U. S. S. R. AT WAR

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At War

TRUE STORIES OF THE HEROIC DEFENCE

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1. Mikhail Katukov, Guards Major, General.
2. I. Prokofiko, Brigade Commissar.
3. Mikhail Romm
4. O. Gorodovikov, Colonel General.
5. Vadim Kozhevnikov.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

For the first time in India it is possible to publish an authentic first-hand story of Russia's heroic defence against the world's mightiest mechanised army. For the last two years Russia has been fighting the sudden and unprovoked attack by Nazi Germany almost single-handed, and even though she yielded ground every inch was fought for, and a heavy toll was taken of the invading army.

In these pages distinguished Russian officers and literatures give a graphic picture of bitter fighting at Leningrad and Moscow; the gripping tale of attack and counter-attack by tanks, artillery and cavalry, the unimaginable feats of courage and endurance by airmen, daily deeds of heroism by ferry pilots, ambushing by guerillas and resistance by unarmed people behind the enemy lines.

The book reveals the secret of Soviet defence and the new technique evolved by a people who are determined to win the war whatever may be the cost, and however sanguinary the fight. It tells you the open secret : *Freedom Fights Slavery.*

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SOVIET TANKMEN

By

GUARDS MAJOR-GENERAL MIKHAIL KATUKOV

Hero of the Soviet Union

On a rainy autumn day senior Lieutenant Alexander Burda, commander of a company of medium tanks, received orders to actively reconnoitre the German forces advancing on the Soviet town of...

Burda covertly led his tanks along the High-road and camouflaged them in the woods.

According to the scouts information it was at this spot that the German troop column would pass. And this was so, for exactly at 8 a.m. the Germans began moving towards the town.

Like a venomous snake, the German column emerged on to the road. In front crawled the panzer vehicles hauling anti-tank guns. These were followed by medium tanks, then again came armoured transport vehicles, then two or three heavy tanks—two regiments of motorised infantry in all.

It required utmost sang-froid to wait the whole column enter within the zone of ambush fire and then to crush and destroy it. Such

were the orders of senior Lieutenant Burda. But one of the men of his tank-borne infantry failed to hold out and opened machine-gunfire when the head of the column had approached to within 800 metres.

The circumstances were such that they had to immediately go into action and attack the enemy, giving him no time to take up formation on a dominating eminence. At Burda's command the tanks in ambush opened target fire against the enemy's armoured transporters and tanks, while Lieutenant Kukarin's platoon leaped from ambush and with the treads of the tanks began crushing the Germans who were caught napping by this audacious onslaught. From one side it seemed as though Kukarin's heavy machine was in a dance.

At the same time private Bogursky, who stood on Kukarin's tank, was shooting point-blank at the Germans, first from his rifle and then from his service revolver. This plucky Red Army man emptied the chambers of both his weapons and not a single bullet went wide. In this battle Bogursky accounted for 30 Hitlerites. Then he leaped off the tank and gave chase to a German officer, shot him down and took his documents and revolver.

The enemy troop column was scattered and it retreated in disorder, back to the town from which it had started out. Only one battalion turned left, making a detour of Burda's group, but they came up against Petr Molchanov's tank

which was in ambush. Whilst the Germans were filling into the gully Molchanov's crew refrained from opening fire and it was only when the tail end of the German column had already entered the gully did Molchanov open shrapnel-shell fires while the tank's radio-operator began mowing the Germans down with machine-gun fire, very few men of the German battalion climbed safely out of the gully, most of them were laid low by the fire of Molchanov's tank.

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" the infantry men gleefully cried as they watched the short but fierce skirmish between Molchanov and the enemy battalion.

Infuriated by this unexpected resistance, the Germans determined to wipe out Burda's group from the air, but foreseeing this move, the experienced commander withdrew his tanks to the vicinity of the nearest village and for thirty solid minutes thirty German bombers diligently bombed and machine-gunned a blank spot.

Senior Lieutenant Burda is only one of the many Soviet tankmen who daily and hourly perform feats of true heroism on the battlefields.

Hundreds of tankmen have been awarded battle decorations and many of them wear on their breast the order of the Gold Star—insignia of their title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

It is only since the last ten years that tanks have found mass utility in the armaments of the Red Army.

The year of 1932, when the first Five-year plan was culminated, witnessed the advent of massed numbers of tank troops armed with battle machines of domestic production.

And during these years Soviet tanks and the Soviet crews manning them have won merited esteem and respect both in their own country and abroad.

The successful production of such complicated machines as tanks was, of course, possible only on the basis of a powerful heavy industry and general industrialisation.

Soviet tanks showed their superb fighting abilities as early as in the 1940 winter campaign. Under most difficult meteorological conditions, the tankmen in their white camouflaged machines displayed true miracles of bravery, war skill and manoeuvring powers.

With the thermometer registering forty degrees frost C., the tank of Anatoli Rastopulo, Hero of the Soviet Union, made a 180-kilometre voyage and entered straight into battle, in its stride. Despite the destructive enemy fire the gallant tankmen flung back the advancing Germans and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

It is now the second year that the Soviet people and its Red Army is fighting against the Hitler hordes, smiting the enemy and inflicting terrific losses upon him. Even when temporarily retreating, the Red Army deals the enemy crushing blows, destroying his man-power and technique.

The tank troops form the vanguard of the Red Army and serve all branches of the service as an example of courage, bravery and skill in action.

At the beginning of the war the Red Army tank troops were organised into divisions. Battle experience has shown these units to be too unwieldy and inconvenient for managing. These units were then broken up into smaller units and reformed into brigades, resulting in more pliancy in their utilisation on the battlefields.

At the beginning of October 1941 Guderien's German tank grouping broke through to Orel and took the city. The Soviet command found itself with one tank brigade available, and it was this brigade that was assigned the defence of the roads to Tula and Moscow pending the concentration of other troops. For eight days the tank brigade engaged in fierce fighting with the enemy which flung against this one brigade two of its tank and one motorised division—three divisions against one brigade. And the Soviet unit honourably accomplished its task, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy while suffering very little itself.

This was achieved with thanks to the excellently arranged reconnoitre service which, by the virtue of the unit's exposed flanks, was conducted along a wide front; a system of pseudo positions, close interaction of all classes or arms comprised within the brigade; able and efficient interspersing of motor-infantry among the various battle units, tank ambuscades and the manoeuvring, from far

behind the lines of shock groups of tanks attacking the enemy.

All the men, officers and political workers showed dogged grit and courage. Their ranks never wavered in face of the enemy whose forces exceeded theirs almost tenfold.

And it was for these battles that the brigade deceived the rank of Guards Brigade. And there are many such brigades in the Red Army.

In the actual course of battle Soviet tankmen gain experience and apply new methods of fighting, tank ambuscade in defence, for instance, or shock-group manoeuvring, employing tank-borne infantry during attacks, interspersing tanks among storming groups when charging against forts and pill-boxes, etc.

In the first period of the war, having launched a perfidious, unexpected onslaught, the Germans could crush the Red Army by dint of numerical superiority and sometimes broke through the line of front and vaunted their "bravery" by mistreating the unarmed civil population and by looting towns and villages.

But when the Germans came up against Soviet tank troops equalling them in force or sometimes even slightly exceeding them in number, the Hitlerites soon found themselves singing small. Their machines were quickly reduced to piles of smoking debris on the battlefield and they would then hastily seek shelter beneath the wing of their

artillery, showing no particular desire to fight the Soviet tanks.

The Red Army grows and strengthens. It is now more powerful than it was in the first months of war. Today it possesses more tanks and other technical means of warfare. It has acquired more experience and skill. Cadres of brave and daring tank and anti-tankmen have grown-up men with a perfect command of anti-tank rifles, who can well wield combustible battles and anti-tank grenades.

Military vocation has always been one of the favourite professions of the Soviet youth. And the young men were particularly attracted by remarkable opportunities offered by tanks in waging warfare.

Cadres of skilled tankmen underwent training at the military colleges and also at the university of tank-craft and at the motorisation and mechanisation Military Academy. The colleges and courses gave training to tankmen while the Academy graduated commanders of major tank units.

And all these men are past masters in handling their battle machines.

A solid foundation of technical knowledge plus selfless bravery, astuteness and stamina—such are the essential features inherent to all Soviet tankmen.

And in the patriotic war against the German invaders, Soviet tankmen perform truly heroic

exploits. They have learned to smite the foe as Suvorov did—not by quantity but by skill, by ability.

Lieutenant Dmitri Lavrinenko—a young fellow aged 23—commander of a tank platoon, was once returning to his unit after having his tank repaired. The tank-crew decided to call a halt in one of the small towns on their road.

They stopped their machine on the high street and Lavrinenko, Bedny, Borzykh and Fedotov—the whole crew of the T-34 tank, headed for the barbershop as they didn't want to turn up at their unit unshaved.

The tankmen were seated in the chairs when a Red Army private suddenly entered the barbershop and told the tank commander that he was urgently wanted at the Commandant's quarters. When Lavrinenko arrived there an officer was waiting for him. From him Lavrinenko learned that a column of German infantry with artillery and motor vehicles was approaching the town and he ordered Lavrinenko to hold up the column with his tank until the arrival of Red Army units which had been summoned.

"Well, do you reckon you'll manage the job?" he asked the tank commander,

"Your commands will be executed," replied Lavrinenko.

Unhurriedly, as usual, Lavrinenko explained the forthcoming operation to his crew. And it was no easy task. A German battalion, accom-

panied by anti-tank guns and motorcyclists, was approaching the town.

"The main thing is suddenness," Lavrinenko concluded in setting forth the task.

The crew took its places and the tank headed to meet the oncoming enemy. Some distance short of the village which was situated not far from the town, Lavrinenko placed his tank in ambush in a small grove in such a position as to have the entire road under range of his fire.

A few minutes later the head of the German column appeared round a bend in the road. In front proceeded motorcyclists, then came the staff H. Q. car, the anti-tankguns, with infantry on foot bringing up the rear. So sure were the Germans of the success of their contemplated attack that they did not even move scouts ahead.

The column drew nearer. Turret-gunner Fedotov charged his cannon but it was Lavrinenko who took his stand by the gun. At such crucial moments of battle he always did the firing himself.

The Germans moved ever closer. Their abominable faces could now be clearly distinguished. But Lavrinenko still waited.

He wanted to have the whole column on the visible stretch of road.

Another minute passed.

"Sharpnel shell against Fritz, Fire!" he gave himself the command and shell after shell flew into the enemy column. The very first shots wrecked two enemy guns while the Germans frenziedly

began turning the third gun for action against the Soviet tank.

"Forward," commanded Lavrinenko. Fedotov pressed the accelerator and the heavy machine lurched ahead, its mighty motor flinging it forward into the road in one spurt and no, like a ponderous birdled on to meet the enemy.

The Germans were dumb struck and did not even try offering resistance. The enemy's anti-tank guns had no time to fire a single shot. The Soviet tank smashed into the German column, crushing everything in its path. Its cannon and machineguns kept up a continuous fire. Ten minutes later the Soviet infantry arrived on the scene, with resounding cheers, they put the finishing touch to the Bosches.

Everything was over. The Battalion of German infantry had been dispersed and partly destroyed. The crew jumped out of their tank and began collecting trophies. The four men attacked 13 tommy-guns and 6 trench-mortars on their tank. Then they took in two ten motor-cycles and the one remaining anti-tank gun with its full complement of shells. Sergeant Bedny seated himself at the wheel of the staff H. Q. car and drove it in the wake of the procession.

The officer who had spoken to Lavrinenko stood waiting for the return of the gallant tank crew. He had seen the tank go into action and this old war-horse fondly embraced and kissed each of these four brave men.

The German staff car was found to be the most valuable trophy of all. It contained important German maps. Everything else in the trophy car formed the "trophies" of the staff officers-stuff they had looted from the population. An odd assortment stockings, frying pans, underwear and even infants' pacifiers.

After being handed a formal testimonial of their recent operation, Lovrinenko's crew could now resume their road.

Well satisfied with the results of this skirmish, the tankmen returned to the barbershop, had their shave and then set out for their unit.

Concerning his heroic action Lavrinenko unassumingly made report to the command: "We were given an assignment and we fulfilled it."

In the course of the war against the German invaders our tankmen, both privates and officers, display their innate shrewdness and astute resourcefulness.

A small patch of woods adjacent to a village, offered good cover for tanks.

Not having rested yet after their fierce battle during the night and early part of the morning, the tank crews climbed out of their machines to stretch their legs a bit and have breakfast. The collective farmers from the village vied with each other in regaling the tankmen and infantry 350 pints of milk, five sheep and bread galore—such were the victuals gladly and freely supplied by the farmers for the Red Army men.

Suddenly the noise of a motor was heard from the direction of the highroad, there where the battle had been fought that morning. Then a German panzer transport vehicle appeared, driven by a ginger-haired German with the insignia of Ober Lautnant. So unexpected was his appearance that every one remained standing stock still. Then Burda almost jumped with joy. This would be fine if he could capture this ginger German and take him to the unit staff for interrogation.

Quietly assuming the command not to shoot without his signal, Alexander Burda swiftly slipped into the hut at the furthest edge of the village, asked the mistress for the loan of a blouse and skirt and, donning this feminine garb and tying a shawl on his head a towel serving this purpose Burda emerged from the hut. So excruciatingly funny did he look thus clad that the tankmen who only now guessed at their commander's stratagem— could hardly restrain their laughter.

Meanwhile the German vehicle came to a halt. The German officer cast a distrusted glance all round and then, placing his tommy-gun against his stomach, sent a round of bullets whistling up and down the village. Then seeing no signs of resistance, he beckoned to Burda with his crooked finger. Burda made believe he was acting shy, and turned away from the officer. The ginger-headed German, still holding his tommy-gun at the ready, boldly strode up to Burda.

Everyone waited for the outcome of this little

scene with bated breath, but eventually Bogursky spoiled the denouement. Fearing for the life of his commander, Bogursky lost his presence of mind and opened tommy-gun fire on the German vehicle. Like a cat, the stupefied German sprang back to his car, veered it sharply round and made off. But a Soviet shell caught up with it and the car was set in flames.

Wherever they may be in action against the German invaders, Soviet tank men always feel the strong links them with the Soviet people. Red Army tank troops are the particular favourites among Soviet children.

The unit command assigned Sergeant Evtushenko to dislodge the Hitlerites from a village they had occupied. When Evtushenko's tank stopped at the village's outskirts a young boy of about 10 or 11 years crept up to him. He shouted some thing and pointed to the village. Evtushenko ordered the motors to be throttled down and then opened the trap-door.

"What is it you're shouting about?" Evtushenko asked the lad.

"There are Germans in that hut. Lots of 'em. Their chiefs have all come there"

Night fell and it was difficult to establish his bearings in the dark. Evtushenko said to the boy.

"Come on, my lad, hop into our tank. You'll show us the way."

The boy clambered upon the tank with considerable agility and Evtushenko pulled him

through the trap door into the machine. The boy asked:

"Where am I supposed to look? You can't see anything here."

"Here's where you have to look," said Evtushenko, pointing to the triplex.

With the aid of this country lad, Evtushenko's tank rode into the village and with point-blank fire shot to pieces the house where there were close to 50 German officers.

The unit command once ordered tankman Peter Vorobyev to drive the Germans out of one of the villages near Moscow. Vorobyev was the favourite of the tank regiment. An unassuming, loyal comrade and excellent commander, he already had 14 wrecked enemy tanks to his credit for four months of fighting when he started for this village. The tank commanded by Alexander Zagudayev joined Vorobyev's in the attack on the village.

The day proved to be bright and sunny. The men on the tank each had a drink of 100 grammes of vodka, treated the infantry to the same and towards evening took up their position ready to go into attack. From the small hill where the two tanks had taken their stand the village was clearly visible. The Soviet tanks were well camouflaged, however, and the German failed to detect them.

Not suspecting a thing, the Germans were busy with their usual jobs. The whole village

was groaning in anguish. The Germans, like a swarm of locusts that destroys everything in its path, were dragging off chickens, pigs, samovars, pillows, everything they could lay hands on. The Hitlerite pillage and plunder was at its height.

"Take aim at the Hitlerite chicken-eaters, fire!" was Zagudayev's command. "Forward!" and his tank started off from the hill for the village. Vorobyev's machine was not far behind.

Caught unawares, the Germans began to scatter in all directions but the two Soviet tanks caught them at every point.

"I let the machine go at such a rate in third gear that I could not stop it. Of course, I could really have stopped it but psychologically, I couldn't look at those disgusted Fritzes any more," recalls the driver-mechanic of the tank-Dibin." one would try to hide under the porch, while another would dash out from under there. The radio operator kept letting them have it with his machine-gun, Leskin from his cannon and I simply crushed them with the threads.

While Zagudayev was wrecking havoc among the Germans in the southern outskirts of the village, Vorobyev's tank was crushing them at the other edge of the village.

At this juncture, however, some German anti-tank guns which the village proved to contain, were brought into play. An enemy shell jammed the transmission on Zagudayev's tank and the machine could only travel in reverse gear. The

men continued to fight, however. Leskin succeeded in putting two anti-tank guns out of commission.

Hitlerite grenade throwers began to creep up towards the tank and the driver, Dibin, had to keep manoeuvring the machine from one side to another in order to protect the treads.

All of a sudden another shell hit the tank and this time the blow served to dislodge the shell lodged in the transmission and the tank could now move forward.

"The gears working first rate. We have the Fritzes to thank for that," Dibin informed the commander and Zagudayev's tank made a dash for the German gun. The latter was crushed to the earth in a pulp together with its gunners.

It began to grow dark. The petrol tank was almost empty. Zagudayev decided to withdraw from the battle. Just as he was about to turn back, however, two sparks of flame revealed the location of the German tanks.

"I'll ram them," suggested Dibin.

"No," commanded Zagudayev. "Two shells are enough for them."

Leskin let the two tanks have it, his well-aimed gun and both machines were silenced.

Zagudayev's tank left the field of battle and went into ambush not far from the village. Now they could reckon up the results of the day's battle. Zagudayev's crew along had crippled two tanks, destroyed three anti-tank guns and not less than two companies of infantrymen.

Tankmen out on reconnaissance duty, making long runs behind the enemy lines on their tanks, have many valiant exploits to their credit.

Lieutenant Koroviansky frequently penetrated as far as 50-60 kilometres behind the enemy lines. The scouting troupes were fond of Koroviansky and had every confidence in him. With him as commander, they never returned without some catch and considered it a disgrace to come back to the unit with empty hands.

On a certain November day Lieutenant Koroviansky's group on two BT-7 tanks with a party of reconnoitre scouts on board made their way far behind the enemy lines. After making sure by their observations and by questioning the local population of the presence of German tanks and infantry in the near-by villages, the group started back. Not far from the front lines Koroviansky learned that there was an endless row of enemy tanks and cars moving along the highway.

Koroviansky's tanks came out on to the highway and, seeing the fresh tracks of armoured cars, set out in pursuit. Soon the light BT 25's —"Betties" overtook two armoured cars. The crew of one of them fled in panic at seeing the Soviet tanks and the other car was hit by a shell from Koroviansky's tank and went up in flames at once. The German crew hadn't even time to get out of the car. Koroviansky stripped the car of its guns, took all the documents and returned to his unit.

The next day Koroviansky set out reconnoitring at six in the morning. He picked up the call signals of the Moscow station on the radio and the tankmen listened to the chimes of the Kremlin tower clock.

The weather was very bad, visibility was almost nil, at twenty metres nothing could be made out. A cold wind swept the snow into the tank. All the instruments were covered with a layer of snow and every 50 metres the driver had to stop and again grope his way forward.

As they travelled from one village to another, the scouts always found hearty welcome and help when needed from the local inhabitants. The collective farmers would crowd around the tankmen, asked about the situation at the front, about Moscow, about Stalin. The lines spread by German propaganda could not shake the peasants' faith in the strength of the Red Army. They had found out on their own skins just what German occupation meant for them. Hitlerite food detachments had already visited every village. Wherever they appeared, wholesale plunder and pillage was the order of the day.

Lieutenant Koroviansky resolved to take the chicken snatchers red-handed. On approaching a village, the reconnoitres noticed a 7-ton truck and five Hitlerites rummaging around it. A round of machine-gun bullets finished the whole group. After the shooting was over all the village residents ran out on to the street. They kissed

and embraced the tankmen and asked them to return their goods and property which the Germans had confiscated.

The German truck proved to be half full of all kinds of poultry and products of which the Germans had robbed the population. The tankmen returned all these stores to the collective farmers and after questioning them as to the movements of German troops, they turned back. They brought the German truck with engineering equipment and secret mine-locators to their units, under its own power.

On one of the sections of the Western Front, the 10th German tank division succeeded in wedging into the defensive units of the Red Army.

The high command ordered one of the tank units to wipe out the enemy wedge but this was not an easy job since the Germans had had time to entrench themselves firmly in this position. Two villages, situated at the edges of the wedge, had been turned into strongholds by the Germans; they had constructed pill-boxes, dug tanks into the ground, fitted out blindages, and set up barbed wire fences and laid mines around the approaches to these villages.

According to the plan of the high command, seventeen tanks were to take part in the attack on the entrenched German line. The whole attacking group was to form in four sections.

Three tanks were to advance forward for purposes of reconnaissance and bear the brunt of

all the enemy fire thus establishing the system of the allocation of the German guns.

The next two tanks were to support the first three with their guns, manoeuvring all the while.

The third section of six tanks was to crush the enemy's anti-tank defence.

Following them would come the fourth group of six tanks whose job it was to insure the advance of the attacking infantry that came up right after the tanks.

The command of the tank unit was applying here the tactics of quick, forceful darts. The tank troops acted very much like the cossacks—those in front dart forward, while those in the rear support them. Those in front withdraw and those in the rear advance forward.

The tankmen prepared for these offensive operations with the greatest care.

Senior Lieutenant Zaskalko, commander of a company of heavy tanks, was careful to check up each machine.

"Listen, fellows, what if we begin to burn all of a sudden," Zaskalko said turning to the crew. "You've never had the occasion to be on a burning tank as yet. Suppose this tank is burning—show me how you would extinguish the fire."

Five minutes were spent in extricating the fire extinguisher.

"If that's the way things are, the extinguishers have to be kept in a more convenient place," were

Zaskalko's order, "in the kind of a battle that's ahead of us, you have to be ready for anything."

Commissar Zagudayev came over to his crew. The driver Dibin was just finishing the turret. Even against the snowy background it seemed dazzlingly white.

"Well, driver, is your machine in good shape?"

"In perfect shape, comrade Commissar, all you have to do is say the word and I'll press the starter."

"That's right. We have to be sure that everything is absolutely ship-shape. We've responsible work waiting for us tomorrow."

"Responsible work...Humph...going into ambush?"

Zagudayev could not repress a smile:

"No, no, you're probably sick and tired of it and want to stretch your legs."

"It doesn't matter what the assignment is, I promise to carry out any one that's given," said Dibin.

The morning scheduled for the attack was cold but clear. The snow which had fallen the evening before covered the broad branches of the fir trees with lovely garlands. The frosty air was invigorating and refreshing. The cooks had prepared some delicious borsch for the tankmen and the latter tackled their breakfast with a hearty appetite.

The motor of the tanks began to hum. Attired in white camouflage suits, the infantry

parties came up with their tommy-guns slung across their chests. Everyone was waiting for the artillery to begin its job.

At exactly 9-30 a.m., the first notes of the artillery music rang out. Everything seemed to fuse into a single roar of ever increasing explosions.

Tank Commander Kopotov looked at his watch—10.00 a.m.

"Forward", Commander Kopotov and his tank started off in third gear along the highway toward the village. Lavrinenko and Borisov followed him. They all opened a running fire on the village. A rain of missiles came in answer to their shots. The Germans put up a solid line of fire before the three tanks. Anti-tank guns were shooting at them, German tanks which had been dug into the ground, soldiers were firing from the dug-outs built in the village cemetery.

Company Commander Zaskalko decided to move on ahead. Just then a heavy enemy shell hit the turret. Zaskalko's tank began to burn. Here was where the fire extinguisher came in handy. The crew calmly put out the flames. Observing the enemy, Zaskalko noticed two German long-range guns set up between two dug-in tanks to the left. With a well-aimed shot from the tank's gun, one of the German guns was put out of commission and its gunners killed.

Under cover of tank fire the infantry parties now advanced boldly. The Germans met the oncoming infantry with heavy fire from their

dug-outs and concealed gun emplacements. Shortly after they started to counter-attack our infantry.

The Hitlerites marched in erect formation, keeping up a running fire from their tommy-guns.

A company of German tommy-gunners was mown down by the tanks' fire and the rest turned and fled—the counter-attack of the Germans had failed.

The fierce battle continued right up to evening. The tankmen had driven the Germans out of their entrenched line. In this one day's fighting they had destroyed 21 tanks, 8 anti-tank guns, 2 heavy guns and had captured 3 tractors, 2 anti-tank guns, 14 trench mortar guns and other armaments.

These examples all testify to the bravery, the boundless valour with which the tank troops of the Red Army fight the Hitlerite army, harassing it in incessant battles.

The men at the front are waging a fearless and selfless battle, but it is not only there, that victory is being forged it is in the distant inland regions as well.

The workers of many tank engineering works receive a number of letters from the fighting commanders into whose hands fall the tanks produced at these works.

The men at the front and the patriots in the rear are competing with each other. The former write of their exploits performed on these tanks and the workers answer them with descriptions of

how production is increasing and how the equality of the tanks is constantly being perfected.

Tank crews very frequently arrive at the works from the front to take over a consignment of machine. Here, in the shops, they tell the workers what improvements and alterations in the construction of the tanks have been proved necessary by the "battle tests" to which the tanks have been subjected.

The constructors take these remarks and instructions into account in their further work. These mighty machines become even more formidable and powerful, designed and produced in collaboration between the workers and the tankmen.

Tank engineering works which have been evacuated into the far interior of the country are already producing more machines on their new location than they did on the old. Many of them were evacuated in sections and each section was set up in a different city and now, in place of a single huge works there are five or six all functioning at full capacity. On literally waste land huge shops and factory blocks sprang up in the course of a few weeks. T-34's are produced here. These are medium tanks which are most numerous in the army and the invincible KV's which strike such terror into the German soldiers.

The Soviet people have made many sacrifices in this war but they are ready to endure still greater losses and privations and will go on fighting the enemy until a complete victory is won, until the

whole country is completely liberated from the savage hordes of Hitlerite Germany. The Soviet people are aware that, side by side with them, stand the friendly, cultured and freedom-loving countries of England and America.

The Soviet people know that the sword raised by our Allies over the head of our common enemy will soon strike and that the Eastern and Western Fronts will converge in Europe over an utterly defeated enemy and the hands of Soviet soldiers will be gripped in friendly clasp by English and American soldiers.

SOVIET ARTILLERY-MEN

By

BRIGADE COMMISSAR I. PROCHKO

I. Its Background

The Russian people have a rich history of war, a history which was moulded in fierce battles fought by the Russian people against numerous enemies who attempted to enslave Russia and deprive the nation of its political and economic independence.

In these battles the glory of Russian arms was upheld not only by the intrepid infantry and dauntless cavalry but also by the mighty artillery. There is not a single great battle in the military history of the Russian nation where artillery failed to play an outstanding role.

Generations of Russian artillery men were reared through the course of the years and the centuries, brilliant masters of their job and versed in all the intricacies of artillery weapons. To be ever steadfast and courageous, to aim true and on the mark was an immutable law for Russian artillery men.

The history of Russian artillery inscribed its most brilliant pages with the beginning of the reign of Peter I. The great reformer of Russia,

an outstanding statesman and talented strategist, Peter I built up Russian armed forces on an entirely new basis and devoted particular attention to the development of artillery.

Reorganised and augmented by new material equipment Russian artillery under Peter I became a formidable weapon in the hands of the military command. In the hard-fought action which the Russian army waged against the Swedes —considered the finest army in Europe—tremendous services were performed by the Russian artillery.

Let us recall the Battle of Poltava in 1709. Peter I and his army were faced with the problem of either defeating the Swedish army and thereby saving Russia or of meeting their death. The Russian army emerged victorious. And Russian artillery played a prominent part in the crushing defeat inflicted on the Swedish troops.

The Duke of Wurtemburg, a participant of the Battle of Poltava who was taken prisoner by the Russians, had the following to say of the action of the Russian artillery.

"Swedish infantry went into attack with their spirits at an unusually high pitch of inspiration but were halted by the Russian artillery which mowed down whole ranks with its thunderous fire and inflicted terrible losses. The battle raged on fiercely but confusion and disorder were rampant among the Swedish soldiers everywhere. Charles XII did his utmost to restore order in the ranks

but all his efforts were futile; the horses drawing his carriage were killed by Russian cannon balls, he ordered others to be harnessed in their place but the Russian artillery did not spare these either. The carriage was smashed to pieces and he himself was thrown out...."

This impartial testimony of the enemy pays high praise to the action of Russian artillery in the Battle of Poltava.

Half a century passed after the Battle of Poltava. It was now the turn of the much-flaunted army of King Frederick II, which plumed itself on its "invincibility" to experience the fearful, crushing blows of the Russian artillery.

In practically every encounter between the Russian and Prussian troops during the seven years' war Russian artillery inflicted heavy losses on the foe. In 1758, for instance, Russian artillery reduced the strong Prussian fortress of Kustrin to a pile of ruins and ashes. Military history will never forget the defeat dealt by the Russian troops to Frederick's army at Kunersdorf in 1759. At the crucial moment of the battle, when the fate of the Prussian army hung in the balance, Frederick II resolved to bring in his last reserves—the celebrated cavalry squadron commanded by Sydlitz — but the Russian artillery met them with a deadly fire of canistershot and the attack was repulsed. The battle of Kunersdorf ended in the complete rout of the Prussian army. Frederick II's army abandoned 165 guns on the field of battle.

In 1760 Russian artillery again raked the Prussian troops with its fire at the approaches to Berlin and facilitated the capture of the Prussian capital.

Within half a century after the defeat of the Prussians, the Russian artillery was waging battle against the first-class French army. And in this action it once again proved worthy of its former fighting traditions.

At the head of the French army stood Napoleon, a man possessing extraordinary military genius. Napoleon himself was an artillery man by training and showed great generalship in utilising his numerous artillery forces. At the same time he entertained due respect for the part played by the Russian artillery in battles fought against him.

During the patriotic war of 1812, Russian artillery inscribed unforgettable pages in military history. In the greatest battle of this war—that of Borodino—it wiped out many thousands of French soldiers and officers. On the eve of the Battle of Borodino, Count Kutaisov, Chief of the Russian artillery, issued his famous order which read as follows:

"Confirm, in my name, the order in all companies that they are not to move from their position until the enemy almost straddles our guns. Let them take us with our guns but let them have the last shot point-blank and the battery which will be taken in such a way will do sufficient harm to

the foe to compensate for the loss of the guns..."

Count Kutaisov himself met a brave death on the field of Borodino but the Russian artillery-men carried out his orders with honour to themselves.

Even the enemy was compelled to acknowledge the brilliant action of the Russian artillery in the Battle of Borodino. One of the participants of the battle, a French artillery captain by the name of Chambret wrote in the memoirs that when Napoleon inspected the field of the battle on the second day he found that overwhelming majority of casualties had been inflicted by Russian artillery fire.

And, finally, in the war of 1914-1918, Russian artillery once more encountered the troops of Kaiser Germany and on the battlefields of this war again displayed its valour and consummate skill.

The Germans were made to feel on their own hides the mastery of Russian artillery men—in the battles on the fields of Eastern Prussia, in the battle of Galicia, in the Carpathian hills and particularly during the advance of General Brusilov. Here the mighty blows of the Russian guns smashed the Austro-German entrenchments and the enemy, abandoning their cannons, fled in panic after having suffered tremendous losses. The results of the Brusilov offensive were manifest not only in the situation on the German front in the East but in the West as well. It was precisely due to Brusilov breaking through the enemy's defences

that the position of the Allies on the Western front considerably improved.

Such are the heroic deeds performed by the Russian artillery over the courses of several centuries. It is in the spirit of these glorious traditions that the artillery of the Red Army has been trained.

Soviet artillery has not only inherited these traditions but has considerably advanced and augmented them. In the years of peaceful construction work, the artillerists of the Red Army perfected their knowledge and skill. When the menace of war loomed upon the horizon, when the Hitlerite hordes invaded the boundaries of the Soviet Union, the artillery of the Red Army proved that it was a worthy bearer of Russian artillery's battle traditions.

Artillery in defence of Moscow

Modern warfare is a war of motors. Thousands of combative machines take part in military operation today. The field of battle shakes with the clanking of tank treads. The air is filled with the roar of hundreds and even thousands of aeroplanes. But amidst all this sound of battle, the boom of heavy artillery cannonade overpowers all else like thunder from the heavens. Thousands of guns belch forth tons of metal and sow death and destruction in the ranks of the foe.

Artillery was and still remains one of the

mightiest of all land forces in battle—the god of war, as Stalin termed it.

The all-destructive fire of artillery reduced powerful tanks to a pile of twisted metal, demolishes the strongest fortifications, blows up munition dumps, annihilates hundreds and thousands of the enemy soldiers and officers. It is with good reason that Hitlerite soldiers who have experienced cannon fire recall with horror those terrible minutes which they lived through.

Soviet artillery was first to bear the brunt of the attacks of enemy tank units. Not only anti-tank artillery, but all the other types, including the heaviest guns, were mobilised into action against the tank offensive. And in the first battles waged roads were strewn with scores and hundreds of German tanks wrecked by Soviet artillery fire.

Successful struggle against tanks demands types of artillery that are easy to transport, simple to handle, quick-firing and able to pierce heavy armour. Soviet anti-tank artillery was equipped with precisely these types of guns.

In the course of the war, Soviet artillery which wages incessant battle with enemy tanks, has been augmented with new material equipment meeting the most stringent requirements of modern warfare.

Hundreds of thousands of Soviet patriots are labouring day and night in the interior of the country, in old and new factories, in plants that

have been evacuated and set up in new locations, producing first-class armaments for their army.

Equipment alone, however excellent it may be does not decide the issue in a battle against tanks. The men who operate anti-tank artillery must possess unusual grit, presence of mind, keen sight and a sure, firm hand. Their job demands supreme bravery, daring, readiness to shoot to the last shell, without being afraid to let the enemy approach within close range.

This is not all, however. The job requires ability to cope with tanks, a knowledge of them, great firing skill particularly in point-blank shots. Soviet artillery-men possess all these qualities in full measure.

Special schools, various courses, and the Dzerzhinsky artillery Academy effect training of the men who are performing wonderful feats of bravery on the battlefield today.

During the course of the war the Hitlerite panzer units brought varied tactical moves into play. They sometimes avoided travelling along important highways, striving to break through unexpectedly by using byroads or simply cutting across open country. But even in such cases the artillery forces were on the alert. They grouped themselves far behind their own defence lines and held anti-tank reserves ready to crush any enemy tanks that might attempt to break through unexpectedly.

In order to offer more effective resistance

to enemy tanks, the anti-tank guns were set up in locations that would enable them to remain undetected and deal sure, telling blows at the enemy. For this reason particular care was taken so that the artillery fire covered narrow passes, forest roads, bridges and fords.

By destroying the leading tanks of an enemy column, the artillery-men succeeded in having the Germans themselves block up the road. The remaining tanks were forced to do either detour around the disabled machines or to turn back. Both alternatives had to be carried out under incessant fire from the Soviet guns and led to heavy losses on the part of the enemy.

Crushing the tanks of the foe, Soviet artillery simultaneously strove to wipe out the infantry following in the wake of the tanks. Even in cases when the enemy tanks succeeded in penetrating the Soviet defence, enemy infantry was nearly always cut off from their tanks. A veritable hell of artillery fire was set up before the front of the hostile infantry and the Hitlerite soldiers met their death from the tommy-guns of the Soviet infantry and from artillery fire. The tanks which had penetrated further were destroyed by the Soviet artillery situated far behind the defence lines.

During the first days of the war, the enemy concentrated strong forces of tanks and motorised infantry units on one of the most important sectors of the front, reckoning on breaking through the Soviet anti-tank defence on the run.

The battle began, both sides putting up a stubborn fight. Despite heavy losses suffered by the enemy in both tanks and man-power, however, the charges did not cease. Particularly intense fighting went on in the section of the X artillery regiment.

One of the units of this regiment was in difficult straits. The enemy tanks had succeeded in breaking through the defence and emerging behind the lines of this detachment. At the same time the Hitlerite infantry attempted to attack and capture the Soviet guns. From a distance of 100 metres the gallant artillery-men sent their fire into the enemy infantry ranks.

The gunners of this unit did not retreat a single step. All the shells had been fired. Close to 70 Hitlerite tanks lay wrecked on the field of battle. Under cover of night, the unit emerged from the circle enemy fire, having brilliantly carried out its combative assignment.

Hitlerite tanks suffered heavy losses on the field near Moscow, in the autumn of 1941. Regarding the capture of Moscow as their most immediate and important strategic task, the accomplishment of which was to bring the war to an end, the German Command launched 51 divisions against Moscow, this number including 13 tanks and 5 motorised divisions.

This huge mass of Hitlerite tanks rushed toward Moscow and mortal danger hung over the capital of the Soviet Union. It was necessary to

halt the avalanche of enemy tanks, to smash it and repulse it.

Artillery anti-tank detachments began to be hurriedly sent out to meet the advancing enemy tanks. Their orders, dictated by the patriotism of the whole country were to die but to defend Moscow, not to let the enemy advance on the city. And it was with firm and boundless resolution to rout the enemy that the artillerists took up their posts at their guns.

Fierce battle began. Supported by considerable tank forces, the Hitlerite troops threw themselves from one section of the front to another, trying to break through the defence of the Red Army units and emerge on the open road to Moscow. These furious attacks of the enemy, however, met with no success. The Red Army, with the entire country supporting it, dealt the German invaders a crushing blow.

Soviet artillery men added countless new pages to their record of brave exploits during the battles for Moscow. Separate gun detachments batteries and entire regiments rivalled each other in dogged grit and the ability to mercilessly exterminate the Hitler hordes striving to reach the capital.

It was here, near Moscow, that the first guards artillery regiments were formed from among the anti-tank artillery units. The high honour of becoming guards regiments was bestowed upon the units commanded by Efremenko, Aleshkin

and Gerasimov. These regiments covered themselves with undying glory in the battles fought near Moscow.

Take the guards anti-tank regiment commanded by Major Efremenko. The cadres of this regiment grew and were tempered in the fire of battle. With the German invaders from the very first days of the war. But the guardsmen of Major Efremenko displayed especially marked bravery on the far approaches to Moscow.

Here the Germans experienced the force of the well-aimed blows of the artillery guardsmen. In a single battle Major Efremenko's anti-tank guns wrecked 23 enemy tanks. All told, this regiment destroyed 186 tanks, 11 armoured cars, 9 guns, 9 aeroplanes, 3 infantry battalions and many firing positions of the enemy near Moscow.

The stamina and grit of the Soviet artillerymen resulted in victory for them even when the enemy had a great advantage in numbers.

Two guns of Lieutenant Mandryko's battery were set up on the firing position near the village of K. The guns were the object of an attack by a large group of enemy tanks. Forces were unevenly matched but not one of the artillerymen ever thought of retreating. Behind them was Moscow and before them death or victory. And the artillery-men accepted the challenge to battle.

They kept up gunfire until their last shell was spent. Both guns were disabled by the enemy's fire. Beside them lay the bodies of the men who

had chosen to perish at their post. The Hitlerites paid a heavy price for their "Victory;" on the field of battle were 37 German tanks destroyed by artillery fire.

The appearance of enemy tanks was awaited near a main road on the distant approaches to Moscow. One of the gun detachments of Frolov's unit selected a convenient location near a house at the edge of the village, camouflaged itself well and lay in wait for the Germans.

Not suspecting a thing the column of German tanks started out for the village. When the distance between the gun and the tanks had been sufficiently reduced so as to fire without the risk of missing, the gun opened fire. In the course of a few minutes 7 enemy tanks were destroyed and the rest had turned tail. In this case soldierly sagacity and skill had ensured the artillery-men victory without any bloodshed.

The fighting near Moscow ended in the complete rout of the Hitlerite troops. In the period from November 16 to December 10,1941 alone, Soviet forces, excluding aviation destroyed 1.434 tanks, 575 guns, 5.416 motor trucks, 338 trench-motor guns and 3.70 machine-guns. A considerable portion of this enemy technique was destroyed by Soviet artillery fire.

In the Spring of 1942 intensive fighting began in the Kharkov sector. The German command concentrated a large number of tanks here, intended for the so-called "Spring" offensive.

On one of the sections of the Kharkov direction the Germans sent 90 tanks into attack. The guards artillery detachment commanded by Sapunov was assigned the task of meeting the enemy with well-aimed fire. In close co-ordination with their tank troops, the guards artillerymen opened action and started to fire at the enemy tanks.

Their shots were so true, their grit and stamina so unshakable that in a short time 46 enemy tanks had been put out of commission. The German tank attack was frustrated and the enemy was forced to retreat without having attained its objective.

The men and officers of the X Guards artillery regiment displayed gallantry and valour in the fight against Hitlerite tanks. In the course of battle the German tanks succeeded in breaking through and approached within a short distance of the Soviet guns. The artillery-men, however, kept up fire against the enemy. The battery commanded by Senior Lieutenant Bykov sent its shells into the Hitlerite tanks from a range of ten metres. The men and officers of this battery remembered that it is useless running away from tanks but by remaining at your guns, you can always destroy them.

And they stuck to their posts. Bykov's battery bore the brunt of the main attack by the enemy tanks. All the men and officers of this battery fought like lions. Many of Bykov's com-

rades-in-arms met a brave death in this battle but these guards artillery-men exacted heavy toll for their lives—18 enemy tanks were destroyed.

In the tense battles being waged on the Stalingrad front, Soviet artillery-men were again faced with the task of repelling numerous enemy tank attacks. Fighting here took place on level open country. It was very difficult to camouflage the guns so that they would be safe from detection by the enemy.

In one spot the enemy managed to seize a railroad crossing that was of utmost importance. Gathering a considerable number of tanks here, the German commander intended to develop its success still further.

This intention on the part of the enemy, however, was frustrated by Soviet gunners. Carrying out a speedy manœuvre, the artillerists unexpectedly opened full fire on the enemy tanks, ninety-three machines were left crippled and wrecked on the field of battle and the Hitlerites were compelled to abandon their position at the crossing.

In similarly tense circumstances our artillery is waging battle against Hitlerite tanks on the foothills of the Caucasus. Here also the grit of the artillery-men is combined with their military skill and the ability to deal the enemy sure, telling blows.

In the rigion of Mozdok the foe prepared to break through the Soviet defence lines. Close

to 90 enemy tanks were concentrated here. A valley led up to the Soviet defence lines and it was towards this valley that the Hitlerite tanks were straining. The gunners were on the alert, however. When the enemy tanks were crossing the valley and had come up within range of a direct shot, our artillery suddenly opened fire. The enemy was plunged into panic—26 tanks were destroyed by the sure firing of our artillery men, the rest of the German machines turned back in disorder.

In the course of the patriotic war Soviet artillery has acquired a great deal of combative experience in resisting the enemy gunfire. Soviet artillery regiments have trained thousands of commanders, excellently versed in their job and masters at hitting their targets. Hundreds and thousands of artillery spotters have been reared in the regiments, these scouts aiding in detecting the enemy's firing positions. The gunners sighted their guns with absolute precision and the shells unfailingly hit the spot marked by the battery Commander.

Soviet artillery moreover is equipped with all modern means of artillery reconnaissance which enables the enemy batteries to be detected. Once the location of the enemy's battery is known, the task of destroying it is considerably easier.

The artillerists engaged in the defence of Leningrad achieved great success in attacking the enemy long-range guns shelling the city. The

Germans attempted to keep within the range of their guns not only the Red Army units drawn up for battle but the main communication lines supplying the front and the city. Besides this, the enemy artillery directed its fire at the city with the purpose of disorganising the work at war factories, demoralising their rear and break down the resistance of the city's brave defenders.

It was necessary here to render the enemy artillery harmless and to destroy the Hitlerite batteries. This difficult task fell to the lot of the artillery, which worked in co-ordination with the air forces, and these branches of the service successfully coped with their task.

The German batteries on the Leningrad-front were particularly menaced by the X Guards artillery Regiment. Utilising to the utmost all the various technique at their disposal, the guards artilerists were quick to detect the location of enemy batteries and directed their fire with the same speed and precision at these targets.

In the first six months of the war this regiment above destroyed 18 artillery and 8 trench motor batteries of the enemy and silenced 78 artillery and 20 trench motor batteries. Truly remarkable feats of skill lie behind these dry figures. The skilful work of Soviet artillerists resulted in the complete demolition of dozens of heavy guns and of trench motor batteries, together with their gunners while others were wrecked and put out of commission for a long time.

Here is one of many instances of how the guards artillerists fought against the enemy's batteries. One of the enemy's batteries which shelled the city every day was located in the region of P. Commander Netunakhin's artillery unit was entrusted with the assignment of discovering the enemy battery and destroying it

A whole network of observation points was set up to spot this battery. For two days and two nights the gunners made the most careful observations. Finally, on the evidence of almost imperceptible clues, they succeeded in spotting the enemy battery. Senior Lieutenant Netunakhin lost no time in setting the range and soon dozens of shells were flying toward the enemy battery. This sudden artillery raid was brilliantly successful—the German battery was completely wiped out.

In another sector the guards artillerists were to support an attack by naval infantry men. The enemy had set up a strongly fortified junction near the village of I. Heavy trench-motor and machine-gun fire from this stronghold hampered the advance of the Soviet marines.

The Soviet gunners received the command to destroy the enemy's stronghold and to wipe out its firing positions. As always, the attack of the Soviet artillerists was unexpected and highly destructive. After several shells had squarely hit the mark, the enemy pill-boxes were destroyed and all the soldiers and officers in them killed.

Three other German gun emplacements and an anti-tank battery nearby were also put out of commission.

The marines were now able to advance. At this junction, however, an enemy battery suddenly opened fire on the reserves coming up the line. This battery had to be silenced and at once. The gunners quickly shifted their fire over to its position. After a few shells had been aimed in this direction fire broke out near the battery followed soon after by explosions. This was the enemy's shell-dump testimony to the accuracy of the guards artillery fire.

A Hitlerite battery was located near X and kept up a continual fire which hindered the movement of our units. The enemy fire had to be silenced, and this job was assigned to Senior Lieutenant Klichishko's battery.

Klichishko's men kept up the hunt for the enemy battery for three days and nights. Finally they spotted the exact location of the enemy position. Klichishko crept close up to the enemy battery and directed the firing by radio from this point. The German three-gun battery was soon destroyed.

The Germans had set up a battery of 37 mm., guns on the slope of a hill and kept up a steady fire against our tanks advancing into attack. Senior Lieutenant Zhikharev located the enemy battery and at once opened fire at it. After a few shots the enemy guns were silenced. Closer examina-

tion on the spot showed that one of the enemy guns had been disabled by a direct hit while another shell had exploded three metres away from the second gun.

The enemy artillery suffers heavy losses from the fire of Soviet gunners. It is not a matter of chance that many artillery regiments of the German army have only half the number of required guns while several regiments can boast of only crews for the guns.

III

Artillery on the Offensive

Soviet troops have been carrying in offensive operations on a number of sectors on the front.

The Hitlerite command, however, makes all possible attempts to obstruct the movements of Soviet units. The Germans cling to each fold of the land, they fortify each populated point and convert each dwelling into a defence stronghold. Field entrenchments, hundreds of enemy pill-boxes and other defence structures all serve in the attempt to plant obstacles in the path of the Soviet troops.

All these enemy entrenchments have to be destroyed so that our infantry can move ahead. Acting in close co-ordination with tanks, Soviet artillery uses its powerful resources to destroy these enemy strongholds and clear the road for the infantry.

Artillery plays a veritable part in the action involved in offensive operations. It has to crush the defence of the enemy in its furthermost depth. At the same time it must accompany with its fire each forward move of the infantry.

Soviet artillery possesses all the requisite means for carrying out these tasks. Its equipment enables it to cope with the most difficult problem involved in offensive operations.

The light artillery which accompanies advancing infantry, is easily manoeuvred and quick-firing guns of this type are very effective in attacks against enemy man-power. At the same time they are efficient for the destruction of light fortifications and are frequently used against tanks.

In carrying out an artillery attack, guns of this type direct their fire principally at the advanced positions of the enemy defence. The fact that these guns are quick-firing enables them to keep up such a steady rain of fire that heavy losses are inflicted upon the enemy. The light artillery keeps pace with the advancing infantry, destroying enemy firing points that for some reason or other have still remained intact as well as those which have been detected at some depth in the enemy defence.

The Red Army artillery is equipped with powerful types of guns for destroying stronger types of field entrenchments and permanent gun emplacements. Guns of this type are not quick-

firing but they are able to fire shells of immense destructive capacity.

In offensive operations the Soviet artillerists have shown themselves to be experts in the matter of destroying enemy entrenchments and in keeping steady pace with the infantry. Under the fire of Soviet artillery, enemy strongholds have been reduced to piles of ruin and the defenders of these strongholds have found their graves under the same ruin.

The artillery of Red Army played an important part in the offensive operations on the Volkhov and Tikhvin sectors of the front. The Soviet advance have involved great difficulties in general. The enemy had erected many fortified structures. The wooded-swampy locality hampered the movement of troops and the utilisation of the mechanised forces.

Under such trying conditions the Soviet artillerists here too made the most of their powerful guns and succeeded in clearing the way for the infantry. The guards artillerists of X artillery Regiment particularly distinguished themselves on this section of the front.

In six months' persistent struggle against the Hitlerites, the guards artillerists have destroyed 82 pill-boxes, 107 blindages, silenced 63 artillery and 42 trench-motor batteries, many machine-guns, anti-tank guns and, finally, wiped out close to 4,000 Hitlerite soldiers and officers.

When the battle for the station of P. was going on, Senior Lieutenant Kucher, battery commander of X regiment, aroused the admiration of all the men by his bravery and his skill in shooting. During the four days of battle, his battery demolished 12 enemy entrenchments on the railway road bed, destroyed 2 trench-motor batteries and 2 anti-tank guns.

The Senior Lieutenant perished on the field of battle but his comrades-in-arms are carrying on the work of routing the enemy hordes.

Here is another example of the valour and skill of the guardsmen. One of the enemy batteries was obstructing the advance of our units. Senior Lieutenant Vavilov, battery commander, cautiously spotted the location of the enemy battery and then directed a hurricane fire at it. The Hitlerite battery suffered heavy losses in man-power. One of the soldiers taken prisoner stated that 110 men had been at the breakfast table but only 34 had turned up for dinner.

In advancing on the enemy who has gone over to defensive tactics, Soviet artillery is frequently forced to fire from open positions. Such firing makes it possible to destroy the enemy's firing point with a fewer number of shells and speed up accomplishment of the particular task assigned to the artillery. Firing has to be carried out under the direct range of enemy guns.

Soviet gunners are able to cope with this task as well. There are many guns whose fire directed

from open positions had destroyed many German firing points and has wiped out considerable enemy man-power. Here is one of the many instances of proving this.

Soviet infantry was advancing on the village of K., situated on the bank of river V. In this village the Germans had erected strong fortifications which commanded all the approaches to the village. They were so well camouflaged as to be quite invisible and fire was opened from these entrenchments only when the infantry had begun to advance.

A heavy gun was brought into play on the Soviet side for destroying the enemy entrenchment. Floundering through the deep snow under cover of the approaches to the village, the Soviet artillerists brought their guns into an open position and immediately opened a hurricane fire at the enemy pill-box.

The foe attempted to put the Soviet guns out of commission but the gunners calmly and coolly kept up their fire at the entrenchments. The pill-box was wiped out by direct hits. The Hitlerites who remained alive tried to entrench themselves in some trenches nearby but Soviet shells from other guns got them here as well. In this way the artillery paved the way for the infantry and the village was taken.

IV

Strikes Down Enemy's Man-Power

Soviet gunners have learned to wipe out the man-power of the enemy by point-blank shots, by shelling them from a distance, and by the usual fire from covered positions.

During the fierce battles on the Western front Lieutenant Royanov distinguished himself for his fearlessness and great bravery. Royanov's gun was stationed at a very important point and was to block the enemy's road at all costs.

The Germans decided to settle affairs with this gun. At first they sent close to 200 shells and trench-motors at it. This was followed by an attack of a large group of Hitlerites.

The Soviet artillerists went into action. In this unequal battle the entire personnel of the detachment was disabled. Lieutenant Royanov was the only one left at the gun. Without losing his presence of mind this gallant Red Army officer opened a crushing volley of fire at the enemy. This fierce battle continued for several minutes and ended in the utter defeat of the enemy. Leaving 274 dead on the battlefield, the Germans fled in panic.

The crew of the battery commanded by Senior Lieutenant Seredov displayed extreme skill and resolute action. This battery together with an infantry unit, was advancing along the Mozhaisk Chaussee. Near the village of C., they unexpec-

tedly encountered an auto column of German infantry moving in their direction.

The Germans were plunged into confusion by this unexpected meeting. The Soviet battery immediately set up their guns and opened point-blank fire at the German machines. The enemy infantry tried to flee the spot but they were caught by the shells of Soviet artillerists.

In a few minutes everything was over. The smoking wrecks of the German machines lined the road and bodies of dead soldiers and officers were strewn everywhere. Only a mere handful of German infantry managed to make its escape.

Captain Peshikov, commander of an artillery unit, showed himself a master in directing artillery fire. Whenever Hitlerite troops came within the range of Captain Peshikov's guns, they invariably suffered heavy losses.

In a single battle near the city of P., this unit wiped out more than 800 German soldiers. While our troops were effecting a crossing of the Dniester River the murderous fire of Captain Peshikov's unit frustrated all the attempts of the enemy to hinder the crossing. The enemy left many killed and wounded on the approaches to the river and failed to carry out its plan.

In another spot, Captain Peshikov's unit again had a hard job to accomplish. Just at the moment when the unit was transferring its firing position to a new location, the enemy sent considerable forces into attack. The situation was

highly critical. The brave gunners, however, did not lose their heads.

After firing several volleys from a covered position, the men and officers brought their guns out in the open and began to shoot point-blank at the enemy. This tense battle lasted for forty minutes. Each shot inflicted heavy losses in the German ranks. The Hitlerites could not stand up against this artillery attack and, leaving many dead and wounded, they retreated 8 kilometres.

* * *

The Hitlerite army on the Soviet-German front is quickly losing blood. The tremendous losses suffered by the Hitlerite troops are a source of alarm among the German command. These losses will constantly increase. The blows of the Red Army will grow stronger with every passing day.

Soviet artillerists have already done a great deal to undermine the enemy's power. Even greater tasks, however, lie before them. The gunners of the Red Army are exerting every effort to completely rout the enemy. They have hopes that very soon English and American guns will also open fire at the Germans. This battlefield friendship will hasten the day of final victory over the common enemy.

CIVIL AIR PILOTS IN ACTION

MIKHAIL ROMM

Backbone of Air Defence

On the night of July 27, 1941, a PS-84 transport plane took off from astray Russian flying field. The pilot, Captain Rubin, switched on his headlights only for a moment, during the actual take-off, but the bright beams were switched off no sooner had they pierced the darkness. Making altitude, Rubin set his course due west. He crossed the line of front unobserved and his plane winged its way through hostile expanses.

The heavy, comparatively slow craft, which was almost unarmed, flew above the territory invaded by the Germans. Being discovered or gripped in the beams of search-lights meant becoming a sure target for heavy German anti-aircraft guns and an easy prey to enemy night fighter planes.

In the vicinity of woods Rubin spotted a barely noticeable pre-arranged signal—three small bonfires forming an equilateral triangle. It was right in the centre of this triangle that Rubin dropped his live-freight, twelve 'chutists. When the last man of the landing party had bailed out and

dropped like a plummet into the darkness below, straight down towards the three dots of light twinkling on the ground, Rubin set his plane on the homeward course.

It was then that his right engine suddenly caught fire. The flames licked out in long tongues, flickering like lightning-signals perfectly visible from afar. Rubin sent his machine swooping down to the tree tops in the woods. Flying thus, low above the ground, the flames from his burning engine were visible only from a short distance. Fortunately the flames soon died down, but the engine remained out of commission. He had to rely on the one remaining engine to bring his plane back to the field base. Rubin changed his course, making a bee-line to cut down the distance and to forego making detours of the most dangerous Sections along the route.

Near Pskov the plane found itself in the grip of an enemy searchlight and again Rubin flung his machine downwards almost to the very ground. The aeroplane escaped from the beam.

Anti-aircraft and machine-guns opened frenzied fire, searching the skies for the enemy plane which was now invisible to them. All round the plane—above and below, ahead of and behind it, to the right and the left, hung suspected flare rockets, blazing balls of white flame turning the night into day.

High in the heavens floated the shadowy outlines of six Messerschmitts—any single one of

these crafts being quite enough to have shot this unarmed, half-crippled machine to pieces. But Rubin slipped past unobserved.

Now he was confronted with a new job—that of locating his home base. A powerful German radio-station was jamming that of the aerodrome and Rubin lost contact with the field. He had to fly blind through pitch darkness, piloting by the instruments. He brought his machine down on the field in a perfect landing as though it were broad daylight.

Thus ended the first flight undertaken by a transport plane above enemy territory. And since then tens of thousands of such flights have been made. There are civil pilots who have crossed the enemy lines on transport planes two hundred times. Thousands of Red Army men, tens of thousands of tons of munitions, war supplies, medicines and literature have been delivered to places far behind the enemy's lines. Special tactics have been worked out for flying above enemy-occupied territory. The PS-84—Passazhirsky Samolet-84 (passenger plane) has been designated into the DS-84 Desantny Samolet (landing-party plane).

Many of the operations put through by civil pilots will go down as glorious pages in the history of the Patriotic war. We need only mention their work in Leningrad.

When the German pressure was halted at the Leningrad Zastava (gates) the Hitlerites resolved

to take the city by starvation. One by one they cut off the railways, highroads and waterways feeding Leningrad. They encircled the city with a belt of anti-aircraft barrage. German planes patrolled the air around the town day and night. The spectre of famine loomed over the city. It was then that three transport planes safely ran the gauntlet of all enemy obstacles and landed on one of Leningrad's aerodromes. The planes were speedily unloaded and a stock of bags of flour, cases with sugar, butter and carcasses of beef.

These three machines were the first swallows. Very soon whole squadrons of heavy transport planes began breaking through the enemy's barrage. They proceeded above Lake Ladoga, thereby avoiding anti-aircraft and artillery fire. They flew low, their wheels almost skimming the water. They were subjected to fierce attacks of fighter craft and learned how to ward off these onslaughts, keeping tight formation, wing to wing, holding the enemy at bay by massed machine-gun fire.

They flew in those days when the Lake below lay inits green frame of forestland, and when this frame turned into yellow and red of the autumn season, when the leaves dropped from the trees, leaving their branches bare. And they flew across the lake when its waters became coated with their first cover of winter ice.

For many long months these ponderous, unwieldy PS-84 planes formed the sole link between the beleaguered city and the outside world. They

were met on the landing field like deliverers, like friends in need.

The successful issue of many major combat operations depended largely on the work of civil pilots. Within a few days their heavy craft would transport whole military corps to decisive sectors of the front. The pilots would make two or three flights in one night, without respite, and carry on like this for whole months on end. They broke through the fierce barrage of enemy fire, would swoop away in escape from pursuing Messerschmitts and, if they failed to get away from the German fighters, they entered into battle against them despite the fact that the German aircraft far outrivalled them in regard to speed, manoeuevrability and armaments. And more than once did these PS-84 planes emerge the winner in such air battles, the machine-gunned German fighters crashing to earth.

Where did these splendid pilots come from —men ever ready to battle with the odds vastly against them, ever ready to stand up to the onslaught of an enemy ten times superior in strength? Where did they acquire the art of such consummate pilot skill? Where did they receive training in such pluck and dogged grit?

Cast a look at the map of the U.S.S.R., let your eye roam across the gigantic stretch of land which embrace over half of Europe and almost half of Asia, a land which has a territory three times that of the U.S.A., and 83 times that of Great Britain.

Side by side with the railways, waterways and high-roads running across the face of this huge stretch of land, since 1928 there also began to appear mail and passenger air-lines. At first these air routes were laid in the more thickly populated regions of the country, but they soon reached out further and further, to the most outlying areas, covering the whole country with a wide-flung network of air-ways. Aeroplanes flew on routes running above the boundless jungle woods of Siberia, over the snow-clad tundras, above the misty and icy expanses of the Artics. Their swift shadows swooped across the salt deserts of Central Asia and the rocky mountainlands of Pamir, where along the thousand years old caravan roads slowly moved straggling lines of camels with their tinkling bells.

The remote towns and settlements of Siberia, the Polar metercologic stations and wintering parties, the Aldan and Kolyma gold fields, the distant Asian villages lost high up in the mountains—all these are today linked up with the centres of the country, linked up with the most modern means of communication, reducing travelling time from several months to but a few days.

These planes not only carry passengers and mail but also freight. Yakutsk enjoys grapes fresh from Sukhumi, Moscow relishes fresh fish from Amderma, at the construction site of the sulphur works in the Kara Kun desert cases of equipment and machinery are being unpacked, two

days after being shipped from Moscow or Leningrad while today the chemical plant in the Urals is already employing sulphur which only yesterday was obtained from the sun-scorched desert of Kara-Kum.

The net-work of air-lines grew at an astonishing pace—from 420 km. in 1923 it had reached to 53.300 km., in 1933 and had mounted to 132,000 km., by 1940.

In 1933 the total traffic carried on all air-lines was 42,700 passengers, 2,000 tons of mail and 1,400 tons of freight. In 1939 the respective figures were 307,259 passengers, 9,000 tons of mail and 38,400 tons of freight.

This does not exhaust the scope of work of Civil aviation. The small, nimble Y-2 planes also serve the needs of agriculture. In 1925 these planes sprayed 6.250 acres of pest infected land, in 1938 the area thus treated equalled 2,250,000 acres, besides which 8,7 millions acres of land and water surface infected with malaria mosquitos were also sprayed in that same year.

Sanitary aeroplanes penetrate to the most backwoods spots of the vast country, they reach into the heart of the huge taiga forests, they land in inaccessible mountain villages and in desert cases either carrying a doctor or surgeon on board to attend to emergency cases or to take back a gravely sick patient to the nearest hospital. There are times when the doctor or surgeon has to bail out on a parachute, as there are occasionally places

where even the hardy little Y-2 plane cannot find a landing spot. And the woman in labour pains somewhere in a distant encampment of reindeer breeders, or a hunter badly mauled by a panther or bear are thus ensured with timely and skilled medical attendance.

It was not only at the special schools of the Aeroflot (Civil Air Fleet) that the army of civil pilots underwent training. The ranks of these pilots were likewise augmented through numerous flying clubs and glider-flight circles set up all over the country. These clubs and circles were attended by young people, students or those engaged at work, flying lessons being held either in the evening or during the time when not engaged in production work. Every detachment of young pioneer children in the towns and villages had its circles of aeroplane modellers and glider-flyers.

The young people were greatly interested in aviation and even before the war the profession of pilot was surrounded with a romantic halo.

On many of the air-routes—in the Arctics, in North Siberia, Ykutia, in the deserts of Central Asia, in the mountain regions of the Caucasus and the Pamirs, the work of civil pilots was fraught with hardships and peril, demanding great skill and pluck.

Summer and winter—in 60° C. below zero, without radio beacons and often even without any radio communications at all, pilots of the Aeroflot

and of the Glavsevmorput (Chief regularly fly their planes here).

Even long before the present war these men had grown well accustomed to daily waging unequal battle not against enemy anti-aircraft guns and fighter planes but against the mighty hostile forces of elemental nature.

Flight through the impenetrable fogs of the Arctic regions became mere workday affairs. The Stalinabad-Horog route which lay above mighty mountain ranges towering to 20-23 thousand feet second only to the Himalaya was turned into a regular air-line carrying passengers to and fro. Planes serving the Moscow-Alma-Ata route, a distance of 2.000 kilometres, ran strictly to time table.

Work of this kind gave being to really splendid pilots, men who knew no defeat in their dogged fight against nature, "millionaires" who had covered a total of over one million kilometres without accident, and this on the most difficult air-routes.

It was through this rigorous school of practical work that the indomitable Chkalov passed, as well as those airmen who, in 1937, made the world famous flights to the North Pole and across the Pole to America. Even before the war the neat, navy-blue tunics of many civil pilots were decorated with orders of the Red Banner.

Such was the stern school where graduated the cadres of civil pilots.

Civil pilots are well familiar with their native land. The cockpit window commands a far wider and better view than is to be obtained from the window of a railway coach or automobile, from ship's deck, or from your seat on horseback or camel. And for civil pilots the words native land are no abstract conception, it is something concrete and tangible.

"I could teach Geography of the U.S.S.R. from a bird's-eye view," that cheery, spirited Ukrainian, Kalina, once said to me. Incidentally, Kalina figures in the story "pilot's profession". Under the name of Rosanov.

"I served on the longest airway in the U. S. S. R. and probably also the longest in the world", Civil pilot Vasilyev once told me. Vasilyev is the hero figuring in another name, in the story "A Restless Persson".

The narratives related by Kaprelyan that large featured boxer with acquiline nose, glitter with talent and humour. His tales, resembling those of Jimmy Collins, swiftly carried me from Moscow to Sevastopol, from Sevastopol to Omsk and from Omsk to China.

Many of the civil pilots have not only gazed on their own country stretching below but also on foreign lands. That same Rubin who piloted the first transport plane deep behind the enemy lines was an outstanding "Internationalist." He had more than once landed his craft on the aerodromes of Stockholm, Koenigsberg, Berlin, Sofia,

Stambul, Ankara, Teheran and Bagdad.

This tangible concrete knowledge of their country has resulted in an equally tangible and concrete aspect in the patriotic feelings of these time-tested men.

Reading a newspaper, their mind's eye always conjures up the physical features of their native land, so familiar to them from the cockpit of their planes.

The encounters and conversations with the heroes of my sketches and tales, as also my chats with these pilots' chiefs and their companions in action who acquainted me with various facts and details which the heroes themselves, out of innate modesty, glossed over in silence, will always live fresh in my memory.

I. High Explosive Cargo Over the Enemy Lair

The plane—a huge, somewhat ponderous bird of the night—was camouflaged in dark paint.

Kaprelyan took off and sent his machine into a steep climb, heading straight into the starless winter sky with its heavy clouds which now and then sent down a stinging hail of sleet.

The great night bird vanished into the winter gloom.

This was an ordinary passenger plane, but its comfortable upholstered arm-chairs had been removed and the roomy cabin was piled with its cargo of tight bales. A revolving machine-gun

was mounted into the roof and, whenever he leaned back Kaprelyan could feel cold armour lying in the back of his seat.

To his right, communicating through a narrow passage-way was navigator Georgi Avaliani seated on a similar seat.

Blacked-out Moscow, with its occasional flashes from the street-car and trolley-bus lines, was left behind. The aeroplane was now flying over fields of snow with clumps of woods here and there. The threads of roads leading to the front were faintly visible from above.

Radio-operator Ryabushkin tapped out his first coded signal-calls. They were immediately caught by radio-man Sorokin, on duty at the X Radio Station. It seemed to be almost traditional now that it was always Sorokin and radio-engineer Kokonin who took up duty when Kaprelyan's plane was setting out on its regular voyage to places behind the enemy lines.

They did splendid team-work and had grown together into close kinship, this crew and these two ground radio-men, and Kaprelyan jokingly referred to them as "our special radio correspondent."

Communications had thus been established between the plane and the ground. And now, without breaking off for a second like an invisible thread of elastic, it would unfold and stretch for hundreds of miles, ever in the wake of the flying machine, linked up with it all the time.

And then this intangible thread would begin to contract and be rewound until the plane safely landed on its home field.

At definite intervals Sorokin would transmit coded messages giving bearings and figures denoting degrees, minutes and seconds. These messages immediately warned of the slightest deviation, from the correct course.

The plane encountered thick clouds and tensely peering into the darkness ahead, Kaprelyan piloted his machine ahead, avoiding rifts where he could possibly be discovered from below.

Very soon a sullen glow could be seen reflected on the lower edge of the clouds.

"Are approaching the line of front," was the message Ryabushkin sent into the ether. "Am ceasing transmission and switching over to the machine-gun."

He left his tiny radio-compartment and went to the passenger cabin where he took up his post at the right machine-gun, pointing its muzzle through the window. Mechanic Gusev took his stand by the left machine-gun while gunner Runov remained where he was, at the central revolving machine-gun. The plane now bristled with machine-guns pointing upwards, to the left and the right. It was only from beneath that the machine was defenceless and here, in the event of attack, it was only skilful manoeuvring that could help.

A huge conflagration could be seen below,

stretching in a wide belt and reaching for tens of miles behind the enemy lines. Hastily retreating, the Hitlerites were setting fire to villages. The incessant spurt of gunfire spoke of fierce battle being waged. And these battles were not only being fought on the ground but also in the air. Dotted lines of flame—machine-gun fire denoted the scene of air battles. Keeping back the pressure of our aircraft, the German planes were trying to give cover for the operations of their land troops.

Kaprelyan piloted his machine high above the scenes of air fights. He did all in his power to remain invisible; he continuously altered his course and tacked through the cloud banks. He crept stealthily forward, ever deeper behind the enemy lines, proceeded as though on tip-toe.

Behind the line of front he eased up on the accelerator and began to descend. Below him lay Soviet land temporarily invaded by the enemy.

Villages and hamlets seemed to slumber in peaceful tranquillity. But this peacefulness was deceiving. Enemy sound-detectors were eagerly listening to catch the sound of aircraft engines, enemy anti-aircraft gunners were lurking watchfully in the woods and hollows, German night fighters stood waiting on the flying fields, ready to take off at a moment's notice.

Danger lurked everywhere and it was only by a finely calculated gamble that peril was to be avoided. It was impossible to remain unobserv-

ed, as the aeroplane could be heard. The problem was not to let the plane be seen and to act in such a manner as to lead the Germans to think that it was one of their own machines in the air.

A dense forest stretched below, and Kaprelyan piloted his plane very low, swiftly speeding across the very tree-tops, the roar of his engines disturbing the sleeping villages in the woods. If German soldiers, still half asleep, sometimes did rush out from a hut at the noise of the plane, the low-flying machine would be then be far away, disappearing behind the village-roofs and tree-tops. And the soldiers would calmly return to their warm huts, reassured, as it was hardly likely that a Soviet plane would fly so low.

The woods terminated and the aeroplane was now flying over an industrial district. Kaprelyan changed his tactics. He flew straight across the town, detouring only the larger cities where there was risk of being caught by searchlights.

Aerodromes were laid out in the vicinity of the towns and it was not always that Kaprelyan avoided them. Sometimes he headed straight across these fields, descending as though making for a landing and the Germans would hurriedly set out landing signs on the ground, the looming shadows of night fighters remaining drowsily standing motionless near the hangers, Kaprelyan would then soar upwards again and press ahead. This was one of his favourite tricks—"hiding" on enemy aerodromes.

Kaprelyan played a perfect and infallible game of "poker" against the Germans, always outwitting them. Navigator Avaliani closely followed the pilot's manoeuvres and had a high estimation of Kaprelyan's skill as a flier, it was only occasionally that his hand would involuntarily stretch to his dual steering wheel as though to ward off a particularly risky manoeuvre. But the latter invariably succeeded, the Germans were again fooled, and Georgi would draw back his hand with embarrassment.

And this happened on every flight. The pilot's unerring eye-gauge always showed itself to be more accurate than the navigator's instrument panel. A boxer, who on the rings of Leningrad and Baku, had thoroughly learned the art of self-possession in tight corners, was better able to weigh the circumstances than a man used more to working with his thoughts than waging a physical battle.

At this very moment Kaprelyan was like a boxer, all on the alert to meet and repulse his opponent. Slightly hunched, he sat in his seat, all on the qui vive, vigilantly peering ahead into the darkness.

"We'll soon reach X," he called out, and began to descend.

Avaliani pressed close to the cabin window. He recognised the aerodrome surrounded by woods, near the town of X, far on the distant western borders of our country. It was on this very

aerodrome that, twenty six years ago, he had first seated himself at the steering wheel of an aeroplane. A different war was being fought then, but against the same enemy, and Gorgi Avaliani, student of the Petrograd Technological Institute enlisted as volunteer in an aircraft detachment and today Avaliani had a flying record of over a quarter of a century's standing. The entire history of Russian aviation unfolded before his eyes from its romantic infancy, from Utochkin's flights and the maiden efforts of the French "aces" to its mighty maturity of today.

And now, by his side, on the commander's seat, was young pilot, representative of the Soviet generation of Russian airmen, and Avaliani was proud of him as a father is of his son who ably continues the cause which he started.

The plane swept across the aerodrome. The Germans laid out landing signs on the ground, the moonlit outlines of hangers and war planes showed clear from above, and then Kaprelyan's machine climbed upwards and winged on.

Ahead of them lay a large city, casting a reflection of its lights high into the dark heavens. This was their destination. Kaprelyan ascended still higher, reaching the altitude necessary for him to drop his cargo. Meanwhile Ryabushkin and Gusev were dragging the bales to the trap-door in the cabin floor.

Kaprelyan signalled by dipping the wings of

his plane, and bundle after bundle went hurtling down to the earth. They caused neither explosions nor fires. These high explosives were not fire—or demolition-bombs. They were something with far greater explosive force than TNT. They fluttered to the ground in a huge flock of large, resulting sheets of paper.

Stalin's words, spoken by him on Red Square on November 7th—words speaking of the inevitable doom of the Hitlerite hordes, of the sacred Patriotic war, of expelling the German invaders. And these were the words spoken by these clouds of falling leaflets-words carrying hope with them, wakening confidence in speedy liberation, calling to struggle.

The cargo had been dropped and the plane set its course for the return journey. At that moment all the lights went out in the city below.

The air-raid alert had been given. The Germans had at last established whose and what plane it was. Dozens of search-lights cast their beams through the darkness, fingering the skies. Spurts of light could be seen below—the German anti-aircraft guns had gone into action, firing blind. It was essential to get away, to remain invisible. And the gamble of "poker" was turned into a game of "hide and seek."

The Germans were looking for the plane at high altitudes, and therefore it was necessary to descend and fly low. Skilfully manoeuvring,

Kaprelyan sent his machine into a steep descend, pressing it close above the dark ground. Detouring towns, inhabited points and aerodromes, he kept his course over eastward. But the huge funnels of sound-detectors located the course of his machine, searchlights cast their beams in his path and anti-guns set up a fierce barrage of fire.

Moscow, which had been informed by Ryabushkin of the state of affairs, was growing apprehensive. The fate of the plane and its crew was giving cause for alarm. Kokonin and Sorokin got in touch with the weather clerks and advised that the plane would hit up against thick clouds when nearing Moscow. This, of course, meant salvation. But just now clear, cloudless starry night surrounded the returning machine.

The invisible plane doggedly pressed on, breaking its way through to the east. At last Avaliani pointed to the horizon ahead—the edge of the cloudbank was now in sight. Very soon Kaprelyan sent his machine into a sudden steep climb. And before the searchlights had time to catch the plane in their crossed beams, before the anti-aircraft guns could set the range, the machine had already vanished to safety into the thick, impenetrable clouds.

"And that's that," remarked Kaprelyan and, with a feeling of relief he leaned back with a resounding "whew!"

At the same moment Avaliani, who had been

all tensed up, bent forward to the dials of the sixty gauges faintly illuminated on the panel board in front of him.

This long and strenuous stayer race was now drawing near to the finishing post. All they had to cover now was a mere couple of hundred miles through a dense fog of clouds. This was flying blind in the full sense of the word. But Georgi Avaliani had long since mastered the art of flying blind with eyes that could see. He had made a ten-years' study of this scientific art.

Himself a past master of blind flight, Kaprelyan was well able to appreciate the efficiency of Avaliani.

"Damn it all, it's boring to fly with such a navigator," Kaprelyan laughingly declared, "he calmly leads you by the reins, as if you were a horse being led to its stable."

Two hours later the machine crossed the line of the Front. Nothing at all could penetrate the dense curtain of clouds.

Kaprelyan descended lower and shortly Ryabushkin received the signal: "can hear the noise of engines," which denoted that the plane was approaching its base. On receiving the signal for landing Kaprelyan sent his machine into sharp descent and emerged through the bottom of the cloud bank fair above the field with its blanket of pressed snow, where war planes stood ready to take off. Sending the snow flying into streams of

spray, the huge bird of night taxied along the field and came to a halt by the hanger. Day was already dawning by the time Kaprelyan and Avaliani had a bite and some tea and settled down to well-earned sleep.

It is not easy to fall asleep straight after a fourteen-hour flight. Resting on his elbow, Kaprelyan was reading Tynyanov's book on Pushkin, while Avaliani was taking down notes of the flight—their sixth flight behind the enemy lines.

After a while Kaprelyan shut the book with a bang.

"Yes, my lad," he said, "today's operation involved serious complications, as my old Dad says. He's a surgeon, you know, a professor—director of a children's clinic. And my mother too is a doctor. A highly estimable medical family with me as the black sheep—I became a pilot."

"By the way, Georgi Mikhailovich," Kaprelyan cut short his own reminiscences, "how many kilometres does a plane cover from New York to London?"

"Three thousand two hundred," was the immediate reply.

"And how much did we cover this night?"

"Three thousand four hundred."

"Not so musty, not bad at all," observed Kaprelyan. He fell silent. Avaliani turned towards him, expecting the conversation to continue, but Kaprelyan had resumed reading his book. He no longer thought of flights, past, present or

future. He was relaxing with his whole being, placidly enjoying Tynyanov's splendid work of prose. And as usual, Avaliani was left amazed at this faculty of Kaprelyan to leave behind in the plane's cockpit all thoughts and worries of battle life.

II. Restless Wings

"Twelve hundred metres," was the altitude estimated by the senior engineer of the squadron as he gazed in wake of the plane.

"May be he'll get through after all," he added a moment later.

The group Commander cast a vexed slanting glance at the wrinkled, clean-shaved face of the engineer. It was precisely because he had thought the very same thing that these words seemed to be uncalled for. It remained to be seen whether the plane would get through or not.

The machine sped away into the distance, growing ever smaller, slowly climbing upwards.

Suddenly the hazy white patch of a searchlight impinged upon the clouds. It shifted from left to right, making short spurts in the dark sky and then, after remaining on one spot for a fleeting moment, it began smoothly following in the wake of the discovered plane. New beams immediately converged from all sides, gripping the plane in their white fingers and inexorably accompanying it on its flight, their milky light seeming to carry it forward.

The first anti-aircraft gun went into action

and reddish spurts of flame burst to the left and above. Machine-guns joined in with their rat-tat, sending a stream of tracer bullets speeding towards the plane. Gunfire burst out like a sudden storm. Very soon this was turned into a solid barrage of fire, all the more dangerous that the aeroplane had no time to climb to a sufficient altitude.

As usual, from the ground below, its flight seemed studiedly slow and smooth, as though the pilot was deliberately exposing his machine to gunfire.

"Why does not he turn back?" asked the engineer. "He simply must turn back, he has no right to run such a risk."

The Commander again cast sidelong look at the cleanshaved face. But this time the engineer was probably right. But here too words were of no avail and could not help matters. Then both of them—the Commander and the engineer—again turned their gaze to the plane.

The machine still continued its course in the misty beams of the searchlights, through the bursts of explosions and the webs of tracer bullets.

It flew ever further into the distance, carrying with it the hurricane of gunfire. Then it vanished into the remote night sky. And only the dry bark of anti-aircraft guns and the distant explosions around the now invisible plane spoke of the fact that firing still continued.

The engineer and Commander strode to the car which stood waiting.

"What a restless person," said the engineer. "Again we won't sleep all night because of him. Why didn't he turn back?"

The Commander remained silent, as though trying to answer himself this same question which had occupied him for a long time now.

"Androsov never turns back," he said, a minute later. "Sometimes it seems to me that he is himself afraid to return. He is afraid that if he gives way even once he'll lose his good luck, determination and self-reliance." The plane continued on its course. The air blasts raised by the explosions hurried the craft from side to side. The crack of splintering wood spoke of shrapnels and bullets piercing the fuselage. Handing over the controls to the second pilot Androsov stood in the passenger's cabin, trying to take up the situation and to determine the location of firing points shelling his plane. At first glance his round face with its equally round eyes and slightly raised brows seemed somewhat ingenuous. It was only when looking more attentively that one noted the firm lines of his small, well-shaped lips and his stubborn chin.

Through the cabin window Androsov espied the location of the batteries. To the right was the enemy while on the left were situated our own troops who had failed to establish whose plane it was flying in the dark. From all sides flaming

threads of tracer bullets streamed upwards, piercing the wings and sometimes hitting the cabin. The barrage was too heavy and there were no chances of safely breaking through to the sea.

Androsov returned to his place in the pilot's cockpit, and, with a resolute movement of the wheel forward and to the right, he sent the plane into a sharp descent, heading straight for the enemy batteries and a range of spurts of anti-aircraft guns below.

This manoeuvre immediately placed him beyond reach of his own ground batteries, but the enemy still kept up fire. The plane zoomed head-on to meet the squall of anti-aircraft fire. It looked like sheer suicide. Soon the enemy batteries also fell silent. Evidently doubts were cropping up as to whether they were not firing on one of their own machines. And this was on what Androsov had calculated. He continued his descent, as though preparing to land. The searchlights lost him from sight and the plane was now winging through the dark.

Skimming low he swept above the now silent anti-aircraft guns, the searchlights and aerodrome and then, veering sharply to the left, found himself above the smooth expanse of the bay. The machine flew low above the water. To the right and left the shores seemed to open out before him, to recede. Ahead lay the open sea.

Androsov began ascending. It was only now, in the ensuing silence, that he fully sensed

the peril which was now passed. Every nerve of his was tensed to the utmost.

"We can't go on taking off like this from this aerodrome," he said, bending towards the navigator, Rzhanov. "We haven't time to make sufficient altitude before fire opens. We're sure to be shot down."

"Absolutely and certainly," imperturbably responded Rzhanov.

Young and also round fixed, he resembled Androsov, not so much in his features as in his whole manner. Before the war they had both served for a long time on the Moscow-Alma-Ata air-line, and this joint work of theirs had no doubt made its imprint of resemblance between the two men.

The smooth, measured flight above the night sea calmed Androsov down. And it seemed to him that he was again flying with his navigator to Alma-Ata. He recollected the whole of this long route with its swift, two-day kaleidoscope of ever changing landscapes and climates-green woods from Moscow to the Volga, reddish steppes of the trans-Volga regions, the darkly wooded ridges of the Urals, the sandy hillocks of the Aral lowland and the snowcapped mountains girdling Alma-Ata-capital of Kazakhstan, the city nestling in the verdure of apple orchards—the very Kazakh words "Alma-Ata" denoting "Father Apple."

To cover the whole of this route strictly to time-table within two days—today in Moscow and

tomorrow in Alma-Ata, was a matter of honour to the pilots serving this airline. And the time-table was strictly adhered to in combat against space and inclement weather, against cyclones, low clouds, head winds and thunder showers.

At that time this seemed a difficult and dangerous job. But what an utterly peaceful idyll it all seemed now, after six months of war service.

And throughout the whole of these six months of action there was not a single case when Androsov failed to fulfil his assignment. The group Commander was right—this was not merely a question of dogged pluck and grit, it was a matter of peculiar fear of losing good luck, faith in himself should he but once retreat.

The plane flew at a high altitude and far below could be seen the faint reflection of the moon on the water's surface.

"It's time to descend," said Rzhanov, "we're one hundred kilometres from the island."

Androsov cast another glance at the map with islands charted on it. The larger island was occupied by the Hitlerites, but the smaller one was pluckily held by a heroic handful of Soviet sailors and soldiers who for many months now had been repulsing all the attacks of the enemy who far outnumbered them in forces. The name of every man in this garrison was surrounded with glory.

The small island was the destination to which Androsov was to deliver his cargo. But before

descending lower he wished to make doubly sure of his bearings so as to avoid all possible mistake.

The dark hutches of the islands loomed ahead on the horizon. They grew ever nearer, swelling in size, their outlines still remaining vague. Androsov began circling above them, slowly descending the while. A searchlight beam flashed up vertically into the sky from one of the islands. The landing sign formed by lanterns denoted the location of the landing field. The other island showed no sign of life, remaining a dark blotch on the smooth surface of the water reflecting the faint rays of the moon.

Androsov did not believe in the authenticity of the signals. It seemed to him that it was the larger island signalling him, the one occupied by the Germans. They were evidently trying to lure his plane to land on their own aerodrome. Without descending further Androsov continued circling, trying to determine the exact location of both islands. Now he was almost certain what his destination was, namely, the dark island. A little later a landing signal appeared here too, faint lights, barely visible. The garrison evidently feared that the Germans on the neighbouring island would discover the location of the aerodrome.

Androsov came to a decision. He descended in sweeping circles and landed on the dark island. He taxied his machine to the further end of the field, turned it round and kept his engines

racing. The plane was thus ready to take oil should it appear that it was the enemy island.

From out of the darkness a figure approached the plane.

Androsov quickly rose from his seat.

"In case anything happens, give her gas and take off," he told Rzhanov." "Don't worry about me."

He leaped down from the cockpit. His right hand gripped his revolver in his pocket. The unknown man was unhuriedly and cautiously approaching to meet him. He was dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant.

"Zdorovo-Howdy do !" said Androsov, offering his left hand. Two hands met in a taut, convulsive grip, like the hands of two wrestlers on the rug.

"Androsov ?" asked the stranger.

And the convulsive grip relaxed. Androsov was at last convinced, he had recognised that before him stood no enemy but a companion-in-arms. And the grip changed into a long and cordial handshake.

"We were waiting for you," remarked the lieutenant, hero, taxi your machine under the trees."

Androsov turned and signed to Rzhanov. The plane taxied along the field, in the wake of Androsov and the lieutenant.

All around them, as though they had sprouted from the earth, loomed the figures of armed men, ready for action should the plane have turned out to be German.

The machine taxied to its place under the trees.

The men stood around, gaunt-featured, their faces darkened by the wind and sun, fatigued by endless days of battle and sleepless nights. Many of them were bandaged.

A tall, thin officer—a Major approached Androsov. The latter recognised the high-cheeked face with its taut, dark skin and eagle profile. He had seen his portrait in the "Pravda" when this man had been awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

"Well, what have you brought us, tovarisch Androsov?"

"Newspapers, ammunition, victuals and tobacco."

"Brought any mines?"

"Seventy five."

"Double that number would have suited us better. But thanks for small mercies."

"I'll deliver the balance tomorrow," Androsov said, unexpectedly even for himself and immediately called to mind the gunfire over the bay and his firm deduction of the infeasibility of such flights.

The men set about unloading the plane. From the dark door of the passenger cabin appeared bundles of newspapers, large but strangely light-weight cases containing tobacco and then smooth elongated, fish-shaped mines.

The last two cases of tobacco were smashed.

"Archies?" queried the Major.

"Bull's-eye hits," replied Androsov.

"Nearly hit the mines," said a loud and cheery voice. "A nice mess you'd have found yourself in with your plane, old boy."

The small figure of a caped man approached the group. He was as round as well-smoothed pebble. And him too Androsov recognised from newspaper photographs and articles. It was he who, with three torpedo motor-boats, had attacked enemy destroyers and transport ships trying to land a party on the island, sinking one transport and hitting a destroyer, forcing the enemy to turn back.

"If you only knew how badly we needed these mines," continued the cheery-voiced sailor, "now, my lads, we're in clover. We fear of the dirty blighters creeping in close to us! Many thanks, old chappy! And what's this? Pork, Boy? Boy, oh, boy! All that we need now is the beans, and what a feast!"

Carcasses of frozen pork were being unloaded from the plane one after another—pink, luscious sides of pork! And by the silence with which the sailors and soldiers watched the viands being unloaded, Androsov guessed the difficulties experienced on the island in regard to food.

A man in the uniform of an army surgeon came up to the Major:

"Don't forget, the wounded must be served first. Rations for twenty seven."

"No, you'll need rations only for seven,"

interpolated Androsov." I'll take the other twenty back with me. Come along, let's have them. I've got to be back before the dawn."

Within three minutes everything was ready. A huge pile of cargo lay stacked near the plane and it seemed incredible that the machine could have accommodated so much freight. The wounded men were placed on board in the cabin. Androsov strode to his machine. The men with their weathered faces crowded round him.

"See you tomorrow, old chappy," cried the cheery sailor.

The Major wordlessly shook Androsov's hand.

The plane taxied along to the start-off, sped across the field and rose into the air.

Dark patches in the rippling surface of the sea, reflecting the moonlight, the two islands now lay far behind. From the larger island several rounds of machine-gun fire were sent in wake of plane.

Androsov returned to his base with the first faint glimmer of dawn. This time, climbing to a high altitude, he slipped by unobserved, eluding gunfire.

The group Commander and the senior engineer ran to meet the plane as soon as it touched ground.

"Tovarisch Chief," reported Androsov, "the assignment has been fulfilled. The cargo has been delivered to its destination. Twenty wound-

ed have been removed from the island. The crew suffered no losses."

"Everybody safe?" asked the Commander, notwithstanding Androsov's last phrase.

"All hale and hearty, tovarisch Commander," replied Androsov, this time in non-regulation tones.

While the ambulance cars were removing the wounded from the plane the senior engineer was already inspecting the machine, nosing around the fuselage and wings.

"An absolute sieve," he cried out. "At least fifteen punctures."

"Tovarisch Commander," said Androsov, "repairs have to be made as quickly as possible. I'll probably have to take off again this evening. They need mines on the island. They've already sent a radio message District Staff H.Q."

"There'll be no take-off," shouted the engineer and, going up to Androsov, added: "I've already told you, your plane's been turned into a downright sieve! And what's more, you can't fly from this aerodrome. You havn't time to make sufficient altitude."

Androsov recollected the fearful gunfire to which he had been subjected, and how his plane was flung from side to side by the air blasts, and the crack of splintering wood. Take-off from this aerodrome was indeed not feasible. But then another picture arose before his eyes—men with weathered faces, with traces of utter fatigue, the

face of the Major with his high cheek-bones and eagle features, the sturdy figure of the sailor in the cape. No, there could be no question of not flying.

"But they're waiting," said Androsov, "The men on the island."

The group Commander and the senior engineer both looked at Androsov, at his round, surprised eyes, at his varied brows and his stubborn, iron-willed mouth.

"Step on Polikarpovich," the Commander said to the engineer, "the plane is to be ready at twenty o'clock sharp. Will you manage it?"

"It'll have to be managed," replied the engineer, and he added: "Good Lord, what a restless person!"

III. Boots from the Sky

Towards the evening Captain Rozanov was summoned to Squadron H.Q.

He righted his tunic, put on his leather coat and went out of the dormitory. The porous spring snow was crisp underfoot. Rozanov cast an unfriendly eye on the moon just rising in the east. Anti-aircraft gunners could see their target perfectly on a night like this.

Large transport planes stood on the landing field astonishingly resembling dolphins when seen from one side. The propellers were whirling with a deafening roar, the mechanics trying out the engines before the take-off.

Squadron Commander Krasovsky stood by a map hanging on the wall Rozanov saw his square back, which seemed to be cast in metal, and his sturdy neck.

"On this spot here", said Krasovsky, pencilling a perfect circle round a green spot charted on the map, "on this spot, in a small forest, eight kilometres from the village of Ravyokin, a battalion of our infantry has been surrounded by the Germans. They are encircled in a close ring. Our men are warding off the enemy but have a hard job of it. It is essential for them to break through otherwise they are done for. But they can't break through—they've no boats. The men are all clad in wood-felt boots, and everything is thawing now. Their boots get soaked during the day and swell with water and get frozen hard at night, becoming slippery as ice. There can be no talk of going into attack in such foot-wear. You're to fly there and drop them leather kneeboots. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly, Tovarisch Krasovsky."

Krasovsky moved away from the map and sat himself before the table.

"Take a seat," he said to Rozanov. "Here, have a smoke, old chap."

Rozanov helped himself to a cigarette and both of them lit up.

"Look here, Pavel, my boy," said Krasovsky informally, "you understand yourself that this assignment is not as simple as it looks...First of all you'll have to locate that confounded forest...

Judging by the map it's no bigger than a saucer... Shrubbery and nothing more...But still, with your devilish intuition you're sure to find it. But the point is now to drop your cargo so that it doesn't fall into the hands of the Germans, otherwise we'll be having the Bosches strutting around wearing our boots. You'll probably have to swoop low and drop it. Any way, you'll see what to do when you get there."

He fell silent for a moment and then shortly irefully added :

"No needless risks, mind you. Any questions ?"

His voice had again become formal and Rozanov rose to his feet.

"No questions, tovarisch Commander."

"Then you may go."

The Captain saluted and left the room. As he returned to the dormitory where his crew was quartered his thoughts were busily turning over all details of the coming operation.

Calling his crew together, Rozanov explained the assignment to them.

"Keep your eyes skinned this time, Yaschenko," he said to the gunner. "We'll have to drop our cargo from a low altitude and at low flying speed, in the immediate vicinity of the enemy. It won't be unexpected if we hit up against enemy fighters."

Yaschenko cast a gloomy look at his Commander. His face, the face of a mischievous village

lad, ever ready with his fists and a beau with the girls wore a discontended and angry look.

"There's no fear of our hittin' up against them. You're sure to think somethin' out. We can fly with you from the beginnin' to the end of this bloomin' war without even spyin' a single German."

Rozanov grinned. He perfectly understood the ruffled feelings of his gunner. Did not he himself always feel depressed by the necessity of ever having to hide, to elude encountering the enemy, to slip through unobserved on their slow transport plane into the enemy's rearliness? Did he himself not always cherish dreams of transferring himself to the cock-pit of a warplane?

When dusk fell Krasovsky's squadron set out on a combat assignment, Rozanov flying in the tail of the formation. When above Medniki station he broke away from the squadron and set for his course.

It was a bright night, though the moon was hidden by a thin veil of clouds. To avoid finding himself in the range of fire, Rozanov piloted his plane at a high altitude.

Spurts of flare rockets denoted the line of-front far below.

Rozanov climbed still higher and slipped past the danger zone unobserved.

The machine flew by its navigation instruments. It was only occasionally that the latter could be verified by particularly noticeable land

signs—railway crossings or row of trees lining the edge of river-bend.

When the time drew near for the plane to reach its destination, Rozanov began searching for the village below. He had difficulty in distinguishing a faint grey blur as being a group of houses. Near the village could be seen a road-crossing and the white wedge of a snow-filled gully. This coincided with his chartings.

And still Rozanov allowed for possible error. A road-crossing and a gully was likely to be found near almost every village. An error in calculation would frustrate the whole enterprise.

He began circling above the village, slowly descending so as to get a better view of the terrain. He took in the minutest signs incomprehensible to less experienced eyes—the outlines of the nearby woods, the direction of the roads diverging from the village. And, guided by that sixth sense of his "devilish intuition," to use the phrase of Krasovsky, he came to the firm conclusion that it was the village of Rovyakins that lay below him. Then the woods where the infantry were stranded was situated eight kilometres north-west of this spot, and now it would not be difficult to locate them.

Making altitude again, Rozanov set his course due north-west. Frequent spurts of German Flare rockets which lit up the scene of battle, made things easier for him. Very soon Rozanov espied trenches dug on the edge of the woods. Now and again black mushrooms of explosions would burst

near the trenches. The Germans were firing on the battalion's positions from guns and trench-mortors.

Now, when his destination lay below him, lit up in the bright flame of rockets, Rozanov appreciated all the difficulties of this undertaking. Krasovsky was right—the woods were nothing more than a clump of trees and it was only by swooping low that he could drop his cargo without risk of missing the exact spot.

Rozanov was just about to descend lower when a searchlight beam suddenly sped to meet him. The Germans had caught the sound of his plane. A second and third beam followed in wake of the first searchlight. One of them caught his plane and Rozanov felt as though his eyes had been hit with a stick. Anti-aircraft shells began bursting close to the wings of his machine. He sharply veered his plane and called out to Yaschenko:

"Give them a good hot round!"

Yaschenko sent short rounds of fire downwards to the source of the blinding rays and the searchlights were extinguished as swiftly as they had lit up. But the firing still continued, growing ever fiercer. Rozanov climbed upwards again and headed his machine to one side.

He circled in the dark night skies, pondering on how best to tackle the job. Now that the Germans had discovered his plane it would be highly risky to skim low over their positions. And this time Rozanov dared run no risk—the fate of

the enemy encircled battalion depended upon him. Again he approached his objective and again a fierce barrage of fire rose up in his path, forcing him to turn aside.

He seethed with impotent fury. If only he piloted a bomber instead of this transport plane!

Rozanov revelled in picturing to himself how he would neatly drop bomb after bomb fair end square on the German batteries. Suddenly an idea dawned on him—the Germans could not possibly know what type of craft he was piloting. It was only for a few seconds in the beams of searchlights that they had caught sight of his machine, and even then, he was flying at a high altitude.

The solution was found and the decision made. Approaching, his objective Rozanov sent his plane into a sharp dive, as though heading to bomb the German positions straight below. The plane sped down to meet a squall of anti-aircraft gunfire. A hit would be fatal, as the missile would smash his engines to the pilot's cabin. But Rozanov's calculations proved correct. Thinking the transport plane to be a bomber, the anti-aircarft gunners fled to shelter in their dug-outs. When low above the ground Rozanov levelled out his plane, eased off the accelerator and still running on the inertia of his dive, skimmed slowly low above the woods. The crew dropped the cargo. Circling back, in the light of flare rockets he saw the opened parachutes gently falling with their cargo, straight for the small clearing in the woods.

Rozanov now set his course for home and kept careful watch of the sky as he piloted his machine. A German aerodrome was located not far away and he expected fighters to attack him.

And indeed, he shortly heard Yaschenko's voice:

"Two Messerschmitts behind us!"

Rozanov sent his plane into a sharp drop. He did not know whether the enemy had sighted him. He was unable to see for himself, as the pilot's cockpit of a transport plane commands a view only ahead, to the side and beneath. But he sensed the enemy in his tracks and the sudden peril menacing him.

"If only I could reach the woods," were his thoughts.

Just then the plane was shaken by a heavy blow and Rozanov heard the rending crash of wood and the tinkle of broken glass. Direct hit on the passenger cabin. What was smashed—window to the gun-turret? Is Yaschenko unarmed?

Yaschenko was alive and safe—Rozanov heard the abrupt whiplash—of machine-gunfire. But what could one machine-gun do against two cannons and eight machine-guns of the Messerschmitts?

Hardly having time to level out his machine, Rozanov skinned low over the pine-trees.

The danger was less now, as the dark outlines of his plane merged with looming woods and he was almost invisible to the Messerschmitts.

This was all that Rozanov could do. Now he had to look out not to hit the trees as he swept over their tops and to trust to fate and good luck. How fondly his hand would have gripped the wheel of a war plane instead of this transport craft! To soar up, flying himself against the enemy, shoot them down, destroy them. And that feeling of vexation which he experienced whenever he was compelled to elude the enemy, to avoid encountering them, now gripped him with tenfold power.

This unequal duel still continued, the two Messerschmitts circling around their opponent. One of them ahead and then circled back, to fire on the transport plane from the front and thus hit the pilot's cabin. It was only now that Rozanov could see the enemy. The German plane' gun and four machine-guns were all spurting-bright splashes of fire. Tracer bullets sped towards Rozanov's machine. At the same moment, from the passenger cabin behind, Yaschenko sent a round of machine-gun fire into the enemy machine. A wisp of smoke and tongues of flame suddenly ascended from the Messerschmitts' engine. Quickly losing altitude, the crippled machine crashed into the trees.

Rozanov still continued skimming just above the tree-tops, waiting for the second fighter to attack him. But he soon heard Yaschenko call out:

"The second one's turned back ..."

In the gloomy preceding daybreak Rozanov

landed his machine at the base. As soon as the plane ceased taxing along the field he left the pilot's cockpit and went into the passenger cabin. The glass top of the turret was cut clean away by a German shell. Poking his head and shoulders out of the hole in the roof was Yaschenko, his hand still gripping the machine-gun and warily looking around him, as though the battle still continued.

"How is it that your head wasn't blown off together with the turret roof, Yaschenko?" asked Rozanov. Yaschenko recalled himself, eased his grip of the machine-gun and, ducking down from the hole, he came out of the cabin. His face was observed with blood.

"I bent down, Tovarisch Commander," he answered. "I bent down just before he fired. Like some one had told me to do so. My head was cut by the broken glass."

"Well, now that you've seen a German, You're satisfied? And you won't be asking for transfer to another crew?"

Yaschenko's face lit up in an unexpectedly soft and timid smile."

"You and me ought to be on a bomber. Tovarisch Captain, he said, "That's when we would do our stuff alright!"

Emerging from the plane Rozanov saw Krasovsky hastening towards him. The Squadron Commander heard out his report that the assignment had been fulfilled and firmly shook Rozanov's hand. Both of them then inspected the plane.

A direct hit and dozens of bullet holes spoke of the perils experienced by the crew.

"Just as I thought. I was sure this would happen," said Krasovsky. "I was really worried over you. Go on, my boy, go and have a good rest, both of you."

After dinner, having a good rest and sleep, Rozanov went to see the Squadron Commander. Krasovsky was making notes in his note-book, seated at the table.

Rozanov took a chair. He was seated sideways to Krasovsky, gazing through the window. There was something dogged and stubborn in his pose and Krasovsky felt something brewing in the air. He tore out a scribbled sheet from his note-book and began drawing something on a clean page.

"Then it's like this," suddenly began Rozanov. "I've fulfilled the assignment. And you know yourself what that assignment was, old boy."

In informal chats such as this he addressed Krasovsky as "old boy" and "old bean."

Krasovsky waited and, keeping his gaze on Rozanov, still continued idly drawing.

"To cut out the cackle, my dear fellow, allow me to hand in application for transfer to bomber aircraft."

"Nothing doing," Krasovsky brusquely retorted. "We need good pilots ourselves."

"I know that. But look here, can't a man have a profession? You know yourself I can find

and hit a target under any conditions. Can't you see my point of view, old bean?"

"Profession!" exclaimed Krasovsky, this time almost harshly. "In war, my boy, we all have one profession—to execute orders given to us. When you dropped food for encircled units, when you delivered arms and munitions to the guerillas, when you removed the wounded under heavy gunfire—it was immaterial to all these men what your profession was. And for your having brought them grub, arms and munitions, for having removed the wounded to safety—for all this they'll always be thankful to you and remember you. And take yesterday's flight. Oh yes, by the way, I nearly forgot to tell you the most important part. They've just phoned through from Group Staff H.Q. Your battalion broke through alright, and occupied Revyakino. My word, their spirits ran high when it began raining leather kneeboot from the sky! They put the boots on right away and went into attack without ado, sweeping everything from their path. You and Yaschenko will probably be in the list submitted for awards.

Rozanov still kept his stubborn silence, looking through window.

"Profession? Bah!" repeated Krasovsky, less wrathfully this time.

"May be, my profession's also something completely different, not that of Squadron Commander. But that's what war means, my boy!"

He tore out the page from his note-book and stretched it to Rozanov. The Captain looked at the sheet and saw his own face in profile, sketched by the hand of a true master. Not only had the outward resemblance been perfectly grasped, the drawing faithfully conveyed the intricate expression—one of gloomy stubbornness and at the same time that sense of confused uncertainty engendered by a vague consciousness of not being in the right.

Rozanov knew that Krasovsky was fond of drawing but he never for a moment imagined he was a genuine artist. He gazed at the drawing with a surprised look. Then his face broke into a soft and cheerful smile.

"Khorosho—alright," he said, rising from his chair and, for the first time throughout the entire conversation, looking Krasovsky in the face, "let's not talk about it any more. But I'm taking this drawing as a memento of our little argument. So long, old bean."

And gently holding the sheet in his fingers, Rozanov went out of the room.

IV Hands of Gold

Like a swarm of buzzing wasps, the large snub-nosed machines circled above the field in the blue mist of early morn. They descended, making for the landing track, and smoothly touched ground one after the other.

Group Commander Stankevich watched the manoeuvring ships, through the window of Staff quarters. He tried counting their number while they were still in the air. The Squadron had been out on a complicated night operation far behind the enemy lines. Had they all returned?

One of the aeroplanes soaring higher than the rest suddenly began doing intricate acrobatics, more appropriate for a fighter craft to a scouting plane. Its screws madly roaring, the heavy transport plane was tilted almost at a right-angle. Stankevich gasped, but the pilot smoothly levelled out his ponderous machine.

This, of course, was an outright infringement of all flying rules and regulations, a flagrant breach of discipline. But what consummate piloting skill, what perfection of manoeuvre, what confidence and audacity! As Commander, Stankevich was highly indignant, as an airman, he was gripped with admiration.

The plane ceased its flying stunts and swooped sharply down, overtook another plane, and made a perfect landing.

Stankevich could now discern the markings on the plane 66.

He lifted the telephone receiver:

"Send Pilot Beketov in to me!"

Through the window he saw the orderly run from the dispatcher's office to Beketov's machine and the pilot heard out what the man told him.

Casting the while a sidelong frowning glance at the window, Beketov then removed his helmet and, swinging it in his hand, he strode towards the Staff quarters.

"Hands of gold and a reckless head," Stankevich recalled the words of Kovalev, the Commissar of the Squadron in which Beketov served. Kovalev did not like Beketov, the more the former admired the pilot's flying skill, the more vexed was he at his conduct. What a pilot he would be were it not for that dare devil recklessness of his, for his stubbornness and his constant breaches of discipline!

Of medium build and statuesque in his heavy flying suit, Beketov entered the office His face wore a moody and obstinate look of a flintstone!

Stankevich had thought to haul him over the coals, but casting a look at Beketov, he said nothing—it would be of no avail. Only his firm neck grew red as a brick. Beketov threw a glance at his commander and his face grew still more gloomy and obdurate.

"Kovalev is stranded with Tulin's crew in the the woods, with the guerillas in A District," Stankevich irascibly said. "You know the place, you flew there a couple of days ago. The Germans have surrounded the aerodrome. Kovalev must be brought back together with the crew and the wounded. You and Petrov will take off when it turns dark."

"Orders are to take off when it turns dark and remove Kovalev, the crew and the wounded," Beketov gave the regulation required repetition of orders received, his voice no less angry than that of his chief.

"Before taking off you are to present yourself to me for final orders and information."

"Orders are to present myself for final orders and information before taking off."

"You may go and rest now."

Beketov saluted, turned on his heel, and went out.

The information that evening was by no means reassuring. The Germans were closing their circle tighter round the small landing field in the woods where the guerillas' detachment operated. This enemy ring was about five kilometres in diameter. Fighting still continued there, bullets whistling above the aerodrome.

It had rained during the day. Beketov was familiar with the field on which he would have to land. It was very small in area and now, that the ground would be soaked landing and take off would be all the more difficult.

Beketov headed for his destination in the darkness of night. He skimmed now when crossing the line of front detouring German anti-aircraft firing positions and eluding enemy searchlights. Only twice did anti-aircraft shrapnel puncture the wings of his plane. Petrov followed in his wake.

Spurts of gunfire around the aerodrome clearly spoke of the fact that the enemy ring was quickly growing ever tighter. Beketov weighed up the situation—Germans were on all sides and not more than a kilometre away, probably even less. He began circling over the woods, trying to make for a landing. Flaming tracer bullets sped up towards his machine.

And then a very red light rocketed up from the landing field below warning him against landing. Beketov understood what this meant—the aerodrome was criss-crossed by enemy fire, which was too thick to allow safe landing or take-off. The men on the aerodrome had decided not to wreck a second machine, to deny themselves aid and to hold out to the last man.

Beketov turned his plane and headed for the home course. The enemy surrounded aerodrome, Kavalov, Tulin and his crew were left behind. The machine smoothly winged its way home through the night.

He sat gloomily at the wheel, his cheek muscles pulsating all the time. Then he suddenly sent his plane into an incredibly abrupt veer and laid his course back to the aerodrome.

"Hang it all!" he thought to himself. "I simply won't leave them in the lurch like this!"

He circled and made landing. His plane taxied the whole length of the field, coming to a stop on the rainsoaked earth. He should really have turned his machine around, keeping his

engines running, but the flashes from the exhaust pipe formed too much of target. Beketov switched off the engines and jumped down from his machine.

Bullets and trench-mortar shrapnel whined all around him. He could see no one in sight. The enemy fire was too fierce and all the men were crouched flat on the ground Kovalov then crawled up to him.

"What the hell did you land for?" he asked Beketov.

"Never mind. Let the man give a hand in turning the plane around", was Beketov's imperturbable reply.

By dint of much effort the machine was slowly veered round by hand, bullets and shrapnel still flying thick and fast. One of the men near the plane was hit and cried out. Pounds of machine-gun fire suddenly spurted from above. What the...German fighter planes. This was the last straw! But no, the machine-gun fire from the skies was signed at the Germans. It was Petrov circling over the field and firing from his single machine-gun. But this was enough for the purpose—the enemy fire directed at the aerodrome eased off a bit.

As foreseen by Beketov, the take-off from the soaked earth would be the most difficult part of the job. But the ground was a bit firmer where a road cut across the landing field, and it was on

this stretch of road that Beketov decided to taxi for his take-off.

Tul'n's crew, Kovalev and the wounded were already on board the machine, the latter seated in the pilot's cockpit on the right seat next to Beketov. He was aware that it would be almost impossible to take off. A loaded transport plane required a run of at least 100 metres before it could rise into the air. The stretch of road across the aerodrome was no more than 70 metres.

Beketov switched his engines on and the screws began revolving with a roar. Those in the plane failed to hear how the firing grew fiercer—the Germans hoped to hit the target which was now better visible to them by the flashes of the plane's engines.

The heavy machine slowly started off and taxied along the narrow road. The looming wall of woods swiftly sped to meet the plane. When the tree trunks were already close the ponderous machine lifted its weight from the ground. The speed of the take-off run was obviously insufficient. The craft swayed from side to side like a drunkard.

Kovalev cast a look at Beketov, at his large, nervous hands which delicately held the wheel. On these same hands, which now slightly drew the joystick inwards, now slightly pressing it away, not turning it left or right—on these two hands depended the life of a score of man seated in the passenger cabin. These two hands sensed the pulsing of the machine, the heavy beat of its heart.

Through his hands, the machine's brain spoke to the pilot and to his amazing instinct of equilibrium. Men and machine were fused into a single being which desperately fought to tear itself of Earth's force of gravitation.

Barely noticeable, the plane's speed increased, the machine now running a bit steadier. Still swifter, still higher. Now the woods floated by beneath the craft's wings. The engines roared steadily, reassuringly and Beketov's figure seated at the wheel was no longer so tense and strained. And now Earth's gravitation has been finally overcome, the aeroplane's wings confidently out through the darkness of night, the whirling screws gripping the air and carrying the machine forward. Beketov threw himself back in his armour-plated seat with a sigh of relief. His big strong hand lay even more delicately and calmly on the wheel.

Kovalev unexpectedly bent across the narrow passageway between the two seats awkwardly embraced Beketov and planting a kiss on him which landed somewhere between his cheek and his neck. Beketov cast his eyes round in an angry look.

"Hands of gold! Hands of gold!" Kovalev cried out. But this time he made no mention of Beketov's head.

SOVIET CAVALRY MEN

By

COLONEL-GENERAL O. GORODOVIKOV

In the military history of the Russian people the cavalry has always shown its heroic fighting skill, and its able and bold action has often decided the issue of battle. In the remote years, when it first began taking form and development—when, under the leadership of Alexander Nevsky, the Russian people defended their country against the invasion of the Teutonic "Hound-Knights" —Russian cavalry played a decisive part in destroying the German invaders in the famous "Ice Carnage" on Lake Chud on April 5, 1242. At a crucial moment of the battle, Alexander Nevsky's cavalry which was stationed on one of the flanks, lunged forward, emerged behind the German lines and had the enemy surrounded. Jointly with the Russian foot forces, they aimed a sudden blow at the foe, smashing the invading army and driving away their remnants from the Russian soil.

Russian cavalry played an equally important role on the Kulikov battlefield.

On September 8, 1380 the troops of the Tatar Khan Mamai, up to 400,000 strong and more than doubling the number of Russian troops, pressed

back the left flank of Dmirty Donskoy's army and cut out it off from fording the River Don. Girdling the Russian's left flank, Mamai had exposed his own flank and rear to the ambushed regiment of Prince Vladimir, whose main shock forces comprised of cavalry. An unexpected and powerful blow launched by the Russian cavalry against the flank and rearlines of the Tatars decided the issue of this historical battle.

Mamai's troops lost about 150,000 men and, pursuaded by the mounted Russians, they ignominously fled the field of battle.

As it is known, the battle of Kulikov was the beginning of Russia's successful fight for the liberation of its land from the Tatar yoke.

Russian cavalry likewise played a highly important role in the battle for liberation of Moscow of its invaders in the year 1612.

The Russian cavalry which routed the invaders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not regular army units. They were largely levies mustered by princes and had no uniformity in equipment, organisation or training.

It was Peter I, who established cavalry as a regular arm of the forces, organising cavalry units in the course of the war against Sweden. Taking into account the experience acquired in the battles at Narva, in 1701, Peter I formed 12 dragoon regiments. By 1711 the Russian cavalry already comprised 33 dragoon regiments of 1,328 men each.

For the first time in the history of war, Peter's dragoon regiments were furnished with cavalry artillery.

In addition to his dragoon cavalry Peter I also had about 50,000 mounted Cossack troops.

Russian cavalry in the days of Peter I was sharply distinguished from that of Western countries. The former swiftly and skilfully manoeuvred on the field of battle and were equally adept in both mounted and foot fighting.

In the battles of Zorndorf, Egersdorf and Kunersdorf during the seven years' war the Russian cavalry routed the so-called "invincible" Zeydlitz cavalry of Frederick's, thereby insuring the Russian army with the possibility of utterly defeating Frederick II's much-vaunted German troops.

After the battle of Kunersdorf in 1759 Frederick II wrote to Berlin: "Of the army of 48,000 I now have only 3,000. Everybody is fleeing. I have lost my courage. A terrible misfortune has befallen...everything is lost. Save the court and the archives."

Acting in its army's vanguard, on September 28th 1760 the Russian cavalry captured Berlin, the capital of Prussia.

Suvorov—the greatest Russian captain of war—paid particular attention in training cavalry. He fully appreciated its high mobility, and attached special importance to swift cavalry charges.

At the battle of Foscani, Jassi and Rymnik,

at the unprecedented storming of Ismail, in the Polish campaign, in his marches in Italy and Switzerland Suvorov's cavalry justified the attention allotted it by its military leader and showed true examples of grit, military training and resolution in action.

It was precisely this training given by Suvorov that laid the foundations for the victory of the Russian people over Nepoleon's army of invasion.

But the great Russian captain of war was not fated to face Napoleon. Suvorov died in 1800, but the Russian cavalry fostered by Suvorov led by his disciple Kutuzov largely accounted for the doom of Napoleon in the patriotic war of 1812.

At twelve noon on September 7, 1812 the battle of Borodino reached its crucial point. Napoleon had prepared a decisive blow and Murat's cavalry charged in great numbers. Napoleon's young guards were already approaching the Semyonov Hills. At this juncture Uvarov's cavalry Corps and Platov's Cowsack Corps charged the enemy's flank and rear, frustrating the attack of Napoleon's troops which had already begun.

Historians term the battle of Borodino as the "Graveyard of the French cavalry." Later on about 40,000 dead horses were either burned or buried on the field of Borodino.

The Russian cavalry covered its army's daring flanking march on the Kaluzhskoye Chaussee,

thereby misleading both Murat who followed hot in pursuit, and also Napoleon himself.

With Kutuzov's withdrawal from Moscow a powerful guerilla movement began among the Russian people against the foreign invaders, and the mounted guerilla detachments of Denis Davydov, Seslavin, Figner, Udashev, Dorokhov, Chernyshev and others became the dread of Napoleon's army, disrupting its communications, attacking French reserve forces, coming up and destroying stores and magazines.

In October, Orlov and Denisov's cavalry, composed of ten regular and Cossack regiments inflicted a defeat on Murat's vanguard at Tarutino, this blow hastening Napoleon's decision to retreat from Moscow.

Napoleon contemplated withdrawing along the intact Kaluga, road but his plan was discovered by Seslavin's guerilla cavalry. Field Marshal Kutuzov blocked the enemy's road near Maloraroslavetz and inflicted defeat on the French, forcing Napoleon to retreat along the Smolensk road which had been laid waste by the invaders themselves.

Pursuing the "Grande Armee" the Russian cavalry, Cossacks and guerilla detachments surrounded the retreating French corps and by incessant attacks inflicted blow upon them.

Napoleon's general, Morand, who routed Chernychev's guerilla detachment near Hamburg, later wrote of the Russian horsemen in the follow-

ing vein: "We saw them every day, like an immense curtain veiling the whole horizon; bold horsemen would press on ahead from their approaching almost to our very ranks. We would fall into formation and charge into attack. But no sooner had we reached their lines than they would vanish like a dream, leaving only the bare pines and birch-trees in sight After an hour would pass we would begin feeding our horses when once again the black line of Cossacks would show up on the horizon, again threatening us with attack. And once more we would repeat our manoeuvre and, as before, without success."

On November 27, with the thermometer registering a slight frost of only 14 degrees below zero C. Napoleon's army recrossed the River Berezina and, via Borisov and Vilno, fled from Russian territory. And at the beginning of December, the real winter frost spells having just set in, the pitiful remnants of the "Grande Armee"—1,500 armed Frenchmen with nine cannons, recrossed our border.

It was not through the rigorous frosts that the army of Napoleon's invaders met their doom, but as the results of the powerful blows inflicted upon it by Kutuzov's troops, and primarily through the fierce charges and blows dealt the French by the Russian cavalry and guerillas.

Concerning this Walter Scott wrote : "Winter was only the ally of Russia and not, as people thought at that time, her sole protector; the retreat

of Napoleon's army was made under the sharp Cossack lances before the northern frosts forced this army to retreat."

In 1813-1814 the Russian army, which had victoriously repelled the Grand Army of Napoleon, accomplished its compaign of liberation in Europe, inflicting final defeat on Napoleon.

In 1813 Ataman Platov's detachment occupied Berlin—for the second time in Russia's history, while Davydov's cavalry took Dresden. In 1814 the Russian cavalry guards inflicted final defeat on the remnants of Napoleon's troops at Fere-Champenoise and, at the head of the Russian army, triumphantly entered Paris.

During the first world war the Russian cavalry had difficulty in showing its fighting abilities due to the fact that this was a positional war and also as a result of a number of tsarist generals failing to make proper use of this arm of the forces.

But even under these conditions various large and small cavalry units showed able action in battles against the German and Austrian troops.

In August 1914 near Iaroslav the Tenth Cavalry Division inflicted a heavy defeat on the enemy when it charged the second Austrian Cavalry Division Sabriog of six hundred Austrians, taking three hundred prisoners and capturing all the enemy's cannons and machineguns.

In a cavalry charge near Prasnysh the Hussars and Cossacks of the fourteenth Cavalry Division crushed two regiments of advancing German in-

fantry, enabling the Russian reserves to close up the breach in their lines.

At Gaivoronokov the Akhtyre Hussars in mounted formation charged and crushed the advancing German Fusilier Guards Regiment. While the first Trans-Amur mounted Regiment at Niva Zlochevsk wiped out the 83rd Bavarian Fusiliers Regiment. At Nedzinsk in North Bukovina the Don Cossacks made a cavalry charge against and utterly routed the Dragoon and Cuirassier Brigade of the Fifth German Cavalry Division.

Inefficient utilisation of the cavalry in almost all armies during the First World War gave rise to the opinion, after this war ended, that cavalry is powerless against modern technique and that its role as an independent arm of troops is over and done with.

Certain shortsighted "theoreticians" took up the fallacious viewpoint, contra-posing the new technique with the former "Purely sabre cavalry" instead of re-arming the cavalry and fully furnishing it with new technique and re-adapting its tactics of action in conformity with the new technical equipment of the army.

During the fierce Civil War, J.V. Stalin, with exceptional perspicacity defined the huge role of cavalry as an independent arm of troops and evaluated its mighty force when used on a massed scale instead of in a dispersed manner.

In spite of the fact that military history lacked adequate examples, with great insight J. Stalin

defined the future path of development and the operative use of large massed cavalry forces as one of the most decisive factors in the strength of the Red Army and began the work of organising such forces.

The 4th Cavalry Division was formed in December 1918 near Tsaritsin, now Stalingrad and in July 1919. With the addition of the Sixth Cavalry Division the First Cavalry corps in the Red Army was formed under the command of Budyenny.

This cavalry corps, the operations of which were directed by J. Stalin, dealt the Whiteguard forces many defeats thereby proving the tremendous significance of massed cavalry units.

In the autumn 1919 the Whiteguard bands threatened the capital of the country—Moscow. General Denikin's forces occupied Orcal and were approaching Tula.

The entire Soviet people rose up at the call of Lenin and Stalin to defend their country and capital against the Whiteguards.

J. Stalin proposed a brilliant plan for routing the Whiteguards hordes by striking through Kharkov-Donbas-Rostov. As the decisive force in carrying out this plan, Stalin chose large cavalry massed units and on November 19, 1919 there was formed from Budyenny's cavalry corps the legendary First Mounted Army commanded by Voroshilov, Budyenny and Schadenko.

Formed and led by Stalin, the First Mounted

Army was the basic and deciding factor leading to the destruction of the enemies of the Soviet people on all the fronts of the Civil War.

The heroism and loyalty of both the men and commanders of the First Mounted Army made it a mighty force while the battle exploits of the valiant cavalry guards became famous not only among the peoples of the Soviet Union but beyond its borders as well.

M. V. Frunze, the leader of military operations in the South of Russia and one of the greatest Russian captains-of-war wrote as follows:

"...The First Mounted Army has won supreme glory and esteem by its immortal deeds. The name of the First Mounted Army, the names of its commanders—Budyenny and Voroshilov—are known to each and everyone of us. And as long as the formidable force of the First Mounted Army exists, our enemies will stop to think more than once before in the grim years of the Civil War.

The cavalry division commaded by Tomin on the Eastern front in 1919, the Second Mounted Army, formed at J. Stalin's initiative on the Wrangel front during the summer and autumn of 1920. The 3rd Cavalry Corps on the Western front in the summer and on the Crimean front in the winter of 1920, the guerilla cavalry detachment in the Trans-Baikal and Amur Region in 1921-1922, the 12th and 18th cavalry division in the Trans-Caucasus in 1920-1921, the cavalry on the Turkistan front in the struggle against the Basmach bandits

from 1919 to 1926—all these cavalry units showed the whole world by their fighting actions in the most varied circumstances what strategic cavalry is capable of doing when it is properly utilised and directed, thus utterly refuting the assertion of many "theoreticians" that "cavalry no longer played a role" in modern warfare.

In the years of peaceful up-building following the Civil War, new arms of the service were formed in the Soviet Union—aviation, motor-mechanised units and others but along with these, the Red Cavalry continued to grow and perfect itself, acquiring new technical equipment.

The Red Army cavalry was copiously equipped with machine-guns and artillery of all types, trench-mortar guns, tommy-guns, means of anti-aircraft and anti-tank defence, tanks and armoured cars, thus acquiring more than ever before the character of a powerful, independent arm of the service capable of waging all manner of warfare.

In actual operations at Lake Hassan, in the encounters near the Halhin Gol River, and in the battles on the fields of Finland, the cavalry units had the opportunity to test their guns, improve their formations and to master modern forms of warfare. Soviet cavalrymen made a careful study of the experience of the latest wars in Europe and on the basis of conclusion drawn from this study, they reorganised, improved their equipment and prepared for combative action.

In paying considerable attention to cavalry,

J. Stalin was confident that cavalry units fitted out with modern technique and well trained in military tactics would find wide application in the impending war.

In his greetings to the First Mounted Army on the occasion of its fifteenth anniversary, J. Stalin wrote: "Let us hope that the sharp sabres and the well-aimed bullets of the Red Cavalry will, when circumstances require it, serve the cause of the defence of our great country as it did in the not distant past."

The Red Cavalry has completely justified these hopes of the leader of the Soviet people in the patriotic war being waged against Hitlerism.

For the second year now the Red Army and the whole Soviet people have been waging a war of liberation against the German invaders.

In the patriotic war cavalry units along with other arms of the service in the Red Army have dealt the enemy bitter defeats and are successfully crushing the forces of the Hitlerite army.

Modern warfare is characterised by the massed utilisation of motors and multiform technique on land, on water and in the air. This powerful technique has exerted its influence on tactics, and had modified a fighting formation but, as shown by the experience of the war, it has not in the least diminished the significance of cavalry as a modern arm of the service.

Soviet cavalry comprises a manifold, well-organised, formidable system of mechanised equip-

ment and in close co-ordination with land and air units it presents a redoubtable force to the Hitlerite army, and particularly for their motor-mechanised detachments.

In the initial period of the patriotic war, the cavalry of the Red Army carried out, for the most part, operations of a defensive character, enabling their army units to fulfil the general strategic objectives—orderly withdrawal to join up with the main forces and inflicting the maximum damage and losses to the man-power and military technique of the Hitlerite army.

Using its favourite method of thrusting into our defence positions "Wedges" comprising armoured tank units and motorised infantry, accompanied by massed air forces the German troops tried to make flanking detours around our units, closing the wedge in to surround them, and operating in their flanks and rear. At the same time, however, their own flanks were very often exposed to the blows of our cavalry detachments who broke through the lines of the enemy defence.

In July 1942 a large group of Hitlerite mobile forces, having penetrated into the district near Balta, threatened to cut off the withdrawal of our rifle units by moving on Pervomaisk.

The Cavalry Corps under command of Major General Belov was dispatched to halt the enemy's advance and in two days and nights it covered more than 100 kilometres in forced marches over roadless country, engaging in battle during the

course of the march. By a sudden blow from the flank the corps drove the enemy out of Balta defeating in this operation the 19th Motorised, 293rd and 297th Infantry Divisions of the German army, and ensuring the withdrawal of our units according to plan.

In the operations at Shtepov in the Ukraine during October 1941, when the armoured columns of Hitlerites were straining toward the north-east to reach Suman and thus surround our troops, General Belov's cavalry, augmented by tank units and motorised infantry, skilfully manoeuvred and emerged on the flank of the detouring German group. With a powerful flanking blow, the cavalry routed the 9th Tank and the 25th Motorised divisions of the Germans, wiping out more than 1,500 soldiers and officers and capturing 300 trucks, 180 motorcycles and much other miscellaneous war material.

In August 1941 several units of the 2nd armoured tank army of the much-vaunted General Guderian, one of the Hitlerite critics of tank warfare, began advancing from the district of Chausi and Krichev in the direction of Rostov in an attempt to emerge behind the lines of our troops operating to the north of Roslav and to surround them.

In their turn, the flank units of Guderian's group were exposed to the attacks of our cavalry detachments commanded by colonels Yakunin and Kuliev. Effecting a forced march under cover

of night, the Soviet cavalry at dawn on the 2nd of August attacked Guderian's columns near Shumachi, destroying 30 tanks, 50 machines with infantry and 2 trench-mortar batteries. The cavalry thus engaged the main forces of the enemy and by skilful manoeuvring, enabled our troops to carry out their withdrawal as planned.

Fitted with powerful, first-class technique created during the years of the Stalinist Five-Year Plans, the Red Cavalry successfully repulsed advance of the Hitlerite armoured hordes. The charred remains burned and wrecked tanks, the twisted frames of guns and machines as well as thousands of corpses lined the roads along which the Hitlerite army advanced.

The cavalry detachment commanded by Major-General Kryuchenkin was entrusted with the defence line at the Ikva River from June 24 to June 31, 1941 against the units of General Kleyst's 1st armoured Tank Army. On June 26 and 27, acting in co-ordination with tanks, the detachment defeated the 16th German tank division, smashing more than 40 tanks and a battalion of motorcycle troops, and capturing an anti-tank battery and a large number of motorcycles, trucks and guns. More than 1,000 Hitlerite soldiers and officers were killed in this battle.

In June 1941, holding the German-Rumanian army units at bay near the fordings across the Reut River, with a powerful blow of cavalry and tanks Major-General Belov's cavalry corps in-

flicted a decisive defeat on the 50th German motorised division and the 1st and 5th Rumanian infantry divisions.

Enjoying the support of the whole Soviet population in the territory temporarily occupied by the Hitlerites, our cavalry units and detachments, penetrated far behind the enemy lines and carried out bold and energetic operations against the foe's communications. Particularly successful was a raid behind the lines of the 6th German army by the Cossack groups commanded by Major-General Dovator, Hero of the Soviet Union.

Breaking through to the enemy position these Kuban Cossacks with machine-guns alone —they had no artillery—carried out a heroic raid behind the enemy lines and routed the 430th infantry regiment. Their record for the period from August 23 to September 2 alone shows that they destroyed two German staff headquarters, more than 2,500 soldiers and officers, 200 automobiles, 4 guns, 2 tanks, 30 heavy machine-guns while their trophies amounted to 65 machine-guns, more than 1,500 tommy-guns and rifles, and a huge amount of ammunitions with which they armed a large guerilla detachment operating behind the enemy lines.

Despite the fact that the German command dispatched considerable forces against the Cossacks whose appearance in the countryside had caused terror and panic behind the German lines, dealing the enemy a swift, powerful blow General Dova-

tor's Cavalry broke through the enemy front for a second time and united with their own forces safe and unharmed.

The extent of the panic reigning behind the German lines may be judged by the fact alone that the German prisoners claimed that "a hundred thousand Soviet Cossacks had gotten through their lines" while in reality Dovator's cavalry numbered no more than 2,000 sabres.

Ensuring the systematic allocation of our already mobilised reserves, in the first five and a half months of the opening phase of the patriotic War the Red Army harassed the Hitlerite hordes by active defence, inflicting terrific losses in both man-power and technique and thus dispelling the myth of the invincibility of the German army. Considerably shattering all the connecting links of the Hitlerite war machine and burying the crazy dreams of Hitler and Co., about a "triumphant Blitzkrieg" against the U.S.S.R., in the winter of 1941-1942, the Red Army under the leadership of its great captain-of-war the people's commissar of defence, J.V. Stalin went over from active defence to the offensive on the most important sector of the Soviet-German front.

In the fighting at Rostov, where for the first time in five months the Hitlerite army was counter-attacked and fled to the spot, where Kleyst's crack 1st Armoured Tank army was routed, our strategic cavalry carried out its first offensive operations.

The strong attack of the cavalry group of the southern front, dispatched by Colonel-General Cherevichenko to the flank of Kleyst's army, together with an attack carried out by our infantry and tanks, resulted in the complete routing of Kleyst's group comprising the 13th, 14th and 16th tank and the 60th motorised German divisions and in the liberation of Rostov from the enemy.

At the beginning of December 1941 the German command concentrated a strong army group in the region of Yeletz and intended to take the districts of Gryasi and Voronezh for their winter quarters, cutting off rail-road communication between Moscow and the North Caucasus. Our command undertook operations for wiping out this grouping of the Germans in which an active part was played by our cavalry.

On December 6, 1941, the Third Guards Cavalry Corps under General Kryuchenkin aimed a blow northward from the district south of Yeletz and in the resulting battle destroyed the 95th German Infantry division and emerged in the neighbourhood of Rossoshnoye on the communication lines of the enemy's 45th division. Here the cavalry guards closed the circle around the German grouping by joining with Colonel Kuliev's cavalry unit, advancing from the region of Telegino, and in co-ordination with our rifle units and tanks utterly wiped out the 45th and 14th German infantry divisions which lost 12,000 killed and wounded, and left 226 guns, 319 machine-guns,

907 trucks and a large amount of other war materials on the field of battle.

The detachments of our strategic cavalry carried out important, responsible tasks at the most crucial stage of the Patriotic War against the Hitlerite invaders—in the great battles near Moscow where, under the personal leadership of J.V. Stalin, the forces of the Red Army inflicted bitter defeat upon the Hitlerite plunder-army and repulsed it from Moscow.

Placing before his troops the task of "finishing with the Soviet capital, Moscow, regardless of everything, by whatever means and in the shortest possible time," Hitler threw two-thirds of his aviation, 13 tank and 38 motorised and infantry divisions for storming Moscow, having resolved to grip Moscow from the north and south and thus possess himself of the heart of the Soviet Union.

From the south picked Hitlerite troops from General Guderian's 2nd Armoured Tank army carried out a strategic detour in the direction of Kashira and Ryazan, the vanguard of this grouping approaching to within 25-30 kilometres of these two points.

The heroic cavalrymen commanded by General Belov, who were the first among the cavalry of the Red Army to win the honorary rank of guardsmen, were also the first to deal a crushing blow at the armoured columns of General Guderian's troops.

On December 7,1941 the First Guards Cavalry Corps inflicted a powerful blow at the flank of the German formation near Stalin-nogorsk and Venyev, cutting the German "wedge" at its very foundation, and in co-ordinated action with Soviet tank forces, utterly wiped out the 17th tank, 29th motorised and 16th infantry divisions of Guderian's grouping and forced them, after suffering huge losses in both man-power and machines, to retreat toward the South West and to abandon all hopes of approaching the Soviet capital.

Subsequently, taking advantage of this breach in the German front, General Belov's cavalry detachment, together with several other units, emerged in the rear of the Hitler grouping at Kozelsk. After re-grouping his forces, Lieutenant General Belov seized the city of Kozelsk and came up to the station of Sukhinin which the enemy had turned into a strongly fortified position.

Without engaging in battle for this entrenched region and leaving a small group to cover their movements, the cavalry guards emerged on to the highway near Yukhnov on December 19. They dealt smashing blows at the flank and rear of the enemy grouping at Maloyaroslavetz and ensured our infantry and tanks with the chance of routing this grouping and freeing the town of Maloyaroslavetz.

The 2nd Guards Cavalry Corps commanded by General Dovator, Hero of the Soviet Union,

was extremely successful in the operative pursuit of the Germans after they had been repulsed from Moscow in December 1941. After having met bitter defeat near Ruza, the Germans began to withdraw, covering their retreat with a strong rear guard. General Dovator sent a part of his corps after the German rear guard while his main forces set out in pursuit of the Germans, going parallel with the main column of the retreating Germans along forest roads where they came out to meet the 78th German infantry division and with swift, fierce attacks completely routed the enemy, utterly wiping out man-power and capturing 82 guns, 143 machine-guns, more than 400 trucks and other trophies.

Dashing into the breach in the enemy's defence made by our army units, the cavalry units commanded by Major-General Gusev, dealt the approaching German reserves a decisive blow and holding them at bay, enabled our units to advance.

Major-General Sokolov's units acted with equal daring and resoluteness. Penetrating far behind the enemy lines, they seized very important communication of the German troops, thus engaging a large number of German troops upon whom they inflicted heavy losses by their unexpected attacks over a period of several months and thereby ensuring the successful actions of our army units advancing from the front lines.

By speedily manoeuvring and skilfully com-

bining mounted and unmounted warfare, in co-ordination with other arms of the service, cavalry units have inflicted and are still inflicting heavy defeat on the Hitlerites.

Wherever the enemy has come up against Soviet cavalrymen, he has invariably been beaten. The Cossack cavalry units fight with particular skill and tenacity.

At a crucial moment for the country, the Cossacks of the Quiet Don, of the Majestic Kuban, and the stormy Terek, the peoples of Kalmykia and the steppes of Stavropol rose up in struggle against the mortal enemy.

The entire population of Stanitsas and villages, brothers, fathers and sons and sometimes whole families joined the ranks of the Red Army as volunteers. These people, from one village and from the same families, mounted on their own horses united together to form companies, divisions and corps. Experienced fighting commanders were placed at the head of the Cossack units and detachments.

The Cossacks went into battle to take their revenge on the enemy for our desecrated land, for the plunder of our towns and villages, for the atrocity and violence perpetrated upon our women and children. They are fighting ably and bravely against the enemy, defending every inch of native soil with rage and hatred for the foe in their hearts. Their fighting motto is not only to halt the enemy but to beat him and drive him out of our country.

Here are several striking examples. The Cossack family of Khlostunov included five brothers—Ilya, Mikhail, Maxim, Victor and Alexei. The first two have been awarded a government decoration for their bravery and valour. Maxim died the death of a hero and was posthumously awarded the order of Lenin. Under heavy shell fire Victor removed Maxim's body from the battlefield and gave it honourable burial.

The Altukhov Cossack family is made up of father and three sons—Vladimir, Semyen and Alexander. Two sons of this family have received government awards for their bravery and valour.

The Cossack family of Surikov is headed by the 58-year-old father who, despite the fact that he was rejected for service because of his age, joined the ranks as a volunteer, and brought his five sons—Ivan, Alexie, Nikita, Mikhail and Dmitry with him. Surikov, the elder perished on the battlefield but the sons took vengeance for their father. Ivan, Alexei and Dmitri have been decorated by the government for distinguished service.

The four Kolenokov brothers—Pantelei Alexei, Fedor and Pavel—are fighting the enemy, with great skill and daring. Pantelei has been awarded a government decoration.

Such Cossack families may be found in every Cossack detachment. The Cossacks swear by the honour and the memory of their fathers to avenge

the Quiet Don. Thousands of Cossacks who in the past were in the ranks of the First Mounted Army have now become volunteers in Cossack units. Here is a letter written by Don Cossack volunteers to their Stalingard fellow-countrymen:

"The time has come when we have again saddled our battle steeds and taken swords in hand. Our sons are long since at the front. We laboured for victory here far behind the front-lines, raised a rich harvest, reared strong horses and strengthened the collective-farm system. But now that the enemy has set foot on our native soil we can no longer remain here in our Stanitsas. Death threatens our children and our wives. We will block the way of the enemy! We shall rise to a man, from young to old, and set ourselves against the enemy as an indestructible wall. We take pride in informing you, our dear countrymen, that our volunteer Cossack detachment has already won glory, honour and respect for itself in battle. The command has entrusted us with responsible sectors of the front.

"We vow by the honour and bright memory of our fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers by our own dear Quiet Don, we vow before you, our comrades in Stalingrad, before our great mother-country, we vow that we shall justify this trust! We shall not stint our lives but the enemy shall not pass! Under the banner of Lenin and Stalin we shall stoically struggle for our native land, we shall mercilessly destroy the hated

enemy, we shall not let a single invader escape with his life from the soil of the Don !"

The entire Soviet people is proud of the fighting exploits of the Cossacks commanded by lieutenant-General Kirichenko. They show equal skill and bravery in fighting on the ground, unmounted, they make bold onslaughts in mounted formation into the enemy ranks and with true Cossack daring and prowess they do away with the German invaders. There is an iron rule prevailing among the Cossacks—not a step back without the commanders order.

The guards cavalry division commanded by Major-General Tutarinov was given the assignment of holding an important defence boundary. The enemy sent severel units of an alpine-rifle corps, two tanks and two infantry divisions into a track against the cavalry division but despite the fact the Germans far outnumbered them, the cavalry division held the line for several days and inflicted a crushing defeat on the foe. Wedging in between the advancing German units, under cover of night, the Cossacks moved their main forces behind the enemy lines and emerged to the rear of the central German grouping, having left only small forces to screen their movements at the front. At dawn the cavalry guards began a fierce mounted attack and by skilful manoeuvring succeeded in cutting off the enemy infantry from their tanks and then, in co-ordination with other forces, completed the rout of the "SS" regiment and 4

alpine-rifle regiments. During the course of this swift attack the Cossacks killed 3,000 soldiers and officers and took 200 soldiers and 80 officers prisoner, besides capturing much war material.

In the vicinity of Kropotkin the Cossack guards cavalry division commanded by Major-General Milerov carried out a series of swift mounted attacks in co-ordination with a squadron of storming planes and in the course of a single day routed a detachment of Rumanian cavalry, killing more than a thousand Romanian soldiers and officers.

The German two infantry regiments, supported by a considerable force of artillery and six tanks, against a guards cavalry unit Cavalry Commander Danilovich went into counter-attack and after cutting a battalion of the infantry to pieces, scattered and repulsed the rest.

In ten days of fighting the Cossacks of Lieutenant-General Kirichenkov's guard corps destroyed 50 German tanks, 3 aeroplanes, 10 heavy guns batteries and captured 8 radio stations, wiping out with sword and shell more than 5,000 German soldiers and officers.

The bravest of the soldiers, commanders and political workers of the Cossack Corps have been decorated with orders and medals. The corps has been given guards' rank for its distinguished services in battle.

Inspired by this high award, the Cavalry

Guards are defending every inch of Soviet soil with even greater tenacity.

Merited recognition of the heroic actions of cavalry units is found in the order of J.V. Stalin, People's Commissar of Defence, awarding the rank of guardsmen to four cavalry corps and a seperate cavalry division: "For valour displayed in defending the country against the German invaders, for endurance, bravery, discipline and efficient organisation, the heroism of the men and officers."

The crimson-gold guards banner, with its portrait of the great Lenin, flutters over the finest cavalry units of the Red Army, calling them to new victories, to the complete destruction of the Hitlerite army.

The Soviet Cavalry Guards of 1941-1942, just as First and Second Mounted Armies formed by J. Stalin in 1919-1920, are a genuine menace for the Hitlerite army of pillage and plunder. The high rank of Soviet cavalry guards is a mark of supreme distinction and at the same time places the utmost responsibility upon those who bear it—to be first in the front ranks in the battle being waged against Hitlerism.

The Cavalry Guards set the pace for all the units of our glorious cavalry forces, which follow close behind, smashing the Hitlerite hordes.

The success of our cavalry detachments is ensured by the fact that at their head stand educated, daring and battle-hardened officers while cavalry units are commanded by experienced and

perspicacious generals. Among the cavalry commanders there is a large body of older men who have been through the school of the Civil War as well as many young, valiant and talented officers. These men are not given to swagger and conceit. They persistently study and master new methods and forms of warfare, themselves learning all they can from actual experience in battle and teaching their subordinates.

The success of our cavalry units is ensured by the fact that they fight stubbornly and bravely. Friendship and aid in battle are qualities highly developed in their midst. They know no fear and tolerate no cowards. They honourably fulfil their country's command—not one step back!

In hard-fought battles matching their forces in single combat against the perfidious enemy, Soviet Cavalry is adding new pages to the glorious history of Russian cavalry; they are hastening the day of final victory over the enemy. They have firm faith that on the battlefields of Europe English and American soldiers will soon be fighting side by side with them so that by their united efforts Hitlerism will be destroyed and wiped out for all time.

BOOK II

WAR STORIES

By

VADIM KOZHEVNIKOV

AERIAL COMBAT

"Izmailov! They say that the crows nearly brought you down today."

Carefully drawing the quilted cover over the motor of his plane, Izmailov good-naturedly assented.

"And how! I escaped by the skin of my teeth."

"How under the sun do you fly without an oxygen mask?" queried Captain Lyutov in astonishment. Turning to the flyers gathered around, Lyutov commented significantly: "Why, he sometimes combs at a terrific altitude of six hundred feet. Just think of it! What a giddy height!"

"Listen, Izmailov, is it true that when you landed in Tula the Militiaman wanted to fine you for infringing street traffic regulations?"

"Oh, that's nothing! Get him to tell you about the time he taxied right up to German staff headquarters. And, do you know, fellows," the speaker, a sunburned, pilot with a girlish face and with laryngaphone wires dangling down his back like a braid, went on to say with studied indignation, "the sentry met him with 'halt' and he—the rude fellow,—answered with a grenade."

"But, really, it was foggy," Izmailov brought out in justification and smiled rather sheepishly.

It was a source of pleasure to Izmailov that these Red Air Force pilots, practically each of whom had shot down several enemy planes were on such cordial terms with him, a rank-and-file airman who flew a passenger plane and one nicknames "a coffin music-box" into the bargain.

Crowding around Izmailov, the army flyers took him along to their mess-room to lunch with them.

Among these dapper, spruce knights of the air, Izmailov presented a rather incongruous figure. He wore a heavy jacket belt low down like the coat of an old droshky driver. Instead of pilot's helmet, his head gear was an earflap fur cap and his feet were encased in Russian felt boots instead of the usual trim leather. A green grenade-handle protruded from the pocket of his quilted breeches.

He walked along with the flyers in his clumsy, wadding gait. They were poking fun at him but he remained unruffled and reasonable through it all.

Of course, it was true—when an A.A., machine-gun began to lash at him, he somehow managed to reach a village and there set to repairing the damaged wings with the aid of a village carpenter. But he did not use paste in putting on the patches, as the pursuit pilots claimed, there was muslin for that. And what if a carpenter did help him?

If there had been no carpenter around, he would have asked someone else to help. What difference did it make?

When Izmailov had divested himself of his sundry outer garments he proved to be a thin, black-eyed lad of twenty.

There is always sure to be plenty of noise when flyers gather around the mess-room lunch table. Captain Lyutov came in for the brunt of it during the meal. That morning he had rammed a "Messer 110." The operation had been carried out at a high altitude and not altogether successfully.

Lyutov had been compelled to abandon his own wrecked plane. Making a delayed parachute jump, he sighted the German pilot who had also bailed out on a parachute heading down below him drawing in the ropes, and getting closer to the German, Lyutov drew his pistol and began to shoot at him. The German returned fire and this duel between the two of them was finished only on the ground.

Lyutov turned up at the aerodrome angry and testy with a puffy livid bruise on his cheek, carrying the German flyers' field wallet in his hands.

Izmailov attentively listened to the spirited baiting to which the rest of the flyers subjected Lyutov and carefully sifted their caustic jibes to find and remember the essential and inimitable qualities that go to make up the style of pilotship.

The discussion that took place around the luncheon table, in spite of its form of amiable banter, was really a camouflage for the finest subtleties of the art of piloting, inscrutable to the uninitiated. And when the adjutant to the commander of the unit brought in a sealed packet, Izmailov was reluctant to leave without hearing the argument out to the end.

Izmailov received no meteorological reports or weather forecasts before taking off. He was a liaison pilot and had to fly under all and any conditions: night and day, through fogs and blizzards. And if a "Messerschmitt" attacked him, he had no guns wherewith to fend off the enemy. Neither could he elude his pursuer by flight, his speed was far too slow. The only course left open to Izmailov was to dive earthwards, heading for whatever spot came to hand and endeavour to harm his plane as little as possible in doing this so that he himself would have no bones broken, save his precious dispatch and deliver it without fail at the specified time.

Among his varied assignments Izmailov had flown with a liaison officer on reconnaissance flights, on searches for detachments surrounded by the enemy and on flights to guerillas operating behind the German lines.

Returning from one such assignment the motor, which was working on very poor German automobile petrol, finally petered out. Izmailov was forced to put his machine through all manner

of turns and loops up in the air in order to shake up the combustible resinous sediment which precipitated in the fuel tanks.

But even this sort of fuel was obtained with difficulty. The guerillas lay in ambuscade for days at a time watching for passing machines that could furnish petrol for the Soviet plane. Once he even had to remove the wings from his plane and haul it by force from behind the German lines when the usual encounter with a "Heinkel" had resulted in two broken cylinders. Very often he carried wounded men on his return trip. Groping his way in the fog, he once landed right on the edge of a village and after asking directions, continued his flight. On another occasion, when flying over a thick wood, with his supply of benzine practically exhausted, he had not been able to make the distance to open country and brought his plane down on the tops of the trees, with the propeller shattered.

Izmailov was very fond of his machine and it seemed to him that he had been flying it from the very beginning of the war.

But this was hardly the case. The plane had been repaired so often and so many of its parts had been replaced that the only thing left of the original was probably the number on its rudder —and it's nickname.

Everyone participating in war has a gauge, as it were, for measuring his deeds of valour. For the infantryman it is the number of enemies

he has personally potted. The artillerymen reckon by the number of shells fired. The tank crews have a wider range of trophies and the pursuit plane pilots count the number of enemy planes brought down.

Izmailov, however, possessed no gauge to measure his deeds.

He simply did everything that he was ordered to. His assignments were so varied, so diverse in nature, that it was quite impossible to reckon up what he had accomplished in his war service.

If Izmailov had been asked: "Well, old man, have you learned to fly like an old hand now?" he would have been at a loss as to what to answer.

But if the weather was very bad and the assignment difficult, the command was sure to choose Izmailov as the man for the job, knowing that he could be absolutely depended on to carry it through.

Izmailov held the military pilots in high esteem, and while listening to them with admiration, was quite free of any feeling of envy—so lofty and unattainable did their art and daring appear to him. He was proud of the fact that many of the air force flyers knew him personally even though each of them felt it his due to poke fun at this "small-flying" colleague of theirs.

A still frost hovered over the aerodrome. The snow glistened with a hard brilliance in the winter sun. The sky was transparent, absolutely clear; not a single cloud warmed its icy vaults.

Izmailov removed the quilted coverings from the motor and propeller, put them into the cockpit and, after warming up the engine, taxied the plane over to the starting point.

The aerodrome officer on duty impatiently waved his hand in token that Izmailov hustle and take off. The officer's opinion was that every extra minute Izmailov's plane remained on the military airfield marred the trim looks of the aerodrome.

After a short run Izmailov took off and, veering sharply, settled on his course.

Having delivered the dispatches entrusted to him, Izmailov started on the return trip to his base. The weather, meanwhile, had taken a turn for the worse. A crisp snow was slanting down and carpeting the earth. Izmailov climbed a little higher to avoid a chance collision with a telegraph pole.

The wind was bitingly cold against his face. Izmailov took off his gauntlets and rubbed his cheeks and nose, heedless of the fact that while he was thus occupied the plane was being tossed about in the air.

He still had to make a landing at the state farm where he was to take on fresh cream for Lieutenant Curovtsev who lay ill in hospital. Lyutov had asked him to do this. Veering his plane about, he kept a careful eye on the earth below, straining to make out the contours of the

square stable building of the state farm through the scudding clouds of snow.

Suddenly a heavy black plane rushed past him with a roar and making a swift upward swoop just ahead of him, sent a stream of blue and crimson tracer bullets right over his head.

Almost automatically Izmailov thrust the joystick forward. The plane instantly lost altitude. But he quickly remembered that there was a heavy snowfalling, that his foe could easily lose sight of him and a blind landing here was a dangerous affair to say nothing of the fact that spending the night in the Steppes with a damaged machine was anything but inviting. Cautiously gaining altitude, he brought the plan directly over the surface of the earth. A minute passed, then another and the German was now here in sight. Izmailov was now flying over a forest. With renewed courage, he climbed another 100 feet then to 400.

And now heard the menacing roar of the German plane behind him again.

It was quite impossible to land on the trees. Izmailov barely had time to shut off the gas. And this proved to be just the right thing under the circumstances.

Unable to make out in the heavy snowfall type of plane he was up against. The Hitlerite pilot tore past Izmailov at such a furious speed that he missed his chance to take a shot at the Russian.

Izmailov saw how the German flyer turned back and shook his fist at him as the big machine flashed by.

Matters did not call for reflection. The "Messerschmitt" was sure to return for a second attack.

The only thing to do was to make a landing.

Izmailov, however, hesitated. He could not forget his glimpse of the German in his cockpit threatening him with his fist, and he thought with some bitterness: "It's all very well for him, the scum, to sit in his fighting plane and mock at me. If I were on a real plane I would give you a taste of a duel that..."

And Izmailov hurriedly took his gauntlet and began to rub the round mirror that was set in a bracket before him, just as in an automobile. With the look of one whose mind is made up, he gripped the controls.

Without taking his eyes off the mirror or changing his course, he piloted the plane forward with only the slightest gain in altitude.

Behind him could be heard the roar of the "Messerschmitt." The Hitlerite kept slightly to the right, intending to cut the helpless, weak machine to pieces with a signal round of bullets. And suddenly, when it seemed that everything was over, Izmailov stepped on the gas and banked his plane sharply to the right, directly in the path of the enemy ship.

Notwithstanding the fact that the German pilot, quick to see his blunder, released the accelerator, the speed of his plane far exceeded that of Izmailov's.

The manoeuvre of the Soviet pilot was more than unexpected. Abruptly stalling his plane, the German pilot attempted to thrust it upwards to avoid a collision. But his machine continued to speed forward and collided squarely amidships with the motor of Izmailov's plane.

The impact was so strong that the "Messerschmitt," after making a sharp somersault in the air, crashed down to earth.

It was all over.

The charred wreckage of the German plane smouldered in the crisp snow and scattered about it were light green fragments of the communications plane.

Thus it was that Serezha Izmailov met his end. Serezha will never know how fond our our military pilots were of him and how hard it was for them to make that last journey in measured strides that fell in with the austere, muffled sighs of the funeral march.

Captain Lyutov, self-assured, daring, scoffing fearless figure with a heart not easily moved, took off his glove, wiped his eyes and said in a hushed voice :

"I had my eye on that chap for a long time; wanted to enroll him in my unit and even sent in a report to the Red Air Forces. He met his death

bravely, you cannot deny that. But he is no longer with us and it's painful for me, fellows, very painful..."

A day passed and Captain Lyutov made a daring raid on an enemy aerodrome. And this raid was dedicated to the bright memory of Serezha Izmailov.

NUMBER FIVE

"Everybody in the army seems to have his due place: fighting, going into attack, thrashing the Hitlerites might and main, I'm the only one who seems left out of it."

Number one, only recently promoted to this post and hence very proud of the fact, took the cartridges from Stepan Sidorenko whose job it was to bring up ammunition supplies from the company base and favoured him with the following reply to his complaint:

"Every job in the army is an honourable one. But first of all, each person has a knack for some particular job of work and he has to fit himself for it. Secondly, it's possible to attain everything. Take me, for instance. I've taken my diploma as a crack shot. Give me any calculation you like and I can work it out in my head without any tables and I'm number one, while you, let's say, are number five."

Stuffing spent cartridges into a sack, Sidorenko muttered a surly retort:

"Even if I'm five, you can't get along without me."

Inserting a fresh belt of cartridges, number one sent a round at the enemy with all the skill of

a virtuoso-two bullets and a pause, two bullets—pause. Then, looking back over his shoulder, he sagely remarked :

"You are indispensable fellow, I'll agree to that."

Sidorenko heaved a sigh, slung the sack over his shoulder and set out to crawl back to the company ammunitions base.

The ground was blanketed with a thick layer of crisp, clean snow, almost blue in the winter light.

It was quite easy for Sidorenko to crawl over this soft carpet and whenever a round of machine-gun bullets sent up a cloud of silvery snowflakes he crawled into a shell-hole or hide behind a mound or hillock, waiting and watching to see where the next stream of bullets would fall.

He had long since become accustomed to the fact that German snipers were hunting after him. He had learned to pull the wool over their eyes and he had also learned how to anticipate each new firing manoeuvre of the foe. He knew exactly the places where he could crawl in safety, digging, as they say in the army, his nose into the ground, or where it was best to make a dash in the open, covering the space in three spurts. He had studied every inch of his road so thoroughly that he probably knew it better than most people do the street they live in. When he knew that there were some particularly tricky and dangerous spots to cover he would go out at night and dig holes

where he could find shelter and a breathing spell in his trips to and fro on the morrow.

The company was well satisfied with the manner in which Sidorenko performed his duties and the machine-gunners whom he served were always confident that Sidorenko would never let them down and would deliver the necessary supplies no matter how fierce the enemy fire.

But Sidorenko was twenty years old. He had a round, amiable face and a warm heart. And each time that he complained of his fate he perforce drew down upon himself good-natured scoffs from his comrades. This made fun of him, calling him "number five"—though each of them was perfectly well aware of the fact that Sidorenko was a fearless chap and an excellent fellow on his job.

At the ammunitions supply base, the sergeant handed over a case of cartridges to Sidorenko, accompanying them with the following remark:

"Sidorenko, you ought to ask the commander to have a pair of tortoises sent down from Moscow for you. You could hitch them up to a cart and carry your ammunition supplies—something like a whipped tank in first gear. The only drawback is that there isn't any whip for you to urge them on with. Otherwise they are quite suitable animals, you know, couldn't ask for better."

Sidorenko quickly gave an angry retort:

"And the least you could do, Vladimirov,

would be to tie an apron around your waist. You purvey goods—but forget to do some window-dressing and get in some shop fisctures. And don't forget to hang out a tradesman's sign."

The sergeant went red and was at a loss for an answer.

The crawl back to the company was a more difficult affair: the Hitlerites maintained fierce mine-thrower fire.

Sidorenko was forced to spiint from one shell-hole to another. Hugging the ground, still warm from the exploding mines, he made note of the nearest spot from which he could aim in the next spurt. Adjusting the traps which held the cartridge case on his back, he made a dash forward on all fours.

In the brief pauses between the mine explosions, enemy snipers went for him with their tommy guns. A bullet slashed the strap-holding the case and now Sidrenko had to crawl, shoving the case ahead of him.

As things would have it the machine-gunners had to change their firing position and the Germans sent out their tommy gunners to smash the firing points. Unaware of this, Sidorenko was making his way to the abandoned position toward which the German tommy gunners, advancing directly in his path, were also heading.

When number one noticed a black spot on the snow he surmised at once that it was Sidorenko. And when he saw the line of German

gunners approaching in Sidorenko's path he knew that the ammunitions carrier was doomed.

After opening fire on his flank, number one ordered number two to inform the detachment Commander of Sidorenko's peril.

The Detachment Commander told the platoon Commander that it was quite impossible to lose such valuable fellow as Sidorenko and was given permission to attack the group of German gunners.

The Germans, in turn, when they saw the Red Army men making a running attack on them, asked for support from their lines. Heavy German machine-guns soon opened fire.

The Platoon Commander got in touch with the Company Commander. After explaining the circumstances, he stated that it was impossible to abandon the best ammunitions carrier to sure death. The company mine-throwers, advancing still further, opened fire on the German machine-guns. Then the German mine-throwers joined in the fray. The Company Commander asked for aid from the Battalion Commander and now artillery opened fire on the German batteries.

The air was humming. Clods of black earth and feathery yellow splinters from smashed German dugouts whirled up in eddies after each explosion.

Our forces advanced and went into attack. By evening the battle died down.

The detachment which had occupied new

positions, was hastily repairing demolished German dugouts and entrenchments and setting up guns. Sappers were burying the dead Germans under cover of darkness.

At dawn the Ragimental Commander rang up the Major's dugout. After extending congratulations on the successful outcome of yesterday's battle, he inquired if they had succeeded in rescuing the amunitions carrier Sidorenko. The Major asked the C.C. to find out. The C.C. summoned the P.C. The latter sent a liaisons man to the Detachment Commander. The P.C. said that he would ascertain matters in a moment and went directly to his men.

And there he found Sidorenko. The latter was sitting in a trench next to number one who had only recently been appointed to his post and was still proud of the fact Sidorenko was relating in a resentful voice :

"How could you be in doubt and act so stingy when you should have been flaying the Germans? If some one else had been bringing up ammunition supplies, then you would have been right in doubting, and going spare on cartridges. You changed your address?—Well, and what of it? Your wheel tracks were left in the snow to show where you had gone. You think I'm blind? I found you at once, didn't I?"

"And what of the tommy gunners?"

"Well, and what of them," said Sidorenko with unmistakable signs of irritation in his

voice. "I'm absolutely at home in this locality, I feel as though I were in a shooting gallery. There's no place for them to hide. And it was nothing but sheer satisfaction for me to take a shot at them. At last I had a chance to fight like a human being, instead of perpetually crawling on my belly."

"Well, everything all right, Tovarisch Sidorenko?" asked the Detachment Commander.

"Yes, Sir," standing erect, Sidorenko reported. And then added in an apologetic tone. "My being delayed by those German gunners, why, I shot only the littlest bit at them, to sort of freshen them up. But there was no break in bringing up ammunition. Tovarisch Number One here can confirm that."

Within five minutes the Regimental Commander was informed that ammunitions carrier Stepan Sidorenko was alive and uninjured.

Ochen Khorosho—"Very good," said the R.C." Excellent fighters must be taken care of."

LINE OF DEFENCE

Sapper Company Commander Silushkin drew upon his motorcycle.

His back was plastered with clammy lumps of mud. He stood up without alighting from the cycle, straddling the saddle and gripping the chugging machine with his knees. Obviously disturbed, he made his report to Major Goustory.

"The work in erecting defence barricades has not been carried out. The boundary which you indicated is already occupied."

"Who has occupied it? When was it occupied?"

Before another minute had passed, Silushkin, with the Major behind him on the pillion, his hands gripping Sillushkin's shoulders, was speeding back in the direction from which he had just come.

"Who is in charge here?"

"I am."

The Major was approached by an estimable looking person whose most conspicuous articles of apparel were a felt hat and sleeveless quilted jacket with a tarpaulin belt from which was suspended a calico bag containing two combustible bottles.

"Who may you be?"

"Filatov, director of the button factory."

"I am asking you your rank!"

"But that is really the only rank I have." And with a smile, Filatov went on to add: "When we learned that the Hitlerites were approaching quite close to our settlement, we decided that we would not close down the factory. Our personnel is a fine body and work together with a will. We located just the right spot. There it is. We got everything ready in all due form. And now we are all ready and waiting for the Germans. The Secretary of the Party Committee is my Commissar, of course." And, with a genial smile, the director put forward the following request. "It would be very kind of you to take a look around and inspect the work we have done? We would appreciate the judgment of an experienced eye."

The Major shrugged his shoulders, glanced at Silushkin and not without obvious reluctance followed the director of the button factory.

What met his view, however, forced him to radically alter his opinion of this civilian figure in his absurd felt hat and with two combustible bottles suspended from his belt.

The defensive structures which he was shown were not only properly erected from the military viewpoint, but they even displayed a real taste and affection for such objects. Metalic I-beams were used as roof supports in the dugouts.

"This building material had been prepared for a new shop at the factory," explained the director.

All the dugouts had telephone connections.

"The factory sub-station works excellently under field conditions," Filatov could not help but boast.

"How many companies have you?" asked the Major.

"Let's just count them. The turning shop-that's one. Carpentry-two. The head engineer's group—three. The office-four. And then the traffic department."

And the director let the Major to the edge of the woods where camouflaged trucks, reinforced with "handmade" armour plating, stood ready for use.

On returning to the director's dugout, the Major expressed his admiration for the superbly built defensive structures and with a sigh of sincere regret said in conclusion.

"In spite of all, however, you will have to yield your rights to this spot. We have orders from the Commanding staff to take up quarters here."

The director's face fell in consternation and his smile vanished.

"I don't understand what this is all about? That's going a little too far, if you will pardon the liberty of my saying it: we shall never give up this place to anyone."

The Major kept silence.

The director got to his feet, paced the dugout, and once again coming over to the Major, addressed him in the most ingratiating tone he could muster:

"Perhaps, Tovarisch, we might somehow manage to make room for each other? Well, suppose we put it this way, we'll be neighbours. And, you know, we can help you out with an odd shot of cement, and some anti-tank obstacles, eh? Honest!—We'll both benefit by the bargain."

The Major did not answer but continued to gaze through the narrow embrasure of the dugout at the firm, formidable line of fortifications which had been erected by the workers of this tiny button factory. He did not utter a word but continued to ponder...Then he rose to his feet, extended his hand to the director and said:

"Very well, we shall be neighbours. As they say, shoulder to shoulder."

Upon leaving the dugout, the Major ordered Silushkin to reinforce the flanks of the defence line and prepare ground for setting up the batteries. Then, turning to the director, he said:

"Have all your company commanders at the command point at 4 p.m., sharp."

"Very good, Tovarisch commander!" was the hearty response. "The shop superintendents will be on the spot at 4 p. m., sharp."

THE OLD WATER-CARRIER

German troops entered the village. They settled down as if they belonged there. The officers, who were filthy and simply infested with lice, commandeered the best of the peasant huts. They decided to have a real wash and to heat water in samovars for their ablutions. Soldiers were sent around to collect samovars from the villagers and bring them to the officers' hut.

Kondratich had worked as water-carrier in the collective farm. The Germans found out his occupation by the ice-covered barrel standing near his hut and ordered him to haul them water.

Kondratich took his cart down to the pond and he was ashamed to look people in the face. And yet he could not refuse, the Germans would kill him.

He came at night to his ransacked hut, tired out, only to find that his old wife and spouse refused to talk with him. After a while she could no longer curb her feelings and shouted at him:

"What do you mean by making yourself at home here, you German Valet? Collect your belongings and clear out of here; I don't care where you take yourself to and see to it that you never cast your shadow here again."

Nikita Kondratich turned a livid blue from these insults but kept himself in hand and answered:

"Can I help it if the only weapon I have a bucket? If I had anything to do with it I would souse them with sulphuric acid and not water."

His wife was a woman of character, however, and to avoid all contact with a muzhik who had so disgraced himself, she left the house and went to live with some neighbours.

Kondratich went on hauling water and his fellow villagers cast baleful glances at him as though there were a dog and not a man sitting astride the water barrel. And it was quite in vain that he doffed his cap in greeting, no one made the slightest attempt to respond.

When Kondratich let his bucket down into the steaming hole in the ice, he became quite sick at heart and he wanted to jump into the water hole and put an end to everything.

The Germans started to hang Kostya Fadeyev but all their efforts proved futile. Then they ordered Kondratich to haul his barrel to the telegraph pole. They put Kostya on the barrel. While the Germans were busy fizing up the noose, Kostya turned to Kondratich;

"Take a good look, you old devil, at the way I am going to die. Afterwards you can tell the people about it, let them learn how to die." And with these words he gave the German standing

near the barrel such a kick in the eye that the latter pitched into the snow head first.

Kondratich went to the villagers to tell them of how Kostya had died. But even Kostya's mother would have none of him:

"It's not for your foul tongue to brag how my gallant son met his martyr's death. Off with you!"

And Kondratich came home to his empty hut, took down the reins from the wooden nail to hang himself with and suddenly stopped in his preparations for the deed, gripped by a new thought: "Why lay hands on myself and do away with myself without any good coming of my efforts? Let the Germans have the trouble of putting an end to my life."

And so he began to show himself in the village and pick quarrels with the Germans. The soldiers, however, only laughed at him, took him to be drunk or something of the sort. They gave him a couple of blows in the face once and let matters go at that. And once again they ordered him to haul water.

Kondratich brought the water and noted that the Germans had spread their lice-infested garments out in the frosty air of the hut porch. He glanced around to see if any one were watching, poured the contents of one bucket on the garments, then another, and only then did he leave the hut, purposely stamping his boots as he left. But no one noticed him.

Kondratich took his place on the water cart and set off for the dugouts where he saw the jutting of the German mine-throw. An idea had come to him. The Germans did not stir out of their dugouts: it was so cold that the saliva seemed to freeze in your mouth. The sentries, wrapped in straw, stood with their backs to the wind and resembled sheaves covered with hoar-frost. They paid no attention to the water-carrier. They were accustomed to seeing him around and considered him as a menial.

And Kondratich, standing on his water cart, quietly began to pour water down the muzzles of the mine-throwing guns dipping his ladle with its long wooden handle into the barrel for a fresh supply each time. After he had poured out the entire contents of the barrel he went down to the pond again.

On the way back, he heard shooting began in the village. He spurred his old nag into a gallop and reached the officer's hut. The Germans were running out of the house in whatever garments that happened to be on them. Their clothes were lying in frozen heap on the porch. And, it was then that Kondratich began to souse them with water. He managed to soak two of them thoroughly, the third lay down and took a shot at him.

The battle was a short one. The German mine-throwing guns were useless, jammed with solid ice. Our troops burst into the village.

When they lifted Kondratich up from the ground, he said in a weak voice:

"Don't bother yourselves, my lads, my blood is hot, it's not water and doesn't easily cool".

They took Kondratich into the hut. The ambulance man dressed his wound. His old wife came bustling in. She had heard all about what had happened. She began to fuss about him, heat the stove, cry and wail—all at the sametime. The ambulance-man comforted her:

"Your esteemed spouse is a man with two lives. And ordinary German bullet cannot kill him. And now, after his feat, he is quite immortal."

Shortly afterwards Kostya's mother arrived on the scene. She brought old Kondratich some cakes. Seating herself on the stool near his bed, she asked him to tell how her son had met his death.

Kondratich raised himself up on his elbows and looking with marked emotion at the sad face of the grieving woman, he said in a hushed voice:

"You can't use ordinary words to tell about a person like your son. You must use words that will sound throughout the world, like the radio—so that the hearts of all will be touched and filled with pity. That's the kind of a man your son was, my dear. And let not tears be on your face, but pride. And I, am old, old man, ought to kiss the ground where your son's feet trod."

Kondratich was breathing with difficulty, and exhausted, he sank back on the pillow.

Kostya' Fadeyev's mother quietly wept the warm tears of a mother.

And a cricket took up its chirping behind the stove. Whether it began to chirp because it was now warm in the hut or whether it was because the Germans had left—who knows? But one may conjecture what he likes.

LOVE OF LIFE

While storming an enemy aerodrome Lieutenant Korovkin had both hands injured by shrapnel wounds and his face badly cut by splinters from his shattered windshield.

Losing a lot of blood and relying only on his foot pedals, Korovkin managed to bring his damaged machine down on his home aerodrome.

At the hospital he asked the doctor:

"Tell me, doctor, will I be fit to fly soon?"

"Well, if you ask me, I don't think you'll ever fly again."

"Oh, we'll see about that," replied Korovkin.

That night, when everyone in the ward was asleep, Korovkin thrust his bandaged head under the pillow and gave way to tears. By morning his temperature had risen and the doctor, shaking the thermometer, informed him:

"If you continue to worry yourself, my prophesy and not yours will prove to be the correct one."

Flaky, white snow was falling outdoors. The air was saturated with a murky, frosty mist. It was decidedly not flying weather.

... We were sitting in a warmly-heated dugout talking of Korovkin.

Vasya Bodrov was squatting in front of the open door of the stove repairing some sort of aeronautical gadget. Bending down toward the flame, he remarked in a sad voice:

"Korovkin asked me to get him something to read. Where can I lay hands on a suitable book? It has to be something that will cheer him up. The poor chap's absolutely in the dumps."

I started rummaging in the tiny squadron library which was no larger than the empty flare-rocket case containing it but there was nothing to fit the need.

Galadzhy, our political Commissar, entered the dugout. Sitting down on a bench spread with straw, he asked me what I was hunting for. After listening to my explanation, he said:

"There hasn't been a book written, of course, for each of life's contingencies. But I read somewhere in an article that when Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was ill and suffering extreme pain, he also asked for something to read. They brought him the works of Jack London, the American writer. And Lenin praised one of his stories very highly. It's called "Love for Life." It would be good thing to get hold of that book."

"But where can you get it here, in the Steppes?"

"It's possible to get anything when it's necessary."

Galadzhy finished smoking his cigarette, put on his helmet and left the dugout. When he threw back the tentflap hung over the entrance,

we caught the tang of a raging wind and the the biting, dry snow of a blizzard.

Carefully listening to the ticking of the instrument in his hands, Bodrov remarked:

"Misha Korovkin is a fellow with no mean strength of character and yet all it took was to be wounded and he's given up. But people don't die of an attack of nerves, do they?" And turning toward me, with the light from the fire playing in red streaks across his face, he stated in a loud voice: "Galadzhy says that whoever doesn't want death must kill it by killing the enemy."

The ring of the telephone broke in upon our conversation Bodrov picked up the receiver.

"Granite at the phone. Galadzhy! did he take off? No, he's not yet returned. I shall let you know as soon as he does, Tovarisch Commander." Putting the receiver back on the phone, he enviously uttered: "Galadzhy—that's a daring fellow for you. Taking off in such a blizzard. The weather's enough to chop wood. Visibility absolutely nil.

Damp logs were crackling in the stove. The gadget which Bodrov had finished repairing was now serenely ticking away. The atmosphere in the dugout was hushed and mournful. Several times during the evening the Regimental Commander rang up to ascertain whether Galadzhy had returned.

At last the groaning roar of a motor was

audible in the distance. It died out only to reappear with increased volume.

Bodrov snatched up his fur jacket and throwing it over his shoulders shouted back at me.

Galadzhy's back. He's searching for the aerodrome. He can't get his bearings. Oh, you, what a foolhardy devil you are; "And with that he rushed out of the dugout.

In about twenty minutes both of them came in. Brushing the snow from his jacket and looking at Galadzhy with some alarm, Bodrov asked him:

"Where did you get so messed up?

"The oil-duct burst. It got on to everything," Galadzhy explained in an indifferent tone and thrust his hand into his pocket. And when he drew out a sticky mass of oil-soaked paper, his face fell and his voice wavered as he brought disconcertedly: "And to think I roused the librarian out of a sound sleep. He even cursed me for it. It was all I could do to drag him out. And now a catastrophe like this would have to happen!"

Galadzhy made an attempt to wipe the oil off the blurred pages of the book but the paper only tore in his hands. When he saw that all his attempts were futile, he went over to the telephone and called up the weather-clerk.

"Wake me up in an hour," he told Bodrov and stretched out on the bench for a nap.

"Do you mean to say that you are going to take off again?"

"Why, of course, what did you think? Did you imagine that there was only one copy of that book in the whole town?" was Galadzhy's gruff response. He yonked the blanket over his head and was asleep in an instant.

It was again quiet in the dugout. The fire was slowly dying out in the stove.

SORROWFUL BUT PROUD

They bailed out at night in square black parachutes. The wire white tarpaulin overalls over their fur flying suits. Their white hoods were fastened low down on the fore-head like Bedouin turbans. White felt boots and white gloves completed their costume. Only their tanned faces, the colour of ripe nuts, stood out in contrast to the white expanse of the snow-covered field.

After burying their parachutes in the snow, Kislyakov, a huge, broad-shouldered, glum sort of fellow pointed to the bags containing their provisions and remarked:

"Perhaps we'll take a snack, Surin? What's the use of lugging all that stuff around for?"

Surin, a small, lively chap with merry dark eyes, answered in an affable voice:

"Grisha, you can carry my bag in addition to your own. You're a hefty fellow."

Kislyakov heaved a rather mournful sigh and easily hoisting the bags on his back set out to follow Surin, ploughing his way through the snowdrifts.

Surin had been entrusted with the job of mining the roads along which the Germans were

retreating while Kislyakov was to destroy all transport bringing up fuel supplies to the enemy.

At dawn they came out on a highway just at the point where the road forked. Stakes were driven into the ground along the highway, bearing sign-boards with the German inscription, "Caution, mines!"

Surin read the inscription, pondered for a moment and turned to Kislyakov with the following command:

"Grisha, pull up the stakes and be quick about it!"

Grisha obediently began to dig the stakes out of the frozen ground and stack them in a pile.

Then Surin ordered him to drive these stakes with their placards along the road which forked off the highway. Kislyakov indifferently asked:

"What did you do that for, Surin? For the fun of it?

"Grisha," said Surin sadly, "why have you such a limited outlook on things?"

"It takes all kinds of people to make up the world," Kislyakov was bound in all honesty to confess.

Surin continued:

"Well, my child, lend me your ears. According to those signs posted on the road the highway is mined, isn't it?"

"It's mined all right," assented Kislyakov.

"And what about the by-paths?"

"The detours aren't mined," Kislyakov repeated decidedly.

"Have things been changed by switching the location of the signposts?"

Kislyakov thought for a moment and retorted gruffly:

"It's all clear now. But I wouldn't like to have you for a partner in a game of cards, you's be sure to put something over on me."

"Of course, what did you think?" Surin proudly confirmed. After taking leave of Surin, Kislyakov headed further west. Surin remained in the woods to follow up the mine trap he had set on the highway.

That night a series of loud explosions could be heard on the highway, and columns of red flame shot up in the sky.

Surin crawled out of the hole he had dug for himself in a gully. Leaping about to get warm, he listened for a while and then crawled into his lair again.

Toward evening of the following day Kislyakov turned up. Surin looked at his blood-stained face and asked in alarm:

"Not seriously wounded?"

"No-O," answered Kislyakov, "I'm as famished as wolf though."

While he was eating, Kislyakov told his story:

"Well, I kept going further and further. I saw a motor-cycle coming along. I came out on

the road and put up my hand. He stopped, I took his place on the motorcycle and started off. Then I caught sight of some petrol tank trucks, eight of them. Well, the machine gun was at my right and grenades on my belt. I stepped on the accelerator. And aiming at the column of trucks without stopping my cycle, I let them have it from the machine-gun. And I threw the grenades under one of the machines. I got past them alright."

"And where were you wounded?"

"Nowhere. I did that myself. I saw three of them walking along the highway. Well, I let into them right on the run."

They were once more plodding through a forest. Lifting his hands in a gesture of despair, Surin said:

"Grisha, what in the world makes you such a dullish stupid sort of a fellow? Always heading straight for trouble."

Grisha listened to him with a gloomy expression on his face and said:

"These places where the Germans are now is home territory for me."

"Well and what of it?"

"Only that it isn't in me right now to play at shrewdness. And the Commander knows that it isn't."

They went on in silence. The white trees cast bluish shadows on the snow. Their steps

echoed in the frosty air like the chimes of a huge glass bell.

When they stopped to have a smoke, Kislyakov unexpectedly continued in a brusque tone:

"A week ago I bailed out here on reconnaissance. Got hold of some very valuable information. I was making my way back, crawling along on my belly. And the Germans dragged a man into the gully behind the cemetery where I was hiding. They didn't shoot him. They broke his legs and his arms with their rifle butts. I was sitting in a clump of trees and saw wall of it. I didn't have the right to show myself. The information I had to deliver was more valuable than the lives of both my father and myself."

"That man was your father, you mean to say?" asked Surin in horror.

Kislyakov stamped out his cigarette, glanced down at his legs and said in a muffled voice :

"He was a plucky old fellow. While they were doing all that to him, he never left off cursing them for all he was worth—like an old salt."

It was now Surin's turn, his eyes blinking with tears and obviously moved, to grasp Kislyakov's hands:

"Grisha, forgive me, for being such a...

But you understand..."

"I understand," said Kislyakov seriously, "a scout has to be able to grasp things quickly.

And I know that I'm not up to par right now."

He twisted his shoulders, adjusted the tommy-gun strap and making an effort to smile, he said:

"Well, shall we go on? There's still plenty for us to do."

This time Surin followed in the wake of Kislyakov who was setting the pace with his long strides. Surin stepped in the deep tracks and kept thinking what words of comfort he might offer this proud, sorrowful figure.

AN OPPORTUNE OCCASION

The hamlet was a tiny one and it lay at the back of beyond. It nestled in a dense forest, far from any high-roads. Advancing along the high-ways the Germans passed through the vicinity and failed to discover this village. Thus for more than a month it remained untouched behind the German lines.

The more able-bodied men and women left the village to carry on guerilla warfare; the older ones stayed on. They resolved on the following course of action: stoves were not to be heated during the day so that the smoke would not give out their presence; dogs were to be kept locked in the shed so that their barking would not draw undue attention and no one was to venture beyond the village boundary so that there would be no tell tale tracks. It was not long before the roads were buried in snow, in soft, flaky, unbroken drifts.

It was about then that our troops began to hammer away at the Germans. The roads came to resemble a shambles where the frozen corpses of soldiers lay interspersed among the debris of battered German tanks. The Germans fled to the woods. A detachment of them, numbering

twelve in all, came across this hamlet which had long lain concealed and occupied it. The Germans had now been living in the village for about a week. They threw their lice-infested garments out into the snow and attired themselves from head to foot in clothes confiscated from the villagers. They spent the whole day steaming their frozen feet in hot water; butchered all available cattle and gorged themselves so that by evening they were invariably victims of nausea.

These Germans were very tired and hence killed only a few of the villagers—three all told—and hung only one—Arkady Maltssv. They hung him in a cowbarn because they were in no mood to venture out into the cold for this little operation.

The dwellers of this hamlet proved to be an unusually cool lot and accepted everything stoically without any visible signs of discontent.

Corporal Kuzmin, scouting in the forest with four of his men, also came upon this tiny hamlet. Buried in the deep snowdrifts the village looked like a Christmas card picture.

"There's something fishy," said Kuzmin, "the houses are intact, but there're no people to be seen—as if the've all been smothered in the snow." And ordering his men to wait for him, he went on to the village alone.

He had scarcely reached the threshing grounds on the outskirts when he encountered a middle-aged woman. She was carrying her wash-

ing on a double-bucket yoke. Kuzmin stopped and asked :

"Can you please tell me, my good woman what power is in authority here ?"

The woman looked at him rather huffily and replied:

"The Soviet power, of course."

Kuzmin could not conceal his joy and queried her further.

"And where could we have a rest and a bite to eat in the village ?"

"Are there very many of you ?"

"Quite a few."

The woman thought for a moment and then said:

"All right, we can take you in but wait a bit before you bring your men to the village while we get one of the huts ready for you."

Kuzmin went to bring his scouts up and when he returned to the village he saw a crowd of of about thirty people awaiting him, among them the woman he had first encountered. She was holding a banner in her hands on which was written "Long live the first of May"!

"What sort of holiday are you celebrating, comrades?"

"Don't you think it's a holiday when the Red Army has come here again ? Call in your soldiers, Tovarisch Commander. We have everything ready for you."

Kuzmin indicated his four scouts and said:

"Well, here are all of my men."

He was surprised to see that the villagers were dumbfounded at his words and began to whisper among themselves as though they were alarmed at the turn events had taken.

Kuzmin asked:

"What's the matter?"

The woman whom he had met on his first venture into the village turned to him and said in an offended voice:

"Why did you deceive us, Tovarisch Commander? You said that you had a lot of soldiers with you and now we see that it's not so at all. And on account of you we've just killed off all our Germans, what are we to do now?"

Kuzmin reflected for a moment, then broke into a smile and said:

"Why, just go on doing what you have just done with them." And then added in earnest: "I'm sure, though, that you won't have to use such primitive methods any longer. You see, I didn't really deceive you so much, after all and even if the Germans are still prowling about these spots, you are no longer in their rear but within our lines. Because we recaptured Ilinskoe some time ago and our main forces are there."

Everyone cheered at this good news and after the impromtu meeting the villagers took the scouts home with them to have dinner. And the middle-aged woman, walking along beside Kuzmin, said in a firm voice:

"I wasn't deceiving you either, Tovarisch Commander, when I told you that the Soviet power was in authority here. Even though there were Germans in the village, I, as the chairman, had talked things over with the villagers a long time ago, and we were only waiting for an opportune occasion. And it finally arrived.

TRYING HIS LUCK

They became acquainted here, in a shell hole out beyond the trenches.

One of them was of Company One and his name was Timchuk. The other was from Company Three—Stepanov.

"How did you land here?" asked Timchuk, "Your place is on the right flank, isn't it?"

"And what did you crawl in here for, when your fellows are stationed behind us?"

Timchuk turned over on his other side. Stepanov replied:

"I was following the code of soldierly initiative! Is that clear enough?"

"Interested in that little house?" queried Stepanov with a meaning wink—

"Extremely so. Four heavy machine guns, peppering away all the time, damned tiresome."

"Have you anything up your sleeve," asked Stepanov in a tone that meant business, "or are you merely out to try your luck?"

"For the time being, nothing but the latter. I must see how things run out."

"You mean that you're going to rush in and take the bull by the horns with nothing but pride to bank on?"

Timchuk did not take offence at this retort, but blithely replied:

"If you've any brain waves, don't be stingy, share 'em."

Stepanov adjusted the pouch at his belt from which protruded the stout handles of his anti-tank grenades and volunteered the following information in a significant whisper:

"It's my idea to crawl up to that ditch over there, then to reach the fence somehow or other, and when I've got there, why, the house will be within a stone's throw. I'll plunge a couple of grenades right into the cellar and that'll be an end of their shindy."

"They'll sight you and let you have it good and hot!"

"Nothing of the sort! I'll make a neat job of it. I've even wrapped white rags around my boots so that they won't give me away."

"Smart feller! But they've got their spy glass peeled on this spot," persisted Timchuk obstinately.

"What are you croaking about, I'd like to know." said Stepanov testily. All you can think of is that they's going to sight me, but you're ready to rush headlong yourself."

"I'm not croaking, I'm only reasoning the thing out," remarked Timchuk calmly. "Listen to me, this is what for you to do. You and I are going to part ways in a couple of minutes: You crawl ahead to your ditch, and I'll let myself

into a hole that I've noticed just a little way further ahead. As soon as you get near the fence I'll give the Germans something to worry about with my tommy gun."

"But, listen, you'll be so close to them that they'll be able to pick you off with the first round of bullets!" it was Stepanov's turn to protest now.

Timchuk looked at Stepanov in cold disdain and deliberately stressing each word, he said:

"They haven't made a bullet yet that can touch me. Come on, let's get going. Else you'll have me thinking that you can do nothing but spout words."

Stepanov took offence at this and without more ado crawled out of the shell hole. When he reached the fence he could hear the cracking of Timchuk's tommy gun and the answering rumble of the heavy German machine-guns.

Making his way up to the brick building of the local Soviet where the German machine-gunners had entrenched themselves, Stepanov rose to his full height and on the run threw two grenades into the window.

The force of explosion threw Stepanov on to the ground and he could feel pieces of flying brick strike him in the face.

When he came to, bayonet fighting was already being waged in the village streets. German machines were burning, tossing up spurts of dirty hot flames into the air.

Stepanov rose to his feet, and wiping his bloodstained face with some snow, he limped off in search of Timchuk whom he wanted to thank for the help he had shown.

Stepanov found him in the very same shell hole, lying on his stomach with the indifferent look of a person who is all in.

"What are you stretched out here for?" Stepanov asked.

"Just taking rest," said Timchuk and looking at Stepanov's face he added venomously: "It's easy to see that you've been using your face for a shovel—go and wash your mug."

Stepanov noticed clumps of damp, red snow lying about Timchuk and queried with alarm in his voice:

"What's the matter, are you wounded?"

"Can't you leave a fellow alone when he's taking rest?" answered Timchuk in a weak, irritated voice: "There's nothing for you to waste time here for. Where's your company?"

Stepanov bent down, picked up the tommy gun and slinging it over his shoulder, replied gruffly:

"What a lot of pride you've got, my fellow!"

Taking hold of Timchuk under the arms, Stepanov hoisted him on to his back and carried him over to the field hospital.

Timchuk kept on growling the whole way, trying to extricate himself from Stepanov's firm

hold, but at last he gave up the struggle and ceased all attempts at conversation.

After he had turned his wounded comrade over to the doctors, Stepanov found the Commissar of Company One and reported:

"Tovarisch Commissar, Timchuk of your Company has performed a heroic feat—he smashed the enemy firing points concealed on the outskirts of the village and did it all on his own. This enabled our Company Three to get in on the German flank and wipe them out."

"Many thanks, Tovarisch," said the Commissar.

Stepanov once more reminded him:

."Don't forget what I've told you, it was Timchuk."

Turning on his heel, limping slightly, Stepanov started out for the western edge of the village where the men of his company had surrounded the Germans and were now busy finishing them off.

Looking up, Silantev stretched his head back so far that his fur cap almost slipped off into the ground. He said:

"Allow me to report, Tovarisch Detachment Commander! A better position could not be found."

The D.C. answered rather indecisively:

"Awfully high,"

"Not more than one and a half times as high as a belfry, Tovarisch D.C.", said Silantev. "And what a view!"

"M-yes, the view could not be better," the D.C. was compelled to admit.

Heads thrown back, they continued their thorough examination of the contemplated gun emplacement.

The sole remaining smoke-stack of a brick works which had been reduced to a pile of blackened ruins rose up in solitary eminence into the sky.

That night Silantev, accompanied by two Red-Army men again crawled up to the abandoned brick factory.

Making his way up the smoke-stack by means of rump set into the bricks, Silantev reached the

top from whence he threw down a rope which he hoisted up a light machine-gun and three cases of cartridge disc.

With a wave of his hand as a parting greeting to the other two scouts Silantev perched himself on the stone brim, his legs dangling down in the black well-tower and began to wait for dawn.

Icy gusts of an unseen wind whirled about the stack. The ground below was hidden by the dry white foam of a blizzard.

Daybreak was still a long way off, but the biting cold was penetrating to the bone; it was no longer painful, there was only a dull numbness that crept up to one's heart and it was becoming constantly more difficult to breathe in this poisonous, soughing air.

Silantev got up and began to crawl about the edge of the stack in an effort to get warm. But then he remembered that the Germans might thus catch sight of him and, hesitating for a moment, he let himself down into the well of the stack. Taking a firm grip of one of the rungs with his legs, he rested his back against the rough sooty wall. Down here, out of the wind, it was at least a little warmer.

Looking through the opening of the stack above him, Silantev could see an astonishingly beautiful, shining, round slab of the starry sky. But right now Silantev had no desire to look at the sky. His thoughts were focussed on only one

thing; would he be able to hold out until morning or not?

The Germans had set up a circular system of defence in this populated point.

When Company One went into attack the Germans had just time enough to dash out of their warm quarters and take their places in dugouts and in the garrets of the buildings, from whence they opened up machine-gun fire.

But very soon, one after another, these firing positions of the Germans were unexpectedly silenced.

An Ober-Corporal, making his way on all fours from one position to another, discovered that the soldiers lying in the entrenchments were killed and wounded by bullet lodged in the head and shoulders as if they had been shot at from above by a plane.

The Ober-Corporal informed the Commanding Officer of this. The officer said that this was the doing of a sniper and ordered that he be located and picked off at all costs.

Soon afterwards the machine-guns loosed fire at the tapering smoke-stack and small slivers of stone were seen to fall down from the blackened chimney. Confident that they had settled with the sniper, the Germans now turned all their guns on our advancing infantry. But once again, the sniper, nothing daunted, began to put the German guns out of commission from his perch up on the brick tower. Once more bricks began to

fly from the top of the stack, again the target of the German machine-guns. After an interval of several minutes, the officer was informed that machine-gun firing from the smoke-stack had been renewed; the Germans again opened fire and again a shower of crumbling stone fell from the smoke-stack. And again German soldiers dropped to the ground near their guns, victims of this sniper.

The officer gave the order to dispatch a tank with super troops and blow up the cursed stack.

After landing the party of sappers at the foot of the smoke-stack, the commander of the tank drove his machine off to one side and opened a running fire at the top of the stack so that the Russian up there should not have a chance to pick off the sappers. But there were some old bullet-holes down in the shaft of the stack out, through one of these gaps in the brick, as through an embrasure, there protruded for the fraction of an instant the hand of that sniper and a bunch of grenades went crashing to the ground.

The sappers, who were busy setting their fuses, were blown to bits. The barrel of a machine-gun was now visible in another gap in the shaft and it was hammering one round after another at the tank turret.

The commander of the tank, enraged at the disastrous fate that had befallen his soldiers, opened up methodical fire from his turret gun with the intention of smashing the stack or rather of

felling it, stone shaft as though it was a tree-trunk.

When he already chipped out a considerable hollow in the shaft, he swerved his tank about to finish the job with a few shots from a different angle.

But our troops had burst in on the Germans and were already driving them out of their holes in a hand-to-hand battle. Catching sight of the German machine two Soviet tanks made for it at full speed. ...

Panting and flushed with the heat of battle, the D.C., ran up to the smoke-stack. The shaft was riddled with bullet and shell holes and this lent it a somewhat curious aspect like a flute. Cupping his hand to his mouth, he stretched his head back and shouted:

"Silantev ! Are you still alive up there ?"

He dropped his hand, and listened for a moment. After a minute or two Silantev made his appearance in a huge, gaping hollow of the shaft. Climbing down to the ground he came up to the D.C., and with a look of pardonable self-satisfaction and a proud smile on his face, extended his hand in greeting.

But the D.C., recoiled in consternation. Leaning against the smoke-stack, waving his hands and convulsed with laughter, he cried out:

"Just take a look at yourself ! You don't resemble a Red Army man, you look more like an Ethiopian or a chimney-sweep !"

Silantev began to shake himself free of the thick layer of black soot covering him from head to feet and then said.

"I'd like to see the man who could crawl around in that smoke-stack for half a day without getting himself messed up."

The commander's mirth finally subsided and he now turned to Silantev with a question put seriously:

"How did you get along up there, Silantev, you made a meat job of it. It's not every man who could do that.

Throwing the D. C.'s white camouflage cap over his shoulder, Silantev set off towards the settlement at the edge of the town where fighting was still going on and where he could finish shooting off his remaining cartridge disc.

He walked along, a white-clad figure and the soles of his boots left sooty black prints on the pristine snow.

NAVIGATOR'S SELF-ESTEEM

The Colonel summoned Captain Llin, the plane commander, and senior Lieutenant Firin, navigator.

By the way the Colonel ushered them in, both flyers sensed at once that they were in for a good rating.

Without suggesting that they take a seat, the Colonel immediately put his first query:

"Did you report that the bridge across the river had been blown up?"

"Yes, Sir," confirmed Llin.

"Then what have you to say to this?" and the Colonel flung an aerial photograph down on the table.

Both of the flyers sent down to examine the photograph in some anxiety. Straightening up, his face flushed in troubled embarrassment, Navigator Firin confusedly uttered:

"The course was exact. I can't understand it."

"Well, I can," the Colonel remarked drily." You failed to carry out your combative assignment! you may leave."

The flyers drew themselves erect and turning about abruptly, left the room.

Once they were out on the street, they came to to a halt.

"Put that in your pipe and smoke it," Llin remarked dolefully, with a heavy sigh. "But I saw it with my own eyes! But go ahead and try to prove it. Photographs can't lie."

"Kostya!" said Firin, gripping his friend by the shoulder in his excitement. "Just think of it! This whole business doesn't affect you! It's I who map out the course and direct the plane for you. And to think that something like this should happen to me, the first navigator of our squadron. No, it's more than I can bear. I'm going to ask permission of the Colonel."

"Permission for what? Wait a bit, don't get so worked up." But Firin had already opened the door of the hut where the command post was quartered.

Llin sat down on a stump near the hut and lit a cigarette. Gazing pensively before him, he began to wait for Firin to appear. It was not long before Firin came out, his face shining.

"Got permission," he stated in animation, "he gave me permission to check it up personally. I'll answer with my life that the course I mapped out was correct. It can't be possible that the bridge remained intact. It simply can't be."

That evening Firin came to the aerodrome. He had strapped a canvas pouch bag of the kind in which sappers usually carry explosives.

The heavy bomber was being made ready for a flight far behind the enemy lines.

Firin produced his permit signed by the Colonel and, after donning his parachute, he took his place as passenger in the mechanic's compartment.

The heavy plane took off smoothly and disappeared into the dark nocturnal sky.

Firin frequently left his seat to go into the navigator's cabin and check up the course. After they had been in the air for about two hours he turned to the mechanic and made a sign for him to open the trap-door which was used to release the bombs. When the hatch was open, Firin bent down, gazing intently at the ground below, obscured in a haze. He suddenly made precisely the movement as does a diver, when jumping off the spring-board and vanished through the dark-blue opening in the floor of the bomber.

The mechanic was left dumb with astonishment at his instrument desk, his hand still raised in the air.

The plane continued on its flight through a bank of murky clouds without even a tremor.

.....Quite a number of days passed Llin was flying with a new navigator by this time. Jealous of his old friend's memory, he could not but help being a little hostile to the new navigator and addressed himself to the latter only when the exigencies of flight made this necessary.

Out of a clear sky some one came up to Llin and volunteered the following information:

"Firin has returned."

"You don't say, where is he?"

"In the bath-house, I think."

Without stopping to doff his fur flying-suit and boots, Llin burst into the bath-house filled with clouds of steam and with the naked figures of bathers. He instantly recognised the lank body of his friend who was industriously soaping his head way up on the third deck. Llin embraced him and pressed him to his bosom.

Extracting himself from Llin's embraces, Firin sadly remarked:

"Now I'll have to begin washing all over again," and clambered up to his perch once more.

Llin had to wait for him in the vestibule.

That evening they were sitting across the table from each other, drinking tea.

Firin was telling his story:

"Well, to begin. I jumped out of the plane. Then I started out on foot. Of course, I had some explosives in my pouch. Since we hand't blown it up from the air, it meant that I had to do it on the ground. I went on. It goes without saying that I had a couple of interesting encounters. Shot my way out somehow. I crept up to the bridge. But the bridge wasn't there. Or if you like, it was there but it wasn't the real thing, just a sham affair. They had laid planks over the blown-up spans and painted them black to look

like metal. And the debris of the girders lying scattered about had been whitewashed. That's the explanation of that confounded photograph. The Germans themselves, of course, rigged up a crossing on another spot. I found it afterwards. It seemed rather silly to lug those explosives back with me so I put them to good use here. After that I set out on the return trip and plodded on endlessly, all the time on foot. When you're flying you haven't any conception of such a thing as distance but I walked my feet into such a state, buddy, that the only thing I'm fit for right now is flying."

"Have you made report to the Colonel yet?" asked Llin, casting a look of loving pride at Firin.

"Yes, I've told him everything". He said "Good. Self-esteem in flyers, I see, makes for an additional factor in their prowess." And, then I went on to tell him: "Flyers, of course, have a wealth of self-esteem, but, pardon me for saying it, Tovarisch Colonel, you haven't yet seen what a lot of self-esteem we navigators have." And he said, "I see it now alright. And since you have proved to be so capable of keeping to your course on the ground I'm going to send Llin and you on a highly interesting assignment." Here I put on a look as if I wasn't too overjoyed at the idea. "Thanks", I said, shook his hand and meanwhile I was all a-twitter and what have you." And, then he said: "You needn't look so rejoiced at the

prospect. You are going to take a good rest first." And Firin concluded dismally: "And now I have to take a rest. But my feet sure do ache. It's impossible for me to take a step. The thing I need is to fly."

"Never mind, Vasya," said Llin in a dreamy voice. "We'll be flying together one of these days." He picked up his guitar and said:

"You know, while you were gone, I composed a little song about you..."

In spite of the fact that the song was tearfully doleful and not altogether harmonious, Firin obligingly asserted that he thought it was perfectly grand.

The Reconnaissance Company Commander brought her into the hut where the men were sleeping and courteously said:

"You sit down here and wait. Our speciality is of such a nature that we have to sleep during the day and do our strolling at night."

Saluting, he clicked his heels and left the hut.

It was probably not required that the Lieutenant salute and click his heels before this girl—there were no insignias whatever on the lapels of her army coat. But in the present case the Lieutenant was acting more as a man than a commander.

The girl sat down on the bench and took to looking out of the window.

The frost had etched a bewildering pattern of white leaves on the window panes.

The men were lying asleep on the floor, their trench-coats drawn over them for warmth.

An hour passed, two, three and she was still sitting on the bench. Her body was convulsed by tormenting fits of sharp coughing; bending down, and pressing her mitten against her mouth she would attempt to stifle the incessant cough. And when she threw her head back, breathing

heavily, leaning against the wall, her swollen lips trembled and tears of pain gathered in her wide-open eyes which she wiped away with her mitten.

It had grown quite dark. The white leaves on the deep blue panes now glistened with scintillating sparks of reflected moonlight.

The Lieutenant entered. Groping in the half-light, he asked:

"Are you here young woman?"

"Here, Tovarisch Lieutenant," she answered in a muffled voice.

The Lieutenant bent down and began to rouse the sleeping men.

This done, he took Detachment Commander Chevakov aside and gave him lengthy instructions of some sort in a whisper and then finished for all to hear in a loud voice:

"The Battalion Commander's orders are as follows: general responsibility for the expedition falls upon you, the practical details on her," and with a nod he indicated the girl sitting on the bench.

"Quite clear," said the Detachment Commander and began to put on his things.

They wasted no time over supper, eating in the dark. The girl took no more than half a spoonful of gruel at a time, and ate this little bit as though each swallow caused her pain.

Seeing that she hadn't finished her portion, the D.C., said:

"Don't worry. It's the first rule of the game to have a good feed before a stroll."

"I'm not worried," said the girl very quietly.

Their preparations were brief and silent. Noticing that the girl was wrapping a warm muffler about her throat and doing it very carefully, Chevakov remarked:

"You're afraid of taking cold, aren't you?"

The girl vouchsafed no answer, however, to this and the whole group went outdoors.

A bright full moon hung suspended in the winter sky. The snow was sparkling. Chevakov directed a few curses at the moon and went on ahead, but turning to the girl, he said:

"I'll lead across the front lines, of course, and after that, if you will be so kind, you will take on."

The girl walked between two of the men, Ignatov and Ramishvili. Looking at their companion as they crossed a glade illuminated by the blue light of the moon which beamed down like a searchlight, they hardly recognised her as the girl who had been in the hut.

A tiny figure, in high felt boots, she seemed to be not so much wearing her trenchcoat as to be wrapped in it like a young lad when he dons his father's greatcoat; her eyes were so beautiful that both men were taken aback and edged away in embarrassment.

When the girl stumbled, Ignatov hurried up to her and said:

"Allow me to take your arm."

"The girl came to a halt and queried in a rather frightened voice:

"Whatever in the world for?"

Ignatov went quite red, notwithstanding the freezing temperature. Ramishvili hastened to come to his assistance, however.

"Down in the Caucasus, where I come from, my dear young lady, men are always expected to play the gallant courtier to women."

"At the front, however," the girl replied in a hoarse voice, "men are expected to think more."

Ramishvili did not want to let this go without an answer but he was interrupted by an angry shout from Chevakov:

"You gabbers back there! Have you forgotten where you are?"

After crossing the frontlines around midnight they entered a dark, gloomy forest peopled with leafy shadows. Now it was the girl who led the group. Her hands thrust into her coat pockets, she walked along quickly but with a somewhat mincing gait. The trail had come to an end. They plodded on through a ravine deep in snow, and when they came to a hollow they had to crawl across it, creeping along all fours for something like an hour and a half. After reaching open ground once again they passed a village which stood out like a black, ugly spot on the sparkling white snow. Then, once again, they were plodding through virgin spaces,

extricating their legs with difficulty from the dry, powdery snow piled high in drifts.

The only thing that marred the expedition was the girl's cough. This dry, hollow, racking cough in the strained, fragile stillness of the forest might have given the whole thing away. When they reached their pre-arranged destination Chevakov turned to the girl and said:

"Shelter yourself in the rick over there and wait for us. We can get along ourselves now."

"All right," said the girl in a whisper of utter fatigue, pressing her woollen mitten to her lips.

The men want their separate ways, after fixing the time for returning to this spot.

A fairly long interval passed. The faint light of the dawn cast a dull, murky glow over the land.

The first to return was Ignatov, followed shortly by Ramishvili. The latter was wrought up and excited about something. He said:

"We ought to carry her on our hands out of sheer gratitude. What valuable information!"

"Just try! I don't think! ..." Ignatov muttered in chargin. And nodding toward the hayrick he asked in a disturbed voice: "Is she married, you think?"

Without a sound of warning Chevakov suddenly appeared on the spot. He gave a crisp command: "Quick march, my lads!" then clapping his hands to his head he exclaimed with genuine admiration.

"What information—priceless! The Battalion Commander will be beside himself with joy."

They took a different road back. And again the girl led the way, her hands thrust into her pockets. And again she was racked with coughing, and pressed her mitten to her mouth in futile attempts to stifle the spasms that shook her.

The men looked with pride at their guide and in the hearts of each of them rose those gentle words which are uttered only once in a life-time for one's beloved.

On the high-road near the village of Zhimolosti they came upon a party of people clearing the road of snow under the surveillance of a German convoy. The German soldiers, wrapped in blankets and shawls were keeping a careful watch over their prisoners. The figure of a woman was seen lying in the ditch alongside the road, legs drawn up to her stomach and blood frozen her face.

Ramishvili clenched his teeth and began to unfasten his grenades. Ignatov took his tommy gun from his shoulders. Chevakov said in a husky voice:

"Don't open fire until you're given the signal."

And suddenly the girl spoke out in a loud voice, as loud as her aching throat permitted:

"There will be no signal whatever."

"What the...why won't there be?"

"There simply won't. Do you want to take a good beating?"

"You mean that they'll beat us up?" asked Chevakov in astonishment. "Twelve scare-crow Fritzes! why, we'll come down on them so unexpectedly..."

"And I say that you'll do nothing of the kind."

"Enough quibbling!" and turning away from the girl, Chevakov ordered:

"Ready for command!"

But the girl did not abate in her protests for a moment. Continuing to cough, she shouted shrilly:

"I won't let you risk the information for some filthy German scum. Do you hear?"

"There isn't a pen's worth of risk in the whole business," retorted Chevakov in a huff. "Let's go, fellows."

The girl barred the way.

"Enough of that," said Chevakov roughly and took a step toward her. "What do you want? Can't you see those people are suffering?"

"Don't you dare," the girl said in a whisper. "I'll shout if you do." and she ran off to one side.

Chevakov tossed up his service revolver, caught it in his hand and without looking at the other two men said in a tired, bored voice:

"Well, I suppose we'll have to let it go. Otherwise we can spoil the whole assignment on account of this display of feminine temper."

"She's a rotter," said Ignatov bitterly.

"A contemptible creature," put in Ramishvili and spat into the snow.

It was a difficult and bitter road back to the camp. The men tried not to look at their companion. Each fold of her coat which had seemed so dear to them but a short time ago, filled them with nothing but repugnance now, and when the girl stumbled, and fell not a single hand was stretched out to help her to her feet.

The sun was already high in the heavens when they returned to headquarters. Chevakov forced himself to speak to the girl.

"You can hardly drag yourself on as it is. Go in and have a nap. We'll hand in our report without you. As far as any thanks is concerned, let the chief worry about that, as for us—nothing of the sort will be forthcoming."

The girl nodded and, huddling down into her coat, she went into the hut.

Chevakov informed the Reconnaissance Battalion Commander of the results of the expedition. The information which the men had secured was extremely valuable and it was immediately telegraphed in code to the Regimental Commander. After this had been done, the Battalion Commander asked:

"Where is Nina Bogoradova? How is she feeling?"

"You mean the girl who led us?" said Chevakov.

"Sleeping like a log, I'll wager...We had our

hands full with her..." Smiling with scornful disdain, he proceeded to relate all the circumstances of their encounter on the road with the German convoy party.

But the strange thing was that the more venomous Chevakov waxed about the girl, the deeper grew the angry flush on the Battalion Commander's face; the latter began to draw in his breath in deep gasp and ever more frequently as though he were being pricked with pins and had perforce to endure this torment in silence.

When Chevakov had finished, the Battalion Commander did not utter a word to break the ominous silence but continued to pace the floor of the hut, ignoring the three men who were standing at attention and gazing at him in astonishment. Suddenly he turned to them with an abrupt movement and said in a brusque tone:

"This girl, Nina Bogoradova, was hung by the Germans in the village of Zhimolosti two days ago. Some guerillas fought their way into the village and rescued her just in time. Did you see how her throat was lacerated by the rope? How she coughs and spits blood? And this girl, ill and wounded, conducted herself just as she should have. It may be that she saw her own parents among those people working on the road but she knew that the information secured by the scouting party was more valuable than the lives of a dozen German soldiers. And you are trying to hand me some sort of yarn about her...What

heroes!..." And with an angry wave of the hand he said: "You are dismissed."

The men left the room and, once outside the door, Chevakov was decidedly pale, Ignatov's lips were trembling. And Ramishvili, clutching at his Khaki tunic was furiously demanding:

"We'll go this instant to ask her pardon! What an awful scandal, what a scandal!"

Ignatov sadly muttered:

"This is a thing, buddy, that you can't put right by merely saying pardon me."

"Even so, we've got to ask her pardon, fellows," put in Chevakov thoughtfully. Only this is the way I think we ought to do it. The detachment will set out for Zhimolosti immediately. And it ought to be highly interesting for us to have a look at those Fritzes who wanted to..."

"We can do anything now," said Ramishvili in an excited whisper. "Now I can do whatever I want. I've turned in my report—I'm free."

"Enough chattering," interrupted Chevakov in a voice that meant business. "We'll work it out somehow. Afterwards, when we get back, we'll have a shave, put on clean collars, full regalia—and make our excuses. Right?"

"Right," was the unanimous reply.

And taking their tommy guns, they set out for the edge of the woods whence the detachment was to advance on Zhimolosti.

The sun was shining, the snow was sparkling and dazzling the eyes.

FUNNY FUNERAL

Heavy machine-guns were hammering away from the window of the building, housing the German Kommandant officer. The first round of bullets just cleared the heads of the horses tearing along the street below at a raging speed, the next shattered the shaft pole and with a dull thud the bullets ripped open the horse's belly and pierced the taut neck, arched up like a bird's.

The second team swerved on to the side-walk and dashed on further. Crouched on his knees in the sleigh, Gorshkov aimed his grenade at the window of the Kommandant Officer. Savkin, who was lying at the bottom of the sleigh, was using a light machine-gun to sweep the street with a hail of lead. Kustov, who had wrapped the reins around his left hand and removed the gauntlet from his right, put his fingers into his mouth let out a whistle. The sound that issued from his lips was ominous and bóded no good—a whistle replete in pluck and daring.

The sleigh jammed into an iron post and the impact threw the three men out on the ground. Dragging the remains of the battered sleigh behind them, the horses raced on.

Crouched in the gutter, Savkin was warding

off the shots of the blue-coated gendarmes who still remained in Kommandant Office. Gorshkov made a dash for the door of the nearest house only to reappear in an instant and, leaning against the door-jam, hurled a grenade into the interior of the building. The force of the explosion sent shattered glass and window frames flying into the street.

Getting up from the ground, Gorshkov shouted. "Over here, fellows!"

Kustov made his way into the smoke-filed house. A mine-thrower gun was slung across his back and two metal cases containing mines hung at each side. His hands were gripped around the stout rope fastenings of a case of cartridges. Without ceasing to fire for a minute Savkin also crawled into the house. Not even glancing around to get his bearings, he hurriedly set up his machine-gun on the window-sill and continued to send out one short round after another.

A German officer was reeling to his feet in a corner of the room. Kustov, whose hands were still gripping the box of cartridges, was taken aback for a moment. But not for long. The next second he raised the box high in the air and brought it down on the German's head.

The impact split the box open and packages of bullets rolled down on the floor.

Bullets were hitting into the wall and crumbling the plaster. Wiping his eyes which smarted from the plaster dust, Savkin ran from one win-

dow to another manoeuvring his machine-gun. Gorshkov shoved a table up against the wall, placed a stool on top of it and climbing on to this edifice was making good use of his tommy gun, with the ventilator outlet for an embrasure.

German soldiers dragged a heavy machine-gun up on to the roof of the building opposite. Its heavy bullets struck against the stone-wall of the house in a shower of blue sparks. Just then an excited officer ran up and ordered the soldiers to cease firing.

The fact of matter was that the German garrison had been left in this well-entrenched town to cover the retreat of their main forces. They were doomed, and they were well aware of it. The skirmish that had started in the centre of the town might well serve to prematurely put an end to their already unhappy ventures at gallantry.

Disturbed by the silence that ensued, Gorshkov was the first to speak.

"What's happened here, fellows? Three Soviet guardsmen arrived on the scene and it turns out that the Germans don't even pay any attention to us?"

Savkin, who was holding a disc between his knees and busily inserting cartridges added in a tone of vexation:

"Remember what we promised the Commander? where's panic we were so sure of causing?"

"There'll be panic alright," said Kustov grimly and flinging the mine-thrower gun over his shoulders he started to crawl up the wrecked staircase to the garret.

The building soon began to rock at regular intervals. That was Kustov in the garret working away at his mine-thrower gun. Cutting through the roofing, he set the muzzle of his gun through the hole and aimed at the German trenches which circled the town.

The Germans couldn't hold their silence against such an attack. They opened up fierce fire at the house which sheltered the three guardsmen.

Crouched against the wall, Gorshkof emitted a shout of joy:

"Here's where they go into a panic! This is the stuff to give 'em!"

A grey film of smoke was seething out of the dormer windows in the garret, filling the air with an acrid warmth.

The Battalion Commander turned to his men and said:

"Hear those shoot? That is our men fighting. Thousands of bullets which are raining down upon them might be raining down upon us right now. Let the name of each of them fire your hearts. Forward, comrades!"

The Battalion Commander had a fondness for eloquence. But he knew no fear in battle. If it had been possible to go into attack with an un-

furled banner, he would have been the man to bear this banner.

The men went into attack.

Clouds of black smoke were already billowing forth from the garret of House No. 24 and vivid tongues of flame were licking the roof in an effort to break through to open air.

Crawling down from the attic in his smouldering clothes, Kustov set up his mine-thrower in a shattered window-frame, his eyes smarting all the while from the smoke.

The Germans now attempted to take the house by storm. A grenade explosion shattered the front door. A flying panel knocked Kustov to the floor. Groping for his tommy gun in the smoke-filled room, he found it, and hugging the butt to his stomach sent a long round of bullets into the gaping out on the threshold.

The Germans then decided to bring a small cannon into play.

Savkin, seeing this, said with noticeable pride in his voice:

"They've reached the giddy limit. They're going to bring a cannon into play now!"

To which Gorshkov added:

"Well fellows, it looks as though we have carried out our assignment with an extra margin."

Kustov, looking down at his wounded legs, spoke up very quietly:

"Things turned out so swell that I don't even want to leave."

Heavy fragments of shattered brick were falling from the walls, dislodged by the rumble of exploding shells.

The Battalion broke through to the town and after a short and heated battle occupied it.

The Battalion Commander lined up his men in front of the ruins of House No. 24 and delivered a eulogy on the three guardsmen who had bravely fallen in action.

While this was going on, a figure in black smoky garments might have been seen crawling out of one of the basement windows of the ruined building, it was soon followed by another; these two figures lifted out a third and helped him to his feet. Taking their places in the rear ranks one of them asked in a hoarse voice:

"What's it all about."

When one of the men explained matters to him, Savkin angrily muttered:

"The Germans couldn't bury us, and here you are trying to..." and made a move to go up and report to the Commander.

Kustov held him back, however.

"We'll report afterwards. It'll be rather interesting to hear what they have to say about us.

The Commander delivered his ardent speech-eloquent as usual.

And the three guardsmen stood in the last tank at the extreme left, with hands taut at their sides, oblivious to the tears streaming down their

blackened faces, tears of emotion and rapturous sorrow.

When, after his touching speech, the commander finally caught sight of them and began to reapproach them for failing to report, the three guardsmen were so touched by the emotion of the moment that they were at an absolute loss for words.

Appreciative of their sudden inability to utter a sound, the Batcom said:

"Never mind, go over to the battalion hospital." He put a last query, however:

"You'll be putting on airs, how, I dare say?"

"Not at all, Tovarisch Commander," Gorshkov fervidly reassured him. "We know that the whole speech was only due to a misunderstanding."

COMBATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Cold was so intense that it seemed to sear the cloudless sky. The snow was brittle and gleaming white, like procelain. The trees in the forest too were standing so motionless and silent that they seemed to be hewn out of stone or iron.

An old crow with an ashy-hued head and ragged wings was perched on a shattered tree stump, guarding his prey with the utmost care and caution.

This prey had fallen down from the sky during the night and now lay motionless in the snow, a large, heavy object emitting an odour of acrid smoke.

The old crow, with his sparse coating of nothing but rough feathers, soon began to feel the chill. At last, overcoming his qualms, he left his perch on the stump and sidled up to a tiny crimson bead of blood lying in the snow beside the black object. He pecked at it, gulping it down greedily and stretching his neck like a hen in the process.

The man lying in the snow in a tattered, half-burned flying-suit opened his eyes and gazed at the hungry crow with an expression of amazement and utter fatigue. The crow stood still for a moment,

then made a hissing sound, jumped aside and took up his perch again on the stump, in the pose of a patient, hungry watcher.

Grigorenko had been sitting in the mechanic's compartment when an anti-aircraft shell exploded in the cockpit. White-hot shrapnel pierced Grigorenko's belt which held a pouch with explosives and he was instantly enveloped in flames. The mechanic made an attempt to put out the fire with a chemical extinguisher but Grigorenko, shielding his face with his bent arm, made a sprint for the hatchway, opened the bomb trap, and bailed out, flaming like a torch.

He kept on falling, not opening his parachute, until the flames were quenched. In landing he caught on the tops of some trees and fell heavily to the ground with the torn parachute dragging after him.

Now, just coming to his senses after all this, he cupped a handful of snow and greedily crunched it between his teeth, wondering why the snow tasted of blood and why the crow hissed like a goose. Could crows hiss like geese? As far as he knew, they could only caw.

Gradually, however, consciousness, accompanied by the torments of pain, returned to him.

Grigorenko sat up, ripped open his boot with a knife and examined his injured foot, evidently dislocated when he had fallen to the ground. Using scraps of the parachute, he bandaged it as tightly as he could manage. The remaining bruises

and scratches did not disturb him so much as did the foot. The point was that he had to go on and his only means of locomotion were his feet. He had jumped out of the plane when it was flying over enemy territory, about thirty miles from the spot where he had instructions to jump.

Leaning heavily on a stick which he took to ease the injured foot, Grigorenko started out floundering in the deep snow. And the black crow watched him go, casting sad looks after his receding figure. When he was out of sight the crow jumped down and began to peck at the spots of blood which lay like crimson bilberries on the snow.

A cold wind was blowing. The German sentry was standing on a wooden look-out tower with his back to the wind and the collar of his coat turned up to shut out the cold. The Germans had converted these brick buildings of a former brewery, surrounded by a seemingly endless paling, into a munitions dump.

There was nothing save an empty expanse of field about the spot, deserted, shrouded in a whitish haze of snow.

And it was across this expanse of field that some object or other was crawling. When the sentry glanced around he noticed this object and took it to be a dog, and one evidently in the last pangs of starvation to judge by the slowness of its progress. He had seen a number of such starving dogs in abandoned Russian villages. The

sentry again turned his back to the wind, and holding his gun between his knees, thrust his frozen hands into his pockets.

By the second night Grigory no longer had sufficient strength to go on. His injured foot had swollen to the dimensions of a pillow. He crept along and his face pained him so that he could not tell. Whether it was from the burns he had suffered or from the extreme cold he would crawl into a gully or ravine for a short rest, boil some sort of soup from the food concentrates, he had with him, using a tin can for a kettle, and would devour it with a ravenous appetite.

He could not sleep at all. Blisters had formed on the burns on his thigh. He bandaged the injured spot as well as he could, using his woollen muffler for the purpose. Each infinitesimal hair of the rough bandage seemed to be pricking the wound, causing him such pain that he wanted to cry out, roll himself in the snow, tear off the bandage and cry.

Torn by the icy crust of the snow over which he crept, his smoke-blackened flying-suit had been reduced to tatters. Grigorenko had no idea of what he looked like. Once, however, someone espied him as he was crawling across a highway on all fours, and by the cry of horror that this person emitted Grigorenko understood what a terrifying spectacle he presented with his blackened, death-like face and his torn flying-suit with tufts of wool sticking out of the gaping

rents. The flapping gauntlets on his hands probably lent them the appearance of some savage monster's paws.

There was a single idea uppermost in the consciousness of this badly wounded 'Chute trooper and that was to reach the spot which his commander had designated, to get there at all costs even if it meant death from exhaustion and pain from unbearable burns. Every fibre that still remained alive in him strove forward to that designated spot with eager tenacity.

And now, crawling across this field of snow, Grigorenko had no thoughts for what might happen further. His whole tormented being urged toward the very heart of that bit of land which the commander had pointed out. He strove toward it as does a drowning man toward the shore even though he sees the breakers dashing themselves into a grey spray against the adamant rocks and knows that death is inevitable, but swims on, into the very clutches of death awaiting him.

When he came plump up against the grey fence, Grogorenko squatted on his heels and with an effort raised his head. It was beyond his strength to climb over. After a moment he took out his knife and began to break off thin splinters from the palings.

It was the duty of Corporal Kurt Hanske to inspect the sentries on duty on the roof. But he neglected to carry out this unpleasant task.

It was very cold up there and he was perfectly well aware that the sentries, burying themselves in a pile of straw, slept when they were supposed to be on duty. To take straw up on the roof and what is more, to sleep on duty, were both offences liable to the most severe punishment. But Hanske had long since ceased to be strict with his soldiers. His predecessor had been found strangled to death in a privy. It had been fortunate that the staff had managed to put all the blame for this affair on the guerillas. This version seemed all the more probable owing to the fact that the guerillas had only recently killed eight soldiers who attempted to force some women from the village to take part in an "evening entertainment." All this impelled Corporal Kurt Hanske to betake himself to the garret where he might sit out the time during which he should have been making his rounds of the sentry posts.

The moon shone through the dormer window of the garret, casting slanting shafts of blue on the earthen floor.

The Corporal was a finicky, elderly man obsessed by a deathly fear of ghosts ever since his child-hood, and he was feeling far from cheerful in his attic refuge. But withal he preferred the torments of fear to the torments of cold, and huddling in a corner he gazed at the blue light of the moon and tried hard to think of something pleasant.

And when all this happened he did not even

cry out, he did not utter a single squall of fear, he simply covered his face with his hands, threw himself head first on the floor, praying only for one thing—that his heart would not burst from fear —the Corporal suffered from myocarditis.

When this hairy monster showed its black face at the garret window and began to crawl into the room, the Corporal was not even astonished. He knew that this horrible thing was bound to him sooner or later. And when he felt the touch of clammy hand at his throat he was conscious of only a chilling pain wrenching his heart. He emitted a throaty gurgle. The death of Corporal Kurt Hanske was due to heart failure and not all Grigorenko's feeble attempts to strangle him.

Fumbling in the dead man's pockets, Grigorenko found a flask with a little cognac. Gulping down the searing liquid, he was so overcome by nausea that he almost fainted.

After resting for a few minutes, Grigorenko made his way down a rusty iron staircase into the quarters of the former brewery plant.

Grates of aircraft bombs were stacked up on wooden shelves along the walls. Grigorenko found some boxes of detonators in another room and managed to drag one of them back in the room where the aircraft bombs were stored. He then placed a container of tuolene in the box of detonators, attached a fuse and touched it off with a match.

The fuse began to burn with a crackle, Grigorenko, sitting on the box of detonators, aimlessly watched the tiny flame slowly creeping the length of the fuse and could not bring himself to move from the spot. The idea of having to retrace his footsteps was sheer torture. Every movement caused him such excruciating pain that he wanted nothing but to sit on here, motionless, and, to complete the utter joy of the moment, to light a cigarette from the smouldering embers at the tip of the fuse.

And yet, when the sentry looked over the snow-covered field he again caught sight of that very same famished dog which he had previously noticed, but this time its progress across the field was even slower. And the soldier thought: "You can see that the poor dog wanted to find some scraps on our garbage dump. What a stupid dog! As if you could dig up anything edible, even a mouse, on our garbage dump!" The soldier raised his gun, overcome with a compassionate desire to put the animal out of its misery, but suddenly, remembering that he was on duty, he again turned his back to the wind, and holding his gun between his knees, thrust his frozen hands into his pockets.

At seven o'clock in the morning the ammunition dump blew up with terrific roar. The explosion was of such immense force that forty motor trucks which had driven up the evening before to take on supplies and were standing in a long

line near the gate of the brewery were reduced to a pile of debris.

It was only after six weeks had passed that Grigorenko returned to his detachment. Had he wanted to, he might have told how some guerillas had found him in the forest, how they had cured his wounds, how he had been deathly afraid of fire for a long time and how they had to drag him up to the warmth of the bonfire by sheer force.

In making his report to the Commander, Grigory stated:

"It was pure effontery on my part, of course, Tovarisch Commander, to approach the designated spot without making a careful study of the roads leading up to it and without using all possible means of camouflage. And, naturally, I was a little worried about my dislocated foot. But still, considering that fire in the cabin of the plane, the job was carried out with a rating of satisfactory."

"How do you feel now", asked the Commander.

Grigorenko shrugged his shoulders and answered in all seriousness:

"Just as usual."

Grigorenko went out the street. His was a broad-shouldered figure, with youthful eyes and a face that still bore fresh livid scars from burns. Going up to a tall, husky pilot, Grigorenko asked him:

"Well, Vasya, when are we going to fly?"

The pilot scrutinised and replied:

"The weather is just right for a flight."

That night the German soldiers began to drive the people out of their houses.

A blizzard was raging outdoors. The air resounded to the furious gusts of a driving wind accompanied by whirling clouds of snow. It was impossible to distinguish the faces of people in the pitch-darkness of the winter night.

The Germans hastily lined up the villagers in ranks and tied their hands together with long wire-lines of telegraph wire. When they had done this, a rope was inserted between their bound hands, the ends of which were held by soldiers.

Thus they were driven along the road-side, and if one unfortunate fell, he dragged the whole line down with him.

The Germans made generous use of their rifle butts on this groaning mass of human bodies. And people, falling in their tracks, would stagger to their feet again, swooning from unbearable pain of the thin wire twisted mercilessly around their wrists.

Motor trucks and vans filled with soldiers were speeding along the roads. If one of the machines stalled, those behind shoved it into the ditch. The air was filled with curses and the

hysterical commands of officers which nobody obeyed.

The treads of one of the tanks jammed from the ice that had formed on them. A soldier got under the machine and began to hack off the ice. When a shell landed nearby, the driver of the tank, without waiting for the soldier to crawl out from under the machine, started the motor and the tank rumbled on.

The Germans were rolling back headlong toward the west, blinded by the blizzard, numbed with cold, crazed by the fear of impending death; each of them was urged on by a single fierce desire —to save his own skin.

Thus ominous, steady rumble of gunfire was drawing ever nearer and red flares glowed ever more menacingly in the black murk of the sky.

Thus the whole night long, seemingly endless, lines of Germans retreated toward the west, like a dirty, black stream flowing along the white, snow-covered roads.

The command to halt was given at dawn.

The soldiers, if they could be called such, lit huge bonfires, in defiance of all orders to the contrary given by their officers, squatting down in the smoke, they poked their fingers, stiff with cold, into the fire, and busied themselves killing lice and hanging their wet rags of garments on sticks near the fire to dry. They looked like a company of vagabonds, with their thin, gaunt faces and their eyes smarting with tears from the smoke of

the bonfire. But their figures were anything but gaunt, on the contrary, they were so plump as to make their owners look quite clumsy. They had become so inflated from the many layers of stolen garments piled on in an attempt to shield their dirty, lice-ridden bodies from the cold.

No force on earth could tear them away now from the smoking, warmth-giving flames of the bonfire. The Russians, however, were right at their heels and it was necessary to think of some way of saving their hides. This was the reason why, in retreating, they had taken the villagers along with them.

Old men, women and children were digging the hardfrozen earth. An Ober-Corporal, sitting with his back to the fire and holding a tommy gun between his knees, was watching them. In order to strike any one of them who might be remiss in his task, it was necessary to stand out there in the cold at the mercy of a driving wind. The Ober-Corporal preferred the comforts of a fire. His first shot was a warning, the second—punishment.

What were these Russian people of ours thinking of at the moment, what sufferings were they undergoing? Perhaps, in a rage of anger, they were cursing themselves for not giving themselves up to the flame together with their huts when these beasts had burst into the village. Or, may be stupefied by exhaustion, they desired only a swift and easy death. Could there be any measure

to the torments they were being called on to endure? Could there be any words comparable to those which they were muttering with their pale bloodless lips?

Or, possibly, they simply wanted to save their lives at any price, forgetting the sacred, lofty pride of the Soviet man? These old men, women, weak in spirit, what could they be expected to do?

Far beyond the trenches, German sappers were cautiously laying mines refilling the holes with snow, they were careful to obliterate all traces, using brooms made of fir-tree branches for the purpose.

The white, shell-like crust of this, snow-covered field with its hidden layer of death-dealing explosives, looked up indifferently at the winter sun.

The Germans were thus well prepared for the contingency of a sudden attack.

Towards evening the prisoners were herded together into an enclosure surrounded by a bared wire fence.

The icy green moon had scarcely emerged from behind a bank of grey clouds when the rat-tat of machine-guns was heard at the edge of the forest and a line of Russian soldiers, invisible in white camouflage caps, approached the German-camp.

Shells began to drop one after another on the German positions. The soldiers who had been standing watch over the Russian prisoners fell to

the ground and began to crawl on their bellies toward the trenches.

It was clear to our Russian people now that rescue was near and that they could make a dash for the forest and save their lives there, hiding in the snowdrifts until the battle should end. And people began to run toward the forest.

Suddenly, however, a thunderous cheer rang out, formidable, exultant, cries that seemed to express in one voice the will of many. These were the shouts of the Russian soldiers who had risen to their feet to go into attack.

And although no one uttered the word the Russian prisoners stopped in their tracks as if they had heard the command "Halt!" They gazed with horror at the snow-covered field, stretching before the line of trenches, filled with its deadly load of death-dealing metal. And again no one uttered the word for what followed. No one appealed to his fellow prisoners to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their rescuers. At first one ran ahead, to that field of death, then another, a third... They fell, smitten by the bullets of the German soldiers, but some of them succeeded in running, others, wounded and bleeding, in crawling, to the invisible, awful boundary.

Pillars of black earth were thrown up in the air as the mines began to explode. And darting in between these pillars our soldiers advanced across the field like avenging spirits in their bil-

lowing white caps, with guns in their hands, bayonets held tautly erect.

By midnight everything was over.

The Commander gathered his men together and, looking at the snowy field with its gaping black wounds from the mine explosions, bathed in moonlight, he bared his head and said:

"Comrades, you have all seen how people live in our country. You know what sort of people our mothers, fathers, sisters are. Where also in world are such people to be found? Will not give the enemy a moment's respite. I know, comrades, that there is a limit to the power of endurance and that it is impossible for us to pursue the enemy without stopping for a rest. But it is not I who ask this of you—it is they who bid you." And the commander pointed to the snow-covered field. "What shall our answer be, comrades!"

And the soldiers looked with exultation at the youthful face of their Commander whose bared head was covered with silvery hoar-frost they too bared their heads, and standing at attention, tion, froze into a formidable silence. Then, without a single word of command, the detachment broke rank to continue their advance. They tore along across the snow-fields in their white capes, like invisible avengers.

LOVE CONQUERS

His tattered flying-suit, speaking of many an open-air camp-fire night, hung in loose folds on the gaunt figure of Captain Peter Zhavoronkov. An unkempt red beard and deep lines which the accumulated dirt of many days' travelling had etched into his face added many years to his appearance.

In March he had landed behind enemy lines on a parachute, to carry out a diversive assignment, and now, when the snow was beginning to melt and rivulets were running hither and thither, it was very difficult for him to make his way back through the forest plodding along in his water-logged wool-felt boots. At first he travelled only at night and spent the day lying concealed in convenient hollows. But now, afraid of becoming exhausted through lack of food, he pushed on by day as well.

The Captain had carried out his assignment. The only thing that now remained for him to do was to seek out the meteorologist—and—radio-operator who had landed about two months ago on a parachute in these regions.

"Assignment accomplished!" How simple it all sounded now. But the Captain had lost

exactly 2 stone 10 lbs., in weight on this undertaking, and that for a man who had never carried an ounce of surplus flesh.

For the last four days he had eaten practically nothing. Trudging through the soggy woods, his famished eyes kept wandering toward the white trunks of the birches, the bark of which, as he knew, could be ground, boiled in his empty explosive container, and later eaten in the form of bitter porridge, which reminded one of nothing so much as wood both in smell and flavour.

Becoming reflective in his moments of greatest difficulty, the Captain would start up a conversation with himself as though he were addressing a brave and worthy travelling companion.

"In view of the extremity of the circumstances" mused the Captain, "You might push on through the woods and reach the highway. This, incidentally, would offer an opportunity for a change of footgear. Generally speaking, however, raids on isolated German transports which play no part in the main issue only serve to indicate your sorry plight. As the saying goes, "the pangs of hunger are drowning out the voice of reason in you." Accustomed to utter solitude for long periods, the Captain could go on arguing with himself to the point of fatigue or until he himself admitted that he was beginning to talk nonsense.

It seemed to the Captain that this other self of his, his alter ego in these soliloquies, was not a bad fellow at all—an understanding, amiable and

sympathetic chap. It was at only rare moments that the Captain would curtly remark to his other self—"It's all well and good chattering, but keep your eyes skinned." This brusque remark would always be forthcoming at the sound of the slightest rustle in the forest or at the sight of an old, thawing skill track crusted at its edges.

The Captain's opinion of his other self, however, as a sympathetic and understanding fellow could hardly be said to have been shared by his comrades. In his detachment the Captain had no reputation of too likeable a man. Himself taciturn and reserved, he lacked the knack of evoking confidences in others. Whenever new 'chute jumpers were assigned to his group for their first trip, the Captain could find no words of affection or cheer for them, on the contrary he seemed to want, to alarm them by his references to all manner of peril that lay in store for them; such occasions served to arouse his latent powers of eloquence.

Sometimes, just before the plane was ready to take off, he would order one of the group to get out.

"Coward," he would shout, "I don't need the likes of you!" and slam the trapdoor.

Returning from an assignment, the Captain always endeavoured to avoid any rapturous meetings. Wriggling out of somebody's embraces, he would impatiently mutter:

"I've got to have a shave; I've mug like a

porcupine", and would hurriedly go off to his quarters.

He was not fond of talking about his work behind the German lines and confined himself to reporting to his chief. He would loll about on his cot, resting after a trip across the lines, and show up for dinner in a sullen, sluggish mien.

"A glum sort of chap" was what was said of him, "a bore."

At one time a rumour began to get about that seemed to offer good grounds for explaining the Captain's conduct. The version was that in the very first days of the war the Captain's family had been slaughtered by the Germans. When this talk came to his ears, the Captain appeared in the mess-room bearing a letter in his hands. In pauses while eating the soup, he informed his mess-companion of the contents of the letter propped against the plate:

....."From my wife. Mother-in-law's arrived from Ryazen, going to live with us now," and added a rather crude boast "I managed to get hold of a swell apartment, with gas and everything."

All the men at table looked at each other meaningly, some with disappointment because they had wanted to believe that the Captain's aloofness was the result of misfortune that had befallen him. And now it seemed that nothing of the kind had happened.

Besides all this, the Captain had an antipathy for violins. The sound of the bow being drawn across the strings had the same effect on him that the scraping of a knife on glass has for others.

A bare, dripping forest. Swampy soil, hollows filled with slimy water, spongy, soggy snow. It was dull business for a solitary, tired, utterly spent person to tramp through such a wilderness.

But the Captain purposely chose just such a path, for it was highly improbable that he would encounter any Germans in such desolate country. The more dreary and deserted became the places through which he trudged, the firmer grew his stride.

The only cloud on his horizon was the hunger which had begun to gnaw at him. At times the Captain felt that his eye-sight was failing him. He would stop, rub his eyes and, when that failed to remedy matters, would take to beating his cheeks with his mittened fists in an attempt to restore blood circulation.

Clambering into a ravine, the Captain bent over a tiny cascade trickling over the icy fringe of the slope and began to drink, sensible of the sickening flat taste of thawing snow. But he went on drinking, even though he was really not thirsty, but simply to fill the gnawing cavity in his stomach.

It was growing dark. Attenuated shadows lay on the sparse wet snow. The air grew chilly. Puddles were freezing over, and the ice crunched

loudly underfoot. The dripping branches were now hushed in icy silence but when the Captain brushed them aside with his hand, they issued a tinkling sound. However hard the Captain tried to render his movements noiseless, each step was accompanied by the crunch of ice and tinkle of icicled branches.

The moon had risen and the forest was all sparkle. Shimmering in the moonlight, innumerable icicles and frozen pools of water glowed with a cold fire, like the pilasters in the "Palace of Soviets" Station of the Moscow Metro.

According to the Captain's reckoning, the radio-operator should be somewhere in the vicinity. He could hardly be expected, however, to find the latter at once since this "Vicinity" meant an area three miles square. And, besides, the radio-operator had probably rigged up a place of hiding as well concealed as a bear's den.

He was certainly not going to walk about yelling in the forest "Hey, Tovarisch! Where are you?"

The Captain was making his way through a thick clump of trees lit up by the bright moonlight; in the chill of the night air his felt boots had become so heavy and stiff that they felt like lead.

He was irritated at the radio-operator for being so hard to find but he would have been even more proved had he succeeded in finding the latter at once.

Stumbling over a fallen branch buried under the hardened crust of snow, the Captain lost his footing and fell.

Just as he was about to rise, his hands thrust in the snow to support himself, he heard the metallic click of a pistol behind his back.

"Halt," someone said in German, in a low voice, "Handehoch !"

The Captain's behaviour at this juncture, however, was very strange. Without turning around, he occupied himself in rubbing his bruised knees. When the whisper "Hande hoch !" was repeated, he designed to look around and said scornfully:

"When a man is lying down, what's all the Hoching for?" You should have pounced on me at once and let me have it with your pistol, after first wrapping it in your cap to muffle the shot. And besides that, would a Bosche shout "Hande hoch !" in a voice loud enough for his neighbour to hear and come to his aid, if necessary. It's been drilled and drilled into you, but what's the good of it all..." and with this, the Captain got to his feet. He gave the pass-word in a voice so low, however, that it died on his lips; he acknowledged the answer with a nod of his head and slipping the safety catch of the blue "Zauer" which had been lying on his knee he put the pistol back into his pocket.

"And yet you were holding your gun in your hands !"

The Captain cast on angry glance at the radio-operator.

"And what did you think, that I was going to rely solely on your wisdom?" And, changing the subject, he impatiently demanded: "Get going, show me where you've fitted up."

"Follow me," said the radio-operator, kneeling in the snow in an awkward pose, "I'll crawl ahead."

"Why crawl, it's absolutely safe here in the forest."

"I've frozen one of my feet," explained the radio-operator in a quiet voice," and it's very painful."

The Captain gave an angry grunt and set out behind the figure moving ahead on all fours. Instead of compassion for the radio-operator's slight, the Captain felt only a seething irritation: how was it possible for a person to sink so low as to freeze one of his limbs? Putting aside the problem how he was to get the crippled radio-operator out of this wild spot, he gruffly asked:

"What did you do, run about barefoot?"

"There was an awful wind when we jumped out of the plane and I lost one of my felt boots while I was still in the air."

"Smart feller! Good job! you didn't lose your trousers into the bargain!" and giving full vent to his wrath, he added: "Chump! Try to get out of this spot now with you on my hands?"

The radio-operator came to a stop with hands propped in the snow and spoke up in a voice that betrayed incensed feelings:

"Tovarisch Captain, I have no intention of leaving this place. Just leave me enough provisions and you can go on yourself. When my foot heals, I'll get out of here on my own."

"Is that so? and pray tell me, who is going to open a sanatorium here for you? The Germans have already charted the co-ordinations of your radio, is that clear?" And leaning down, the Captain suddenly asked in a disturbed voice:

"Wait a second, what's your name, your face looks familiar to me."

"Mikhailova, Nina Mikhailova."

"When—ew—ew! Let out the captain who did not know whether to be embarrassed or offended. "Well, let it go at that, We'll straighten things out somehow." And then he inquired with the utmost courtesy, "Can I help you in any way?"

The girl ignored this polite gesture and crawled ahead, floundering elbow-deep in the snow.

Then Captain's irritation gave way to quite another feeling, less definite but much more disturbing. He recalled this Mikhailova girl now, she had been one of the students back at the base. From the very first she somehow aroused a feeling of hostility in him, even of wrathful indignation. He could not for the life of him under-

stand what she was doing in such a place—a tall, good-looking girl, even beautiful, her head held proudly erect, with vivid, generous but finely chiselled lips from which it was hard to tear your eyes when she spoke.

She had an annoying way of looking you straight in the eyes, unpleasant not because her eyes were so disagreeable to look at, on the contrary, they were quite charming—large, quizzical and serene with gold-flecked iris about the pupils. The only fault he had to find with them was that he could not endure their steady glance. And the girl had noticed that.

Another thing that troubled him was the way she wore her hair, letting it fall down over the collar of her regulation coat. Her hair was thick and luxuriant, shimmering with the same golden flecks as the iris in her eyes.

How many times the Captain had reprimanded her:

"Tuck in your tresses. Military uniform isn't a masquerade costume."

Nina Mikmailova was a very diligent student; staying on after classes were over, she would come up to the Captain with questions that were quite intelligent. He, however, was firmly convinced that his knowledge would never stand her in any stead and confined himself to very brief, abrupt answers, all the while keeping his eyes on the clock.

The chief of the training school had madea remark to the Captain for paying so little attention to Mikhailova.

"She is a fine girl, you must admit."

"Fine for family life," and here the Captain asserted with unexpected fervour and passion": You must understand, Tovarisch chief, that people who do the sort of work we do can't be bothered with any sort of extra baggage. Circumstances may demand that we do away with ourselves. And what about her? Would she be capable of doing that? Why, she would begin to feel sorry for herself! A girl like that could never.." and the Captain floundered.

As a means of getting rid of Mikhailova, he had her transferred to the radio-operator's group.

The 'chute jumpers' school was quartered in one of the rest homes situated not far outside of Moscow. The sprawling glass-enclosed verandas, the red carpets indoors, the highly polished parquet-floors and furniture—the whole atmosphere of the place, which had not yet lost the charm of pre-war life, disposed its occupants for entertainment in the evenings. Some one would sit down at the piano and this was the signal for dancing to begin. If it had not been for the military uniforms, one would think that this was the usual week-end crowd at one of the Moscow suburban rest homes.

Anti-aircraft guns were barking and searchlights fingered the sky with their stiff, white

tentacles but if one so desired—such things could be forgotten for the moment.

Once, after classes were over, Mikhailova was in the living room sitting on a davenport with her legs tucked under and a book in her hands. She was reading by the light of a floor lamp, which had a huge shade set on a thick mahogany base. The appearance of this girl with her lovely, tranquil face, her relaxed pose, her gold-flecked hair hanging down her back, her tapering, white fingers, seemed entirely out of keeping with the technique of laying explosives or of striking sharp blows at prickly clay-besmattered undergrowth with a rubber-handled knife.

When Mikhailova noticed the Captain come into the living room, she jumped up and stood at attention just as was required in the presence of a Senior officer.

Zhavoronkov passed on with a curt nod of the head. Once again he was seething with wrathful indignation. This fine, well-knit figure of a man, whose tanned, taut face, despite its tired and sombre look, betrayed the sportsman, was very exacting to himself.

German sapper troops had mined the country roads leading to the main highway. That night Zhavoronkov used his small-calibre pistol, which went off almost inaudibly, to remove the man left on duty at the fork of the roads, and appropriating the latter's lantern, took up his watch of the highway.

He signalled the cars coming along the highway, with red and green flashes. When a column of tanks appeared, however, he blocked the turn to the highway and flashed a green light in the direction of the country by the road which had been mined.

Then, when he came upon a cable leading to staff head-quarters, he cut it and began to wait. The German signal's man soon appeared on the spot accompanied by a detachment of tommy gunners. After repairing the damage, they all left. As soon as they had gone, Zhavoronkov ripped off the insulation from the cable and placed it on the ground. His reckoning proved correct. Thinking the poor audibility to be due to a mere leak in the line, the signal's man appeared this time without his escort and it was an easy job for the Captain to bayonet him. Rolling up the cable, he threw it into a haystack nearby and set fire to it.

He clambered upon the roof of a German blindage. He had no grenades with which to blow up the dugout so he opened his cartridge case and began to drop handfuls of bullets down the chimney. When the occupants of the blindage began to run for their lives he potted the one after another with his tommy gun.

The Captain preferred to work on his own. He had every right to act thus. The death of his wife and child had left a cold, gnawing ache in his heart. They had been crushed to bits by the

iron treads of German tanks on June 22 in a small frontier village.

The Captain was rather ashamed of his grief. The memory of what had happened tormented him and he did not want his misfortune to be considered the reason for his fearlessness. That was why he deliberately deceived his comrades-in-arms. He kept telling himself: my wife and child have not been killed, they are alive. I am not a petty person. I'm made of the same sort of stuff as everyone else is. I must go on fighting the enemy and do it quietly, with no fuss or feathers." And there was really no pettiness in his nature. He scorned death. The Germans themselves had done their best to turn him into an efficient, cool and calculating soldier. Every fibre of his being was concentrated on the desire for revenge. Among the combatants of war today are to be seen many such people—proud, sorrowful, strong, whose very hearts are bleeding.

Oh, my people, so good, so kind and gay! what misfortune is it that has so embittered you?

And now, walking behind the crawling figure of the radio-operator, the Captain tried to banish all thoughts that might interfere with the problem he had before him. The girl, crippled by her frozen foot, was not much better off than a wounded soldier. And, of course, she was counting on his help. She could not be expected to know that he was nearly all in himself.

Ought he to tell her everything? No, better not, it would be wiser to somehow make her muster what strength she could and, then, perhaps, the two of them could manage.

The turbulent waters of many a spring and autumn had washed away something like a niche in the sloping side of a ravine. It was overhung by a matting of hornv roots, some thin as rope and others twisted and gnarled to resemble rusty coils of hawser. The niche was roofed over with a sheet of ice and during the day light penetrated through this icy dome as it does into a glass-enclosed green-house. It was clean and dry inside, with fir-tree branches spread underfoot. A square box holding the radio set, a sleeping bag and a pair of skis against the wall made up the furnishings.

"A cozy little cave you have," remarked the Captain. And slapping his hand against the fir carpet, he added: "Sit down and let me have a look at your foot."

"What for?" The girl asked in anger tinged with amazement.

"Come along, show me your foot. I must see in what sort of a state it is."

"But you are not a doctor and besides..."

"Look here!" retorted the Captain, "let's come to an understanding right here and now,—less talk from you."

"Oh! it hurts!"

"Don't squeal," was the Captain's comforting retort, and he proceeded to examine her foot, so swollen that the bluish skin was stretched to a gloss over the bone.

"But I can't bear it any longer."

"Just be patient for a minute," said the Captain, removing his woollen muffler.

"I don't need your muffler."

"You think a smelly sock is better?"

"It's not smelly, it's clean."

"Listen here," the Captain admonished for the second time, "Don't bother me with silly talk. Have you a rope?"

"No."

The Captain put his hand up to the twisted matting of tree roots that hung overhead, tore off a thin piece of root, and tied it around the muffler with which he had bound her swollen foot. He could not refrain from adding:

"It holds very well."

He then dragged the skis out of the shelter and seemed to be busy rigging something up with the aid of his rubber-handled knife. After this was done, he came in, took up the radio set and said:

"We can start now."

"You want to pull me along on skis?"

"I must admit that I don't feel any great desire to do so, but there's no other way out."

"Well, I suppose there is no other choice for me."

"Now you're talking sense," agreed the Captain.

"Oh, yes! Have you anything in the way of food with you?"

"Here," said the girl and offered him a broken piece of rusk which she extricated from one of her pockets.

"Not very much."

"That's all that I have left. For several days now I haven't..."

"Of course," said the Captain, "other people usually eat their rusks first and leave their chocolate for a rainy day."

"You can keep your chocolate to yourself."

"I had no intention of offering it to you," and with that the Captain went outside, bending under the weight of the radio.

After an hour's going, he saw that matters were in a bad way. Even though the girl tried to help him by pushing the ski-sleigh along with her hands, his strength was rapidly failing. His legs were shaky and his heart was hammering so that it seemed to stick in his throat.

"If I tell her that I'm absolutely done in, she'll go off into a panic. And if I go on playing the gallant rescuer, things will come to a sorry end."

The Captain looked at his watch and said:

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to have something hot to drink."

"Have you any vodka?"

"Never mind," said the Captain, "Sit still, I won't give you any vodka anyhow."

He dug a hollow in the snow, using a stick to fashion something like a chimney hole which he screened with twigs and snow. This would serve to filter the smoke and render it invisible. Breaking off dry branches and twigs from the trees the Captain placed them in the hollow, took a tiny silk pouch out of his pocket, poured out a handful of coarse gunpowder on the dry branches and touched it off with a match.

The fire was soon crackling, flames licking at the branches. Placing an empty explosive container on the fire, the Captain threw icicles and lumps of ice into it and while waiting for them to melt he took the piece of rusk, wrapped it in a handkerchief and, putting it on a stump, began to beat it with the handle of his knife. When he had finished this operation, he poured the crumbs into the boiling water and began to stir it. He then lifted the container out of the fire, and placed it in the snow to cool.

"Taste good?" asked the girl.

"Almost as good as coffee," answered the Captain and proferred her some of the brownish liquid.

"I can do without, don't bother," she said.

"You'll have plenty of opportunity to do without," the Captain replied. "Don't waste time quibbling now. Drink it."

Towards evening he succeeded in killing an old rook with the aid of a stick.

"Do you mean to say you are going to eat a crow?" said the girl.

"It's not a crow, it's a rook," retorted the Captain.

He broiled the bird over the fire.

"Want some?" and he offered the girl half of the browned bird.

"Not for anything in the world," she answered with a shiver of repugnance.

The Captain hesitated for a moment, and then thoughtfully remarked:

"I suppose it's the fairest thing to do," and proceeded to devour the whole bird.

Lighting a cigarette, he seemed more cheerful and turned to the girl with a query.

"Well, how's the foot?"

"I think I might be able to walk a bit now," she said.

"Just put that idea out of your head."

The whole night long the Captain dragged the skisleigh through the forest and the girl lay back, dozing. At dawn he brought the sleigh to a halt near a gully.

A huge pine tree, uprooted by a storm, lay on the ground. There was a hollow under it where the roots had been torn up and after the Captain had dug the snow out of this pit, he spread a tent blanket over branches placed at the bottom.

"Do you want to sleep?" asked the girl, awaking from the doze into which she had fallen.

"Just an hour's nap, nothing more," said the Captain, "I haven't slept so long that I've forgotten how it's done."

The girl began to clamber out of her sleeping bag.

"What's that for?" asked the Captain, getting up. The girl came up to him and said:

"I'll lie down with you, it'll be warmer that way. We'll cover ourselves with the sleeping bag."

"But look here—..." said the Captain.

"Shift up a bit," was the girl's answer. "You don't want me to lie on the snow, do you? ... Aren't you comfortable".

"Tuck in your hair, otherwise it tickles my nose and makes me want to sneeze, and besides..."

"If you want to sleep, go ahead and sleep. My hair isn't bothering you in the least."

"But it is..." said the Captain with noticeable lack of conviction, however, and in an instant he was asleep.

The trickle of thawing snow and the drip-drop of melting icicles. Shadows of clouds moved across the snow like wisps of smoke.

The Captain slept on, his fist clenched against his lips, a tired, harassed look on his face. The girl leaned over him and very cautiously put her hand under his head. Heavy drops of water were falling on the Captain's face from the branches

arched over the hollow. The girl freed her hand and put up her palm to shield his face. When the drops had accumulated in her cupped palm, she would carefully fling the water aside.

Finally the Captain awoke, sat up and began to rub the palms of his hands over his face.

"You have a grey streak here," said the girl. "Did it turn grey after that incident?"

"What incident?" asked the Captain, straightening up.

"Oh, when they wanted to shoot you."

"I can't remember," said the Captain with a yawn. The yawn was feigned, he simply didn't want to think of that particular incident.

This was how it had happened. In August the Captain had blown up a large German amunition dump. He had suffered contusion and been rather severely burned as a result of the explosion and had been picked up with wounded German soldiers and taken to a German field hospital. There he spent three weeks. Prior to their evacuation farther behind the lines the wounded were examined by a special commission. The Captain, together with a group of German soldiers simulating illness, was sentenced to be shot. The punishment was reprieved at the last minute, however and they were sent on transport planes to a place near Yelna. Here they were driven into a "psychic" attack on the Russians, taking their places behind a company of tommy gunners. The Captain had been sounded by his own people,

who later took him off the battlefield and this time he spent another two weeks in a Soviet hospital.

He had no desire now to mull over the detail of this adventure. With the aim of cutting the conversation short, he put a question to the girl in a brusque, pertinacious tone.

"The foot's still hurting?"

"I told you that I can walk on alone," the girl answered with obvious irritation.

"Never mind, get into the sleigh. I'll have you running races, when the time comes for it."

The Captain harnessed himself in and began to trudge along through the thawing snow.

Rain, which turned to snow and back to a drizzle again, added to the misery of the going. It was impossible to keep a firm footing. The Captain frequently fell into hollows and ruts filled with slushy snow. It was a dull, dismal day. The Captain was filled with anxiety as to whether he would be able to cross the river which was probably already covered with water over the layer of ice.

Just then they came upon a horse lying in the road, the sole remains of some encounter which had taken place here.

The Captain squatted down beside the dead animal and took out his rubber-handled knife.

"Do you know," said the girl, getting up in the sleigh, "you make such a neat job of everything you do that I don't even mind watching you."

"That's because you want to eat," the Captain answered quietly.

He broiled thin slices of the meat over the fire on the prongs of the radio antennae and manipulating them the much as you would a spit.

"Delicious!" said the girl in astonishment when she tried the first bite.

"I should think so," retorted the Captain, "broiled horse meat is even better than beaf."

"I'll have a look around, and you stay here for a while," he said when they had finished their brief meal.

"All right," the girl agreed. "Perhaps it sounds funny to you, but it's hard for me to stay on alone now. I've gotten used to our being together already."

"Now, now. Let's have none of that nonsense," said the Captain.

His words were, however, rather addressed to himself, since it was he who was embarrassed, and not the girl.

Dusk had fallen by the time he returned from his scouting venture.

The girl was sitting in the sleigh, holding her pistol on her knees. Catching sight of him, she smiled and got up.

"Keep your seat," said the Captain in the voice he reserved for students who invariably rose to their feet at his appearance. He lighted up and looking at the girl with some apprehension, he said:

"A pretty kettle of fish. The Germans have got up an aerodrome not far from here."

"Well and what of it?" asked the girl.

"Nothing," answered the Captain. "It's been very cleverly done." Then he added in a serious voice: "Is your transmitter working?"

"Do you want to establish contact?" asked the girl with unmistakable joy in her voice.

"Precisely," confirmed the Captain.

Mikhailova took off her fur cap and donned the ear phones. Within a few minutes she was already asking what she was to transmit. The Captain knelt down beside her. Beating his fist against the palm of his hand, he gave her the following message:

"To put matters briefly—our chart is so water-soaked that I cannot determine the exact location of the aerodrome. I am giving its co-ordinates by compass. In view of the low cloud-banks, linear orientations will not be visible. Co-ordinates can, therefore, be determined by using our radio on a wave length of...What's your wave length? Let them have it."

The girl removed her ear phones and with a beaming face turned to the Captain.

But the Captain, occupied in rolling another cigarette, did not even deign to raise his eyes.

"Here's what we have to do now," he said curtly. "I'm taking the radio set and going over there." He waved his hand in a vague direction and went on as if to explain: "In order to be

nearer the scene of action. And you will have to go as best you can, alone. When it gets properly dark, go on down to the river. The ice is very thin so take some sort of rod or pole with you—it'll be boundly should you fall through. After you've crossed over, crawl along to Malinovki, about two miles further, and someone will meet you there.

"Khoroscho—very well," said the girl, "But you won't get the radio."

"Now, now," said the Captain, "Drop that."

"I am responsible for the radio, and I stick to it."

"In the form of a free supplement!" said the Captain in a grunt. And, losing his temper, he said loudly: "I order you to do it."

"You know, Captain, that any command of yours will be obeyed. You have no right, however, to take the radio from me."

"But, after all, you must understand," said the radio-operator.

"But, after all, you must understand," said the Captain in an outburst of wrath.

"I understand perfectly," said Mikhailova very calmly. This assignment concerns me and only me." And looking the Captain straight in the eyes, she went on angrily:

"You are the one who is all excited and meddling in other people's affairs."

The Captain turned around very abruptly at those words and looked at Mikhailova. He wanted

to say something rude and snappish, but checked himself and with an obvious effort at controlling his temper, he stated:

"All right, go ahead and do what you want," and then added, unable to forego the chance of crying quits:

"You couldn't think of this yourself, and now..." Mikhailova scornfully laughed:

"I am very grateful to you, Captain, for the idea."

The Captain slipped back his cuff to glance at his watch.

"What are you sitting here for, wasting time?"

Mikhailova took up the straps of the sleigh, went on for a few steps and then turned around:

"Do Svidaniya, Captain!"

"Move on, move on," grunted that personage and took his way toward the river.

A cloudy murk lay over the ground, the air was clammy with dampness and all around could be heard the trickling of tiny rivulets which even the chill of the night air failed to quiet. It is particularly unpleasant to die in such weather. But then, it is equally unpleasant to die in any other kind of weather.

If, three months ago, Nina Mikhailova had read a story in which the hero and heroine had met with just such adventure, her eyes would probably have lit up with a dreamy expression; curled up under a warm blanket, she would have imagined herself in the heroine's place; at the end

of the story, however, she would most certainly have saved the haughty hero's life to avenge him for all his injuries and insults. And then he would have fallen in love with her, and she would have ignored all his attentions.

The night she had told her father of her intention to study in the school for 'chute troops', she had no idea that this work would place almost inhuman strain upon her strength, that you had to be able to sleep in the mud, to go without food, to freeze in the cold, and to pine in solitude. And if someone had explained this in all its manifold details to her, she would have simply asked:

"But other people stand it, don't they?"

"And what if you are killed?"

"But not everyone is killed."

"And if they torture you?"

She would have thought for a moment and then quietly answered:

"I am not sure how I would conduct myself. But no matter what I did, I would never betray anything. You know that yourself."

When her father finally understood her intentions, he let his head drop and brought out in a hoarse voice that seemed quite unlike the one she was accustomed to:

"It will be very hard for your mother and me now, very hard."

"Dad," she said in a voice ringing with conviction, "Daddy just try to understand, I can't stay behind."

Her father lifted his head and she grew almost frightened. He seemed to look so weary and old all of a sudden.

"I understand," he said. "Well, it would be still worse if I had a daughter who did not want to do such things."

The next morning they told her mother that Nina was to enter a course for military telephone operators.

Her mother grew pale at the news, but, trying not to show her anxiety, she simply said:

"Be careful, my child."

At the courses Mikhailova proved herself to be a very apt and diligent student but this did not prevent her from worrying whenever an exam. was due, just as she used to worry over tests in school. She was overjoyed when she saw her name posted in an order where not only the number of words she had transmitted but her general literacy had come in for praise. The Captain, however, had been right. When she had found herself alone in this forest during those wild, cold, pitch-dark nights, she had cried a little at first and had eaten her stock of chocolate. But she transmitted her messages regularly, and even though she was sometimes consumed by a desire to add something of her own to these massages so that things would not be seen quite so forlorn, she overcame her longing and was sparing of the radio battery.

And now, making her way toward the aerodrome, she was amazed at how simple it had all

been. There she was crawling over the wet snow, soaked to the skin, and with a frost-bitten foot. Before, whenever she had had a touch of gripe, her father had sat at her bedside and read aloud to her so that she would not tire her eyes. Her mother would warm the thermometer between her palms, all the time with a most solicitious expression on her face, for she knew that her daughter disliked putting the chilly piece of glass under her arm. Whenever the telephone would ring, her mother would hasten to answer and in an anxious whisper would say "She is ill." And her father muffled the telephone bell with some paper so that it would not disturb his daughter. And now, if the Germans succeeded in quickly locating the radio station, Nina Mikhailova would be killed.

They would kill her, such a fine, lovely, amiable, and even, perhaps, talented girl. And she would be left lying in the wet, revolting snow. She recalled that she was wearing a fur flying-suit. The Germans would most likely strip her of it. And she was filled with horror, imagining herself lying naked in the dirty, thawing snow. And the soldiers would look at her naked body with their abominable eyes.

The forest she was in resembled the grove near the Moscow suburb of Kratovo, where she had spent the summer months. The same kind of trees as in Kratovo, and the same as those in the Pioneer Camp she had spent her vacations

as a child. And a hammock had been fastened to just such twin pines as these.

When Dina had carved her name on the bark of a birch tree like that one over there, she had been angry with him for spoiling the tree and had refused to talk to him. And he had walked on after her, looking at her with his sad and hence lovely eyes. Afterwards, when they had made up, he had said that he wanted to kiss her. She had closed her eyes and said plaintively "Only not on the lips." And he had been so wrought up that he had kissed her on the chin.

She was very fond of pretty clothes. Even when she had been delegated to make a report somewhere, she had donned one of her loveliest frocks. The fellows in the school had asked her "why all the glad rags?

"Why not?" she said. "Why can't I be well dressed and make a report at the same time?"

Looking at herself in the mirror, she had thought:

"I'm a lucky girl. It is really nice to be nice looking."

And here she was now, crawling along the ground, dirty, wet, her eyes and ears strained for the slightest sound, dragging her swollen, aching foot. "Well, suppose they do kill me. What of it? They've killed Dimka and many other splendid fellows. And now it's my turn. I'm no better than they."

Snow was falling, puddles squelched underfoot. Dank snow lay in slushy heaps at the bottom of gullies and ravines. The girl crawled on, painfully but steadily. She would rest for a moment, lying on the wet ground, her hand crooked under her head. She was too weak to crawl to a spot and she would only pause to rest when she felt that she was unable to move another inch.

And once more she began to creep on, with the stubborn tenacity of a wounded person making his way to a first-aid-station where somebody will see to it that the flow of blood from the wounds will be stopped, will give him something to drink and where he will find blissful tranquillity and attention.

The damp fog took on the blackness of the surrounding night. Somewhere in the heavens huge ships were sailing by. The navigator of the flagship was leaning back in his armchair, his eyes half-closed, straining his ears to catch the sound that he was waiting for amidst. The crackling and hissing that could be heard through the megaphone but the signals of the radio-operator that he was trying to locate were not forthcoming.

The pilots, up ahead in their cabin and the gunner-radio-operator were listening just as intently to the wheezing and whistling of the megaphone but there were no signals to be heard. Propellers were slashing the black sky, the ships

ploughed their way through the murky night air and still there were no signals to be heard.

And suddenly, the sounds of cautions, tentative signals calling into the atmosphere could be distinguished through the sounds and voices in the megaphone. The huge ships, following this fragile, spidery thread of dots and dashes turned about on their course; their heavy engines roaring, they winged through the masses of clouds, and the repeated calls of the radio somewhere down below became ever clearer and nearer. Kindred as the chirp of a cricket, as the swish of ripe wheat ears in the steppe wind, as the rustle of autumn leaves against a window pane, these signals calling into the ether were the lodestar for these mighty ships of steel sailing through the sky.

The squadron Commander, the pilots, Gunner-radiomen and mechanics—and Nina Mikhailova as well—all knew that the entire load of bombs was to be hurled down upon that kindred, calling cry of the radio. For it designated the place where the Germans had concealed an aerodrome.

Nina Mikhailova was crouched in a hollow, knee-deep in black, slimy water, and, leaning over the radio, she was methodically tapping away at the transmitter key.

A heavy sky hung overhead. But it was empty and absolutely silent. Her injured foot had grown quite numb in the oze at the bottom

of the hollow, her back was beginning to ache, her temples were throbbing and the pain seemed to press in like an iron vise. She was shivering with cold. When she put her hand up to mouth she felt that her lips were feverish and perched. "I've probably caught a cold," she thought listlessly. "It doesn't matter, though, now."

At times it seemed to her that she was losing consciousness. She opened her eyes and, frightened, began to listen intently. She could hear the ringing, steady signals in the ear phones. Why, then, her hand had been involuntarily been tapping at the key all the time.

"That's perfect discipline for you. It's a good thing that I came here, and not the Captain. His hand would never have gone on tapping of its own accord. If I hadn't come here, I'd be in Malinovki by now, and, perhaps, someone would have given me a warm fur coat...a stove would be burning there...and everything would be different. And not there will never be anything...It's strange, here I am lying in the snow and thinking. And over there somewhere is Moscow. People, lots of them there. And no one knows that I am here, lying in the snow. Anyhow, I really am a plucky person. Perhaps I might even be called brave. After all, I'm not afraid. No, that's not really so, it's only because I'm in such pain that I'm not afraid... If they would only hurry... Why are they so long in

coming? Can't they understand that I can't stand much more of this?"

With a sob, she lay back on the slope of the hollow and turning on her side, continued to tap out her signals holding the key in the palm of her hand. Now she could clearly see the immense, heavy sky stretching overhead. Suddenly fiery tongues of searchlights began to lick at the huge black void and the faint throb of steel ships could be heard far in the distance. Nina, gulping down her tears, uttered in a whisper:

"My own, my dear ones. At last you have come for me. It's so hard for me here." And suddenly she became frightened. What if she had tapped out those words instead of her signal calls? What would they think of her?

She sat up and began to tap out her signals slowly, precisely, repeating the code aloud to herself so that there would be no chance of confusing it with the words running through her mind. The drone of the motors was drawing nearer and nearer. The black sky seemed to be alive with sound, sliding down into the infinite like an avalanche of stone.

Anti-aircraft guns opened fire.

"Aha! you don't like it, do you?"

Nina got to her feet. She felt no pain whatever now. She was tapping away at the key with all the strength she possessed, as though she were wrestling cries of "Beat them, beat them!" from the radio instead of calling signals.

The first bomb cleaved the pitch—dark sky and hit the ground with terrific impact. Mikhailova was flung on her back by the terrific air blast that followed the explosion. Flames were reflected in splotches of orange on the rippling surface of the pools. The ground shuddered and rocked as bomb after bomb burst with a muffled roar. The radio set tumbled into the slimy water and the girl made futile attempts to lift it out. Bombs hissed through the air, seeming to be headed, straight for the hollow where she lay.

She handled her head down in her shoulders, screwing her eyes as though to shout out the surroundings. But she could see the flames even through her closed eyelids. A gust of wind that followed one of the explosions hurled an unrooted stake enmeshed in barbed wire into the hollow where she was lying. In the intervals between explosions she could hear sounds of something bursting and cracking on the aerodrome, illuminating the sky with a yellow glow. The murky fog seemed to exhale the fumes of burning petrol.

Soon silence set in, the anti-aircraft guns ceased their noise.

"Of course," she thought with a touch of melancholy. "Now I am alone again."

She tried to get up but her legs...She felt no sensation whatever in them. What had happened? Then she remembered that such things do

happen. Your legs absolutely numb. It was probably a case of contusion, nothing more. She lay back, leaning her cheek against the damp clay, to take a moment's rest. If only a single bomb had fallen on this spot! How simple everything would have been then. And she would have never known the most terrible thing of all.

"No," she told herself suddenly. "Others have been in a worse fix and still managed to get out of it. This cannot happen to me. I won't have it happen."

The sound of an automobile motor could be heard somewhere near, and several times the white, cold beams of its headlights slid along the dark clump of trees; a little while after there was an explosion, but too weak to be that of a bomb and this was followed by the sound of shots being fired and very near the hollow, too.

"They're looking for me. And it's so nice to lie here. Is it really possible that I can't even lie here in quiet?"

She made a move to turn over on her back, but the pain in her leg shot up like a hot iron into her heart. She cried out.

Cold, firm fingers were fumbling at the fastening of her collar.

She opened her eyes.

"Is that you? Have you come for me? said Mikhailova and began to cry.

The Captain wiped the tears from her face with his hand and she closed her eyes again. He gripped the belt of her flying—suit with one hand dragged her up out of the hollow. His other hand hung limp at his side.

The girl was vaguely conscious that the runners of the sleigh were grating along the ground.

It was afterwards that she opened her eyes and saw the Captain. He was sitting on a stump, and holding one end of his leather belt between his teeth, he was wrapping it around his bared arm from which blood was streaming. Raising his eyes to look at Mikhailova, he said:

"Well, how goes it?"

"It doesn't 'go' at all."

"It makes no difference," the Captain said through his clenched teeth, "I'm done for—Haven't an ounce of strength left. Try to get on, it's not much farther."

"And what about you?"

"I'll rest here for a bit."

The Captain made a move as though to get up but instead with a rather sheepish smile, he toppled off the stump and fell to the ground in a dead weight. He was very heavy and the girl was exhausted by the time she had dragged his limp body on to the sleigh. He lay there, very awkwardly, face down but she did not have the strength to turn him over on his back.

She tugged at the straps for a long time until she succeeded in moving the sleigh from

the spot. Each step caused her unbearable pain. But she stubbornly hauled at the harness, and stumbling ahead, dragged the sleigh over the slushy ground.

She was no longer able to comprehend what was going. How much longer could this go on? Why was she standing and not lying, exhausted, on the ground? Leaning back against a tree, she stood thus with her eyes closed, afraid of falling, for she knew that she would be unable to get up again.

She saw how the Captain wriggled on to the ground and then grabbing hold of the cross-bar of the sleigh with his uninjured hand, he rested his head and chest on the bottom of the sleigh, saying in a whisper:

"It'll be easier for you this way."

He crept along on his knee, half-hanging on to the sleigh. At times he lost his hold and then his face would strike the ground. She would then try to shove the sleigh under his chest again and she did not even have the strength to turn aside so as not to have to look at his blackened, battered face.

Then she fell, and again she heard the scraping of the runners against the ground. Afterwards she was conscious of the sound of ice cracking. She was gasping for breath, choking water seemed to close in about her. All this seemed to be taking place in a dream.

She opened her eyes, conscious that someone was staring at her. The Captain was sitting on a bench, looking at her, a gaunt, sallow figure with untidy growth of beard, his hand in a splint made of two dirty boards.

"Wake up ?" he asked in an unfamiliar voice.

"I wasn't sleeping."

"That's all the same," he said, "you can call it sleeping."

She raised her hand and saw that her arm was bare.

"Did I take off my things myself ?" she asked plaintively.

"No, I did it," said the Captain. And, playing with the fingers of his injured hand, he went on to explain :

"You and I had a sort of swim in the river, and afterwards I thought that you had been wounded."

"It makes no difference," she said very quietly and looked the Captain in the eyes.

"Of course, not," he concurred.

She smiled and said.

"I knew that you would come back for me."

"And why, may I ask ?" the Captain queried with a smile.

"Well, I simply knew that you would."

"Nonsense," said the Captain, "You knew nothing of the kind. You were the target during the bombing of the aerodrome and it was highly possible that one of the bombs might have

finished you. Just to be on hand in case that happened, I hunted out a haystack and hid there, ready to signal with fire if you were put out of commission. And, secondly, an armoured car with a radio outfit had found your bearings and was combing the spot for you until I finished him with a grenade. And, thirdly....

"Well, go on, 'thirdly'?" asked Mikhailova insistently.

"And thirdly," continued the Captain in all seriousness, "thirdly, you showed that you're made of the right stuff," and immediately went on to add in an abrupt tone: "But then did you ever hear of anyone acting differently than you did under the circumstances?"

Mikhailova sat up and, clutching the scattered articles of clothing to her chest, she directed her shining eyes on the Captain and said loudly and distinctly:

"You know, I think that I love you very much."

The Captain turned aside. His ears took on a deep red hue.

"Cut out that sort of stuff."

"But not that way, I, simply love you and that's all," said Mihkailova proudly.

The Captain raised his eyes and looked at her frowningly, then said very thoughtfully:

"Well, if it's that way, then it's a different matter."

Rising to his feet, he asked her:

"Have you ever ridden horseback?"

"No, never," answered Mikhailova.

"Well, you're going to now," said the Captain...

When the Captain returned to his company from the hospital, his comrades had difficulty in recognising him. He was unwontedly cheerful, animated and talkative. He would laugh heartily, was not amiss at cracking jokes, and he had a pleasant word for every body. His eyes seemed to be constantly searching for someone. His comrades noticed this preoccupation of his but soon guessed the reason for it and mentioned to him in an off-hand, casual manner:

"Nina Mikhailova has been sent off on a new assignment."

A tiny wrinkle of disappointment appeared on the Captain's face for a fleeting instant and disappeared almost as soon as it had come. Without looking at anyone in particular he said in a loud voice:

"She's a girl made of the real stuff, you can't deny that," and giving his uniform a tug, he went into the Chief's office to inform him of his return.

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