one wave had been forced to hug the earth, mown down by our fire, another appeared, a third, a fourth...

Now the seamen's favourite weapon, grenades, came into play. The earth thundered and seemed to bristle up against the fascists. But still they came on, penetrating that wall of thunder, flame and splinters. In front was an officer with a reddish-grey face, no cap, and black hair plastered down on his brow.

The ardour of battle raised Nikulin and carried him lightly across the parapet. "Follow me!" he shouted, turning to his men, and rushed forward, bayonet at the ready. As he ran, the officer raised his tommy-gun and fired a round. Nikulin sidestepped, the bullets flew past him, and before the officer could raise his gun again, Nikulin leapt at him, reaching for him with his bayonet. The officer screamed and stooping, tried to seize his rifle, but slumped, spitted by Nikulin's bayonet. Four soldiers, too late to save their officer, made for him, their faces contorted and savage. Fighting them off he stumbled and it would have been all up with him had not Zakhar Fomichov come in the nick of time. Roaring, eyes bloodshot, he dashed up, holding his rifle by the barrel and with the heavy butt laid out right and left in an instant knocking down two of the soldiers, smashing the skull of the third, while Nikulin himself squared accounts with the fourth.

The fascists could not stand the hand to hand fighting. They gave up, hesitated, fell back. Drunk with the lust of battle, the men were dashing in pursuit, but Nikulin's voice recalled them to the trenches.

"Hot work!" said Nikulin, wiping the sweat from his face with the sleeve of his blouse. "Well, thanks, Zakhar! I won't forget that!"

"And why did you want to shove your nose in?" replied Fomichov angrily. "We'd have managed without you."

He was still carried away by the fight, his hands were trembling, his lips were tight, and the bandage on his head was black with soil, smoke and sweat.

"Go to the left flank," cried Nikulin. "See how Kharchenko's getting on there. If there aren't many left, bring them over here."

Stooping, Fomichov ran to the trench.

He returned with Kharchenko. It turned out that on the left flank the Germans had struck with a half company of picked troops. Everything had gone much the same as in the centre, ending with hand to hand fighting. The Germans had been driven off, but Kharchenko had only eighteen men left, whom he had brought to Nikulin. Kharchenko frowned and touched his head gingerly.

"A German with his butt," he explained. "Good thing that I managed to sidestep, it was a glancing blow."

"And the German?"

"The German didn't manage to sidestep..."

"We've a hundred and fourteen men left," said Nikulin. "How does that look to you, Fomichov?"

"Where can we go now?" replied Fomichov. "After all, the Rumanians

have got a kick left too... But we shan't let them get to that bridge all the same," he added resolutely. "I'll stop them if I have to stay here alone!"

His head sank, his gaze bored into the ground.

"I'm all burning inside, burning till I can hardly stand it. And it gets worse as I go on... I could tear them to pieces!"

"Pull yourself together," said Nikulin. "If anything happens to me, you take over the command. Don't forget..."

At nine o'clock in the morning the approaches to the crossing were still in Nikulin's hands. And it was the same at ten o'clock, and at eleven... One would have said it was impossible! In strength of numbers and arms the fascists had the advantage of Nikulin's men not ten times over, not twenty, not fifty, but a hundred times. One would have thought that they would crush the handful of daredevils in passing, without pausing on their way, without even slowing down. But on the contrary, they were held up at the crossing and could not move a foot. Nikulin would not let them pass.

Exhausted, two thirds of their forces gone, Nikulin's detachment continued to fight still more fiercely and indomitably, in defiance of all mathematical calculations.

At eleven forty the Rumanians again rose to attack and just as every previous time were beaten off. Nikulin had fifty-two men left. He himself had stopped two bullets, one in the shoulder, the second in the arm. Dad and Fomichov bandaged him.

"Passed through?" he asked, his bloodless lips twisting with pain.

"Passed through," replied Dad, winking at Fomichov. He did not want to upset Nikulin, so he did not tell him that the shoulder bullet had lodged in the bone.

Nikulin's head was swimming, he swayed on the broad earthen bench, and before his eyes a grey haze seemed to make everything dim and illusory. He heard Dad's voice:

"Quick, Fomichov, the flask!"

"It's all right," said Nikulin with an effort, "in a minute I'll... It's all right..."

His face became yet paler. He raised his lids. In the dark grey fog which seemed to cover everything he could dimly see Dad's face. Nikulin gritted his teeth angrily—this was too much! He was the commander, he had no right to lose consciousness during battle. He succeeded in overcoming his weakness, his eyes cleared.

"We have very few men left," he said. "We'll beat off one more attack somehow, and then... I don't know... The bridge will have to be blown up!" he ended decidedly.

The Immortality of Ivan Nikulin

Up to that time Nikulin had preserved the bridge—it would come in handy for our men when they arrived. Now it would have to be blown up.

Fomichov swore vigorously.

"Where are our lot, anyway? What do they think they're doing back there—ambling along on bullocks?"

He did not know that our units heading for the crossing had overtaken a tank group on the steppe. Out of sixty-five tanks only twelve succeeded in getting away and these were now making for the river at full speed.

"They're up to something," said Nikulin, alert and suspicious. "We'll have to blow up the bridge, there's nothing else for it."

"And how do you think you're going to get there?" remarked Dad.

"Ye-e-e-s," said Nikulin. "That's right, there's no way to the bridge... They're battering us from that bank too. What are we going to do now?" Slowly, searchingly, his gaze passed over the faces of his commanders. "That means, then, that the Rumanians'll get through?"

The commanders were silent. Dad frowned; screwing up his eyes, Fomichov looked at the river surface, blinding in the sunshine, with the sparkling current running swift in the middle.

"In that case, why have we sacrificed so many men?" said Kharchenko impetuously. "Why, if the Rumanians can pass all the same?" His voice was trembling strangely. "Let me try, comrade commander! I'll have a go at it. Maybe I'll get there!.. I'll go by the very edge, in the water or out of it..."

"Where do you think you'll get?" Fomichov interrupted him. "You'll get yourself into the next world, that's all you'll do."

"What are we going to do then?" cried Kharchenko, jumping up. "Have our pals died for nothing?"

Frowning, Fomichov waved him away with a weary, exasperated gesture.

"Don't fidget... Yelling right in my ear, can't hear myself think. Don't disturb me, let me think, for God's sake! To get to the bridge from the bank's impossible," he continued slowly. "No use even attempting it—it would do no good, all the same. That means that some way round must be found. This is where guile will do the trick."

"By water?" Nikulin caught him up, pleased to find that Fomichov's words supported his own idea.

"Exactly!" said Fomichov. "There's no other way to the bridge. We know how to swim—we're sailors, after all... If you go up stream about a hundred and fifty metres and then take to the water, the current itself will carry you to the bridge, to the middle pontoons."

"And the grenades? Carry 'em?"

"We can make a small raft. You can push that in front of you, nothing in that. The water'll hide it. The sun's too blinding, you can't look at the middle... And I think, comrade commander, that it would be best to send two to be on the safe side. If anything happens to one of them, the other'll do the job."

"Whom shall we send?"

"I'll go myself," said Fomichov simply. "You can't send a landsman, they swim badly and the water's icy just now. You can't use a landsman for that sort of job."

"And the second?" asked Nikulin.

Up to this moment Dad had said nothing. Now he gave a gusty sigh.

"Well, I may as well, comrade commander..."

Nikulin thought for a moment.

"I don't like sending you, Dad."

"Why not? D'ye think I can't swim it? When I was young I've swum the Kerch Straits."

"Better send somebody who's not married... Or like Zakhar, whose family's been killed."

"Don't you worry, my family'll not be left in the lurch," said Dad seriously. "They're not buried in the forest with wolves howling round them, they're among their own people. Don't you worry about that, comrade commander—the collective farm'll not let my family down. My son, the oldest, finished a course last year, he's a professor. He'll look after them..."

The preparations did not take long. Dad went down into the commander's dugout where the wounded had been laid, brought out fragments of boards and his leather satchel with the unit funds. Fomichov undertook to make the raft. Dad handed the satchel to Nikulin.

"There's twelve and a half thousand here, and some small stuff—I forget how much. There are all the accounts and receipts there too, wrapped up in oilcloth. They're written in copying ink pencil, it runs if it's wet, that's why I wrapped them up that way..."

After a moment's silence, he added:

"There's an address there, too."

Kneeling, Fomichov twisted wire around the planks with his strong fingers, fastening them together.

"Ready!"

He stood up, shaking the soil from the knees of his trousers. Nikulin glanced at the raft.

"Too small, it'll not carry the stuff. Grenades are pretty heavy, then there's your clothes..."

Dad and Fomichov said nothing. Nikulin understood that they were not intending to put their clothes on the raft.

"No, you're wrong there," he replied, as though they had told him their decision in words. "You must take your clothes with you. You never know..."

Both of them remained silent, and Nikulin too said nothing more.

After putting the grenades into a sack, Fomichov held out his big sun-burnt hand to Nikulin.

"Well, comrade commander, we've spent a pleasant time together, been good pals. Now... it's time for me to be off..."

"Good-bye, Zakhar!"

With a firm handgrip, they looked hard into each other's eyes. Fomichov guessed Nikulin's thought and smiled.

"That's not what matters, comrade commander! Everything's in order, don't worry. The main thing..."

He did not finish his sentence, and it was not necessary to finish it; Nikulin understood him without the need of words.

Dad took leave old style, kissing him three times.

Picking up the sack of grenades and the raft, they left. Nikulin gave orders

to open machine-gun fire, so as to distract the attention of the Rumanians. This precaution was not without grounds although to right and left of the bridge there was a thick growth of willows which the Rumanian sappers had not had time to clear.

Time passed, the watch ticked on in Nikulin's hand. His thoughts were with Dad and Fomichov. The Rumanians had not shown any sign of having discovered their movement through the bushes. That meant everything was going well. They had probably got there already, they were undressing, loading the grenades on to the raft, laying their clothes behind them.

"Kharchenko!" said Nikulin. "Go down into the dugout and see how the wounded are getting along."

Kharchenko went. Left alone, Nikulin sat down on the seat cut in the soil and pressed his face to the damp earth wall. . .

The fascists soon disturbed Nikulin. They suddenly came to life, shouting noisely, and many of them, forgetful of caution, ran out waving their caps, standing erect in full view. But at the same time they did not open fire. All this was strange, incomprehensible, and Nikulin was on the alert. He looked over the parapet, trying to discover the reason for all this joyful excitement.

But he did not have to think and guess for long!

"Tanks!" said Kharchenko, and his face became grey. Nikulin swung his binoculars to the side he indicated, and saw tanks with the enemy's identification crosses. His mind was working more clearly and intensily than it had ever done. Here it was, the greatest, most difficult test in his life's examination taking place today! Here it was, the greatest thing, the main thing about which Fomichov had not spoken when taking his leave...

"Grenades here!" Nikulin ordered, feeling his whole being filled with strength, lightness and agility. He took the bundle of grenades in his unwounded right hand and glanced over it.

"Zhukov, you take over the command. Here is my last order to you—don't let them by! Hold out to the last!"

Inspired with some tremendous and previously unknown strength he felt that all he was doing was right, indisputable, and could not be done in any other way. He had not the slightest doubt in his victory. Our forces still had not come, but with his inner eye he could already see them as clearly as though they had been before him. They were nearby, already quite close, and there was no longer anywhere the Rumanians could flee to escape destruction.

Seventy metres divided the trenches from the narrow throat of the ravine. Tommy-guns and machine-guns chattered at Nikulin as he ran, filled with a sure confidence that he could not have explained, but which told him that these bullets could do him no harm. In the same inexplicable fashion he sensed that round which was dangerous and flung himself down. The bullets passed just over him and ploughed up the earth four paces behind him. He jumped up and raced on.

At the narrowest place in the ravine, he saw a hollow half-filled with rain water, and lay down in it. He did not even feel the water, did not feel its chill, because all this was unimportant and he did not in the least need to feel it. The grenades he held out of the water. He listened to the sound of the approaching tanks.

They were advancing along the narrow ravine, one behind the other. When the first was quite close, a hot, bright wave lifted Nikulin, and feeling with the whole of his being, with indisputable clarity and confidence that it was not death, but immortality that was before him, he rose from the hollow and lightly flung his body under the rattling treads.

Forward, to the West!

The explosion causing the leading tank to cant and swerve and to end up square across the ravine effectively blocking the path of the other tanks, was clearly audible to all the men in the trenches. It was heard also by Fomichov and Dad.

They had placed their grenades on both sides of the central pontoon, in the chinks between the links of the bridge. They talked across the pontoon, without seeing one another.

"Ready?" called Fomichov. The current was pulling at him, he held on to the wire props. The water was singing

past him, carrying bubbles and white foam on its surface.

"Wait a bit," replied Dad's voice.

The firing on the bank increased, shouts could be heard. "They're attacking," Fomichov decided.

He was right. Realizing that all the hopes they had placed on the tanks had collapsed, the Rumanians were frantic with rage and had rushed head on. Hand to hand fighting developed at the bridge. Kharchenko, twice wounded, took a fat NCO on his bayonet, drove backward with the butt, then spitted a third Rumanian. Beside him Zhukov and the fireman Alyokha were fighting, and the old Cossack with the medal "For distinguished labour" had fallen.

"Hurry up!" shouted Fomichov to the other side of the pontoon. "Can't you hear? They're breaking through to the bridge!"

"Ready!"

"I'll count to three!"

"Right you are!"

Fomichov grasped the catch of a grenade protruding from the bundle.

"One!"

"One," replied Dad from the other side of the pontoon.

"Two! Three! . . "

And pulling the catch of the grenade, Fomichov began swimming down stream, instinctively striving to swim away from the explosion. But who can swim far in four seconds!

The bridge shook, roared, flames shot up from the centre, soared and disappeared in black smoke. . .

Torn from the centre, the mutilated and smashed link separated from the chain, and swaying heavily on the waves, floated down stream, accompanied by fragments and chips among which something white and indistinguishable appeared twice. . . Was it Fomichov or Dad, or simply the freshly sawn surface of a log? . . Singing triumphantly, the water rushed through the broad breach, the disconnected ends of the bridge slanting down stream.

The Rumanians yelled in fury. They had already driven our men out of the trenches and pressed them back to the shore. They had only one hope remaining—to restore the bridge. But that last forty metres dividing the Rumanians from the bridge were impassable.

"Holding out, Kharchenko?"

"Holding out, Zhukov!"

The fireman Alyokha had fallen. There were very few of the men left—thirty in all—when our pursuing tank units and dashing Cossack regiments came out on the shore. Like a stream of lava, they flowed down upon the Rumanians, iron screaming, fire spurting, sabres glancing and glittering in the sunlight. . .

When the crossing had been cleared of the enemy on both sides, it was the turn of the sappers. They brought the separated ends of the bridge together and joined them; by dawn the crossing was restored, and the endless passage of our troops across it began.

Westward, westward, forward to the attack! An endless stream of infantry. Motors humming, lorries rumbling. Westward! As though in answer to the call, the planks rattled and rang under the drumming hooves of Cossack horses. Westward, for the honour and liberty of our land! Lapped by the water, the pontoons sank under the weight of huge tanks, appearing even heavier and more tremendous as they emerged from the fog. Guns passed—large and small, anti-tank and anti-aircraft, mortar units passed, and after them infantry again, and again Cossacks, tanks, guns, and again infantry, infantry, infantry! . .

And westward, together with the troops, marched the sailor Kharchenko, the sailor Zhukov and the other men of the detachment.

Thus ends the story of the life and immortality of the Black Sea mine-layer Ivan Nikulin and his comrades-in-arms.

Translated by Eve Manning

ARMS TOO SHORT!

Drawing by Kukryniksy

THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS POLISH FISHERMEN...

... AT HARD LABOUR

Drawing by Boris Yefimov

A BIG DAY

Sergeant Ivan Pavlovich Tokarev's seven-hundred-and-fifty-sixth battle day began quite simply, presaging nothing of the events with which it was to end.

This is what happened. While waiting for the order to launch into attack the company, commanded by First Lieutenant Semyonov, were lying low at the place from which they were to start, on the edge of a peat-bog which was already dry in patches. It was in the early hours of a slightly misty morning, before sunrise. The efficient petty officer had managed to bring up hot food for the men at dawn, and most of the fighters, having enjoyed a hearty breakfast and downed the regulation tot of vodka—as though utterly oblivious to the day of battle awaiting them—now lay blissfully dozing, fondly embracing their rifles and machine-guns, their beautific snores heralding the dawn.

According to his old habit of easing his heart of everything that weighed on it before going into action, Sergeant Tokarev, the box of a machine-gun belt on his knees, sat in the trench writing a letter home to Chelyabinsk, to Yenissei Street No. 6, that lovely little house surrounded with lime trees where he was born and bred, the hearth where he had left the hopes and happiness of his twenty-four-year-old life and from whence, almost every day, he received letters sent him in turn by his mother, sister and younger brother.

He began the usual letter in the usual manner, by saying that there was no special news. He wrote that he was homesick. Then he remembered his turning lathe and asked who was working it now after the graduation of the trade school pupils and whether the new lathe operator still had the copper tablet attached to the machine in honour of its stakhanovite record.

Here the letter was cut short. First Lieutenant Semyonov, company commander, appeared just then with the platoon commanders. The sergeant hastily put away the letter. The officers came to a halt near Tokarev and bending down, peered through the embrasures examining the terrain and checking up on the map, conversing as they did so. Having finished his business the company commander slipped the map back into his wallet, and was about to leave when he caught sight of Tokarev, needlessly vigilant. With the Russian's usual friendly smile he addressed Tokarev, asking him how things were and how the men were feeling.

Tokarev threw a careful glance at his sleeping companions and after a second's pause he said in a serious tone:

"The men are feeling fine, Comrade First Lieutenant," and after a brief silence, added: "Allow me to report: we've got big hopes in our artillerymen. We ought, first of all, to destroy the fresh machine-gun nests." Tokarev stepped up to the embrasures: "Over there, under the aspen trees. See? They're holding the whole road under firing range. And over there, where you can see that little patch of bog, near the birch grave, there is a mortar battery which turned up this morning—it also needs flattening, otherwise it'll never give us a minute's peace. And those bushes nearby ought to be uprooted because maybe tommy-gunners are ambushed there."

"Hold on, how did you get to know all this? Been out scouting?"

"Good Lord, Comrade First Lieutenant, it's two years I've been at war now, time to notice what's where on the battle-field."

Semyonov fixed Tokarev with an attentive and earnest look, jotted down something in his notebook and then said to the sergeant:

"Thanks for the good service!"

Platoon commander Lieutenant Berezhnov patted the sergeant on the shoulder:

"You're making fine headway, my lad!"

Tokarev shyly smiled at these words from his favourite officer.

The officers left and Tokarev reached for his sheet of paper to resume his letter.

The sun rose, dispelling the morning mist, and now a good view could be obtained of the slightly elevated, wooded edge of the bog occupied by the Germans. Quite near—with the naked eye—could be seen the black earth cut with trenches, embrasure slits: in peace-time no more than sixty seconds would be required to reach the other side, the fringe of the woods. But now it would probably take more than a day to overcome this negligible stretch of land; some, try as they might, may even never reach that lovely glade fringed in a lacework of silver birches.

Tokarev smiled bitterly as he closed the envelope. If only his mother and sister knew, could feel what a great road he was to travel this day! Afterwards, when the war is over, he would tell them all about it, all about that which was hardest and most terrifying of all and about which his near ones have not the slightest suspicions just now.

Lieutenant Berezhnov returned from the company commander. From the unusualy strict and stern expression on his face the sergeant knew that zero hour was near. Gently and slowly Tokarev began to rouse the platoon—the Red Army men Gertsov, Kurnikov, Stepanov—his comrades-in-arms, his true companions and buddies whose friendship had been emented in battle.

Glancing at his watch, Lieutenant Berezhnov said:

"Don't wake them, Tokarev, they'll soon get up themselves."

Exactly at seven a.m. our artillery opened barrage fire. At the first salvo the men woke up, some nonchalantly, some with alarmed ejaculations, others with the muffled question: "Has it started?" but all of them with equal vigilance, on the qui vive, ready for action. And only those who had been seasoned and reseasoned by war—Gertsov and Kurnikov, the same age as Tokarev and both hailing from the same place in the north of Russia, indulged in loud yawns as they lazily stretched, rolling thick cigarettes with their fingers tanned to blackness.

The Germans immediately replied to our barrage with heavy gunfire. But strangely enough, practically all their shells, with rare exception, burst far ahead of our initial positions. As far as the eye could see the thermite shells had set fire to the dried peat-bog. Fanned by the wind, the solid wall of fire gained momentum, raging between our positions, the Germans' and the road. The only means of approach to the woods and to the glade fringed in birchtree lacework was under a criss-cross of multilayered machine-gun and rifle fire.

A series of green rockets hurtled up into the sky, which still remained clear blue.

"Forward, comrades!"

Berezhnov went over the top with enviable agility and ease, resting on one hand he vaulted over the piled mound in front of the trench. Without casting a backward glance, sure that the whole platoon was following him, he ran across the swampy bog, heading towards the road. The men dashed in his wake. The wind, which had not been noticed before the conflagration, drove swirling clouds of suffocating smoke towards our side from the burning peat-bog. Thermite shells were still bursting here and there on the bog, but the Germans had now shifted the brunt of their gunfire to the bottle-neck of the road, implacably barring it with a deathly hail of fire and metal against the advancing infantry. The tall figure of Lieutenant Berezhnov with his unruly waving hair escaping from beneath his sun-bleached field-service cap, with his tommy-gun gripped in his hand and grenades dangling all around his belt was rushing headlong towards the bottle-neck, his men following close in his steps. Nobody lagged behind. Their officer's fearlessness, his determination and faith in victory was transmitted to them. Thus, making an irresistible wedge, with their officer at its head, the platoon would have dashed—with very few casualties—right through the fierce enemy barrage and burst into the trenches. It was precisely this non-stop headlong movement that would have decided the outcome of the attack.

Indeed, all would have been well but for an irretrievable misfortune. When only a few steps remained to reach the bottle-neck of the road Lieutenant Be-

rezhnov pitched to the ground. He fell, and did not rise. And maybe it was because, from the moment they went over the top, the men had wholly and indivisibly subordinated their will to their commander, had been transmuted as it were into his physical and moral continuation, that the death of the officer had such a tremendously profound effect on them. Perhaps this was why they all, as one man—Sergeant Tokarev included—threw themselves flat on the ground, not daring to advance a single step beyond Lieutenant Berezhnov. And how very, very near was that wall of barrage fire, how easily one could dart through it with a running start!

Tokarev crept up to the officer and with his teeth tore open the first-aid packet. But life was swiftly departing from the young body of the lieutenant which only a moment before had been so full of movement and surging strength. His lips were red-blue, as though smeared with overripe berries, his eyes were losing their lustre and quickly sinking in beneath his high, clear forehead and his cheeks were so pallid that the silky chestnut down which had never yet known the touch of razor-blade seemed to stand out like dark stubble. Life still lingered, but only in his hand: warm and quivering, covered with blood. More instinctively than consciously, it stretched towards the hand of Sergeant Tokarev and, mustering its quickly failing strength, it pressed Tokarev's hand as though it wished thereby to transmit everything that had been great and noble in the life of Lieutenant Berezhnov.

Not a word did the dying officer utter, but the handshake he gave as he died told Tokarev everything that he, as inheritor, was to do.

The earth where the infantry platoon had entrenched heaved and tossed from the nearby explosions. Clumps of peat, water and mud rained down on the men as they lay prone. Shell splinters whined above their heads. The high, southern azure sky had long since vanished in the gloom of this death-dealing storm. The barrage fire raged as frenziedly as ever in the bottle-neck of the road. The dry peat-bog was engulfed in furious flames and the wind drove the smoke which suffocated the men as it rolled slowly along the ground like poison gas, bringing tears to their eyes and choking them with a hacking cough. The only free and liveable stretch was that which lay behind the attackers. How natural it would have been to yield to that mighty instinct to live, how simple it would have been to back out, to breath deep and full of the fresh air, to muster strength again!..

The sergeant rose to his full height and, in a voice which rang with the strength and faith, the will and fearlessness of the fallen commander, he gave the command:

"Follow me, comrades!"

He flung himself forward, not straight to the bottle-neck, but a bit to the left, right into the smoke of the burning peat-bog. Those who happened to remember Tokarev as he appeared at that fleeting instant, later told me that as long as they live, they would always see him as they saw him at that moment—small-built, wiry, with his red-starred metal helmet perched low on his head, dark-featured, his tommy-gun in his hand and the hazy smoke of the fire swirling around his figure, as though he stood on the peak of a flying cloud.

That moment when the men silently and trustfully flung themselves into the attack in his wake was the happiest in Tokarev's life. He raced ahead, his breast ploughing through the smoke, unable to see the earth on which his feet trod. He experienced no fear: he sensed the men following in his steps, he heard their heavy breathing, the clink of arms, their wordless faith that he would lead them out to the place they were heading for.

The source of the conflagration was nearer the middle of the peat-bog. The men reached it. Covering their mouths and noses with the moistened sleeves of their tunics, stumbling and falling, sinking waist-deep in the swamp, the tears pouring painfully down their cheeks, the men were on the verge of exhaustion. Tokarev felt this. Soaking wet, all heated up, covered in weeds and mud, without slowing his breakneck pace he dashed right into the heart of the flames and neither by hearing nor by sight, but by some instinct, he divined that the platoon had followed him right into the flames. One thing Tokarev clearly heard, and that was how his water-

logged uniform hissed on him as it came into contact with the flames. Luckily the wall of fire was narrow. On passing through it, the sergeant reached the banks of a draining ditch filled with water. He threw a glance over his shoulder. All grimy and blackened, smoking like fire-brands, the men came dashing out of the flames. Tokarev leaped across the ditch and dashed ahead. The smoke gradually thinned away and through the curling wisps he saw in the distance, away to the right, the edge of the woods fringed in birchtree lacework—the object of their attack. They would deliver the Gemans an unexpected blow from the rear.

Under cover of the fire, choosing places where the smoke was thickest, Tokarev led the platoon out of the peat-bog. Quickly covering a small stretch of firm, grassy land thickly shrubbed, they launched a concerted attack against the German trenches from the rear, showering the enemy with grenades. Bayonets came into action to put the finishing touch to the job. In the hand to hand fight Tokarev killed about ten Germans—at least he only saw the death of ten with his own eyes.

The men were resting, dog-tired after the battle and the fortification of the line they had wrested from the enemy. Only the sentries and the platoon commander were on guard. Having made sure that the men were fed, and after making a round of inspection of the firing points, Tokarev also decided to relax for a bit.

With the Order of the Red Star pinned to his breast and with the words from Lieutenant-Colonel Sherstnev, regimental commander: "Congratulations, Comrade Tokarev, on your promotion to officer's rank," constantly ringing in his heart, he sat near a trench mortar and, afraid of letting slip the precious few minutes of light remaining before sunset, he wrote a letter to Chelyabinsk, to Yenissei Street No. 6, to that lovely little house surrounded with lime trees. The letter was an unusual one. Today, for the first time in those two years of war he had rid himself of that pining for home, for his native Urals. It was really remarkable how easily and simply and happily it had all come about!

On that never forgettable seven-hundred-and-fifty-sixth day of war he wrote to his near ones that until today he had never known himself. There was only one talent he possessed—military talent. Yes, he was a military man. A military man to the very core. The joy of life, all its hopes, all its happiness was now for him no longer there, in Chelyabinsk, but right here, at the front, on the field of battle. A new man had been born—an officer, whose life henceforth was for all time wholly and utterly devoted to the army, to war, to the defence of his country. To the end of his days he would not doff his soldier's uniform. To his dying day he would remain a soldier, and as soldier he would go to his grave...

All that I have set forth above is, of course, far from everything told me by Ivan Pavlovich Tokarev himself as we sat in a sand quarry at the bottom of a shell crater not far from the spot where these events had transpired. Throughout our long conversation his dark expressive face, clever beyond its years, was never once touched even by the vestige of an inadvertent smile. He spoke in low, deliberate tones, in a voice aching with unspeakable affliction. The shade of Berezhnov, from whom he had received his heritage, stood before him all the time, and his desire was to be an officer worthy of his commander who had fallen in action.

A. AVDEYENKO

THE PATH OF THE BOLD

(The Third War Navigation Season of Soviet River Workers)

A chart of all the waterways of the Soviet Union hangs in my office. It occupies an entire wall. Numberless blue arteries run into great rivers which, in turn, stretch towards the spaces indicating seas. Eighteen imposing volumes in severe black bindings contain but a brief description of our rivers. The Soviet Union has over a hundred thousand kilometres of navigable waterways. All the navigable rivers of the United States of America, Britain, France and

Germany together in kilometres would not run into six figures. If Britain is justly called mistress of the seas it seems to me that Russia has every ground to be called a great river power.

I often look at the conventional signs and flags on my map. The daily pile of radiograms and telegraphic photographs tell me of that immense and difficult job is being done by hundreds of thousands of people in navy-blue jackets or greasy boiler suits. These people have made a big effort for their country in this bitter, sanguinary war.

I'm not going to cite the millions of tons of cargo carried; that's the job of economists and statisticians. All I'll say is that statistics show that the Soviet river workers have done better this year than in any of the six preceding years despite the difficulties.

I want to tell you here of some episodes, not always connected with each other, to share my observations with you and describe a number of meetings with river workers, in the hope that it will give the reader an idea of the sort of people who sail our rivers and of what they are capable when the country calls them to stern effort and fighting exploits.

Unloading at landing stage of the Moscow-Volga canal

In an Astrakhan port on the Volga I saw a faded Red Banner in the River Workers Trade Union Committee room. Attached to the pole above the banner was a military order. That's the Volga boatmen's most precious souvenir.

"That Order cost us our blood and the blood of our comrades," the grizzled skipper of an oil barge told me. He had just come into the committee room on business. "It happened twenty-five years ago," he said. "We fought well on the Volga then. When my son went to the front not long ago I brought him here. 'An order like this must be pinned to your jacket when you return after victory,' I told him. 'Go, my boy, and remember that the Volga boatmen have never been cowards and have always loved their country more than life.'"

I heard these words from the old skipper early in the war; I have recalled them many a time since.

In the terrible days of the Leningrad blockade the city's only supply line lay across Lake Ladoga. In the winter a motor road ran across it. The name given it was brief and to the point—"The Road of Life". "The Path of the Bold" would have been no less appropriate. In spring, tug skippers replaced the motor-drivers. They jokingly called each other "Lake taxi-drivers".

Formerly navigation lasted no more than five months in the year on Lake Ladoga, that Russian inland sea. Fierce storms hampered shipping. The steamers only dared make their first trip when the route was entirely free of ice, and that happens late in the year. The north wind forms unexpected ice fields to the southern bank when there are already lilies of the valley in bloom.

Last spring the century old tradition was broken. The first ship steamed through a channel blasted in the ice while the last lorries were churning up the water on the melting winter road. Lake Ladoga now worked the year round: there was not a moment's break in the stream of food supplies flowing to Leningrad.

Lake Ladoga sailors sleep by day,

and work by night. They are as pleased as punch when it rains or when it's foggy, and curse the moon when it peeps out from the low-scudding clouds at the wrong moment. You should see their ships. They are tiny but powerful tugs with lowering funnels which permit them to pass under the low Leningrad bridges. You'd think that the big Ladoga waves would certainly swamp them in the first storm, but it's precisely these tugs, made to negotiate narrow canals, that are bearing the brunt of supplying the huge city.

There is not a ship that hasn't been fiercely bombed at least a dozen times. I've not seen a Ladoga tug with a lamp glass intact and I am ready to take a bet that there is not a tug on the Ladoga that hasn't got patched sides or a riddled funnel. If the Germans so far have sunk but one tug it can only be accounted for by the amazing skill at manoeuvering shown by the Ladoga captains, and, perhaps, the pocket size of their craft. I can imagine how Junkers pilots curse these tiny, elusive targets which, in addition, hit back with vicious anti-aircraft machine-guns.

Captain Vassili Isheyev of the Ladoga tug *Sea Lion* has been decorated with an order and two medals. I asked him once:

"How many times have you been bombed, captain?"

He laughed. He's a middle-aged man with a stern, weather-beaten face and a determined chin but he laughed like a boy, loud, gay, and infectious. Then he called the steersman and repeated my question to him.

"Ask me something easier!" the steersman grinned. "I'll give you my word, it's a sight easier to count the times we haven't been bombed. I guess that's happened about seven times this season. Sorry, not seven but six for being shelled by an armoured cutter also counts for something."

The part played by river transport in the great battle of Stalingrad is generally known. Everything the country sent to the Stalingrad front went by way of the Volga. I wasn't at the Stalingrad crossings at the height of the battle but everybody who was agrees that "hell let loose" is too weak a description for the conditions under which the Volga boatmen worked.

There were days when enemy planes hovered over the river from dawn to

On the Volga. Unloading ammunition for Stalingrad

dusk. The scream of bombs, earth rocking explosions, the cries of drowning people—all merged into one great hellish cacophony. But the boats went on crossing the river without a break. The population and factory equipment were carried away from blazing Stalingrad.

Heroism at the Stalingrad crossings was an everyday occurrence. Not one nor hundreds of people distinguished themselves, but thousands. Captain Bogatov on a fast passenger boat dashed across the twelve kilometre zone under devastating German artillery and mortar fire. He delivered highly valuable cargo where it was badly needed. In action the crew of the *Sokrat* shot down three enemy planes: a warship might envy such a record. In one night Captain Shvaryov on his by no means large boat carried more than ten thousand people to the east bank under bombardment. Before the war the captain would have called anyone mad who told him that such a thing was possible. Captain Koshensky's vessel was sunk. He took over another. A direct shell hit sank that too. The captain bandaged his wounds and mounted the bridge of a third. Iron men of unyielding will manned the ships at Stalingrad!

Some river workers who perished at the crossings are buried in the Central Square in Stalingrad right opposite the department store where, in the basement, Field Marshal Paulus and his staff were captured.

But the finest memorial to the Volga heroes is the Stalingrad port which has arisen out of the ashes and ruins. Here is embodied the labour of people from the most remote basins. In the winter they stayed on in their workshops after the day's work was over to make cranes, conveyors, window frames and tools as gifts to Stalingraders. All this packed in thousands of cases bearing the two-word address "Stalingrad Port" sailed down the Volga in the spring with the first stringe of barges. By the end of the navigation season Stalingrad port was working at full capacity.

The Don and the Kuban are now the rear. Busy life is humming here. Many tugs and barges raised from the river bottom are again sailing under the Soviet flag.

Let me tell you about one of them. One night it was attacked by a swarm of German bombers. Water poured into the holes which had been pierced by splinters. Practically the same minute a fire broke out that swiftly caught the deck. The tragic end soon came. Captain Shlygin was the last to reach the bank. He led his crew into the reeds which the scouts of the advancing German infantry had already gained.

In the winter, when the Red Army threw the Germans back with a powerful blow, the crew again came to the well-known spot. Only the fire-twisted bridge and the poor tortured skeleton of the cabin and navigator's look-out were to be seen above the ice.

Captain Shlygin said to his men:

"You see how things stand. We haven't even a spade to clear away the snow. But we've strong hands and a good head on our shoulders. 'Where there's a will there's a way' is what we sing in our songs. We'll sail again in that little tub. Am I right, men?"

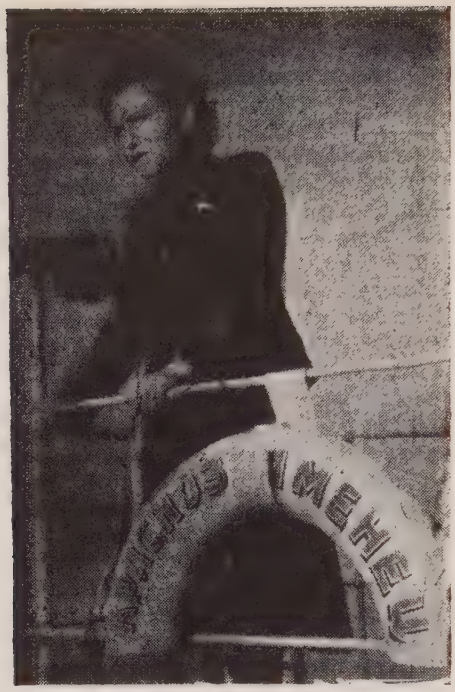
"Dead right," replied the crew.

They decided to raise it by the "ice-dock" method. The ice is hacked away around the ship leaving a thin layer at the bottom. The cold does its work and the water under this thin layer quickly freezes. The operation is then repeated. The men patiently repeat the operation until the ship is in a sort of natural ice-dock.

One night the water burst through the too thin ice crust. The alarm given, all jumped out of the dugout. Without a moment's hesitation the captain gave the lead by throwing himself into the blood-freezing water so as to stop the bared leaks and prevent the water entering the vessel.

After long days of painstaking work all the damaged part of the hull was exposed to view—it was pierced in one hundred and nine places! The holes were stopped by anything available. By the time the ice began to break up the tug was afloat and was taken to a berth.

This had been completely demolished by the Germans. All materials had to be lugged by hand. Everything to be found among the wreckage was used to repair the engine. Battered German tanks came in useful. The crew did not leave the vessel for days on end.



Captain M. Popova, of the "Krasnoznamenets" Her tug has won first place among those plying the upper reaches of the Volga

By the end of May the tug was hauling its first string of barges along the river with supplies for the front.

In late autumn I got a telegram from indefatigable Captain Shlygin. He reported that his tug had hauled more cargo that summer than in any year in peace-time. . .

I have given you a brief account of the work of rivermen in basins in the zone of hostilities. But what is happening on the remote rivers of Siberia in the East? What new departures has the war introduced into the work of the river fleet as a whole?

First of all the very make-up of the river workers has changed. The strong young fellows have gone to the front. Come any morning, and board any ship. You'll hear the ringing voices of girls, see women at the stokehole, at the anchor, even on the captain's bridge. Over seven hundred women joined the Volga tanker fleet alone in just one month. Who are they? Mostly the wives and daughters of our grand captains, engineers and mates.

I remember well the time I happened to go aboard the Volga S.S. *Vosstanye*. While chatting with Captain Nikita Yudin my eye was caught by the confident movements of the girl at the wheel. The captain observed my interest and said proudly: "That is my daughter Nina."

Down in the engine room I was introduced to oiler Viktor, the captain's son. When we sat down to supper in the officers mess I did justice to the cakes and praised the ship's cook.

"Yes, my wife always had a name for tasty fare," said the captain.

At that moment the door opened and a well-built girl in greasy overalls peeped in.

"Papa," she said to the captain, "I've put your book back on the table, I'll finish it after the watch."

She turned out to be stoker Evguenia Yudina, the captain's second daughter. The old Volga captain's family were serving aboard his ship!

Who would have thought in peace-time that women would be capable of doing almost any heavy job? And now Captain Maria Popova of the tug *Krasnoznamenets*, an energetic young woman has picked an all women crew and for the second season her ship has been considered one of the best on the Volga. For distinguished work on the broad and deep Amur Captain Zinaida Savchenko was recently decorated with the Order of Lenin.

Newcomers are given a short preliminary course of training before they go aboard. Old and experienced rivermen willingly give a lot of energy and persistance to training the tenderfeet. A month or two of the real thing afloat and the newcomer feels himself at home. 1943 gave peak results in ship sailings strictly to schedule, in sailing until the very freeze up, and in hauling extra-heavy loads. And this, mark you, despite the substitution of wood for Donets coal and the shortage of anti-furring materials for the boilers and a number of other difficulties.

Fearing to trespass on the field of narrow technical problems I shall wind up with a small episode. It happened in Central Asia on the capricious and wayward Amu-Darya. Many Turkmenians work in the shipping here. These recent nomads have abandoned their

chequered national cloaks and tall fur hats and are now proudly wearing the blue jackets of the river workers.

Captain Hoja Atamuradov received me with purely eastern warmth. We sat in his cabin and drank strong and fragrant green tea. The hot day was drawing to an end. The shades of night deepened.

"Where are we putting in for the night, captain?" I asked.

I had been on the Amu-Darya more than once and I knew that no captain would risk sailing his ship in the dark along that mad river, where the navigable channel was capable of shifting twice a day.

"We've an old saying," the captain replied with a smile. "A hundred horsemen can overcome a thousand, if only they are led by a bold and able captain. Stalin says that everyone now must work for two. That's good advise. Up to the war I sailed the ship until the sun went down. Now I can see in the dark too. We shall sail all night and by sunrise we shall already be at Horezm Oasis!"

It turned out just as the captain had said.

Nowadays they sail twenty-four hours round the clock on the Amu-Darya.

During the war Captain Hoja Atamuradov has begun to do the work of two. Many tens of thousands of his comrades are doing the same.

They find things tough at times but they know that victory lies ahead. The wind from the Dnieper brings smoke from the funnels of the first vessels flying our flag. The chorus of ships sirens at anchor in liberated Kiev is heard by the river workers of the Amur, Volga and Ob. "Victory is near," pipe the whistles.

PYOTR PELIPIENKO,
editor of the newspaper "River Transport"

BYELORUSSIAN PATRIOTS

In the autumn of 1943, just after the town of Dobrush had been liberated from the German fascist invaders, a secret Soviet youth organization came out into the open.

Thanks to skilful conspiracy at the start, the work of this organization was successful, not one failure did it have during the whole of its existence. It was founded by three persons, and soon increased to many times its original size. The first groups of dynamiters and scouts were formed. Only the members of the bureau knew each other by sight. All the others knew only one or two members of the organization.

The young patriots worked in pairs: two young men or two young women. These "pairs", as they were called by the bureau, engaged chiefly in blowing up trains and distributing leaflets. The combat activity of the secret organization in the town was closely linked with the operations of young partisans.

The patriots blew up railway trains, sometimes two or three a day. They also blew up the building of the burgomaster. In Dobrush and its vicinity they set fire to six petrol stores. They were everywhere and yet nowhere. It seemed that the city was flooded with them, yet they were as elusive as though invisible.

The inspirer and organizer of all the combat undertakings of the patriots was a young woman of twenty-two called Katya. As has now become known, her real name is not Katya but Varvara. Varvara Vyrvich from Rechitsa. But the name "Katya" has stuck so firmly that today there are few people who call her Varvara.

She smiles as she recalls the time she prepared to blow up her first German train. At that time the partisans had just begun operating in this district and the roads were practically unguarded.

"To blow up a train," says Katya, "was not difficult. But we had no experience, and, I must confess, I was quite frightened. Not for myself," she adds, "but for the cause."

And really, nothing came of the first attempt. When she heard the train whistle she crept up to the track and, burying a mine under the rail, ran back into the bushes.

"In two minutes," Katya whispered. "In two minutes," she repeated.

They all waited in breathless silence. Katya kept her eye on the second hand of her watch. In two minutes the locomotive came up. With a monotonous

click all twenty-four cars passed one after the other. There was no explosion.

"What's the matter?" asked the flabbergasted Katya. "Has it gone?"

She felt so hurt and wretched about this first failure that she burst into tears. But this was only a moment's weakness.

"We'll blow up a train today just the same!" she stated firmly. "Won't we, friends?"

They did not leave the embankment until they heard the sound of an exploding train. How can one convey the joy, the genuine joy of these people who for the first time had taken a part of their revenge on the enemy!

From that time on Katya took part in many battles and became an excellent horsewoman and sniper.

When she went out on reconnoissance or some other assignment her place in the forest, where headquarters was located, was taken by Tassya Voykova, her closest friend and aide.

On such days it was Tassya who gave instructions to the girls who came from town, always in pairs, telling them the addresses of apartments where mines and leaflets could be obtained.

Work in the patriots' organization went on at full swing, and extraordinarily much was accomplished in a short time. It was at this time that Tassya Voykova had one of her first meetings with the schoolgirl, Masha Tereshchenko.

"On the third of August," Voykova recalls, "I managed to see Masha at one of our meeting places in town. I gave her an assignment from the commander of a partisan detachment with which we were closely connected. The assignment was to find out exactly how many Germans there were in town and where they were stationed. On the fourth of August Masha reported in the fullest detail. That day I gave her a second task, to distribute leaflets among the young people of Gomel region. On the sixth of August the leaflets had been distributed among the population."

Thus Maria Tereshchenko, an ordinary Dobrush schoolgirl, became an active underground worker. She worked together with her friend Tonya Gutorova, and it must be said that they worked zealously.

Once the girls came to the bureau worried and upset.

"Mobilization has been announced in town," they said. "The Germans want to send everybody born in 1925 to Germany."

What was to be done? How could they disrupt this mobilization?

The bureau of the underground organization considered the question and made a speedy decision. A short leaflet "To the young men and women of Dobrush" was written, calling on them not to be deceived by the German provocateurs.

When the leaflet was written Katya came out to the two girls, who were waiting impatiently for her.

"Girls," said Katya. "This is an important job. Today and tomorrow you must make thirty copies of this leaflet and paste them up in the centre of the town. It is a very important assignment. Clear? Can you do it?"

And, not waiting for an answer, for Katya had perfect faith in her friends, she began to ask what else was new in town and how things were at home.

"Mother does not suspect anything?" Katya asked Gutorova.

"No, no, certainly not," answered Tonya.

"Well, that's all to the good, otherwise she would worry..." She embraced the girls and kissed them, saying: "Good luck, I'll be waiting for you."

The girls came home from the forest and did not know where to begin, for there was neither paper nor ink, nor glue. First they looked for paper, and among their school copybooks found a large drawing album with almost all the pages clean. They made some ink and began to write the leaflets in big block letters.

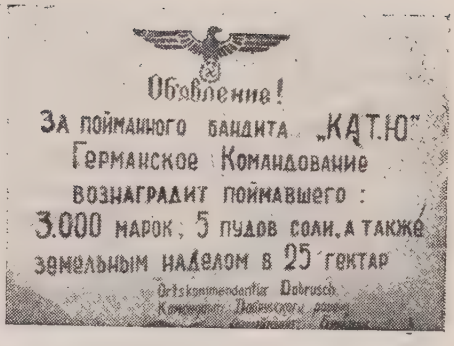
"We sat in the cellar for almost twenty-four hours copying those leaflets by the light of a tiny lamp," told Tonya later on. "At last they were done. We made paste out of flour and starch, and in the day-time went out into town, but there were Germans and policemen everywhere. How were we going to put them up? It was easier to lay a mine than to paste up thirty leaflets. We returned home and tried to think out how we were going to accomplish the job. It was prohibited to be out the streets at night."

Finally the girls decided that the best time would be from seven to nine in the evening. This was the time when the patrols were relieved and dusk began to fall. As soon as a patrol passed, the

NOTICE!

For the capture of the bandit "KATYA" the German command offers a reward of 3,000 marks, five poods of salt and also an estate of 25 hectares.

Ortskommendatur Dobrusch.
Commandant of Dobrush District
Oberleutnant BROCKMANN



girls jumped out from around the corner of a house, one smeared the wall with paste, and the other stuck up the leaflet. For some two hours the girls followed the patrols until all thirty leaflets were pasted.

The next morning the girls got up as soon as it grew light, and, going out to have a look at their work, saw hundreds of leaflets. It turned out that they had not worked alone that evening: there were many friends in town whom they did not know. And although the Germans and the police angrily tore the leaflets down, the contents were already known to the whole town.

That day a German orchestra played in the park to lure the young people. But the park was empty, for not one of the youth who had received a notice ordering them to appear in the park on that day appeared. The Germans and the police checked all passports and made dragnets, but strange to say, all the young men and women born in 1925 had completely disappeared. Some hid in cellars and did not come out for weeks; others went to the forest to the partisans.

One night Fedya Kukharev, one of the youngest of the partriots, who blew up three trains by himself, made his way out of town together with his friends and dug up his secret store, hidden in an unused trench. The booty was three machine-guns, fifty rifles and many cartridges.

"I collected all this from the very beginning of the war," said Fedya with pride.

In their underground work the youth of the little town of Dobrush grew and developed, their conspiracy becoming more perfected with every day. And although the organization numbered several dozen members the Germans were unable to get on its trail. True, not long before their retreat from the town the Germans did arrest Zhenya Petrankov when he was preparing to blow up a German barrack. They found a notebook on him with the addresses of his friends in code. No matter how hard the Germans tried to force him to tell what was written in this notebook, Petrankov refused to reveal the contents. He was tortured with fire and the skin was cut off his hands but he kept silent.

Sixteen-year-old Zhenya Petrankov suffered horrible tortures with fortitude. He died at his fighting post, leaving in the hearts of his friends a warm memory of himself and his extraordinary steadfastness.

The terror in the town increased. Horrible punishment was threatened by the Germans for anyone who gave shelter to the underground workers, but this only made them rally more closely around their leader Katya. Their leaflets appeared everywhere: on the walls of homes, in apartments, in the town hall, and even in the police barracks. A policeman might pull out his handkerchief and a crumpled piece of paper would fall out. He would unfold it to find a leaflet.

The commandant of the garrison signed orders, one more threatening than the other. Nothing helped. There were already many middle-aged people, even old people in town who helped the young patriots in every way they could.

In one of her last meetings with Katya, Natasha Malysheva, who had come from town, told her that she had managed to discover a new petrol store.

"It is well camouflaged and has a strong guard," the young patriot reported, "but it can be set on fire."

"So what's the trouble?" asked Katya. "Do it."

"I have no mines."

Then Katya gave her an address and password.

The next day Natasha knocked at the door of a tiny house on the river bank. For a long time no one answered, but finally the door opened to reveal a grey-haired old woman.

"Good day," said Natasha.

"Good day, daughter. What do you want?" asked the old woman in a weary voice.

"Regards from Katya."

The old woman changed instantly, greeted Natasha warmly and asked her to step in. Closing the door she turned to Natasha and, standing near the door, asked:

"What is it you want?"

"I need medicine."

"Ah-h," murmured the old woman in a voice now quite gentle in which there was a warm, motherly note.

She went into the next room and came back in a few minutes carefully carrying in both hands something wrapped in an embroidered towel.

"Here you are."

Natasha took the bundle and immediately understood that it contained mines. She was astonished at receiving them from this old woman, who apparently could have no possible connection with their organization. But there was no time to ponder over it. Rising to leave, Natasha said:

"Thanks, grandmother."

The old woman approached Natasha, looked into her face searchingly, and drawing her head down onto her breast, gently kissed her.

"Make haste, daughter."

Natasha left the house and immediately took a quick look around as usual, to make sure that no one had seen her leave the house by the river. Noticing no one, she strode off. Then she crossed the street and, half-turning again, swept a glance over the passers-by. No, no one was following her.

At such moments a spirit of childish bravado always awakened in her. At first she thought it would be a good idea to blast the dump then and there, and even pictured to herself how the "dear old woman" (as she was already mentally calling the mistress of the house on the river bank) sitting thoughtfully at the window would startle when she heard the explosion and then would be overjoyed and would praise her when she learned that she, Natasha Malysheva, had done this. Then, however, thinking it over, she decided not to risk it; better to check up again on the entrances to the dump and try to find out tomorrow's password in the city. . .

When Natasha had blown up the dump and gone to the woods to make her report, she wanted to ask permission to visit the old woman again, or at least learn something about her. But knowing that Katya did not like superfluous questions, she did not do this.

It became more and more difficult to work in the town. Arrests and executions of peaceful residents did not stop. Many underground workers had to go off to the woods to the partisans. Fedya Kukharev became commander of a group of dynamiters and in a short time blew up twelve German trains. He became the best dynamiter, and the partisans called him "king of the mine-layers".

He worked with enthusiasm, infecting all the members of his group with his zeal.

They blew up twenty-seven German trains. The small group of daring mine-layers fought thousands of German soldiers and officers and emerged victorious. With each passing day it became more difficult to attack trains. The Germans cut down the forests along the railway and set up a heavy guard on the line. On motor-driven rail cars, bicycles and on horseback patrols continuously scuttered back and forth along the line. It no longer became possible to plant a mine beforehand and then leave. It would frequently be discovered and stripped by a patrol before the arrival of the train. Despite the danger involved, they had to plant mines some hundred or a hundred and a half metres ahead of an oncoming train. This was risky, but then the train was sure to be blown sky-high. . .

Today the young men and women of Dobrush, firmly welded by the long months of secret work, have begun with a will to rehabilitate the town.

THE KOBZAR

Withered, gnarled fingers slipped across the strings of the kobza [1], and, wafted over the market place, cutting through the hubbub of voices and noise, came the alternating sounds of a lively tune or slow, wailing melody. Swaying slightly the kobzar repeated his song in a quavering old voice.

With his legs curled under him on the frozen ground which looked grey in the morning hoar-frost, he sat there bent over his kobza. Gusts of wind ruffled the grey hair of his bare head and carried the words of his simple song across the market place. Deep wrinkles furrowed the immobile face of the kobzar. The sunken eyes gazed lifelessly from under the bushy eyebrows, eyes that had long ago ceased to see.

"Boris the kobzar is alive, he is alive," came from the lips of people who hurried to the spot from whence came the familiar, beckoning voice of the blind kobzar.

He sang about the expulsion of the "vicious beasts", the Germans, from his beloved Ukraine, about the joy of being liberated and the valour and glory of the Red Army regiments. And in the strumming of his instrument could be heard the firm tread of Soviet regiments, the roar of engines in the skies, the thunder of artillery salvoes, cries of victory and jubilation, the flutter of battle standards and the clamp of hoofs. . .

Gathered round the kobzar was a crowd of people. With bared heads, old men, women and children stood in a close circle. Times without number they had heard the familiar stirring sound of the kobza, but this time it was different. The kobzar sang song after song, swaying to the rhythm of the flowing sounds as if carried far, far away on the invisible buoyant wings of his song.

I was told the story of this blind kobzar. For many years he has been singing his songs on the banks of the Dnieper. The melodies played on his kobza have been heard in ancient Pereyaslavl, in the streets of Kiev and on the market squares of Borispol and Darnitsa, they have winged their way to Chernigov. Only in those days when the Germans, with fire and sword, invaded the Ukraine and overran the banks of the Dnieper, did the kobza of the old kobzar become silent. Summoning his strength however, the kobzar still went to the market squares, to the silent streets of town and village, to the houses and white-washed cottages where he sang his songs to the accompaniment of the kobza. A barefooted boy led him from house to house, from village to village, from town to town.

The kobzar's voice rang out mournfully. He sang of bygone days of happiness, of life lacerated in his native Ukraine, of a people made homeless by the Germans. A welcome guest everywhere, he found shelter at night by the fires of tired travellers or by those burning in countryside cottages and townlets. The chords of his kobza played wrathfully and prophetically:

They came on tanks,
They will go back on sleighs.

The kobzar's voice rose higher, became infused with vigour, and under the gnarled fingers of the player, the kobza sent out a clarion call.

In the spring the Germans arrested the kobzar and threw him into a cellar.

"You are a partisan," shouted the infuriated gendarme, levelling the cold muzzle of a revolver at the bard's temple.

"I am a blind beggar," was the kobzar's calm reply.

He was starved, beaten with sticks over his venerable grey head and hands. The kobzar patiently endured all his torments but did not part with his kobza.

One night the head of the prison entered the basement, went up to the blind singer and, wrenching the kobza from his hands, broke it in two. An hour later gendarmes hauled the kobzar from the basement and flung him into the mud. Dragging his feeble body, the blind singer crawled to the nearest dwelling where he was given shelter.

Some time passed and again the voice of the blind kobzar was heard in the market places. On his old knees lay a new kobza presented to him by the inhabitants of one of the villages hidden

[1] Ukrainian musical instrument.

in the depths of the Chernigov forests.

"Boris the blind kobzar is with you again," he sang in a low voice, his fingers gliding over the chords.

Another winter and spring passed. Moving in step with the boy leading him, the kobzar journeyed from town to town and village to village along his native Dnieper, leaning on his stick, undeterred by storms and blizzards and flooding rivers.

Again he was captured by the Germans and thrown into prison.

The same questions, the same beatings, head and face again smothered in blood, and hands bruised.

"Where are the partisans?"

"How is a wandering blind man to know where the partisans are?" replied the kobzar.

"We'll shoot you," threatened the gendarmes.

The kobzar was silent. Convinced that they would get nothing from him, the Germans beat him mercilessly and flung his unconscious body into the street.

But the singer recovered and again appeared in the market squares with his kobza.

And when powerful Soviet guns roared over the great river and the tanks rumbled forward, the kobzar sang at the top of his voice, with new words to his songs, new tunes for the obedient strings of his kobza to play.

The village market hums with the voices of people, the neighing of horses, the squeak of bullock carts and above all this rises the song of the kobza.

Y. MAKARENKO

ON THE ROAD TO "GREAT FINLAND"

The economical condition of the country has been completely ruined by Hitler's Finnish fawners. The Finnish herds have been reduced to half their normal.

(From newspapers)

Eatables are coming to an end...

Drawing by V. Fomichov

BOOKS AND WRITERS

LEONID SOLOVYOV

In the summer of 1943 Leonid Solovyov's story *Ivan Nikulin, Russian Seaman* appeared in the magazines *Novy Mir* and *Krasnoflotets* bringing the author wide popularity.

Some ten years ago a book of short stories by Solovyov, giving a new viewpoint on the people and customs of Soviet Central Asia, was noted by so exacting a critic as Maxim Gorky.

At this time the young author had already lived through a great deal, and was keenly impressed by the regeneration Soviet power was bringing to the East and its centuries-old ways of life.

Leonid Solovyov has firm roots in the East, for, pure Russian though he is, he was born in Tripoli, Syria, where his parents taught for some time at the Russian Consulate. In his youth he spent some ten years in Kokand, for a considerable time working as correspondent for the Tashkent newspaper *Pravda Vostoka*, where his first stories and sketches appeared. His first collections of short stories entitled *Nomad Camps* and *The March of the Victor* attracted attention not so much for their exotic settings as for their freshness and their light, lyrical beauty, that artistic surprise at the phenomena of life which is so characteristic of a genuine writer.

The end of the 1930's saw the more and more frequent appearance in Soviet literature of a new type of hero, the young man who had grown up in Soviet society. One of the first books of this type was Solovyov's novel *High Pressure*. Though the author's ideas and impressions were not yet marshalled clearly before him, the fire with which he depicted the formation of the Soviet youth's character could not leave the reader unmoved. Much argument and discussion was evoked by *High Pressure* among those whom the author addressed in his novel:

". . . Young people! You are the first in the history of humanity not to know the meaning of hunger, competition, careerism. You will not be cheated or abandoned or ridiculed. Neither hopelessness nor despair threaten you. So be bold masters of your destiny and seekers of happiness. . ."

True recognition was won by his next novel *Disturber of the Peace*, which Alexei Tolstoy in his *Twenty-Five Years of Soviet Literature*, justly holds to be one of the best works of the period. In this novel the author again returns to his beloved East and makes Hoja Nasreddin, a character famed in fable, its hero.

The figure of Hoja Nasreddin has held a place in the literature of the East for hundreds of years; Daghestan and Azerbaijan, Central Asia, Turkey and Persia lay claim to him.

Thought and the word are Nasreddin's constant, unfailing weapons. He spares neither those who are pictured to the people as holy men and prophets, nor tsars, feudal lords, the rich or the clergy. In essence he is an indefatigable iconoclast, a "disturber of the peace".

Solovyov depicts Hoja Nasreddin not only as the gay and sharp-tongued tramp of folklore; the author goes far beyond the framework of folk traditions and creates an entirely new image of the man, a man who fights injustice not only with words but also with deeds, persistently meddling in the life around him. In old Bokhara Hoja Nasreddin has a series of dizzy adventures that resurrect the almost forgotten tradition of the roguish novel. In the end resourcefulness, nobleness, determination and the good luck that always follows Hoja Nasreddin triumph. His first day in the city Nasreddin commits the blunder of saving from a watery grave the money-lender Jafar, who holds hundreds of poor people in his power. At the end of the novel Nasreddin escapes inevitable execution by means of a series of clever tricks, and in his place Jafar is drowned.

The pages in the novel devoted to love are splendid. The refreshing feelings displayed by Nasreddin and in general by the common people, stands out boldly against the soulless world of the puppets constituting the Emir's court.

The dedication and the motto with which the author prefaces his book are a sort of key to this unusual work in which whimsically and harmoniously are blended the style of the Oriental fairy tale and the European realistic

novel. Alongside the flowery quotation from Ibn-Hasm's *Necklace of Doves*, testifying to the fact that Solovyov's novel, like a necklace, has its origin in many folk legends, there is a dedication stating plainly that the author's friend, Mumin Adilov, a Soviet worker who lost his life from an enemy bullet among the mountains, was in many respects the prototype of the hero of the novel.

The breath of the new culture permeates Solovyov's book. The Revolution brought the peoples of Central Asia not only liberation, but also the culture of Russia and West Europe. This meeting of two cultures considered alien to one another since time immemorial has resulted, not in conflict, but in their mutual enrichment. Both the style and content of Solovyov's novel reflect the remarkable spiritual and material regeneration of the Soviet East. His Hoja Nasreddin retains his native traits and at the same time is spiritually a brother to people of all nationalities. This is why he is beloved by both the Eastern and the Russian reader.

The war against the German-fascist invaders has called the writers to the defence of their country; it has put aside peace-time themes. The war has become the main theme in Soviet art, and Leonid Solovyov's work, like that of thousands of others, has got a new content. His work as war correspondent in the navy opened his eyes to an entirely new world. The life on board ship with all those features peculiar to it, its influence on the characters of the sailors make great demands on the writer. To depict this life required much work on the part of the writer and for that reason his contributions during the first months on the Black Sea, at besieged Sevastopol, were few in number.

But at the end of the first year of the war he felt the call to express the powerful impressions he had received, and earlier than many of his colleagues, he gave up writing sketches and in the summer of 1942 wrote *Black Sea Sailor*, one of the first tales about the war and the first written about Red Navy men in battle. In the main, it is an attempt to picture the soul of the Soviet man in time of war. The story is about an ordinary young man, Petty Officer Stepan Polossukhin, who, like thousands of others, is fighting "not for glory but for the sake of life on earth."

Stepan Polossukhin is the son of a Black Sea fisherman, a former soldier, honest, simple and wise. His personality has an ennobling influence on his son, who through him comes to know the sea and the stern life of the fisherman, a life giving birth to bold and freedom-loving men. The war calls forth a maelstrom of feelings in the youth, principally alarm for the fate of his country. But this fear is not longlived; it is followed by a firm belief in the fate of his people. It is in action, in struggle, that his passionate love for his country and bitter hatred for the enemy is expressed. The hero lives through many trials; he experiences the horrors of German torture and he loses the girl he loves. From this and the severe battles he takes part in he emerges a grown man and fighter.

It is this process of precipitous maturing of the Soviet youth in the vortex of war that Solovyov attempts to follow. The task is a difficult one and not always is the author successful. Frequently he only hints at separate phases in the spiritual maturing of the hero, but does not enlarge upon them.

The story stops short in the spring of 1942, when the Germans were storming Sevastopol for the second time. The hero, Polossukhin, is one of the defenders of the city. Undoubtedly there are certain drawbacks in the story such as a schematic portrayal of some of the characters, weak battle scenes and a tendency towards declamation which can be accounted for by the haste with which the book was written. But these drawbacks are redeemed by the wealth of feeling expressed by the author; in all the descriptions and incidents his personality can be felt. He shares with his heroes the sorrows and the labour of a martial life. The story is deeply personal. The very style of the narrative, written during the difficult days of the German advance in the summer of 1942, reflects the sad thoughts of the author on the trials that have fallen to the share of his country.

We find quite a different mood in Solovyov's *Ivan Nikulin, Russian Seaman*, a more finished war story written a year later, when the Red Army, already mature in battle, took up the offensive. This book pictures the first bright events of the liberation of the country. In developing the characters of Nikulin and his comrades, the author shows them as matured fighters and depicts, not only their eagerness for self-sacrifice, but also their efficient skill in forging victory.

During this time Solovyov had again been with the navy and had seen with his own eyes that spiritual maturing which, in many respects intuitively, he had endeavoured to express in his first story. Full of new impressions, the writer again burned with the desire to create an all-embracing portrayal of the rank-and-file Soviet fighting man at a new stage in his development. Life itself dictated his choice of the Black Sea Fleet miner Ivan Nikulin, who, together with twenty-four comrades, gained immortal fame by their exploits behind the enemy lines, as the hero of his story.

The best testimony to the fact that the writer was correct in his depiction of the innermost thoughts and aspirations of millions of Soviet fighters is the reception the book has met among the navymen.

"I do not know whether the critics will find serious defects in Solovyov's book," writes Red Navy man Shklyaev from the Far North, "but I, a rank-and-file marine, liked it better than any other book which has come out during the war. . . I have written to many friends telling them to be sure to read it. I collected all the numbers of the periodical in which it ran, had them bound, and now the book travels from hand to hand among the men in the outpost. How eagerly we drank in the writer's words that 'the important thing was not how and where a man died, but what he was dying for and what of himself he was leaving behind him in the world!' How true this is!"

Solovyov's art has become grimmer in wartime, his principles have become grounded even firmer. In the same way that his Hoja Nasreddin realized that "the road gives courage to those who go along it" so do the heroes of his latest works believe that if man's will be unbending, his courage boundless and the cause a righteous one, he will conquer.

Following his story about Nikulin, Solovyov has written several short stories, the best of which is *Long Cruise*.

At present Solovyov is back again with the navy. He has long been planning a novel about sailors aboard ship. There is no doubt that, like his previous works, this new book will be filled with his unshakeable belief that the frightful brown plague of nazism will be soon wiped off the face of the earth, that the earth will heal its wounds and there will come a time when people will come into world only to be torch-bearers of radiant light, joy and happiness.

ALEXANDER MAKAROV

A SOLDIER AND CAPTAIN OF WAR*

Cyril Pigarev, the young writer and historian, does not pursue the aim of throwing exhaustive light on every aspect of the personality of Suvorov. The author was merely concerned with showing Suvorov as a military educator; nevertheless Pigarev succeeded in giving a striking picture of the great tactician and strategist who built up the edifice of Russian military skill.

The success is perhaps explained by the fact that the author was able to reveal the most essential and significant trait in Suvorov's personality. Whether Suvorov "is engaged in developing his remarkable 'science of conquering' on the basis of his profound knowledge of the distinguishing features of the Russian mentality, or whether he is engaged in painting his ideal of a hero in letters to young commanders, in embodying this ideal into real life, asking his subordinates to solve brain-racking riddles, chatting with soldiers in their 'own tongue', discussing historical personalities or works of literature—we invariably see this captain of war fostering the spirit of the Russian soldier." And it is perhaps this aspect that reveals Suvorov's genius, his versatility, the profoundly popular character of his military doctrine best of all.

Pigarev's sketches begin with a memorable episode. Resting on a bed of straw in an Alpine hut where he stopped during the Swiss campaign, old Suvorov was instructing the then youthful General Miloradovich: "Choose one of the heroes of antiquity as an example, study him, follow him and having overtaken him, get ahead of him—and glory be to you! I chose Caesar; the Alps are behind us. . . The Russian eagles have winged ahead of the Roman eagles." The author justly traces Suvorov's military genealogy to practically all the outstanding captains of war from both the near and distant past. The most educated man of his epoch, he was able to benefit from the military experience of everyone of his great predecessors. But his direct example, from whom he never ceased to learn, was Peter I, who, according to Suvorov, was the "leading captain of war of his days". "In Suvorov's character," Pigarev writes, "there was much akin to Peter I. This affinity lies in their selfless love for their country, high sense of duty before their own people, irresistible thirst for action, exceptional ability to dispose of their time efficiently, directness and persistence of character, contempt for conventionalities in treatment of people, Russian mould of mind with its crude affability and a keen sense of the sublime and the ridiculous." From Peter's school Suvorov borrowed his conception of military honour. He devotedly adhered to one of the rules of Peter's "Army Regulations" which insisted on the inviolability of discipline based on subordination. "Prepare for peace in time of war and for war in peace-time,"—in these words Suvorov conveyed Peter's behest: "While hoping for peace do not weaken your military training." Suvorov's kinship with Peter is also expressed in his attitude to the soldier. Peter's military pedagogy is based on the idea that the soldier constitutes the principal strength of the army, its age-old treasure. Peter insisted that his commanders should treat their soldiers like "fathers would treat children", care for the "integrity of the soldier" was the officer's duty. "I value the soldier more than I value myself," Suvorov used to say and he was ruthless in his treatment of those officers who adopted a negligent attitude towards the soldier. "Eat your share but let the soldier have his." "The whole earth is not worth even one drop of uselessly shed blood," was Suvorov's stern bequest to the officer.

The essence of Suvorov's military and military-educational idea, based on personal experience in fighting and profound knowledge of the national historic traits of the Russian soldier (which brings him into close affinity to Peter I), is expressed in three "verbal instructions" and in letters to his contemporaries, where the great general paints his ideal of a hero. In this portrait, drawn in the laconic style of the great general, his contemporaries recognized Suvorov himself. It constitutes a combination of much of what Suvorov generously scattered in his aphorisms and sayings. However, even his instructions frequently assumed the form of brief aphorisms. First and foremost, he tried to inculcate in his soldier the feeling of national pride and sense of duty before the people. "I am proud of being a Russian!" Suvorov was fond of saying. "The Russian is no coward." "Prove that you are indeed a Russian!" Suvorov would say to his subordinates when the latter was given a difficult problem to solve. Suvorov bid his subordinates value their soldier's honour higher than life. "There is no difference between death and captivity." "I'd rather lose my head than my honour." "Fostering in his subordinates the sense of moral strength," Pigarev writes, "Suvorov banned from the official language all terms expressing faintheartedness, weakness. „*Secours* is a word expressing unreliable weakness. . . *danger* is a timid word and sometimes like secours not usable and forbidden by me. Instead there is *caution*, and for those who are well versed in military art—*precaution* but not haste.'"

The great general endowed the soldier with the most noble feelings, the feeling of unselfish

* Cyril Pigarev, *A Soldier and Captain of War*. Sketches of Suvorov. State Literary Publishing House, 1943.

An old engraving of Suvorov

comradeship in particular: "You may perish yourself, but save your comrade."

One of the secrets of the effectiveness of Suvorov's lessons was that they were reinforced by personal example. "If he demanded constant self-education of others," writes Pigarev, "then first and foremost he himself laboured much to 'educate myself by studying the sciences. . .' Demanding of others the justice of Aristides and the truthfulness of Epaminondas, Suvorov himself was not afraid to 'throw the truth' into one's face. Instructing others to emulate the stoicism of Fabricius, he himself set an example. Hence his seeming quaintness: the worn-out 'father's' cloak to keep him warm on the march, straw instead of a mattress, amid the splendour of the Taurida Palace."

Suvorov's military art was enriched by his daily contact with the soldier. Therefore, his "science of victory is the result not only of his superb generalship but also of his profound knowledge of the mentality of the Russian

soldier. Able to express the most complex thoughts with utmost brevity, Suvorov gave the essence of his army regulations in ten words which sum up his "science of victory":

"Subordination, exercise, discipline,
cleanliness, neatness, health,
vigour, daring, courage,
victory."

The first line includes the duties of the soldier with regard to service in the ranks, second—his duties towards himself and third—fighting qualities of the soldier. And these nine commandments are crowned by the tenth—victory. This formula of Suvorov's science of victory, complemented and developed in his orders, reports and letters, was persistently carried into practice by the great general.

Suvorov made his men regard discipline and subordination as the mother of military art. "Discipline is the mother of victory," he was wont to say, but he demanded not blind obedience but conscious fulfilment of duty. "The soldier is precious," he said and insisted that "military work" and military training "strengthen health".

Contempt for cowardice was one of the distinguishing features of the character of Suvorov's soldiers. The Russian general himself set an example of dauntlessness and courage. "The closer to the enemy, the better," Suvorov would say. "Beat the enemy without sparing either him or yourself; fight with fury, fight to the death; victory comes to him who spares himself least." "The brave man is in front and lives; the coward is killed like a dog even when lagging behind; even if he lives there is neither honour nor place for him." An enemy of prolonged "siege stalemates", Suvorov called speed and action "the soul of real war". "One minute decides victory," "victory depends on one's legs," Suvorov taught his "wonder heroes" and made them descend upon the enemy "like a bolt out of the blue".

The Swiss campaign afforded brilliant confirmation of Suvorov's aphorism: "Where the reindeer passes a soldier can pass." Under Suvorov's leadership the Russian soldier indeed marched towards victory, time and again astonishing the world by his courage and ability.

Pigarev justly shows that Suvorov was not only a master of offensive tactics but at the same time a master of active defence, which, in his hands, became a means of active resistance. "Suvorov 'glances behind him' not to run away, but to attack," writes Pigarev with a subtle understanding of the essentials of Suvorov's tactics.

Suvorov's science of victory—if this is to imply Suvorov's entire system of military pedagogy—originated as a counter-system to the schematic Prussian system of Friedrich II, which treated the soldier as a moving automaton. This lifeless parade-ground system was rejected in all Suvorov's teachings and by his unparalleled fighting experience. When old Suvorov was asked whether anything could be borrowed from the German school he simply replied: "The Russians have always beaten the Prussians, so what is there to copy from them?"

Suvorov was in the centre of the intellectual movement of his time. He was in close contact with the most prominent writers of that time and was well-read in philosophy. Pigarev, who made a thorough study of Suvorov's epistles, writes: "Living in the village he wrote for Fontenelles' treatise about the multitude of worlds. He was known to discuss Voltaire, Rousseau, Raynal, to cite Molière, La Fontaine, Montesquieu, Fielding and Lomonossov in his letters and conversations. He was obviously familiar with the "Essays" of Montaigne.

A special chapter in Pigarev's book is devoted to language and literary style of Suvorov's orders, letters, of his remarkable "Science of victory" and verbal instructions. As an example of the irresistible power of Suvorov's word, replete with fire, passion and the full power of the Russian language, Pigarev cites Bagration, closest comrade-in-arms to the great general. We quote this statement in full: "Bagration could not conceal his emotions when he was describing his impressions of Suvorov's speech at the military council at Muttental. In the words of Bagration, 'this was the speech of eloquent and great military tribune.' Suvorov convened a meeting of his generals to inform them of the treachery of the Austrians and appeal to 'the supreme courage and greatest selflessness' of the Russian troops. When Suvorov said: 'Ahead of us lies the greatest effort, unprecedented in the world,' Bagration lived through unforgettable moments. 'My blood was boiling as never before; some powerful force shook me from head to foot; I was in the grip of an unprecedented elation, in such a state that if a host of enemies descended or hell itself with all its evil spirits were to appear before me I was ready to fight them. . . The same was true of all present. . . We walked out with feelings of elation, of selflessness and strength of spirit, ready to win or die, but die with glory, covering the banners of our regiments with our own bodies.'"

The portrait of the great general who fostered the spirit of the Russian soldier rises in full stature from the pages of Pigarev's book. It is accentuated and complemented by the interesting collection of Suvorov's maxims in a volume entitled *Suvorov's Behests* issued simultaneously by the same publishers.

ANATOLE KOTOV

THE POET OVANES TUMANYAN
(1869—1923)

Ovanes Tumanyan invariably turned to the life of his own people for inspiration; in it this great bard of Armenia found the source of his strength and the basis for his whole outlook on life.

The long path traversed by the people, at whose service Ovanes Tumanyan placed his talent, was a thorny one, a path of suffering which has given a tinge of sadness to all Tumanyan's works for the image of tortured

Armenia made a lasting impression on the poet's heart:

I come, but not with merry song,
Nor with flowers to your blossoming hills,
But with bitter tears and a sense of wrong,
Your abysmal gorges to fill.

Tumanyan's brilliant talent is revealed with especial lustre in his remarkable poems. In the words of Valeri Bryussov, the best of his Russian translators, Tumanyan's poetry "reveals thorough knowledge of the people's life and the people's spirit. Tumanyan's poems (as, for example, his *Anush*) give foreigners a better knowledge of contemporary Armenia and its life than thick volumes of special research work could do."

Tragedy also left its mark on the heroes of Tumanyan's lyrical poems. They perish in unequal combat with the stagnation of patriarchal life.

The poem *Anush* which Tigranyan has chosen as the basis for his opera of the same name, describes the power of custom sanctified by tradition, vendetta which paralyses man's finest instincts. Anush, a peasant girl, loves the youthful shepherd Saro. The latter, however, had offended her brother, Mossi. In accordance with prevailing traditions she must break with her beloved, but instead she flees with him to the mountains. Mossi overtakes them and kills Saro. Left alone and scorned by her kin, Anush becomes insane.

In the *Sako of Lori* a healthy village lad is driven insane by nightmares resulting from the reactionary patriarchal life.

The tragedy of love is also the subject of the poem *Akhtamar*, based on a folk legend and written with indescribable brilliancy. Evil people extinguished the light which led the lover to the object of his dream, he loses his way and is found dead in the abysmal chasm of the sea.

Outstanding is the poem *David of Sassun*, inspired by ancient folk epics of Armenia. With remarkable skill the poet portrays the struggle against the foreign yoke, a hard struggle which ended in the victory of the people. In his brilliant verse, the famous folk epic *David of Sassun* wrings with new power.

Armenian folklore has always deeply interested the poet. "My legends and fairy-tales have been taken from the people. I have always tried, to the best of my ability, to remain close to them," wrote Ovanes Tumanyan in 1913.

Especially successful among the fairy-tales retold by Tumanyan are: *Nazar the Brave*, *The Master and His Worker* and *Khazaran Blbul*. The first is a biting satire on autocracy, slightly resembling the famous fairy-tale *The Brave Tailor*; *The Master and His Worker* shows the social divisions in the Armenian village; *Khazaran Blbul* reflects the freedom-loving aspirations of the Armenian people. Tumanyan's realistic stories breathe warmth and indescribable sadness; among his best works are *Gikor*, *Reindeer* and *My Comrade Neso*.

Tumanyan's charming quatrains (rubaiyat), written in his declining years may be compared to the best Persian works of this genre which in concise and austere form convey the wisdom nurtured by the people for ages.

Action in Tumanyan's poems, stories and fairy-tales usually takes place amidst the backward life of the Armenian village. Their heroes are real living people whom the poet knows as he knows his own self.

Depicting the patriarchal mode of life of the people, Tumanyan is far from idealizing it. The poet's sympathies invariably lie with those who boldly enter into conflict with the unprogressive, stagnant ancient customs.

"Ovanes Tumanian's appearance in literature was met by nationalist critics then dominating the literary world with dissatisfaction and at times with ridicule," writes Nvard Tumanyan, the poet's daughter, in her reminiscences. But the poet never bent his head, never swerved from his convictions and, despite his rather modest circumstances, undeviatingly continued along his glorious artistic path, obedient only to the voice of his conscience.

The poet's implacable hatred for the money bag mongers who tried to subordinate the honest pen of the writer to their influence, is expressed with special force in his satire *The Poet and the Fly*, which gives a striking, realistic description of the power of money.

Tumanyan's language is exceptionally rich. Picturesque turns of speech, apt comparisons, expressive contrasts, all the fruit of thorough and profound study of the people's speech, lend lively colour to his songs, legends, fables, ballads, poems and tales.

There is an astonishing multiplicity of genres in Tumanyan's works. Having imbibed the culture of his people, he at the same time made a thorough study of the works of outstanding representatives of world literature and rendered Armenia an inestimable service by his first-rate translations of masterpieces of Russian and West-European poetry. His translations of Russian folk epics and Pushkin's ballads, according to Valeri Bryussov, "enchant by their penetration into the spirit of the original work, his ability to divine the very essence of the work translated".

Ovanes Tumanyan harmoniously combined in himself the poet and citizen. By his fruitful social-political work he rendered a great service to the brotherhood of the peoples of the Transcaucasus. In 1905, at the time of internecine feuds incited by the tsarist authorities in the Transcaucasus, the poet, armed with the flag of truce, canvassed the villages of Lori, Kazakh and Borchalo districts preaching peaceful companionship of nations and succeeded in preventing the fratricidal war between the Turks and Armenians raging in Baku and Tiflis from spreading to these districts.

In one of his letters, written in 1905, Ovanes said: "I am now satisfied, not so much with what I have done for literature, as with the fact that I was able to reconcile peoples risen one against another and make them put their swords back in their sheathes thereby saving thousands of innocents from brutal slaughter."

For those peacemaking activities Tumanyan was arrested by the tsarist authorities in 1908 and remained in prison until 1909.

Ovanes Tumanyan was first among pre-revolutionary Armenian writers to hail the establishment of Soviet power in Armenia and Georgia.

"It now rests with the new, free Russia not only to save the Armenian people from outside danger, but also to secure the independence of its political life," wrote Ovanes Tumanyan in 1920 in a letter addressed to the Revolutionary Committee of Armenia. "... The new Russia which is out to deliver small peoples from slavery, is opening up a whole era in the history of mankind."

Ovanes Tumanyan died in 1923, from a serious illness, in Moscow, where he was taken for treatment.

J. KHACHTARYANTS

NEW BOOKS

The heroes of Leo Nikulin's sketches collected in his booklet *The Ural South* (State Literary Publishing House, Moscow, 1943) are those people working in the factories of the hinterland in the Southern Urals, who, under the difficult war-time conditions, help the victories of the Red Army by their selfless efforts. These are all people who with great enthusiasm give themselves wholly to their jobs, fulfilling their work with honour, and often establish unprecedented production records.

These heroes differ in age, in their pre-war past and in the circumstances which brought them to the factories of the Urals. Here you will find a very youthful but skilled artisan, the former pupil of a trade school, who made the trying journey from regions temporarily occupied by the enemy on foot—a long journey which ended at the Urals; two girl friends who first began working at the plant, not long before the outbreak of war; an old foreman of a munitions factory evacuated from the Ukraine and now employed here together with his son and daughter; the director of one of the biggest tank plants of the country; an old locomotive driver who performed a heroic feat whilst driving a trainload of heavy tanks to the front; a sailor of the Baltic Fleet who saved the life of his commander during battle and who after having his feet amputated as a result of his wounds, started work at the plant.

"He has the knack of speaking about most involved technical problems in lively, figurative and understandable language," the author says of one of his characters. And this too is the language in which Leo Nikulin has written his book.

The State Literary Publishing House recently issued Andrei Platonov's *Tales of the Motherland* (Moscow, 1943).

This collection opens with the tale *Inspired People* about a battle between a Red Army unit and a detachment of German tanks on the approaches to Sevastopol. Defending their native soil to their last breath, the men of this unit sacrificed their lives for their country. When they had run out of ammunition, and had only one grenade each left, they attached them to their belts and flung themselves under the oncoming enemy tanks—another German tank wrecked for each heroic death.

This volume also includes stories about Soviet people in action behind the enemy lines. The hero of the tale *Armour-plate* is a naval engineer, Savvin, who invents a new, superdurable metal for armour-plating. When the Germans advanced through the Kursk region he had to bury the blueprints—the fruits of ten years of labour—to prevent their falling into enemy hands. After being wounded and demobilized, he returned secretly to the area occupied by the Germans to retrieve the precious plans. He witnessed the German atrocities and the terrible tortures the nazis inflicted on the population—burning people alive, driving off Soviet citizens into slavery, poisoning children—and was gripped by a burning hatred. Savvin wiped out the sentries and the officers of a German staff, perishing in this fight against overwhelming odds.

The mind simply refuses to comprehend that extremity of degradation to which these two-legged beasts, these rampant savages clad in the uniform of hitlerite officers and soldiers, have fallen.

The portraits of these brutes are given in the drawings made by the artist S. M. Chekhov and collected in an album under the title of *They* issued by the Moscow Art Association.

Chekhov has undertaken that exceedingly difficult task of recording those ghastly episodes—the atrocities perpetrated by the Hitlerites against Russian people who love their country, against their wives, their children and their mothers.

Each picture illustrates an actual fact, something that actually did take place, either in some village or town, and very often not in only one place, but in scores and hundreds of places.

A village schoolteacher courageously declined to laud Hitler and Germany. He was buried alive. Buried head down, and the inhabitants witnessed the horrible death of this Russian patriot. This happened in the village of Krivino, Leningrad Region.

In Plavsky District, Tula Region, the Hitlerites hanged people head downwards to drag out their death agony.

The Germans drove old people, women and children ahead of them and attacked the Red Army from behind this living shield.

The Germans revived the monstrous "amusements" practiced by despots in medieval times—during severe frosts they poured water over live people, turning them into pillars of ice.

The nazis drove people into deep trenches and amused themselves by using their victims as living targets, turning these trenches into ghastly shooting galleries. This happened near Kholm, Kalinin Region.

Like the Spanish inquisitors, they burned people alive, first pouring petrol over them. And the monsters referred to this appalling execution as "the trial of petrol".

The Hitlerites were particularly ferocious in their savage torture of partisans. They vented all their malice on the partisans' kith and kin. But nothing could daunt the patriots; the neighbouring woods sheltered the camps of the people's avengers and retribution lurked at the butchers' every step.

Finally the day of retribution came. The thunder of Red Army guns foretokened the

hour of liberation. Sowing the fields of Russia with their dead, the monsters fled to the west.

The last picture in this album shows a village engulfed in flames, the dead body of a woman lying in the road—bloody traces of the nazi hordes that passed here, and the artist tersely and expressively entitled this episode *Where They Have Passed. . .*

They have passed, and gone. But never will these villages forget the atrocities of the two-legged beasts.

The album of Chekhov's drawings went to press in the days when the Red Army was already dealing the nazi invaders and hangmen crushing blows. These drawings, created by the stern hands of a realist-artist, will first be seen by those who smashed the Hitlerites at Stalingrad, under the walls of the great city of Lenin, on the Don, in the North Caucasus, in the Ukraine. . . And if these truthful drawings will give yet still greater force to the heavy hand of the Soviet fighter, then the artist will have achieved his aim.

And the words which the author uses as his epigraph to this album, are being justified:

"Motherland! To hatred I call thee!"

Iskusstvo (Art) Publishers have brought out a series of booklets under the *Popular Library* edition. In popular form, this series acquaints readers with the outstanding works of Russia's fine arts and architecture and with the biographies and works of individual artists.

In a concise and absorbing monograph N. Guilyarovskaya gives the history of the erection and a detailed description of that famous monument of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Russian architecture—the Cathedral of Vassili Blajennyi, which stands on the Red Square in Moscow.

The monograph by G. Zhidkov is dedicated to the painter Vassili Tropinin (1776—1857).

Of the booklets issued in this series special mention should be made of those by the art scholar N. Shchokotov, dealing with the canvases of four remarkable Russian painters of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries: Surikov's "Suvorov's Crossing of the Alps", Vasnetsov's "Russian Titans", Gué's "Peter I and the Tsarevich Alexei" and the painting by our contemporary—P. Sokolov-Skalya "The Taking of the Livonian Fortress of Kokenhausen by Ivan the Dread". Shchokotov not only gives a description and analysis of these paintings but also relates how these canvases were created and touches upon the works of other masters on the same subjects.

The author gives a deep psychological analysis of Gué's "Peter I and the Tsarevich Alexei". This picture shows Tsar Peter interrogating his son who is involved in a reactionary conspiracy. Vasnetsov's painting "Russian Titans" gives Shchokotov an opportunity to dwell on the old Russian folk tales, the "byliny". The booklet on Surikov's famous picture "Suvorov's Crossing of the Alps" revives this renowned military operation of the great Russian war captain.

This popular library edition acquaints its readers with the works of Russian painters. The booklets are artistically bound and include from three to eight superb reproductions—the whole booklet not exceeding fifteen pages.

Sketches from Ukrainian History issued by the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, embrace the history of the Ukrainian people from ancient times to modern days.

This volume comprises nineteen chapters, written by eminent Ukrainian historians. The Introductory part, by Academician K. Vobly, deals with the physico-geographical features of the Ukraine. The first two chapters, written by M. Slavin, have, as their subject, the population of the territory of the Ukraine from ancient times up to the formation of the Kiev state.

Chapters three and four, by K. Gushisty, give the history of the Ukraine from the formation of the Kiev state up to 1569—the year of its seizure by the Poles. A special chapter, written by M. Petrovsky, deals with the struggle for liberation waged by the Ukrainian people from 1569 to 1654. Then follow chapters on the history of the Ukraine in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and about the Ukraine during the revolutionary struggle in 1905—1907 and the part played by the Ukraine in the first period of the World War 1914—1918.

The closing chapters, by M. Suprunenko, depict the flourishing Soviet Ukraine and the place it occupies in the family of peoples of the Soviet Union. The final chapter gives a picture of the Ukrainian people's fight against the nazi invaders.

The Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. has published the first volume of a series containing the text of *Russkaya Pravda* (Russian Law), one of the most important cultural monuments of eleventh and twelfth century Kiev Russ, and, in essence, the first Russian code of laws. This volume is the fruit of many years of work accomplished by a group of investigators.

Of the 112 MSS of *Russkaya Pravda* known to have existed, this group of research workers succeeded in finding 102, preserved in various depositories.

The accepted opinion of Russian historians is that there were three independent versions of *Russkaya Pravda*: a concise copy, the most ancient; then a more detailed one of later origin (approximately, the beginning of the twelfth century); and lastly an abridged version (which must probably be assigned to the latter half of the twelfth century). The compilers of the present work maintain that only two independent versions existed—the most ancient, concise copy, and the later, more detailed one. They maintain that the third version is merely an abridged modification of the detailed text.

The huge amount of analytical investigation done by the compilers of this first volume in collating the texts of the various MSS shows *Russkaya Pravda* to have been a complete, integral work, which served as a general reference book in legal practice up to the middle of the twelfth century.

The History of English Literature to be published by the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. in two volumes is the result of work, performed in 1939—1941 by a group of specialists of Moscow and Leningrad headed

by professor I. I. Anissimov. The board of editors included: professors A. C. Djivelegov, M. M. Morozov, M. P. Alexeyev, Professor V. M. Zhirmunsky, Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., and A. A. Yelistratova.

Owing to war-time conditions the first volume has been divided into two parts of which the first has recently made its appearance. This issue embraces the history of English literature from its origins to the early Renaissance; it deals with such subjects as the old epic poems; the early Saxon literature; the Latin and Norman-French literature in England; the English poems of chivalry; the popular ballads of England and Scotland; the English humanists; Renaissance poetry; the origins of the drama; and the precursors of Shakespeare. Separate chapters are devoted to the outstanding authors of these periods: Langland, Chaucer, Bacon, More, Spenser, Marlowe and others. Shakespeare is the subject of the opening chapter of the second issue (now being prepared) which will contain the literary history of England up to the end of the eighteenth century.

This is the first Soviet attempt at a systematic exposé of the many centuries of English literary development. The current that the authors have attempted to trace through those early periods is the formation of national literature.

The manifestations of this process were by no means simple.

For instance the fourteenth century poems of chivalry that were cultivated at the court of Edward III cannot be considered as genuinely national although they were written in English—instead of French which had been the accepted literary language; they even adopted the old alliteration, discarding the Latin and French metrics based on rhyme. Yet the brilliancy of that literature was but short-lived. It bore within it the germs of decay. Feeding upon legend, and abstract reasoning it did not keep pace with the times and stood aloof. Its national tendencies were, on the whole, formal and, in their spirit, conservative.

On the other hand new landmarks were often set up by those who made no laboured attempts to restore or preserve a form that was once thought national. An author could have his pick of metrical forms and even borrow the outward frames of his plots, provided he lived and felt with his times. No matter what manifold and sometimes outlandish ingredients went into the making of it, literature became a new and harmonious whole, truly national, if its makers turned for inspiration to the life of the people.

It was so in the case of Chaucer—Latin, French and Italian scholar, courtier and diplomatist and, at the same time, indefatigable and broad-minded observer of English life. It was this latter quality which made him "the father of English poetry", the creator of a literary language; while his other accomplishments furnished him with a rich choice of tools and equipped him for his task.

It was so again at the birth of the English drama. The first attempts were a queer and heterogeneous mixture comprising medieval heritage, classical influences and popular "interludes".

The makers of the drama boldly drew from every source; the treasury of old tales was ransacked; Italy, antiquity and the "Land of Romantic Nowhere" were displayed on the stage.

Yet, at a time as exuberantly alive as was the English Renaissance, the drama could and did become a form of art truly popular and national and the old plots came to life under its magic touch.

Designed primarily for the students of literature, the book may be of interest to all those Russian readers who are familiar with the best works of English classics but would like to know more of their background.

Several books were published on the life and work of C. Timiryazev on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of this eminent Russian scientist. The Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. has brought out a collection of articles under the editorship of Academician L. Orbeli—*A Great Scientist, Fighter and Thinker*. The Agricultural Publishers have issued a book by A. Korchagin: *C. A. Timiryazev, His Life and Work*; the Political Literature Publishers have released a brochure by Academician M. Mitin *Climent Arkadyevich Timiryazev*.

The Russian translation of the works of two Ukrainian poets—Leonid Pervomaisky's *Birthday* and Ivan Nekhoda's *Southern Front* have been brought out by the State Literary Publishing House.

The Soviet Writer Publishing House has issued a small book by the Tuvian author Sal Toka: *In the Birchbark Choum* (a "choum" a tent, covered with animal skins or tree bar This book gives a simple little story of life a poor Tuvian family in pre-revolution times and is the first part of an autobiographical novel *The Great Threshold* laying the foundation of a Tuvian national prose literature.

The Death Crossing is the title of a book of stories by the talented young author Ivan Menshikov, who was killed while fulfilling a combat assignment behind the enemy lines. This book brought out by the Molodaya Gvardia Publishers, includes vivid episodes in the war of the Soviet people against the nazi invaders.

Two books recently issued by the Naval Publishers—N. Chukovsky's *For the Defence of Leningrad* and C. Paustovsky's *Leningrad Night*, tell of the people of Leningrad and their fight for their native city.

ARTS

CHAIKOVSKY'S BALLETS AT THE BOLSHOY THEATRE

Among the superb creations treasured by Russian choreographers the most prominent place, beyond doubt, is held by Chaikovsky's immortal ballets *The Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nut-Cracker Suite*.

All three ballets are included in the repertory of the Bolshoy Theatre. A new production of *The Nut-Cracker Suite* has been staged during the current season.

The ballet troupe of the Bolshoy Theatre deservedly ranks as one of the best in the Soviet Union and may be regarded as bearer of the classic traditions of the past—traditions created by great maestros of choreography. And it is in Chaikovsky's ballets that this company fully displays its skill.

Inspite of the dissimilar subject matter of these three ballets, they have one theme in common: the struggle of Good against Evil.

The Swan Lake was the earliest of Chaikovsky's ballets. It was written in 1876 and ever since 1895 it has been a permanent feature of the repertory.

This ballet is one of the most fascinating works by that great poet of music Pyotr Chaikovsky. As in the poems of Heine's youth and Zhukovsky's romantic ballads, everything here seems bathed in the silvery moonlight of legend, aquiver with the shimmering reflection of mysterious forest lakes, filled with echoes of old fairy-tales about maidens who turn into swans.

The libretto of *The Swan Lake* was based on the story of a fairy-tale about the knights of old. The Princess Odette, bewitched by the wicked sorcerer Rotbart, is turned into a swan until a youth is found whose love can withstand all temptations. Should this youth break his promise then Odette and her companions are all fated to die. It is only at night that they can resume human form. The hero of the ballet, Siegfried, sees Odette for the first time in the blue beams of the moon on the reed-grown shores of a lake. Nearby stand the ruins of a Gothic tower, and in the dark shadows of a crevice Rotbart is perched in the form of a huge owl.

In its music and staging this act is the most poetic of all. In the first act the swan melody, full of a poignantly moving mystery, sounds like a voice reaching from an infathomable world of fairy-tale. The same melody in Act II attains ineffable force and charm in the gay rustic holiday in Siegfried's castle.

The dance gives an inspired interpretation of the music. Elegiac languor, the anxieties of the soul, gloomy forebodings, vague disquietude, inexplicable alarm—all this permeates the music's texture and finds a splendid interpreter in that remarkable Russian ballet master of the nineties of the past century, Leo Ivanov—one of the most subtle poets of the pance that the Russian stage has ever known.

Traces of Ivanov's production of *The Swan Lake* can still be felt despite the numerous alterations and changes that have since been introduced in the staging of this ballet. The original line of the choreographic drawing is still evident through the later coverings just as the outlines of a figure painted by an old master are sometimes discernable through the coating of paint and varnish applied by restorers of precious canvases. This is felt in the disposition of the groups of dancers, in the outlines of movement. It is sensed in the fleeting motion of the swans and in their swirling white rows.

What are the two most frequent methods of depicting a swan in choreography? In the first the dancer is balanced on the toes of one foot, the other in the air. The arms, widely extended, flutter ceaselessly, like impatient wings. The body leans forward—and the whole is a picture of a bird ready to soar into the air. The second method is employed to portray anguish. Both arms are stretched forward, crossed at the wrists as though shackled by an invisible chain. The head droops on the breast.

A noticeable feature in the swan dances is the rich play of the hands and arms which, in the old classic ballet, served often only for purposes of balance. But here acting with hands, wrists and forearms is also brought into play. The arms now rise smoothly and flowingly above the head, like a radiant oreol, and now, with a smoothed rounded motion are extended forward. One movement is reminiscent of light, the other of slow gliding over the mirrored surface of water. The figure most often repeated is the arabesque, this pose seeming to express onward urge.

The second act ends with Siegfried's promise to be true to Odette until death. Unobserved by the lovers, Rotbart laughs wickedly behind their backs: he has lived long enough on earth and knows better than to put trust in the vows of lovers.

Act III shows Siegfried's mother, a noble-born countess inspecting brides in the castle. Rotbart, gorgeously arrayed as a knight from foreign parts, has brought with him his daughter Odile who, having taken the form and features of Odette (these two roles are usually danced by the same ballerina), captivates the youth. Whenever Siegfried's heart feels the slightest doubt Odile repeats the motions of the swan dance, as though to say: "Dost thou not recognize me? It is I- the Maiden of Swan Lake." The motions are the same, but their nature is different. In Odette they are chaste and virginally tender, pensive, as though bathed in the soft reflection of tranquil waters gleaming blue and gold in the moonlight. In Odile they are voluptuous and seductive, filled with a sinister flame. Between the dance of the diabolic Odile and that of Odette is the same

M. Merzhanova as the White Kitten from "The Sleeping Beauty"

difference as that between the wonderful romantic "blue blossom" and the white flowers of the swamps, with their intoxicating perfume.

Deceived, Siegfried gives Odile his vow of love, thinking he is but repeating the promise he gave Odette. The familiar melody is heard in the orchestra, like an imploring cry of pain, like a fleeting reproach. The white vision of the swan passes before Siegfried's eyes. Rotbart bursts into devilish laughter: Odette is now in his power, and she is doomed to perish. But no sorcery is potent enough to vanquish the magic power of love.

The last scene of the ballet again reverts to the shores of Swan Lake. It is night, and a wild storm rages. The waters of the lake heave and toss. The swans have resigned themselves to death and await their end. A huge owl swoops in mad circles. The swans cower down and dash hither and thither in alarm. But Siegfried is once more at Odette's side. His devotion triumphs over the evil schemings of Rotbart. The orchestra rings out in pacified tones, the sounds of the music seeming to be permeated with the soft rosy glow of the dawn which rises over the lake.

In clarity of subject, chiselled form of figures and, what is most important, in perfection of its dances, *The Swan Lake* more than any other of Chaikovsky's ballets offers most material for performers and especially to the ballerina who is able to display her skill in two utterly opposite roles—Odette and Odile. Marina Semyonova gives a truly brilliant performance in these roles at the Bolshoy Theatre.

Good always triumphs over Evil, but one must withstand all trials, to love selflessly, not fear sacrifices, suffer temptations—this is Chaikovsky's underlying idea, so splendidly unfolded in the music of *The Swan Lake*.

Didactics are alien to Chaikovsky, but this artist—whom some contemporaries reproached for feminine tenderness, and even more often, for pessimism—this artist teaches courage, strength of will and a bright outlook on life. This theme of struggle between Good and Evil also underlies the other two ballets by Chaikovsky—*The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nut-Cracker Suite*. Here too, this theme is clothed in the form of a fairy-tale. The story of *The Sleeping Beauty* is too well-known to need recounting here.

The subject of *The Nut-Cracker Suite* is taken from a fairy-tale by Ernst Hoffmann, Chaikovsky's music reviving the tale about a little nut-cracker presented as a Christmas gift to a small girl named Masha. This Nut-Cracker became her favourite toy. The composer presents Masha's quaint dream in which the Nut-Cracker valiantly defends Masha from nasty King Mouse who had arisen from his underground domain wearing his keen-toothed crown and purple mantle and how Masha, in her turn, rescues the mannikin from death by flinging her shoe into the midst of the congregated rats who were getting the upper hand of her brave defender. In his end the ugly, big-headed Nut-Cracker turns into a beautiful prince; Masha becomes his princess and together they glide in a glittering boat along the mysterious waves of a silver-and-rose sea. They arrive at the Kingdom of Sweets where instead of chocolate they are regaled with a Spanish Dance, instead of coffee they are offered an Oriental dance and in place of tea—a Chinese dance.

Chaikovsky has given extraordinarily expressive descriptive features in his music to this ballet. In portraying the night the composer unfolds a complete canvas of sound. One seems to hear the indistinct and muffled voices of the night, strange whisperings, the faint creak as of boards in an old house. And through this curtain of vague sounds is heard the squeaking of mice, resembling a whistle which at times attains a misleading semblance to the twitter of birds, but inexplicably sinister. And all this is veiled in a stirring atmosphere of mystery.

Both in *The Nut-Cracker Suite* and *The Sleeping Beauty* the hostile forces antagonistic to Good are embodied in the tangible images of rats and mice. In *The Nut-Cracker Suite* the mice attack the toy soldiers and dolls, in *The Sleeping Beauty* they form the retinue of the wicked fairy Karabos. The music is unusually graphic when depicting the conflict of Light and Darkness in the scene where the good fairy Lilac finally triumphs over Karabos. The soaring, dulcet moonlit melody of Lilac's theme gradually predominates over that of Karabos, with its harsh-clipped sarcastic rhythm.

So full-bodied are the musical images presented by the composer that of themselves they prompt tangible, visible figures, greatly assisting the work of ballet masters and dancers.

Take, for example, the dance of Aurora in the first act of *The Sleeping Beauty*. Picturesquely portraying the wayward change of moods of the sixteen-year-old maiden, now gay

and carefree, now roguishly teasing, now playfully coquettish or swiftly surging, the composer helps the ballerina to depict all these shades.

The ballet master Petitpas, the first to stage *The Sleeping Beauty*, found choreographic movements to express the inner content of all the dance images presented in this ballet. The soaring upwards and the flights characterizing the dance of the Blue Bird, the softly feline leaps of the *pas de chat* of Puss in Boots and the White Kitten, the dance *sur les pointes* of Little Red Riding Hood; and the numerous brisé in the dance of the Diamond Fairy conveying the shimmering glitter of precious gems, also his smoothly swaying dance at the end of Act I of *The Nut-Cracker Suite* depicts to perfection the hovering and swirl of snowflakes, now condensing like a dense snowdrift, now lifted by the wind and scattered again, to form a glittering, dancing star.

A whole series of ballet masters have sought to give their own individual interpretation of Chaikovsky's musical thoughts. But so great is the wealth of the composer's musical ideas that each new producer discovers ever new features and aspects in these scores. These musical images created by the composer inspire ever new generations of artists. The role of Aurora (*The Sleeping Beauty*), Masha (*The Nut-Cracker Suite*) and especially Odette (*The Swan Lake*) attract the greatest Russian ballerinas.

A number of new young talented ballerinas have come to the fore in recent years, demonstrating their art in the ballets of Chaikovsky.

Peerless among these is, beyond all question, Olga Lepeshinskaya. There is scarcely a ballerina today who could vie with her in virtuosity. Both *tempo à terre* and *tempo en l'air* are equally her forte. There is something truly brilliant in her mastery which is imbued with the warmth of life by her juvenescent daring and her lively, vivacious smile. Lepeshinskaya is not only a superb dancer but also an excellent mimic actress, with mobile features and a most expressive command of gesture. This ballerina has a better command of the roles of Aurora and Masha than of the elegiac part of Odette. The very lines of her body—short and firm-built—do not lend themselves to conveying the serpentine lines of the swan dance which seem to prostrate themselves above the water like the reeds thriving there.

Another young ballerina, Tatyana Bessmertnova, has made her advent since the beginning of the war. This dancer was prima ballerina in all the performances given on the stage of the Moscow Affiliate of the Bolshoy Theatre during the time when the main part of the troupe was evacuated to Kuibyshev.

Bessmertnova's debuts in leading roles took place under unusual circumstances. It was in November of that grim year of 1941. The Germans pressed closer on Moscow every day and sometimes as many as eight to ten alerts were sounded daily. The whine of sirens and the hooting of whistles sometimes preceded the performances, and sometimes interrupted them half way. And more than once did the burst of enemy bombs serve as an anti-climax to the end of a performance. Added to the impressions they carried from the theatre, spectators saw the picture of gunfire flashes, the bursting of anti-aircraft shells—greyish-yellow or purplish-rose flashes of lightning in the skies which for an instant faintly lit up the early darkness in the unlighted wintry streets of Moscow.

The common danger menacing the city brought artists and spectators closer together, it heightened their feelings, their sense of the beautiful, the enjoyment of art, the pleasure of Chaikovsky's enchanting music. The spectators largely consisted of the gallant defenders of the Soviet capital. Khaki tunics, the huge, unwieldy fur-boots worn by fliers, sleeveless leather jackets, like the jerkins of medieval days, were far more in evidence in the theatre than were civilian clothes.

It was precisely during this period that Bessmertnova became Moscow's favourite and that Ludmila Litavkina and Zinaida Korotayeva advanced to the rank of soloists, these two young ballerinas performing the swan dances in *The Swan Lake* and major solo numbers in *The Sleeping Beauty*.

In the movements and carriage of Zinaida

"The Nut-Cracker Suite". Act II

Korotayeva, in the manner she holds her head, in the line running from her neck to her shoulders there is something singularly proud, that feeling of personal dignity which forms the vitally intrinsic essence of Russian folk dance. This Russian element, perhaps unconsciously introduced by the young artiste into the classic dance, gives pulsating warmth to its chaste forms, translucent as ice.

Ludmila Litavkina's performance has something of the nervous impulsiveness of adolescent girlhood. This young ballerina has command of a high leap and possesses strong toes. The most subtle movements, demanding polished chiselling, are just as superb as her broadly flowing motions. The daring with which she flings her body into the air—head forward, soaring over the ground horizontally before she falls into her partner's waiting arms, is truly admirable. And whilst Korotayeva's performance is distingushed by softly rippling contours of plastic line, the dominating features in Litavkina's dancing are its soaring flight, impetuosity and youthful verve.

Among the male dancers—not counting, of course, Assaf Messerer and Alexei Yermolayev, who performed all the leading roles in Chaikovsky's three ballets (Siegfried, the Prince in *The Sleeping Beauty* and the Nut-Cracker) and whose names have for many years now enjoyed wide fame, among those who advanced to the fore in war-time years particular mention should be made of Alexander Rudenko (Siegfried and the Nut-Cracker). Simplicity, mellowness and nobility of style are the most salient features of this young dancer's gifts. And it is this that determines the success which Rudenko invariably achieves in Chaikovsky's ballets.

Another young male dancer is Georgi Farmanyants, who finished the ballet school only in 1940. Farmanyants commands a splendid effortless leap, high and impetuous. He is equally successful in tours on the ground and in the air and in his *jeté en tournant* all around the stage. Special mention should be made of his performance as the jester in *The Swan Lake* and, in particular, his dance with the masks at the ball in Siegfried's castle.

From the very first moment, when the masks surround the jester, intriguing him and drawing him into their dance, vague alarm fleets over his handsome countenance. There is something ominous in this dance of the masks, in their external appearance. Their movements are insidious. The colouring of their medieval apparel, black and yellow, with white stripes, give them a semblance to huge wasps, while their headwear, adorned with flourishes like the feelers of insects, accentuates this similarity. When their eyes gleam strangely from beneath their half-masks, and they cast quick glances at the jester—their heads swaying in mocking rhythms, the spectator senses their crafty wiles.

In this dance of the masks, hemming in and pestering the jester, the festively arrayed throng of courtiers sees nothing but playful masquerade and gaiety. But the jester senses the baleful shadows of the gloomy world of horrors lurking on the edge of the bright world of reality, biding its time to crush it with darkness, chaos and death.

The convulsive dance of the jester, his tragically desperate leaps acquire a particular significance in Georgi Farmanyants' performance. It seems as though he is seeking to break free from this enchanted ring, but as in a heavy dream, he is powerless to do so. His wild leaps arouse laughter. But they are cries of anguish, an appeal to those around him to help, to save him.

New interpretations of several roles in Chaikovsky's ballets is further proof of the latters' wonderful vitality. Productions grow old one after another, but the music remains eternally youthful.

Laroche, one of Chaikovsky's contemporaries, declared that the music of the author of *The Sleeping Beauty*, even when he writes on foreign subjects, "smacks of Russia". This does not refer to the local colour, which Chaikovsky was able to observe and present so consummately, but in something that was more general and deeper—"in the inner structure of the music, mainly in the foundation of the melodic elements. This basic element is beyond all doubt Russian."

It is in this mergence of kindness and strength, it is in the profound humanism, in the readiness to fight indefatigably and fearlessly for lofty ethical ideals that Chaikovsky's Russian nature and simultaneous with this also his deep bonds with the traditions of world culture found fullest expression.

VICTOR IVING

HOW THE SEVASTOPOL PANORAMA WAS SAVED

(An open letter)

Among news items in a Moscow paper I read not long ago that the Sevastopol panorama rescued during the hard days of the city's defence was now in Novosibirsk and is being restored there.

And I recalled how Black Sea sailors saved that priceless work of art.

It was during Sevastopol's most trying days. The insensate Germans, weltering knee-deep in their own blood, were already breaking through to the outskirts of the town. The last lines were being fought for. We fought where our grandfathers fought in 1854—1855. Then, in daylight on the July 27th, 1942, naz fliers made a concentrated raid with the direct aim of demolishing the famous panorama.

Bombs demolished the left side of the building; the dome began to burn. The flames seized on the panorama on which the skilful hand of the landscape artist Roubaud had depicted the siege of Sevastopol in 1854—1855.

First to dash into the blazing building were pupils of the anti-aircraft gunnery school led by Captain Loman. Then to their aid came machine-gunners stationed nearby and three men from the municipal fire brigade.

After putting out the fire the Soviet navymen carefully cut up the canvas into sections and packed the pieces right on the spot, on Historic Boulevard. By evening the job was done. Three dozen huge sections of canvas were wrapped in blankets and sacks which the navymen had brought from their dugouts. On the night of the 27th officers and sailors loaded the panorama canvases onto lorries and took them to Kamyshovaya Bay.

That night the destroyer *Tashkent* arrived—the last ship to run the blockade. Its voyage, one of amazing difficulty, has been graphically described by the late Eugene Petrov, the writer. It was decided that the wounded inhabitants of the town and the panorama must be got away on the *Tashkent*.

The destroyer was loaded under ceaseless artillery and mortar fire. The time left for loading was literally minutes. We had to load 36 enormous bales. To leave behind even one bale meant an irreparable loss to the entire panorama. There would be no other chance to ship it to the "mainland".

The ship had already slipped its moorings when we threw the last panorama canvas aboard.

I want to make special mention of the young painter, Red Navy man Annapolsky to whom we are largely indebted for the preservation of the panorama.

Amidst the raging conflagration, in the heat of battle, under fire, during the third German offensive, this gallant artist and sailor sketched, drew posters and when necessary took up his rifle and defended the city with all the rest. In the most trying days he picked up among the debris of the Museum precious exhibits that had survived, china-ware, paintings, marble, historical relics and despatched them all to the "mainland".

A group of commanders left Sevastopol by plane on June 30th, when the unparalleled battle was drawing to a close. Annapolsky remained behind on that tiny scrap of land still held by the heroes of Sevastopol's defence—he was waiting for the arrival of the submarine which was to take aboard the last of the Museum exhibits.

Some laughed at him—it did not seem to be the time to be worrying about museum relics. But Annapolsky was obdurate. "We shall return to Sevastopol," he said, "and the Museum will have to be restored. After all it's a monument to our martial renown. How dare we abandon such precious relics?"

I. PYATOPOL,
Second Petty Officer

ART NEWS

The Komsomol Theatre in Moscow has just presented a new play *Youth of Our Fathers* by Boris Gorbatov, a front-line writer. Gorbatov is the author of *Unbowed*. In the play mentioned the author returns to the youth of those men who today are directing operations at the front and the self-sacrificing work of the rear. *Youth of Our Fathers* is a play about the events of twenty-five years ago when in fierce battles against the enemy, the young Soviet country affirmed the people's right to independence, freedom and happiness.

The play's heroes are youths, girls, secondary-school pupils and young workers, and it revives the atmosphere of the first years of the Revolution. The inner connection between the events of the play and those of today is stressed in the prologue, the scene of which is laid in the present war against nazism: several youths and girls come to a Red Army colonel to receive a special combat assignment in the fight against the Germans. In his youth the colonel had been friendly with the mother of one of the girls who had come to him. He begins to tell the story of the days when he and his generation was still young. These recollections form the subject matter of the play, the content of its nine scenes.

A historical fact forms the subject of the epilogue: the conference of revolutionary youth which was addressed by Vladimir Lenin. The stage shows the lobby at this conference. Here friends meet from all the corners of the Soviet land. Fragments of phrases and exclamations are heard. The young people are waiting for Lenin to arrive. Expectancy grows. At last the news flies round: "Lenin's arrived!" From behind the half-open door leading to the rostrum a group of young people listen with rapt attention to Lenin's historic speech (the audience listens with them). I. Bersenev, the producer and V. Kozlinsky, the settings artist have done better in this than in any other scene.

It is interesting to note that the theatre staging this play occupies the very building where the Third Youth Congress at which V. I. Lenin spoke took place.

The first actors to perform in Kiev after its liberation from the German invaders were members of the Moscow Vakhtangov Theatre. A. Tutishkin, producer and leader of the troup relates:

"On November 6th, 1943, the day of Kiev's liberation from the German invaders, we gave concerts for the men of the First Ukrainian front ten miles from the capital of the Ukraine. On the evening of November 10th, we arrived in Kiev. Next day an army vehicle with a radio installation cruised through the streets announcing our first performance.

"The first concert left an indelible impression. In the city where there was as yet no electricity and no water, the lamps suddenly lit up in the cinema—the Red Army men had installed a mobile power station. The concert lasted over two hours."

The works of the composer N. Y. Myaskovsky, Stalin Prize winner, occupy a prominent place in Soviet concert programs.

During the war Myaskovsky has written several symphony and chamber productions: the cantata *Kirov Is With Us*, his 23rd Symphony and the 9th Quartet.

The cantata *Kirov Is With Us* is written to a poem by Nikolai Tikhonov. The stern courageous music of the cantata gives a grand picture of the "Iron nights" of besieged Leningrad. The chorus and orchestra are dealt with by the composer as an indivisible whole; the human voice is spun into the symphonic fabric and lends it a vital warmth of colour. On the background of this music naturally emerges the image of Kirov, a great citizen of his epoch, whose last years were all linked with Leningrad. It is him Leningraders remember in their self-sacrificing struggle, it is he who inspires them to new deeds:

And Kirov's challenging name
The regiments of Leningrad leads. . .

Myaskovsky's 9th Quartet was first heard in this winter's concert season. It is of a sweeping scope—a genuine Russian production, impregnated with the charm of Russian scenery and the true intonations of Russian life and Russian spirit. The success of the composition was enhanced by the Beethoven State quartet's masterly interpretation.

A new newsreel film called *The Urals Forge Victory* shows us the Soviet arsenal of the Urals.

The film reflects the significance of the Urals in Russian history. The soldiers of Peter I were armed with Urals carbines when they defeated the Swedes at Poltava. The soldiers of Suvorov, the great Russian general, had bayonets made of Urals steel. Urals regiments entered Paris on the heels of Napoleon's army. Urals guns rumbled along the streets of vanquished Berlin.

In late years the second coal and metal base of the Soviet Union has been set up in the Urals. This rigorous region stretching from the ice of the Kara Sea to the rolling steppes of Kazakhstan has been covered with huge factories.

The film *The Urals Forge Victory* shows the enthusiasm for labour which has gripped all the Urals in these days of war. The Ural mountains yield an inexhaustible supply of ore. Blast and open-hearth furnace blacksmiths and rolling-mill operators smelt and roll the metal. The men at the front are unanimous in their appreciation of the weapons the Urals send them.

Such is the theme of the new documentary film *The Urals Forge Victory*. The scenario is by Boris Agapov and the directors are V. Boykov and F. Kisselyov.

A still from "The Urals Forge Victory"

NEWS AND VIEWS

Considering that it is winter time there are a surprising number of suntanned faces at the Writers' club today. Guests have come to Moscow from Tashkent, Uzbekistan's sunny capital—they are Uzbek writers and artists. Their evening at the club became a real festival of art, a vivid proof of the friendship of the peoples. At the presidium's table were outstanding Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Estonian, Lithuanian and Turkmenian writers. Among them are Alexei Tolstoy, Ilya Ehrenburg, A. Fadeyev, Maxim Rylsky, Yakub Kolas, Johannes Barbarus, Hamid Alimjan.

The club hall is packed. The speech of Hamid Alimjan, secretary of the Uzbek Writers' Association, on Uzbek literature is followed with close attention. He mentions the names of the famous historian Sharafutdin Ali Yazdi and the ancient poets Kashgari, Yassavi, Lutfi and the great Alisher Navoi. Uzbek literature, one of the richest in the East, passed through many centuries and tribulations before it flowed into the general stream of Soviet poetry, without losing any of its peculiar national character.

Now the names of such poets as Gafur Gulyam, Hamid Alimjan, Sheikhsade, Uygun, such a splendid master of prose and poetry as Aibek and many another are well known throughout the country [1].

After Alimjan's report poets read their poems in Uzbek and were followed immediately by interpreters who read them in Russian. The literary part of the evening's program was brought to a close by the reading of excerpts from Navoi's poem *Farkhad and Shirin* and the ancient popular Uzbek epic *Raushan*, translated into Russian by the poet V. Derzhavin, who was heartily applauded after his reading. The poem describes how a youth seeks a beautiful girl, his bride-to-be, the princess of a certain state and learns that on holidays she sells caps at the market. He goes through the lines of stalls but cannot find the space where caps are sold. The varigated scene of the eastern bazar is portrayed for the listener. By its wealth of imagery, its freshness of humour, the picture can be compared to the best in world literature. At the end of every verse the audience laughingly anticipates the repetition of the line: "Where can the cap bazar be?"

The second part of the evening is devoted to the other arts: musicians playing folk instruments, singers and dancers.

The main part of the Uzbek dance consists of movements of the arms and the upper part of the body. The movements of the arms are amazingly varied: now they wave sinuously, like snakes, now spread out like wings, now convey the movements of the seamstress or the cotton picker. And how expressive is the face during the dance! Now pensive, now proud, now arch, now alluring. The splendid dancer Mukarram Turgunbayeva nips with her teeth the tip of her white silk sleeve and is off in a Bukhara folk dance. How rogish is her smile, what plastic smoothness in her movements! Then suddenly there's a sharp change. Mukarram is no longer floating but pirouetting, her face is no longer arch but full of strong joy.

It is said of Halima Nassyrova, People's Artist of the U.S.S.R., that "when Halima sings it seems that it is not a woman but a bird". Her voice has an original timbre and wide range. At times it seems delicate like glass, at times resonant like metal. There's an unusual warmth and intimacy in her singing. To the accompaniment of folk instruments she renders songs of various Soviet peoples with lyric tenderness. Now she sings a martial air of Armenia in a major key, now trills into ringing laughter in a Kazakh waltz, while her rendering of the popular Russian song *Eventide at Anchor* is particularly in favour. Halima Nassyrova combines with her fine voice, personal charm, exquisite artistry and vivid mimic.

The talent revealed by the Uzbek guests indicates the inexhaustible possibilities of Uzbek national art.

Not long ago Konstantin Fedin, author of the novels *Towns and Years* and *The Abduction of Europa*, returned from a visit to territory freed from the German invader in the Orel Region. He then wrote about it in his *Notes of 1943*.

Konstantin Fedin's reading of his work drew a big crowd at the Writers' club.

In sharp clear strokes the writer describes the devastation wrought by the fascist barbarians. He tells of the dauntless inhabitants who, despite raging terror, kept in touch with the partisans all the time. "He", as the enemy was called in the Orel Region, destroyed material values but could not stamp out the people's hatred for the enemy nor their determination to struggle. Fedin recounts the return of the surviving inhabitants from their hiding places in the forest to their homes, now piles of ashes, of the spirited way in which they set about the restoration.

Fedin also gives a number of sketches of armymen encountered on the road, on the march: he recalls a sapper in particular, who gave a colourful and pointed account of the heroic, obstacle-smashing work of his detachment.

Humour gleams throughout Fedin's sketch. He frequently stresses apparently insignificant details which give warmth and colour to the entire story. Speaking of the officers and men who were the first of the victors to enter

[1] We gave a review of the works of the most outstanding Uzbek literature in our issue No. 8, 1943.

Orel he repeats the joke of an officer who said he would drink tea in Orel on August 5th, and kept his word.

Fedin's sketches are true to life and convincing, so affirmed Victor Shklovsky, V. Fink, Pavel Antokolsky and everybody else who took part in the discussion.

It is a rare case for an author and his hero to speak from the same platform but there was a case like this at a recent literary evening. Bek, the author of the clever book *Panfilov's Men at the Forward Line*[1] read the introduction to part two and acquainted his audience with his further plan of work. Right there too, was Colonel Baurjan Momysh-uly, a Kazakh, the hero and inspirer of the story.

A little taller than the average height, broad-shouldered, and well set up, he looks supple, agile and strong. He has a swarthy round face with large flashing eyes unusual in a man of Asia. His face is strong, firm and a little stern, which makes his infrequent smile all the more brilliant.

Momysh-uly is not only the hero of the novel, he is the hero of the evening. He follows Bek in addressing the audience. He outlines the book's objective: to describe battles and the psychology of the men and to reveal the process of fathering courage.

Colonel Momysh-uly takes up the cudgels with Bek. He fears that Bek will make the story too artistic while he wants the book to give a true picture of the war, and, as he puts it, "to be a book of military education". He is dissatisfied at being made the main character in the book. Momysh-uly defines the ratio the characters must bear to each other in the book: 50% of it must be devoted to the soldiers, 25% to General Panfilov, his chief and teacher, and 25% to himself.

At times you get the impression that Momysh-uly is laying down the law in no uncertain terms to Bek. It is hardly likely that any other author has struck such a difficult and refractory hero. But this makes the writer's task all the more interesting.

Momysh-uly has fought in a hundred engagements. He has studied fighting in all its aspects. From engagement to engagement he develops as a commander—the battlefield was his "academy". His generalizations are the result of immense experience. The degree of his success in military art can be gauged if only by the fact that he started the war as a senior lieutenant and is now a colonel.

"I don't want this book about war to be a lie masquerading as truth," he says. "Fighting brings out all the qualities of the human spirit in all their complexity and they must be portrayed by the author with absolute truth."

Momysh-uly propounds his own philosophy of war. "There's no such a thing as chance in war," he boldly asserts, "or more correctly, all separate incidents, all successes and defeats take their proper place in the general course of the battle. By studying them you master military art. But the main thing is to study the man, to know with what and how to influence him."

As Bek's story shows, Momysh-uly is a past master of the art. One of his precepts is: "Heroism is the result of military training and the conviction that honour is dearer than life, that disgrace is worse than death."

"The most formidable weapon in action is the spirit of the soldier."

"Don't be in a hurry to die, but learn to fight," says Momysh-uly in conclusion, citing the words of his teacher General Panfilov.

"Not to die but to live," is the heading of one of the chapters of Bek's story.

In seeing and hearing Momysh-uly himself, you are astonished how truly the writer has portrayed him and you believe that the book formed by such a partnership—even though in creative dispute and conflict—will be truthful and convincing to the end.

Between 1892 and 1899 Anton Pavlovich Chekhov lived in the village of Melikhovo in the former Serpukhov District not far from Moscow. These years were a prominent period in the writings of this great Russian author. It was at Melikhovo that he wrote the stories *Peasants*, *The Man in a Case*, *Ward No. 6* and the plays *Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya*.

The personnel of the Serpukhov Museum, headed by S. I. Aristov, one of the oldest experts in the local lore of the Moscow Region, recently opened a Chekhov Department. The exhibits here include rare photographs and letters of Anton Chekhov to his friends and acquaintances.

In Melikhovo Chekhov founded a school for peasant children. The first teacher at this school was M. P. Levina. When Chekhov went to Yalta (the Crimea) for the sake of his health, he still maintained interest in the school and often wrote to Melikhovo. For over forty years M. P. Levina treasured all his letters and this correspondence never before published, has now come into the possession of the museum.

During his residence at Melikhovo Chekhov was often visited by I. Levitan, the well-known painter. In a letter to A. Suvorin (editor of *Novoye Vremya*), dated April 8th, 1892, Chekhov wrote:

"Levitan, the artist, is at present staying with me. Yesterday he and I went out shooting. He bagged a woodcock which, hit in the wing, fell into a pond. I retrieved it; a long beak, large black eyes and splendid raiment. The poor bird wears an astonished look. What's to be done with it? Levitan frowns, shuts his eyes and, in a trembling voice, says: 'Be a good chap, knock its head against the gunstock!..' 'I can't,' I say. He continues nervously shrugging his shoulders, jerking his head and pleading. Meanwhile the woodcock still gazes in astonishment."

In 1892 cholera raged in the villages around Moscow. Anton Pavlovich took an active part in combating the epidemic. He was indefatigable, trying to render the population every aid possible.

Detailed material has been gathered of how drama enthusiasts staged the play *Uncle Vanya* in Serpukhov on March 18th, 1896. Chekhov took part in the rehearsals and conducted the first reading of the script.

[1] Excerpts from the first part of the book were printed in our issue No. 10 for 1943.

The Writers' Bookshelf has obtained for the Gorky Museum in Moscow the documents of the Committee for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments and Objects of Art which worked under the chairmanship of Maxim Gorky in 1917.

Up to now this period of Gorky's biography and the investigations he was then carrying out has been little studied.

A very valuable find was an unpublished speech made by Maxim Gorky in March 1917, at a general meeting of the Petrograd workers and also the text of an appeal made by the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet to the city population on the preservation of art monuments, penned, as now ascertained, by Gorky.

After a break of two years, caused by the war, the Leo Tolstoy State Museum in Moscow has now reopened.

In the autumn of 1941 the Museum building was badly damaged by a German H.E. bomb. Now it has been completely restored, right down to the artistic decoration of the ceilings and the bas-relief on the facade. Academicians A. V. Shchussev and I. E. Grabar cooperated in the restoration work. The ceiling decorations were done under the direction of the artist P. Korin.

The Museum exhibits show the work of the great novelist. A special department is devoted to his book *War and Peace*. The curator of the Museum is S. A. Tolstaya-Yessenina, the writer's granddaughter.

A. Perventsev, the author of the novel *The Test* gleaned the material for his book at coal and ore mines and factories.

When A. Perventsev's book was published over three hundred miners at the Rudnichnaya Pit in the Kizel coalfields gathered at a readers' conference in their library to discuss it.

Colliers of all trades took the floor at this conference: fitters, mechanical-cutter operators and pneumatic-drillers. They subjected the book to a detailed and keen analysis, speaking of its attributes and shortcomings.

The leader of one of the brigades of women miners, A. Ustinova, said: "I remember what agonies our miners suffered when the hitlerite hordes reached the walls of our town. How could they tear themselves away from the pits where for decades sons had worked with fathers and grandfathers with grandsons? But still, they manfully blew up their own pits and went off to the Urals to forge victory in a new place. All this is forcefully described in the novel *The Test*."

The village of Velikie Sorochintsy lies on the picturesque banks of the Ukrainian river Psyol. Here in 1810 Nikolai Gogol was born.

Thousands of excursionists came to the Dwelling-house-Museum of N. V. Gogol which was augmented by new exhibits from year to year. Here were placed on show the canvases by prominent Russian painters, old-time Ukrainian household utensils and furniture, first and rare editions of Gogol's works.

When the Germans entered Sorochintsy they signalized their advent by pillage and violence. In the very first days the Germans sacked and destroyed the Gogol Museum. Led by an Oberleutnant nazi soldiers broke into the cottage which for so many decades had been preserved by the Russian people as a cultural monument, and began wrecking everything that came to hand; they smashed the showcases containing exhibits gathered with such loving pains, and with bayonet and knife ripped and slashed pictures. The nazis burned books and manuscripts on a bonfire in front of the Museum. An old collective farmer, by the name of Lebed, whose house stands next door to the Museum, tried to protest against this savage violence, tried to tell the nazis that Gogol was a great writer whose works were known throughout the civilized world.

"Gogol? I've never heard the name. The Bolsheviks have invented it!" replied the German officer carrying on with the destruction.

On retreating from Sorochintsy the Germans blew up and burnt the Gogol Dwelling-house-Museum. On the spot dear to every civilized man as a memorial to the great writer and humanist, there now remains nothing but a heap of ruins.

Literary circles of Georgia recently celebrated the 50th birthday and the 35th anniversary of the literary activity of Galaktion Tabidze, the Georgian folk poet.

Tabidze's poems enjoy great popularity in the towns and villages of Georgia.

During the present war Tabidze has lent all the weight of his talent to the fight against the hitlerite invaders. His songs are sung by Georgian armymen at the forward positions, his poems are published in Red Army newspapers.

The Georgian State Publishing House is shortly to issue a collection of new poems by Galaktion Tabidze.

A West-Siberian branch of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. is being founded in Novosibirsk. The first organizational conference of scientists from Novosibirsk, Tomsk and the Altai Territory included members of the Academy of Sciences headed by Academician Skochinsky and took place in the House of Science and Technique.

The basic task of this new branch and its institutes is to render scientific aid in the raising of the productive capacities of West Siberia.

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