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*A. Fyodorov*

THE  
UNDERGROUND R.C.  
CARRIES ON

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A. FYODOROV

TWICE HERO OF THE SOVIET UNION

THE  
UNDERGROUND R. C.  
CARRIES ON



BOOK TWO



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BOOK TWO

THE BIG  
DETACHMENT

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## CHAPTER ONE

### PRELUDE TO BATTLE

THE regional detachment was stationed in Reimentarovka Forest in the District of Kholmy. Our group arrived here on November 17, 1941. This was now our base, the regional centre, the place where we were to live and work.

The 17th of November, 1941, was a very happy day for me. I shall never forget it. I met Chernigov men, my friends and comrades-in-arms; I saw with my own eyes that the regional detachment was alive, was carrying on, and that the members of the underground R.C.\* of the Party—Popudrenko, Kapranov, Novikov, Yaremenko—Communist colleagues whom I had known for years—were each at his post. Druzhinin, who like myself had crossed the entire region on foot, was there too, but I did not meet him until somewhat later. Popudrenko had appointed him commissar of the cavalry group,

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\* Regional Committee.—*Trans.*



and it was still in Gulino where the regional detachment had been stationed at first.

I have already related that immediately our group arrived a gala breakfast was arranged, followed by a meeting. After the meeting we newcomers were rejuvenated by the barber.

At around twelve o'clock the R.C. met.

We got together in headquarters—a roomy dugout with a high ceiling and a glass window. In the middle there was a table with legs imbedded in the earthen floor. In a frame in one corner stood a bicycle which had a belt running from the rear wheel to a generator. The comrades rode this bicycle for hours, charging the radio battery. The radio itself, a receiver taken from a plane, stood on a box nearby.

A section of the dugout was partitioned off by a big grimy curtain behind which wooden bunks with pallets of hay could be seen. This was the "bedroom" of the top-ranking personnel. Quilted jackets, horse cloths and blankets lay on the bunks; there were even two pillows. On a stool in the corner stood a water pail. Portraits of the leaders adorned the walls.

The R.C. members wore quilted pants and quilted jackets, like the rest of the men and commanders. Only a few sported leather coats or windbreakers.

A dozen of us had gathered around the table. First to take the floor for a report was Popudrenko

What he delivered, though, was sooner a narrative account of the activity of the detachment and the R.C. than a report.

As I listened I could not help drawing a comparison between the Popudrenko of today and the man I had known in Chernigov. His expression, his bearing and everything else about him now bespoke a partisan commander. He was obviously proud of his new position. His clothes showed it too. A tightly-belted leather jacket, a brand-new shoulder strap, a tall fur hat cocked like Chapayev's, two pistols and a grenade at his belt. His brows were knitted, his gaze was steady. . . . Frankly speaking, there was a hint of affectation in Popudrenko's new appearance.

I knew Nikolai Nikitich Popudrenko well, and I believe I hit on the real reason for this new propensity of his for show: by nature a very kind person, he evidently feared that people would quickly catch on to his kindness of heart and take advantage of it—and hence the striving to look stern.

I must add, however, that this man's mildness and kindness went hand in hand with a strong will and sharp irreconcilability toward everything that ran counter to his conscience as a Bolshevik.

Nikolai Nikitich spoke with fervour, like an orator at a rally:

"We have no right to hide from the R.C., from our own selves, that winter is approaching and our

food and clothing stocks are running low, that we're out of tobacco already. We know, too, that a brutal, crafty and ruthless enemy is hunting us, has surrounded the forest. Now he has put forward fifteen hundred men against our detachments. Tomorrow he may throw four or five thousand into action against us. Well, we are proud of that! Each partisan is worth ten fascists! And the more forces we draw toward ourselves here, behind the enemy lines, the less there will be of them at the front. Daring, daring, and again daring—that's what is demanded of us, comrades! The partisans—the people's avengers—scorn death. With each passing day the boldness of our thrusts will increase. Dozens of the enemy's trains will be derailed, his staff headquarters will fly into the air...."

"Explosives are needed for that," someone remarked in an undertone.

I asked Nikolai Nikitich a few questions: Why had the detachment moved from Gulino? What was the R.C. doing? How efficient were the communication and intelligence services? How were things in the districts?

I was not overjoyed by the answers. The detachment had had quite sound reasons for moving: the forests here were thicker, and hiding from the Germans was easier. But only part of the detachment had moved. The cavalry group was in the old place. And it was now a cavalry group in

name only. The comrades had felt it risky to keep horses and had turned most of them over to the Soviet troops which passed through those districts.

"A man on foot can hide behind a bush if he has to, but a horseman can be seen a long way off."

There was another unpleasant piece of news: it appeared that part of the men had left along with the Red Army. This had naturally led to a certain amount of confusion. The men who went away had said that the partisans wouldn't hold out long, that the Germans had materiel, that they had artillery, that they were better organized. . . .

The communication service was in a very bad way. The radio station lay buried in the Repki detachment cache and now nobody could find it because the radio operators had fallen into the hands of the Germans.

"We've kept the food caches," Popudrenko said. "There aren't any complaints about the feeding. We've got arms too. But the communication service isn't any good. We listen to the war bulletins and there's more than enough music, but we haven't any contact with the army or with the Soviet home front. We've sent out nine groups—some seventy of our finest Communists and Komsomol members—on missions to cross the front and contact the army command. So far there are no results. We know that two of the groups fell into the hands of the

Germans. With the district detachments and the others we're in constant touch: mounted and foot messengers. There are four detachments in these forests of ours: the Reimentarovka, Kholmy, Perelyub and Koryukovka.

"What is the R.C. doing? All its members are fully occupied with detachment duties: Yaremenko is the commissar, Kapranov is the quartermaster, I'm in command.... Bear in mind that the people of the region don't know where we are. Not even all the Communists know. Can we direct the whole region from here, especially with our means of communication such as they are? Can we extend our influence to all the Communists, all the Kom-somol members, all our Soviet men and women? Should we strive for that? Let's discuss it. As for myself," Popudrenko wound up, "I doubt it."

It was apparent that Nikolai Nikitich did not have very much faith in the feasibility of combining Party and military, that is, partisan, work.

"Our basic task," he said, "is to support the Red Army from here, from behind the enemy lines. We must harass the fascists daily on the roads, blow up trains and railway bridges. Strike in small, light, mobile groups, and then take cover. We can't operate with big forces, we can't base ourselves in one place...."

From the way he spoke it seemed at times that he was not certain he was right. He seemed to be



trying to convince not only me and all the other members of the underground R.C. but himself as well.

The man on duty burst excitedly into the headquarters dugout.

"Permit me, Comrade Commander. Scouts report German units moving from the direction of Novgorod-Seversk toward Kholmy. Motorized and cavalry...."

Popudrenko adjourned the meeting. I had the feeling he did it with pleasure. He summoned the commanders and ordered them to have all the effectives of the detachment form ranks. Placing the scouts at the head of the column, he mounted his horse and commanded:

"Forward, double time, march!"

We who had arrived that day did not go out on the operation; we decided to rest after our journey and wash up in the steam bath. Only about thirty-five people in all remained in the camp. We certainly would have had a tough time of it if the Hitlerites had thought of raiding us then!

After a bath and a rest I decided on a tour of the camp. It had only five dugouts: headquarters, three lodgings and a hospital. The excavation for a sixth was being dug. Here a printing press would be installed and a newspaper and leaflets would be put out.

The roofs of the dugouts were barely noticeable mounds. They had been sodded, and some even had bushes planted on them. A passenger car had been dug half into the earth and camouflaged with branches. It was not easy to spot the partisans from the air. \*

From the ground, however, there was nothing especially difficult about discovering them, or penetrating into the camp as well. Three sentries were on duty at a radius of one hundred to one hundred and fifty metres from the dugouts, and they didn't camouflage themselves or take cover in fox-holes.

Two carpenters were making a bed for the printing press. I struck up a conversation with them. Then several more partisans came up. From what they told me I saw that things in the detachment were going none too smoothly.

The men were dissatisfied. With what? They themselves could not say offhand. They liked Popudrenko and they had full confidence in the other top-ranking comrades. But they were indignant about Kuznetsov, the chief of staff: he drank to excess, was rude to the partisans, and, worst of all, was incompetent.

Of Popudrenko they spoke with admiration: he was a brave, sensible and clever commander. True, at times he overdid things, was rash. But he was just, and kind and attentive too. Toward the

enemy he was as aggressive as anybody could desire, and yet—

It took me quite some time to grasp what lay behind that evasive "and yet."

The men told me about an incident that occurred while the detachment was moving from Gulino to the new place. On the way it was decided to wipe out the starosta in the village of Kamka, who was a traitor. He ran away, however, and the partisans weren't able to catch him. In his shed they found one hundred saddles which the Germans had left in his care. The saddles could have been taken along—they would have come in handy in the detachment—but they were burned, either out of mischief or in disappointment at the starosta's escape.

"Why destroy things for nothing? It'd be different if we really couldn't take them along. . . . Comrade Fyodorov, are we actually going to remain without any cavalry? Do small-time fighting? Hop-skip and blow up a motorcycle here, kill a German there, and before you know it poison a bloodhound and have a drink to celebrate: my, what fire-eating partisans!"

This was said by a sober, moustached chap of about forty. He was working on the excavation. Thrusting his spade into the earth, he wiped his hands on his pants and went on:

"Just take a good look at how we're living, Comrade Fyodorov, how we're fighting and what



we're looking forward to. We're living off what was buried in the caches. We even cart flour to the neighbouring village. Out of our flour the women there will bake us bread and biscuits and pies with the greatest of pleasure, any time. Well, and what when our flour gives out? Are we going to go begging from the women?"

"What d'you mean give out?" one of the cooks, a cheerful-looking woman, put in with a wave of her hand. "There's stocks, they say. You, Kuzmich, how long do you reckon on fighting?"

"If we go on fighting like this there'll be stocks left over. Only the question is—for whom? The way I see it, for the Germans, or those Magyars. They may be dumbheads, but they aren't going to stand for us any too long. First they'll polish off Balabai, then Kozik and then before you know it they'll tackle us. Just look how many of those punitive troops have come! A battalion's arrived in Pogoreltsy."

Several more people came up from different parts of the camp and joined in the conversation. These questions worried everybody.

"Why talk about flour and bacon? Look at the goings on here! What's the sense, say, of where they're going now? They'll be lucky if they have a good look at those Germans on the road. Maybe they'll even fire a few rounds. Just as likely there'll be nothing. Just an excursion!" a machine gun-

ner who was wounded in both arms spat out. "The scouts reported the Germans were in Orlovka. But that's fifteen kilometres away. Cover that on foot, at double time all the way, besides, and with a full kit and a light machine gun. There and back makes thirty kilometres, and with detours and bypaths all of forty. And the result's three dead Germans."

"But all that's not the main thing," Kuzmich muttered.

"Well, what is?"

"What d'you mean what?" he said in surprise. "Everybody knows the main thing is to hold out. The Red Army'll slam 'em, and then we pitch in. The army from the front and we from the rear. And will we fight! We've got to save our strength. That's the main thing!"

"Do you intend saving it long?"

"It's hard to say how long, but about three or four months anyway. We've got to go easy on food. If we go easy, ration it, then we'll hold out."

I interrupted the speaker. "Just a minute, comrade. How long do you reckon on fighting? Three months? And what's your opinion?" I asked the others.

It appeared the others didn't figure on fighting long either.

Only one said eight months. The others shushed him up and called him a nut.

Frankly speaking, I myself did not believe the war would last longer.

After thinking over what I had heard, appraising the first part of Popudrenko's report and recalling the impression left by the Ichnya detachment, I saw that the main trouble lay exactly in those words "*hold out*."

The men too were evidently beginning to understand that for small and scattered groups even holding out was impossible; that the tactics of minor, sporadic, unplanned raids was dangerous tactics.

And as if in confirmation of this, Popudrenko returned toward morning empty-handed.

"The Germans rode while we walked," the men, wet to the skin and dead tired, said irritably. "How could we ever chase them?"

The operation fell through, naturally, because it was faultily planned. Popudrenko himself was dissatisfied with the outcome but he did not want to admit it in so many words. He took a drink to drown his disappointment and then stretched out next to me and said he was going to go to sleep.

"Ah, Alexei Fyodorovich," he said a minute later, with a forced laugh. "I thought a drink would put me to sleep. But no—even liquor doesn't help.... We're wrong somewhere, Alexei Fyodorovich. Something's got to be changed."

I told him frankly that I considered the line the command of the detachment had been pursuing hitherto to be incorrect. The forces had to be united, not divided. Singly we would be smashed before we knew it. A big detachment could carry out substantial operations, crush enemy garrisons, could attack the German fascists instead of simply defending itself against them.

At first we spoke softly so as not to wake our comrades. But the topic was so absorbing we raised our voices without being aware of it, and soon we noticed that everyone lying on the bunks was listening to us. And since here were all the R.C. members, it turned out to be a natural continuation of the morning meeting.

Without lighting a lamp or getting up Kapranov and Novikov, and then Dnieprovsky (whom we had co-opted into the R.C.) took the floor.

A very serious threat already hung over us, it appeared. The Germans and Magyars had virtually surrounded our groups. It was not that they had set up on unbroken frontline, but there were German garrisons in almost all the district centres and villages within a radius of thirty to forty kilometres; in some the enemy had already massed special units to combat the partisans.

The nearest place was Pogoreltsy, in which a punitive detachment about the size of a battalion

had arrived a few days before. Enemy scouts had begun feeling out the forest and were giving the Perelyub detachment trouble daily.

"Balabai asked Loshakov for help," Kapranov said, "but he answered, 'It's none of our business. Do your own fighting.' And what's Baiabai got? Only twenty-seven partisans."

The majority of the comrades agreed on the need for merging all the detachments stationed in the Reimentarovka Forest. Popudrenko did too, and having done so he wasted no time—he was not that kind of man. He got out of bed, lit the lamp and wrote out an order for the commanders of all the detachments to report to headquarters in the morning.

"What do you think?" I asked. "Will they all consent to a merger?"

"Why, Alexei Fyodorovich, they dream about it themselves," Popudrenko replied.

We decided to discuss another question with the commanders too, one which could no longer be put off: what to do about admitting new men into the detachment. There were many applicants—big groups, small ones and simply unattached men.

\* \* \*

On November 19 the commanders and commissars of the detachments gathered: Balabai, Nakhaba, Vodopyanov, Kurochka, Kozik, Korotkov,



Loshakov, Druzhinin and Bessarab. All the R.C. members as well as platoon commanders Gromenko and Kalinovsky of the regional detachment took part in the conference too.

On my own responsibility I invited another person. This was Lieutenant Rvanov, whom practically nobody knew as yet. He had come to the detachment shortly before us.

Rvanov, a shy-looking, soft-spoken man of medium height, made a far from striking first impression. He had a wounded arm, besides, and one would have thought he should be having it treated instead of holding a position of command. For all that I introduced him to the comrades as the chief of staff of the future united detachment.

Why had I appointed a total stranger to a position of command? Nobody asked me this question, but I could read it in the eyes of the majority of those present. I had good reasons, of course, which I had told only to Popudrenko and to Yaremenko, the commissar of the detachment. They agreed with me.

It was quite hot in the headquarters dugout. The gathering was a large one, and some had to sit on the floor. I advised the comrades to take off their coats, which they did. All but Bessarab, the commander of one of the local detachments. For him this was easier said than done, so bedecked was he with gear: two pistols, several hand gre-

nades, a map case, field glasses, a compass and so many belts one wondered how he kept from getting tangled up in them.

Stepan Feofanovich Bessarab, a thickset man of about forty, was chairman of a kolkhoz before the war. Although he had not made a go of his job, he was widely known in the locality and carried a certain measure of weight. He was well known, too, because in the collectivization period a kulak had tried to kill him—had fired through a window and wounded him in the head.

Bessarab was a sluggish fellow. He didn't much like to get about, or to open his mouth either.

When circumstances did compel him to say a sentence or two, he invariably cleared his throat, paused, started off with "ahem" and "er" and then freely sprinkled his speech with these two interjections. When people thought of him, the first thing they remembered was his "ahem" and "er."

"Ahem, er, I guess I won't take off my coat. Er, don't feel well. Afraid, ahem, of catching a cold."

I must stress at this point, though, that Bessarab became a partisan on his own initiative. And the people of his kolkhoz had followed him, acknowledging him as their commander. There was no doubt about his being a loyal Soviet citizen.

Practically everybody I met at the conference had been interviewed by me in Chernigov before

he became a partisan commander or member of the R.C. I have already told about the change in Popudrenko's appearance and ways. All the others dressed and acted differently too.

It was still too early to speak about changes in character. Yet to a certain degree the new outward appearance reflected each man's inner state. By his clothes and his gear—to be more exact, by the way he wore his quilted jacket, hat and pistol, the comrade seemed to be saying: this is what I want to be like among the partisans.

Popudrenko's cocked fur hat, Bessarab's collection of belts, Fyodorov's moustache, the white collar band on Balabai's army tunic, the rough manner adopted by Kurochka, secretary of the Kholmy district committee, who was the kindest and friendliest of men—all this seemed somewhat ostentatious, as is always the case with novices.

Yes, as partisans and underground fighters we were novices. First-graders. Most of us had no few years of work behind us, had long since found our place in life, and now here we were in the forest, in a dugout, surrounded by enemy troops. . . .

My attention was drawn to the agronomist Gromenko, now a platoon commander. Before the war he worked in the Chernigov Regional Land Department, and now he looked as if he were at some conference there. His appearance was absolutely



unchanged. This struck me as being even more deliberate than Bessarab's belts. I asked him the usual question:

"How're things?"

He was pleased by my attention. "Things are all right, Alexei Fyodorovich," he answered eagerly. "except that I didn't have time to evacuate my wife. And she's about to give birth. She's with her folks in the village. There are Germans there."

"So that's what's on your mind," I thought. It was only natural for Gromenko to be thinking about his wife. But I had expected him to speak about his platoon or about the condition of the detachment.

Meanwhile Gromenko continued:

"You don't remember my wife from when we lived in Chernigov, do you? Well, I suppose one can't remember everybody.... She's in a village about forty kilometres from here. I ought to pay her a visit, but on the other hand I think maybe not. Just extra heartache...."

To tell the truth, I couldn't advise him. It had never entered my head that such questions might arise at this conference.

"All right," I said. "We'll discuss it afterwards. We'll think of something."

Popudrenko told the comrades why they had been called together and asked each commander

how he looked upon merging the detachments into a single one under my command. The majority said they were for it.

The opinion of the majority was, "It's high time. Otherwise we're done for."

Only Bessarab announced, after some meditation, that he would have to talk it over with his detachment comrades. When we told him the R.C. of the Party recommended the merger, he said:

"I'll, ahem, er, think it over a bit. Let you know tomorrow morning."

"Don't forget, then, Comrade Bessarab. We'll be expecting you at nine tomorrow morning. When you come we'll sign the order."

We went over to the second question: our attitude toward the individuals and groups that wanted to join the detachment.

Quite a few of them were roaming about the forest; there were the remnants of smashed units, escaped prisoners of war and men making their way to the front out of encirclement. All were armed. One group even had a heavy machine gun. But these men felt like outsiders in the Reimentarovka Forest: they had difficulty finding their way about, by far not all of them dared to mingle with the inhabitants of the district, they had no ammunition, their uniforms were in rags, they suffered from the cold, and, worst of all, they were

starving. Almost all of these groups were asking to be taken into the detachments.

An argument flared up. Rvanov, flushed with agitation, indicated the door with his eyes, as much as to say to me, "Wouldn't it be better if I stepped out while this question is being discussed?" It was indeed a matter concerning men in his position. He was the only representative at the conference of the "strangers," that is, the men not yet admitted officially into the detachment.

"Stay where you are," I told him. "It'll be interesting to hear your opinion too."

Loshakov, the commander of the cavalry group, a big sullen-looking chap who was as dark-skinned as a Gypsy, said:

"What do you mean admit them? I don't see why we ought to sidestep vigilance all of a sudden like that. In Chernigov you yourself, Comrade Fyodorov, and the other secretaries of the R.C. warned us to maintain the strictest secrecy. And now? It turns out vigilance goes by the board. Let in everyone who wants to. . . . What's a guy who came out of encirclement, anyway? That means he didn't die in battle. Take him into the partisans here in the forest and he won't want to die here either, he'll begin hiding behind somebody else's back. And that goes double for a prisoner of war. Once he was a prisoner it means he surrendered. No, we don't need that kind. The Party picked us and con-

firmed us. You I know, Kurochka I know, and Bessarab and Kozik too. I've got every right to depend on them. The same goes for the men. We know them all; we know all about them."

Next to take the floor was Balabai. He countered Loshakov heatedly. To tell the truth, I had not expected such fire from him. Alexander Petrovich Balabai, a history teacher and principal of the Perelyub school, had been described to me as a retiring fellow given to an even-tempered, well-ordered life. He had been appointed principal only a short time before. People praised him for the order and cleanliness in the school and its fine educational methods. "A young but thoughtful and reliable educator"—that was the appraisal I heard most often when Balabai's name came up. Besides, I had been told that he was a happy newlywed. Involuntarily I had pictured him to be a quiet, blissful soul entirely taken up with his school, his wife and a little house with a garden.

He turned out to be a man of powerful build, in a Red Army officer's uniform which suited him very well. He held his head intentionally high; his white collar was no accident either, and he had come to the conference closely shaven. It would have been fine if all the comrades took him as an example. And although he blushed like a girl while he spoke, I could see that this shy-looking

fellow knew how to stand up for himself and his principles. This is what he said:

"What of it if we've remained behind voluntarily? What special merit is there in that? We'd have to fight anyway, and it seems to me it's always better to fight as a volunteer than as a draftee. That means we're the same kind of soldiers as the Red Army men. What's there to be especially proud of? Comrade Popudrenko reprimanded me because our detachment took in five men who'd been in encirclement. But they've shown themselves to be good fellows; they've proved it in action. A group of twenty-six men headed by Avksentyev is hiding out in our forest. And we all know they're good men. Their division received an order from the command to break out of encirclement in small groups. They're carrying out that order. But if they push on farther to the front many of them will perish. In my opinion it would be more correct to take them in. In my opinion we ought to take in everybody who genuinely wants to fight the fascists. And as for those who were in encirclement, as a rule they're men who don't want to surrender, who hold out to the last. They're partisans already. Only they're not organized. We have to help them organize. They're armed men and this isn't their first day in war. They'll be useful to us..." At this point Balabai took a long pause. He ran his eyes over the gathering, gave a deep sigh, and



added in a tone of regret, "In my opinion it would be a crime not to take in the men who were encircled. Yes, a crime!" he concluded firmly.

"Well, ahem, er, Alexander Petrovich went off the deep end," Bessarab remarked, shaking his head.

"Do you want to speak?" I asked.

Bessarab looked up at me, thought for a moment and then said importantly:

"I can. I hold that if the encircled men feel like it, let them, ahem, organize themselves. It's not for them we, er, made the preparations and hunted for equipment, and especially food. I say out and out—I'm against it."

"And what if the R.C. asks you very much?" I could not refrain from putting in. "What then, Comrade Bessarab? Will you comply with our request?"

"About taking in men?"

"In general, what's your attitude toward the R.C. of the Party directing the partisan movement in the region? You're a Party member, aren't you?"

Bessarab went into a sulk. His eyes reddened. Knitting his brows, he said glumly:

"I know the Party Rules. But on the matter under discussion my opinion is no. The only exception can be on the territorial principle. I can, ahem, er, take an encircled man into the partisans if he used to live in our district, seeing as we're

called upon to defend our district. It can't be that everybody who wants to should be taken in...."

As he said all this Bessarab stared sullenly at Rvanov. Everyone understood this was the man he saw at the bottom of the trouble. The other commanders also surveyed the unknown lieutenant with none too friendly eyes.

I intended issuing an order appointing Rvanov chief of staff of the united detachment without giving any explanations, thereby at the same time preparing the men for the introduction of army discipline. Naturally, before taking that decision I had questioned Rvanov about his previous army service and had seen from his answers that he was a man of staunchness and, most important of all, an officer of the regular army with a splendid knowledge of military tactics. Another thing I liked about Rvanov was that despite his harrowing experience he had retained his officer's bearing, had not ripped off his insignia of rank and had somehow even managed to keep his tunic, breeches and boots neat.

Actually, what I had called was neither a military, partisan nor even a Party conference; it was simply called out of habit. I had not yet got used to issuing orders, and the comrades weren't used to the idea that I was not only a Party leader but a commander as well. Before me sat Soviet and Party

officials, agronomists, engineers, a kolkhoz chairman, a schoolteacher.... The majority of them, and in particular those who objected to taking in the encircled men, had not yet experienced at first hand either the real hardships of war or actual danger. They knew only by hearsay what encirclement was, who the men who had been in it were and what trials had befallen them. It would do them good to find this out. And at the same time they would realize why I had appointed Rvanov chief of staff.

"Dmitri Ivanovich," I said to Rvanov, interrupting Bessarab, "I will ask you to tell us how you landed in this forest."

My addressing Rvanov by his name and patronymic\* evoked surprise among the comrades. And surprise, as is known, heightens attention. Rvanov was surprised too. But he rose with alacrity and threw back his shoulders.

"Is my biography wanted?" he asked.

"No, the purpose is this: by your example I want to show the comrades who the men that were encircled are and why they should be taken into the partisans."

"All right. I'll be as brief as I can. I was in action from the first day on. My last post, since the fifteenth of July, forty-one, was chief of staff of an

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\* This form of address is a sign of respect.—*Trans.*



infantry battalion. Was cited twice for efficient operations, by the regiment commander and the division commander. On the ninth of September, at nine-thirty, the Germans outflanked the village of Luziki in Ponornitsa District where we were stationed. I was in headquarters with three messengers. The Germans opened up machine-gun fire at the headquarters hut. We only had tommy guns, pistols and a carabine. The boys gave me a cover of tommy-gun fire. I took the most important staff papers, ran across the street and dropped down in a patch of millet. Began returning fire from my carabine. Laid low five Fritzes. They were drunk. That helped me wipe them out. But a bullet got me in the arm. I crawled over to a hole. There was manure and garbage in it. I buried the papers in the garbage, strapped my wounded arm and crawled off toward a house. I crawled along a fence. Came to a hole in the fence. Here lay assistant platoon commander Kiselev. He was wounded in the left shoulder and the right palm. He had managed to knock a board out of the fence but didn't have the strength to crawl through the opening. 'Comrade Lieutenant, save me,' he begged.

"Somehow we crawled into the yard. Meanwhile the Germans had taken full possession of the village. We crawled into a shed. Inside was a suckling in a stall and some hay. Kiselev began feeling very bad. I covered him with hay and dug myself

in too. At eleven hours Kiselev turned limp. He asked for water. At thirteen hours an old woman came in to feed the suckling. I asked her for some water. When she saw how much blood there was she advised us to surrender. We told her that was impossible. At sixteen-twenty, some Germans came into the yard and started talking to the old woman. Kiselev and I agreed that if they came, we'd do them in first and then ourselves. We heard the Germans ask her, 'Mamka, any Rus?' 'Two officers,' she said, 'were here and went away.'

"When it got dark, we climbed through the hole in the fence and crawled through the millet to the forest. The regiment had been set the objective of capturing Ponornitsa. I laid our course accordingly. Kiselev and I walked all night. At dawn we were fired upon as we came out into a clearing. I laid a course west. There were lots of tracks and the marks of Russian boots on the road. We followed the road and came to a village. I learned that our men had passed through four hours before. A woman gave us a piece of cloth and a little bread and makhorka. We had a bite and a smoke, bandaged our wounds and set out again, to catch up. We went through Reimentarovka. Almost ran into a German scout patrol there. Then we went on to Savenki, seven kilometres ahead. Now Kiselev had to rest every fifty metres. It took us five hours to get to Savenki. The Ubed River lay along the

way. We forded it at a cart track. I carried Kiselev so he wouldn't drown. Entered Savenki at twenty-two fifteen. Knocked on the door of a house. Kiselev was bleeding to death. He fell against the door."

Rvanov spoke in the jerky, terse style of a report. He stood erect, without leaning on anything, while we who listened either sat or reclined. From his manner of speech and his bearing we could see that before us was a seasoned officer who under no circumstance would forget that he represented the Soviet Army. Druzhinin walked up from behind, bent close to my ear and said in a loud whisper, so that many others heard:

"It's not for Bessarab or for Loshakov to judge whether Rvanov should be taken into the partisans but rather for Rvanov to decide who of us is any good."

Meanwhile Rvanov continued to report. He told how an elderly kolkhoz woman, Natalia Khavdei, and her fifteen-year-old son Misha had given Kiselev and himself shelter. They bandaged their wounds, fed them and put them to sleep. When the Germans came into Savenki, the woman told them that Kiselev was her son. As for Rvanov, he went off to live in the forest; from time to time he stole into the village for food and to dress his wound. He contacted the secretary of the village Party organization, Dusya Oleinik, and through her the partisans of the regional detachment.

Without his audience being aware of it, Rvanov went over from an account of himself to a speech. And I must say he was heard with attention and sympathy.

"Through the secretary of the Party organization the wounded soldiers quartered in the village have received and are continuing to receive food from you, comrades. Your feldsher visits them, dresses their wounds, gives them medicine. That's good. Many thanks to you. But only receiving help, and not taking part in the fight himself—that doesn't become the Soviet man. Some of the wounded have already recovered. I feel it my duty to say that there are no few honest Soviet people in the woods around your camp. It's very painful for them not to be recognized as friends. If my opinion means anything to you, I ask you to consider my proposal too: to count the 26th group, Karpusha's and Lysenko's groups and the others as partisan detachments and to incorporate them into the regional detachment on a par with the local ones."

Two or three others took the floor. I remember Druzhinin's brief and energetic speech:

"Actually, comrades, there's nothing to argue about. We're fighting a war. We are a military unit of a peculiar kind. Whether we want it or not there'll be losses in our ranks. And the losses will have to be made good or else we are finished



as a military unit, as a partisan detachment. Incidentally, I myself came to you out of encirclement, only I was left behind beforehand. Some say I was taken in because I come from Chernigov Region and the chiefs know me. Some say we took in Dnieprovsky as one of our own for the same reasons. Bessarab has even proposed taking in only Chernigov men, or, for that matter, only residents of the district in which the detachment was formed. That idea is wrong and harmful. That kind of localism won't lead to anything good. Our native land is the whole Soviet Union and not Reimentarovka District or Ponornitsa District. On the instructions and at the call of the Party, partisan detachments were formed and left behind beforehand. Why was it necessary to pick for these detachments men the R.C. knew? Because they were to make up the core, the foundation of the partisan movement. It's naive to think we can do anything by ourselves, without the support of the people, without reserves, without replacements. . . ."

"The question seems clear, comrades, eh?" I asked, and although not everybody answered affirmatively, I promptly closed the conference. "Tomorrow you'll get the order."

Bessarab gave me a puzzled look and whispered something to Kapranov, who sat next to him. Then he turned to Loshakov and whispered to him.

"Isn't everything clear, Comrade Bessarab?" I asked.

He made no reply. An awkward silence set in. Kapranov answered for him:

"He asks how come there isn't any decision. He says how is it we don't adopt a resolution. Why was he disturbed, summoned here?"

I burst out laughing. Several others joined in. But by far not everybody.

I had to repeat that they would receive the order the next day.

\* \* \*

That night Rvanov drew up the order. Instead of signing it at once I decided to wait for Bessarab. He had promised to come by nine o'clock in the morning. But here it was ten already. Popudrenko recollected that a month before he had asked the commanders to send in lists of the Party members, and everybody had done so but Bessarab. He did not refuse but simply kept putting it off. When Popudrenko sternly demanded as R.C. secretary that his instructions be carried out, Bessarab grumbled that there was no peace for him any place; even in the forest he wasn't his own boss. . . .

We were in no special need of Bessarab's consent. It was not for the sake of democracy that we were waiting for his decision. We saw that at heart he was balking, and we wanted to know how far

he would go. And why use compulsion before the proper time? Maybe the man would think it over, would realize that he was on the wrong path.

At eleven o'clock, when I saw that Bessarab wasn't coming, I ordered a horse and set out for his place together with the commissar and a group of men.

"Well, boys, we're off to subdue the duke," I joked.

At the approaches to Bessarab's camp a sentry stopped us. As we later learned, he had been instructed to detain anybody who came from the regional detachment and to sound the alarm if they tried to force their way in. He knew us, however, and let us through. We rode into the camp and found it in a peaceful, sleepy state.

It was a serene and prosperous manor. Laundry was drying on lines strung up between trees: shirts, foot cloths and even bed sheets. Opposite, carcasses of beef and mutton hung from branches. A young fellow sat on the ground dressing a freshly-slaughtered hog. There were many carcasses, far more than in the regional detachment; yet we had three times as many men, and Kapranov, our quartermaster, knew his job too.

Smoke curled up from the kitchen, and such a tantalizing smell was wafted over that my adjutant shifted his eyes in that direction and wet his lips.

We rode up to the kitchen—a high, roomy dugout. In the middle stood a big table with a



stack of juicy hamburgers. A young partisan and two cooks were in charge. One of them, a pretty, vivacious girl named Lenchka, struck a proud pose at the sight of us.

"Doing well by yourselves," I said, pointing to the hamburgers.

"Yes, not like you," Lenchka chirped back. "Should we starve? You think you're going to feed yourselves at our expense and then send us begging? Popudrenko tried to tame us but it didn't work. We like freedom...."

"So that's how Bessarab's trained you to dance to his tune? Well, all right, we'll pay him a visit. Where does he live?"

Lenchka showed us Bessarab's dugout. "Nothing'll come of it!" she shouted after us.

At the entrance to the dugout we were met by Stepan Ostatny, Bessarab's deputy. He measured me with a frowning look and in reply to my greeting gave a nod. He let us pass into the dugout, however. The dugout was a mess. Papers, slices of bread and chunks of potato were strewn on the table. The floor was littered with cigarette butts. The benches and stools stood every which way. Obviously, after a conference here the previous evening, they had all got up and left the place as it was. They had made no preparations to receive "guests."

The chief was in bed behind a calico curtain. Our arrival had roused him.

"We got to bed late last night," Ostatny thought it necessary to explain.

"Don't offer any explanations," a woman's voice spoke up from behind the curtain. "You're not in a militia station."

My adjutant drew aside the curtain. Bessarab, in boots, breeches and tunic, lay on top of a blanket on a trestle bed. He turned his face to the wall. We greeted him. He mumbled something but showed no desire to turn around. On the edge of the bed, next to Bessarab, sat his wife. She looked sleepy and dishevelled.

Two more of Bessarab's right-hand men, Jan Polyansky and Shkolyar, came in. They assumed challenging poses.

Without waiting for an invitation I sat down on a stool.

"What decision have you come to, Comrade Bessarab?" I asked. "We waited all morning for you. After all, it's very important for us to learn the results of your meditations."

Bessarab went on lying with his back to us and wheezing.

"I'm speaking to you, Comrade Bessarab. Do you think we've come here to ask for your daughter's hand?"

His wife replied for him. "Who invited you? You can go, we're not holding you back."

"She your deputy, Comrade Bessarab?"

"Yes, his deputy. What's it to you?"

I could not refrain from saying a few strong words. The woman gave a screech and ran out of the dugout.

Bessarab rose lazily. "You've got no call, ahem, er, chiselling in on somebody else's glory."

"What kind of glory have you got anyway? Sitting here and eating the kolkhoz folk out of house and home? Comrade Yaremenko," I said to the commissar, "while I have a talk here with the chief will you please assemble the whole detachment?"

Bessarab looked surprised but said nothing.

"Well, now," I said when Yaremenko had gone out, "tell us about your glory."

I knew, however, what Bessarab had in mind.

Little though the regional detachment had accomplished in this period, its men were not sitting with arms folded. Now a bridge caved in, then a German truck blew up on a mine; now a traitorous starosta vanished without a trace, then a group of invaders landed in a roadside ditch with their heads smashed in.

The people of the surrounding villages knew that on instructions from the district committee of the Party, Bessarab started forming a partisan detachment even before the Germans came.

His detachment was made up entirely of local men. Every now and then they dropped in on their

relatives and friends, and naturally they never objected when the operations of all the groups and detachments based in these forests were ascribed by the population to Bessarab's partisans.

"Out with it, don't be bashful," I urged.

"I operated on the flank of the 187th Division. . . . I, ahem, er, have a citation from the command. . . ."

Meanwhile Yaremenko had assembled about twenty partisans and lined them up near the headquarters dugout.

We stepped outside. I made Ostatny and Shkolyar and Bessarab himself join the line.

"From now on, comrades," I said, "all the detachments based in this forest are merged into one. That is a decision of the R.C. of the Party and of regional headquarters. That is what life demands. Does anybody have anything to say?"

Bessarab made a move forward.

"Wait. We've done enough talking with you already. We know your opinion."

Shkolyar, Polyansky and a comrade I did not know spoke. Like a lesson learned by heart, each maintained that a merger would be fatal. Stocks were giving out fast, and soon there wouldn't be anything to eat. If the detachments were merged, they would lose the main advantage of partisans: mobility and the possibility of concealment.

Polyansky bent over backwards. "What's the use of talking?" he said. "It's clear what's behind all this. It's all clear to us. The R.C. needs to lie low. The R.C. needs a guard. It hasn't enough men of its own, and they're all city fellows besides—first thing you know they'll get lost in a clump of three pines. . . . You want to get into heaven at somebody else's expense."

I had to cut the meeting short. Yaremenko explained the aims of the merger to the partisans and reminded them about partisan and Party discipline. I read out the order to the line:

"As of today the district detachment, formed at the initiative of the district committee of the Party, is incorporated into the united partisan detachment and will henceforth be called the 3rd Platoon. I appoint Bessarab commander and Grechko political instructor. Polyansky is placed at the disposal of detachment headquarters."

I told Bessarab to appear the next day to make a report. Polyansky I took along with me.

That was how the existence of the duchy came to an inglorious end and the combat history of the 3rd Platoon began.

That evening all the commanders received the order uniting into one the regional, Koryukovka, Kholmy and Reimentarovka detachments, as well as the groups of men who had broken out of



encirclement and had taken the path of partisan struggle.

The combined force was named the Stalin Partisan Detachment.

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The order went into effect. I became the commander of quite a sizable partisan detachment.

But issuing the order was not enough. Now we had to start organizing the regional detachment. We had to demonstrate by deeds that we did not merge in vain. As for myself, I still had to win a commander's prestige in the eyes of the comrades.

I had never been in command of an independent military unit in my life. After the Civil War I commanded a platoon in a railway regiment for a while. But that was almost twenty years ago. What comparison could there be, anyway? There I reported daily to experienced commanders; the regiment had a coordinated, well thought-out structure and long established order. The enemy we fought in those bygone days were insignificant bandit gangs. But some of the knowledge I acquired in the cavalry school in 1920 came in good stead now. I called to mind pointers from my combat experience, and some of the information I had picked up during the short-term training periods in army camps stuck in my memory....

It later transpired, however, that a military



schooling was not the only thing needed to make a good partisan commander. Some officers of the regular army felt lost under partisan conditions and were unable to command. The men who had studied in special military schools spoke regretfully of the fact that little or nothing had been taught about the tactics of partisan warfare.

It was not without misgivings that I took the post of commander upon myself. I feared that daily operative leadership of the detachment might interfere with my main work—that of secretary of the underground R.C. of the Party. Popudrenko had already had a taste of combining the two jobs. It hadn't been to his liking.

But the R.C. members had come to a unanimous decision: the first thing was to consolidate the detachment.

This was correct, of course. It was time to get down to real work. Myriads of problems were arising. There turned out to be any number of men desirous of talking things over with me, seeking my advice, and even of gossiping. And some came to me and demanded, "Once you're the commander—shell out! Give us guns, give us ammunition, give us men, give us food!"

First of all a precise assignment of duties had to be made.

In the legally-functioning R.C., in peacetime, the study and selection of people for leading posts

is a big collective job. Before the R.C. bureau recommends this or that Communist for a leading post, it studies him a long time, gathers the opinions of other comrades about his abilities, his knowledge, his integrity. It weighs all the pros and cons. Sometimes transferring a person to another post or removing him because of unfitness takes no little time too.

And under partisan conditions? People had to be studied, the principles remained the same—our Bolshevik principles. But it was of course impossible to convene the R.C. every time to confirm an appointment.

"They appointed Rvanov chief of staff. Why Rvanov? We've got old and experienced Party workers. Chernigov men. We've got secretaries of district committees, chairmen of district Soviets. And all of a sudden, if you please, a youngster of twenty-four. A lieutenant. An expert indeed! Kuznetsov at least was a captain...."

There was some talk of this kind. But you can't listen to everything people say.

About Bessarab having been left in command of the platoon, too. I shouldn't have done that, of course. But so far I had no reason to consider him a poor commander. The man had to be tested in battle. He had chosen the men for his detachment himself; he knew them and they knew him.

Now, looking back, I sometimes think: "It certainly was a strange situation in that first period. As commander I answered to nobody. There were no ranking officers over me. Without a support like the R.C. it would have been easy to lose my bearings."

But I couldn't turn to the R.C. too often either. The comrades themselves said, "You're the commander—make the decision. Our job is to obey."

I won't hide that occasionally I thought I really had had an easier time of it when I was wandering about in search of the detachment. Then I answered only for my own conduct and my own life.

The day after the order was issued Bessarab came up to me.

"I'm, ahem, er, waiting for your combat instructions."

"You read the order? Carry it out."

"The boys are at loose ends. They want to meet the damned invaders in battle."

"How come you weren't hankering after action before?"

"We were waiting for the commanding officers to come. Ahem, er, for their orders."

"Ten-shun! About face! Forward march!" I was forced to command.

This was probably just what Bessarab had been after. He went to his men and said: see?—instead of combat operations the chiefs are busy selecting

personnel, studying something or other, holding conferences, ahem, er.

Quite a few of the men, especially those in the regional detachment, I knew from Chernigov. Now I renewed my acquaintance with them. I visited the dugouts and lent a hand in the construction work which was begun before the arrival of our group. I was not certain the work was necessary, but meanwhile I did not discontinue it. The men had to be occupied. There is nothing worse than idleness. Soon drill was started. At these exercises, too, I studied the men.

I rarely went about alone but either with Popudrenko, with detachment commissar Yaremenko or with Rvanov; my adjutant accompanied me almost all the time. Popudrenko and Yaremenko knew the men well. Rvanov was much younger than I, but then he knew military affairs. In that way I learned something from the comrades while on the go. I watched how they behaved toward the men, how they sized up a situation.

Nothing, of course, was ever done without jokes and wisecracks. That was a must among the partisans. In the daytime and at night, in battle, on a mission and on the march the men always bantered. Some even joked at their own expense—anything for a laugh. This was understandable: the men had to bear a host of deprivations, and laughter buoyed them up.

At that period the men displayed a great deal of nervousness.

Never in my life had I come across so many engrossed people. True, when they gathered of an evening, the men sometimes danced and sang. But both the one and the other they did very badly. Popudrenko, who was very keen on soldiers' songs, once remarked to me:

"What kind of a crowd is this anyway? Not a single decent dancer, not a single accordionist. And when they strike up a song, you'd better run. . . ."

Only much later did it come out that they sang and danced badly simply because thoughts were preying on their minds. If one could only write out an order: "From today on I forbid anyone to go off by himself and ponder over our situation."

At this time I had quite a noteworthy conversation with partisan S. He is not, I think, a stupid person; he used to be the head of a district board of education. He took me aside and said:

"Look, Alexei Fyodorovich, help me figure it out. This idea came to me: what if I were lying ill and the doctors sentenced me to death?"

I become wary. What was the man driving at?

"One shouldn't put any stock in such sentences," I replied.

He went on:

"But still. If it's really beyond all doubt. Then what? I, for one, would rather not wait. I, Comrade



Fyodorov, would prefer to die right after the consultation, to shoot myself!"

"What's behind this graveyard talk?" I asked.

"This." Now S. began to speak with genuine fervour. "That if the Party placed us here as a sacrifice, for a sacrificial deed, then let's quick think up that deed and do it."

And this comrade, bear in mind, was sober, he wasn't delirious. I had to tell him that he was a whiner and a pessimist.

"What do you mean? Say the word and I'm ready to blow myself up together with an enemy headquarters!"

A year passed, and this comrade learned to blow up German headquarters and trains without getting a scratch. In 1944 the title of Hero of the Soviet Union was conferred on him. One day I reminded him of this conversation.

"I confess," he said, "that I didn't believe we were able to offer the Germans any serious resistance. I thought that once we were fated to die, we might as well die quickly and beautifully."

At just about the same time I had a memorable talk with Gromenko.

He had returned from his "furlough." After the conference with the commanders I gave him leave. He had been considering, if you remember, whether he ought to visit his wife and find out how the confinement had passed. He set out for his wife's



place with gifts from the partisans. We gave him honey, butter, candy and cookies. He also had a hundred rounds of ammunition, two pistols and a pair of grenades.

Gromenko was away five days. Two days there and two days back, and only one night at his wife's place. He reported briefly:

"Gromenko, commander of the 1st Platoon. Back from leave. Everything is in order. May I take up my duties?"

A couple of hours later I caught sight of him among the men of the 1st Platoon. He had settled them in a circle and was enthusiastically telling them something. I sat down to listen. Gromenko explained that he was conducting a political talk.

"Comrades," he went on, "each one of us has to look back at his whole life from a new angle...."

"What's he driving at?" I wondered. "What's this philosophical talk with the men?" But I held my tongue and listened further, especially since the men were engrossed in his words.

"Whether we want to or not, we're all doing a great deal of thinking nowadays. And how could it be otherwise? Our normal life has stopped, our families are broken up; the occupations for which we trained for years aren't needed now. Until victory, anyway. And so we feel bad. Many do. I hear

that Comrade Martynyuk told a dream he had—how his daughter ran up to him to be petted, and she hugged him and cried. Then Comrade Martynyuk woke up to find himself stroking the sleeve of his padded jacket, and the sleeve was wet with tears. Tell me, Comrade Martynyuk: how old are you and what did you do before the war?"

Martynyuk, a thickset man with a straw-coloured moustache, rose from the log on which he was sitting, blinked, and said:

"It's true."

"I asked you to tell your age and occupation. There's nothing to be worried about. I'm not reproaching you for dreaming about your children. I dream about the old days too. For more than two months now I'm either pickling seeds or pruning an apple tree or—"

"And yesterday," a lad of nineteen suddenly interrupted the platoon commander, "I played soccer against a German team. And the ball was like a mine—it could blow up. Honest...."

Everybody laughed. Martynyuk's face brightened too, and he said:

"I'm forty-four, Comrade Commanders. I'm a moulder—cast iron. I beg your pardon for telling my dream to others and upsetting them. I'll absolutely look back over my life, and I call upon others to do the same. You see, our daughter was

born when I was thirty-eight and my wife was thirty-four. She was our first child. And a German bomb killed her. . . . May I sit down?"

I rose and went away without saying anything to Gromenko, although I thought he was wrong in getting his men worked up. That evening Gromenko approached me himself, choosing a moment when I was alone.

"Alexei Fyodorovich," he began, "can I have a talk with you as with an older comrade? I have the feeling you didn't like that talk I conducted this morning."

"Come, Comrade Gromenko, let's take a stroll in the woods."

He agreed readily. We went about two hundred metres from the camp and sat down on stumps. This is what he told me:

"I'm an agronomist, Alexei Fyodorovich. That you know. I used to be an ordinary peasant. Peasant blood and peasant upbringing. In general, an intellectual sprung from the people. I think about things—can't help thinking. And when I worked in the seed control station, I didn't see grain as bread only. No, I saw it even more as the people's labour. Michurin dreamed of making wheat a perennial plant, and if he couldn't do that with wheat or rye, then maybe develop bread nuts. . . . I've always understood that dream very well.

"But actually I wanted to speak to you about something else. To tell you about my trip to my wife. . . . But I can't without prefacing it. . . . I felt, Alexei Fyodorovich, that I could be a good Communist only if I buried myself in my profession. I worked conscientiously, gave myself up completely to my work. I considered myself a happy man. No, not only considered myself happy but really was, because at home everything was very fine too.

"I remember that a tremendous impression was made on me by Comrade Stalin's answer to the letter from Komsomol member Ivanov, at the beginning of 1938. Then, for the first time, I not only thought but actually felt that a struggle was inevitable, that the capitalists would attack us absolutely. But you know how it is. I thought about it but I went on living the same way. I even justified my indifference to the future clash by the fact that I was working and thereby making my country stronger. I didn't picture myself as a soldier and I didn't prepare to be one. That's the point.

"I volunteered into the partisans. You know that too. And so we landed in the forest. After all, you can't say, Alexei Fyodorovich, that we didn't do anything before you came. How Comrade Yaremenko threw himself into setting up the printshop! The boys sneaked type out of Koryukovka—a heroic piece of work. Right from the

start there's been any amount of heroism. And it's sincere heroism.

"Balabai almost got killed in a fight with ten Hitlerites. Balitsky posed as a schoolteacher and went unarmed through villages in which there were Germans; he called upon the population to resist and he collected intelligence information. Popudrenko—in him I see not so much the big commander he is, but rather an embodiment of the people's hatred. He's a barrel of energy. And if not for his sense of responsibility for the detachment, for the men's lives, I'm sure he'd throw himself headlong into the hottest fight.... But that's discussing a commander, and I won't continue it. Let's get back to myself.

"Why hide it? I came to feel that our partisan efforts were insignificant. No, it wasn't a case of faint-heartedness or cowardice—that wasn't it. And then that business with my wife. I didn't manage to evacuate her. To tell the truth, she was near her time and didn't want to risk a long journey in her condition. She was very angry at me for joining the partisans and leaving the family at a time like that. She was angry with me, but just the same she realized it couldn't be any other way. And to give me a free hand she packed all of a sudden and left for the village. What happened to her after that I didn't know. Now the torture of uncertainty was added to all my other worries."



Gromenko drew a sigh. He asked me if I wasn't tired listening. We lit up, he was silent for a moment, and then he went on:

"Before I left we agreed I wouldn't tell anyone there in the village what I was doing. Remember, you forbade me to carry on any agitation? And that was right. Before beginning that sort of work you have to look around, get to know the people. I won't bother you with the trip. I got there fairly successfully. To be sure, there was a bit of shooting, but that doesn't count.

"I knew the house my wife might be in. In general, I've known that village since childhood. Everybody there calls me by my first name. I made my way to the house in the darkness by way of the back yards. I was sure no one had noticed me. Then the reunion, with tears and embraces. The boy was already a month and three days old. It was decided he was the 'spit and image of his papa.' The partisan presents came in handy. But on the whole the wife isn't too pinched for food yet. They've got some supplies. We cried, we laughed, we related what had happened to each other. But, you know, there was one strange thing—from the very beginning it was all in whispers.

"At first the boy slept. So I thought it was not to wake him. Then he woke up but the wife went on the same way. Besides, she hurried to



make the bed. Once or twice I spoke aloud. She waved her hand at me and immediately blew out the lamp.

"‘What’s up?’ I asked. ‘Just listen and take a look out the window,’ she answered. ‘It’s dark and quiet all over. Everyone’s afraid.’ ‘But there aren’t any Germans in the village.’ I had just got these words out of my mouth when a drunken band came galloping down the street, whooping it up. They were swearing for all they were worth, threatening somebody.

"‘Who are they?’ When my wife began naming the men who were lording it in the village, I tell you I saw red. Well, you know, Alexei Fyodorovich, we had a fellow by the name of Ivan Drobny. A rat, a miserable sponger and a drunkard. Everyone had forgotten long since that his father used to be the landlord’s bailiff. That Drobny was a half-wit and a souse of the lowest kind. When he was broke the morning after, he used to fall to his knees before people and beg a three-ruble bill. And now they’re afraid of him.

"Sanko turned up from somewhere. During the NEP years he blossomed out, had a tannery in Chernigov. Lately he was a bookkeeper at a musical instruments factory or some other place, I don’t remember exactly where. Whenever I ran into him in town he was just so meek."

I interrupted Gromenko.

"I don't know what there is to be surprised about. You didn't really think the fascists would appoint you and me to run the village, did you? Naturally, they're collecting all kinds of skunks. Who else would go to work for them?"

"That's not the point, Alexei Fyodorovich. That's not what I wanted to tell you about. This is what upset me: here in the forest, Soviet life goes on—the people and their relations to one another and everything else is Soviet. For a few hours I was in a village I know, and which I look upon as my native village. I didn't even see those rats, I didn't knuckle under to anyone. But just the fact that all night my wife begged me not to talk out loud, not to move, kept stopping up the child's mouth, and trembling all over.... And toward morning she began hurrying me to leave. Just that alone, you'll agree, is killing. Who was I supposed to be scared of? The lowest skunks ever! In a word, I got a real idea of what enemy occupation is."

"That's right," I said. "But I still don't quite understand what you wanted to talk to me about."

"We must act, and the sooner the better. We, that is our platoon, have decided to ask you to send us on an important independent operation as soon as possible.... Allow me to make a suggestion, Alexei Fyodorovich. After I told my men all about those rats who are bossing our village, about each one, we're just itching to get at them."

"In other words, you want your platoon to make a partisan raid on that village and wipe out the starosta and the police?"

"That's right."

"That is, propaganda by deed?"

"Something like that. I know all the approaches to the village. On the way back I talked with some of the people. We came to an understanding. I studied the lay of the land. We wouldn't need much time or many weapons for this operation...."

"Think of what you're saying, Comrade Gromenko. You started out right. Your heart told you that action was required. But what's the result? Each officer will lead his men to his village because he knows the names of the scoundrels who are bossing it. If we're going to act along those lines I'd have to take you all to Lotsman-skaya Kamenka near Dniepropetrovsk."

"The comrades will be terribly disappointed, Alexei Fyodorovich. We've already mapped out the route, fixed the time and assigned the duties. Your refusal will hurt the feelings of a lot of them, Comrade Fyodorov. You see, the boys are itching for action...."

"And will you feel hurt too?"

"That's not the point, Comrade Fyodorov. You don't need to pay any attention to my feelings. But you'll agree that one of the advantages

of partisan warfare is that we operate in our own districts. . . ."

I explained to Gromenko that the operation he thought up didn't enter into the plans of the command. He protested that since plans are drawn up by human beings they can be changed. He went so far as to accuse me of lacking resolution, and said I didn't know how to follow up the initiative of the masses.

I had to cut short the talk which had begun so well and explain to Gromenko in no uncertain terms what partisan discipline is.

He went off vexed. In parting he said I couldn't take criticism and that I lacked feeling, but that nonetheless he would obey the order.

That talk left me with mingled feelings at the time. It was good that our officers were thinking men. It was very pleasing to have them come to share their thoughts and feelings with me.

I liked Gromenko's genuine ardour, his burning hatred of the invaders, his thirst for action. But at the same time I was astonished at his light-minded attitude toward partisan warfare and was disturbed by it. Like many another, he still could not realize that a partisan detachment was a military organization and not just a voluntary society or artel for the extermination of the first invaders that come to hand.

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One of the main tasks the R.C. set the Communists and Komsomol members at that time was to fight for the strictest partisan discipline and against laxity, slackness and irresponsibility.

To some we had to make it plain that the Party could not let the partisan movement take its own course, drift along. The Party demanded discipline, planned action and organization from the partisan just as from the soldier, it expected the various detachments and men to help each other out.

A Communist is everywhere a Communist. Whether in the forest, or in underground work, or among his friends, or in the bosom of his family a Communist may not forget that he is a Communist, he may not take a vacation from his Party responsibilities or violate the Party Rules.

In some detachments, mainly those organized after occupation had set in, there arose the practice of electing officers, a practice long since condemned by the Party.

The R.C. condemned this practice and required that all detachments operating on the territory of Chernigov Region be connected with regional headquarters and coordinate their actions with it.

Simultaneously the R.C. worked to strengthen one-man leadership and the authority of the commander. The commander's word was law. The



R.C. promptly nipped any attempts to hold meetings to discuss decisions taken or the orders of a commander.

The partisans were free citizens in the occupied regions. But this was not freedom to wander through the woods at will. The partisans in this war had to look upon themselves as fighting men of the Red Army.

"You serve in the army because the fundamental law of the Soviet state obliges you to do so," we told each partisan. "And don't forget, dear comrade, that although the enemy has entered the Ukraine it remains a part of the great Soviet Union. You are a partisan because the conscience of a Soviet citizen obliges you to be one. And so observe discipline willingly and conscientiously. The fact that you volunteered does not mean you are free to be undisciplined."

Some of the comrades were very much surprised: What's this, anyway? We don't wear uniforms, we seem to be civilians; there are even people not liable to military service among us—old men, women and plain youngsters. And they have to submit to army discipline too?

I was told that one of the most fiery advocates of partisan freelancing expounded the following ideas:

"Maybe," he said, "I stayed behind here in the forest on purpose when the Red Army retreated.



I'm crazy about partisaning it," he said, "about freedom without any buts! What d'you mean this one or that one's a commander? The commander's the one the men follow into battle. A partisan can't be fenced in. A partisan's like a forest animal, like a wolf. They get together in a pack when an enemy's got to be fought, and when the fight's over each one's his own boss again!"

We summoned this "wolf" to headquarters.

"Are you in earnest when you say you stayed in the forest on your own initiative, so to speak?"

I'm a Chernigov man," he replied. "I didn't feel like going beyond the bounds of Chernigov Region. I decided I'd fight and take revenge only on my native territory."

"What do you mean you didn't feel like it? So you deserted from the army, is that it?"

"With my character I'll be of more use as a partisan. Army discipline crushes my personality."

"No, you answer the question: did you desert from the Red Army?"

The champion of "personal freedom" looked a bit nonplussed. He thought for a while. Then he looked around but saw that no one was going to support him.

"I didn't desert; I just switched to another branch of the service."

"Did you receive an order to this effect?"

"My conscience gave the order...."

"What rank has this conscience of yours that it can countermand the orders of the Supreme Command? Turn over your arms and off to the guardhouse!"

I must say to the credit of this lover of "wolf freedom" that in time he became wiser; when he realized that speeches of that sort would lead to no good he stopped making them, and fought well.

The R.C. required every Communist to inculcate love and respect for the Red Army in the partisans. Every one of us would have been happy to become a soldier or officer in the Red Army. When with our help the Red Army liberated the enemy-occupied territories we would gladly join its ranks.

The comrade I have just mentioned came to the partisans from the army. He knew what army discipline was. All we did was to remind him that laxity was impermissible. The majority of the partisans, however, especially in that initial period, were civilians through and through. It was difficult for them to get out of the habit of criticizing and discussing, or to remember that what they were before the war was unimportant now.

Somehow it came out that by hook or by crook some of our men were getting out of sentry detail

and various camp duties. A certain highly respectable person had not been on sentry duty once, I was told.

"Yes, it's a fact," the comrade confessed. "But they themselves offer to take my place: 'Look here, Sergei Nikolayevich, we'll go on duty for you. You're along in years, it's hard for you....'"

"How noble of them!"

"Yes, they're noble, all right, only the devils make me pay through the nose for their nobility."

"How much? What's the rate these days?"

"It depends for what. If it's standing guard at the food stores, for instance, that's a measure of makhorka or two slices of bread. Peeling potatoes in the kitchen costs a little less. It depends, though, on how you bargain and who the other fellow happens to be."

"Isn't the bread ration really enough? And where do you get your extra bread?"

"Well, you see, for me personally it's enough. Then, I only started smoking here in the forest, and I don't smoke much. Don't eat much either...."

"Naturally, if you don't work much you don't eat much."

"That's partly true too. But those who need more bread are mainly the newcomers, those who were in encirclement or were war prisoners.

They're starved from wandering around in the woods. . . . Well, you feel sorry for them. Honestly, they want to do it themselves."

When we scolded the comrade and disciplined him he became insulted.

"Now look," he said, his voice trembling, "I've been holding down responsible Soviet posts. It's true, I joined the partisans on my own free will. If I'd known I would have joined the army instead. You don't know how to make use of your men, comrades. To make me an ordinary private. . . . Of course, if they made me a private in the army I would have to obey all the orders too. . . . But you'll agree that in the army no one would know me. And here we have all our own people. Honestly, they make fun of me. 'This is no swivel-chair job,' they say."

During that organizational period what we suffered from were growing pains. They were due to lack of confidence in ourselves, to an extremely vague idea of how long the war would last, and to lack of ties with the masses. Yes, we were undoubtedly cut off from the people. For some three months the detachment had been hiding out in the forest. The partisans had insufficient contact with the local population. They had little knowledge of how the inhabitants of the occupied villages and towns lived and what their interests were.

This lack of contact with the masses, with the

people, might prove disastrous for us. The R.C. adopted a decision to get the men used to the idea that the partisan struggle would be a long one. The German invaders had gone deep inside the country. We would surely have to spend the winter where we were. The sooner the Red Army went over to the offensive and cleared our region of the Germans the better. But meanwhile we had to put a stop to talk about when the war might end, stop thinking of how to hold out, stop worrying and start acting.

The R.C. instructed headquarters to plan a substantial offensive operation. It was to show what our men and our organization were worth.

In fulfilment of the R.C. decision on the need for closer contact with the population and more propaganda among the masses, a group of comrades left for the village of Savenki one evening.

I went too. This was the first meeting of peasants I took part in during the occupation. Probably that is why I remember it so well. Subsequently I had frequent occasion to speak at such meetings. But at that time it was all new to me.

My companions later confessed to me that they too had had a queer feeling of uncertainty, even nervousness. Because of danger? No, for we knew that there were no large enemy forces in the neighbourhood. Preliminary reconnoitring had been carried out. Our people, that is, the Communists



working underground and the activists living in Savenki, had let the inhabitants know in good time and had stationed sentries all around.... But just the same we were anxious.

What worried us, naturally, was the peculiarity and novelty of the situation. How would they receive us? How should such a meeting be conducted? Even the organizational side was not clear. Should such a meeting be conducted with the solemnity characteristic of peacetime meetings? Should we have a presidium?

Still more important was to determine what was really the main issue to take up. Before the war each meeting was devoted to certain specific questions: discussion of the kolkhoz production plan, or a summing-up of Socialist emulation among the brigades and teams, a report of the kolkhoz board, a subscription to a new loan.... There were all kinds of agendas. Even if it was a lecturer coming to talk about the international situation, the kolkhoz people knew what it was going to be about and prepared questions for submission to the speaker.

But we were going not to discuss any particular issue but to get acquainted, exchange news, find out the mood of the people. Of course, first and foremost we intended speaking about a war to the hilt against the invaders and about support of the partisan movement. But we were not yet



able to present the kolkhoz people of Savenki with a concrete plan of action.

When we came to the schoolhouse we found a table with a red cloth on it set up in the big hall. Above the table hung a portrait of Stalin. A meagre light was afforded by two lampions. The men who had fixed up the hall apologized: "Can't get kerosene anywhere, so we filled the lampions with ox fat."

The people gathered singly or in pairs. Some felt it necessary to pretend they had just dropped in to see why the hall was lit up. Others, on the contrary, entered with a show of resolution: they strode firmly, looked straight before them, and spoke louder than was necessary.

The girls and young women hung around the entrance for a long time, whispering and peering into the hall. When they were invited to come in they said no. Only later, after the meeting was well started, did they make their way in softly.

Commissar Yaremenko said:

"Now I will give the floor to the commander of the partisan detachment and secretary of the underground R.C., whose name I won't tell you for reasons of secrecy...."

I rose and was just about to begin when someone in the hall giggled. I wondered why.

"Why, that's Fyodorov."

"Of course it's Fyodorov."

"Where's the secret? It's Fyodorov!" someone shouted from the back rows.

Yaremenko frowned, but I burst out laughing. My feeling of constraint disappeared at once.

I told briefly who the partisans were and how and for what they were fighting. I related the contents of the latest Soviet Information Bureau communiqués. They listened eagerly.

"Any questions?" Yaremenko asked the meeting when I had finished. The questions started coming immediately. They were important questions which were not easy for me to answer. After all, there was much I myself didn't know.

A tall, elderly, grim-visaged peasant asked:

"What, Comrade Fyodorov, does the Communist Party think about the other powers, like, for instance, America? What about the bourgeoisie of America? Are they helping us from the bottom of their hearts or have they got a dagger up their sleeve? And what about Japan—will she start squeezing us from the Far East?"

"That's a lot you've bitten off, Sidor Lukich!" the man sitting next to him exclaimed, in admiration or else ironically.

"No, it's to the point.... It's an important question."

"And how about our planes, will we have more of them? Are the Urals and Siberia working?"

Suddenly above the buzz of deep masculine voices rose a thin childish voice:

"Uncle chief, may I ask a question too? I am eleven years old and just went into the third grade. Are we going to study in German schools or will we be with our fathers and the partisans?"

Everyone laughed, but the boy seemed to have given the cue: the people began to ask questions connected with life in the village itself. They began to speak more softly, instinctively moving closer to the light as though members of some secret society were meeting in that hall. A robust, moustached old man asked in what was almost a whisper:

"Tell us what we're supposed to do. Say tomorrow the Germans come—either punitive or food supply units.... And one of those Germans is billeted in my house. He knows I'm a peaceful man, not a partisan at all, or yet, God forbid, a Komsomol member, but just a peaceful old villager...."

"Hurry up, Stepan, get to the point."

"Wait a minute. So it's like this, Comrade Commander: a German or maybe two of them are quartered in my house. Will you give me poison for them, or dynamite, or should I just apply the axe when they're asleep?"

I barely managed to hold back a smile. But his fellow villagers regarded this as a per-

fectly serious question and expected a serious answer.

"It depends on the circumstances," Yaremenko said.

This reply did not satisfy the meeting. Eyes turned to me. I had to put my brains to work.

"Dynamite, or TNT, to be exact," I said, "we won't give you to use on two Germans. We don't have much of it. As for poison, you wouldn't be able to poison all of them, and we don't have any anyway. But all weapons are useful against such a vicious enemy. In the first place, we invite anyone who wants to fight the enemy in earnest to join the detachment. Secondly, you can help us a good deal right here, on the spot, by giving us intelligence information and hiding our messengers when necessary. . . . And if we have to annihilate a garrison of Germans or a punitive detachment in your village—then, we hope, you'll put both axes and rocks to use. Well comrades, will you support us?"

A general buzz of approval was the answer to my question.

Natalia Khavdei, member of the kolkhoz board, a woman of about forty, asked:

"Comrade Secretary, in recent years we've learned to think as a kolkhoz community instead of each by himself. We still have the board. And we've got kolkhoz grain too. Don't worry, it's safe-

ly hidden. One pit contains grain due us for our workday units; in the other pit is the grain we must deliver to the state. How shall we turn it in? Will you come for it yourself, I mean your men, or shall we deliver it to you? The Germans took almost all our horses...."

"The grain should be distributed among the population."

"That we know. That's not the grain I'm talking about, the grain for the workday units. I mean the grain due the state. We discussed it at a board meeting yesterday. The crop was a rich one, there's a lot of grain coming to everyone for the workday units. Sell it to the Germans? It's no secret, there are some snakes who'd sell to anyone, just to get the money. But the Germans aren't going to pay for it. They know their business: they poke a tommy gun at you and say, 'Let's have it!' They'll take what we've earned for the workday units too. So how can we distribute the state grain?... And so we decided: who's our government, our state, our Red Army now? Of course, the partisans. That means the grain due the state belongs to the partisans."

We saw that the kolkhoz board had prepared to make us an extremely valuable present.

Sooner or later our food stocks were bound to give out. In some detachments they already had. A serious and ticklish question now arose: Where



to obtain supplies? Of course, our main source had to be German warehouses and supply trains but from time to time necessity would force us to turn for help to the local population. What forms should this help take?

The gift of the kolkhoz people answered this question in considerable degree. It was especially gratifying because it revealed the new traits of the Soviet peasant, Socialist traits.

"We won't refuse," said Yaremenko. "Thank you. We'll let you know later how to get the grain to us or how to keep it for us. Only you must hide it in such a way that if there's any danger of a German raid it can be destroyed at once."

The meeting lasted more than two hours. We were asked a host of questions. And there was only one person who tried to steer an underhanded course. This was a skinny, poorly-dressed chap of about fifty with a keen, intent, but shifty look. In what seemed to be a very friendly and intimate tone he said:

"And may I ask you whether you're Ukrainian?"

"What's the point?" I rejoined, on my guard.

"Nothing special.... Your name's Fyodorov, but you look like one of us...."

"I'm Russian," I said (although actually I consider myself a Ukrainian). "Does that make any difference? Just what do you mean—one of us?"



"Why, nothing," he answered evasively, and pretended to smother a yawn.

"No, you go on please. You started it, now finish it."

Here the grim-visaged peasant who had asked about America (he appeared to be about the same age as this one), turned and shouted in a very angry voice:

"Well, out with it, spill it! What are you trying to hide?"

The guy wasn't embarrassed. Narrowing his eyes first at me and then at the other fellow, he began slowly:

"There's no reason for not telling you. I look at it this way. The Ukraine is all under the Germans, isn't it? It is. So why should we go thinking of the Party now? You gave up the Ukraine, so get going. We'll handle the Germans ourselves or else we'll—"

"Come to an understanding!" shouted the other. "You, you dog's soul, you'd be glad to come to an understanding with them. Huh, a one hundred percent Ukrainian! Speaks for the whole of the Ukraine. I'll tell you this, you Judas, it's not the Ukraine you're thinking about but money. Just like when you tried to become a kulak when you were young. Free trade is what you want. Your own piece of land and a dozen farm hands to work for you. And you talk about the

Ukraine. . . . And you stop poking me in the ribs." He turned abruptly to the woman standing beside him. "I'm not afraid of him. If he goes against the kolkhozes and goes over to the Germans, why, we'll string him up quick."

"That won't be," said the skinny chap. "I'd never give away any of our own people. I'll keep it among ourselves. I'm just asking a question; we're having a friendly talk, aren't we, Comrade Fyodorov?"

He mumbled something else but suddenly stopped short, uttered a muffled sound and disappeared in the darkness. There was the noise of a scuffle in the back rows. They must have gagged him and passed him along to the back like a sack of flour. No one struck him; he was simply ejected from the building. And what happened to him outside is nobody's business.

Just before the meeting ended the moustached old man who had asked whether to use an axe or dynamite spoke again. This time too he began with a question.

"Now here's what else I'd like to know: what are we going to do, comrade partisans, if the Germans burn down our village?"

Voices shouted at him: "Don't go borrowing trouble there, Stepan!"

"Hold on. There, they won't let a man speak. I'm liable to get balled up even without your

butting in. The Germans are going to set fire to us—we know that for sure. If there's a wolf he's got to eat. But I'll say this to you, comrade partisans: don't feel bad about it. This is war. The worst ever.... I'll answer the question myself: we'll get ready for anything, for fire, for a cruel death, for agonizing torture. But there's one thing we're not good for, and that's licking the German's backside or pulling his plough. You tell that to Stalin, Comrade Fyodorov."

"Thank you, friend, we partisans thank you from the bottom of our hearts.... Only the trouble is we have no radio yet, no way of getting it to Moscow yet."

"That's your worry, how to do it." He grinned slyly. "One heart can get a message across to another heart. And Stalin, I reckon, believes in us the way we do in him."

\* \* \*

On the twenty-ninth of November Yaremenko woke me at about five in the morning.

"Alexei Fyodorovich, there's shooting! Alexei Fyodorovich, get up!"

We had learned the day before that a fairly large group of German occupants had mounted an offensive against the Perelyub detachment. The detachment had been forced to retreat into the heart of the forest. The commander, Balabai, had

asked for help. He had been ordered to hold out at all costs.

Inidentally, although the order on joining forces had been issued and the detachments were officially called platoons, they were still located at their old places.

Regional headquarters was drawing up a plan to wipe out a big fascist garrison, and it was not in our interests to reveal our main forces to the Germans ahead of time. That is why we refused Balabai support.

The plan was being worked out in secret. Only a few knew about it. And lately the mood of many of the partisans had taken a sharp turn for the worse. Indeed, up until recently, sallies had been made, although not big ones. Even if they were not always successful, at least the men did go out to shoot at the Germans and blow up bridges. And now a new commander had taken charge and occupied himself with educational work and combat drill. But the Germans were not sleeping; they were just waiting for their chance.

Such was the situation when the unforgettable day of November 29 began.

"Listen, listen, Alexei Fyodorovich," Yarenenko repeated when he realized I was fully awake.

There was no one else in the dugout except us two. Popudrenko, of course, had long since jumped

up and run out to learn what was happening. The other members of the R.C. had also gone out.

I dressed and picked up a gun. At that moment the door opened and Popudrenko, Kapranov and Novikov piled into the dugout. With them was Yurchenko, the scout squad leader. He was all covered with snow and was panting, either from running or from excitement.

"Well, speak up, was it you who fired?" Popudrenko insisted.

"Wait a second.... All here our own men? No new ones, I mean?"

"The devil take you!" shouted Popudrenko. "The way he twists and turns you can't get a straight word out of the man! Speak up now: did you fire?"

Yurchenko nodded.

"Why did you fire, why did you alarm the camp?"

The evening before, Yurchenko's group had been ordered to reconnoitre the forest in the direction of the village of Samotugi. It was not at all surprising that he should come across German scouts. So what if there was a little shooting? Yurchenko was no timid soul.

But it was not the echoes of distant firing that had roused the camp. No, the point was that several shots had been fired right here in camp, practically next to the headquarters dugout.



"My fault, Comrade Commanders," Yurchenko finally managed to utter. "I emptied my pistol into the air out of excitement."

"What'd you get so excited about?" Kapranov asked impatiently.

Interrupting him, I asked some of the comrades to step out. Only Popudrenko, Novikov and I remained in the dugout. Yurchenko continued to breathe hard and could not find the words he needed to make his report. I gave him a shot of liquor.

"Oh, Comrade Commander, Alexei Fyodorovich, there's a traitor among us!" he exclaimed. "Honest to God, a traitor. You call in the boys. They'll tell you."

"Wait a minute. Where are your boys? Comrade Novikov, please round them up at once and tell them to keep quiet until we get to the bottom of this."

"Oh, that's right, they might babble," Yurchenko agreed.

He was a young squad leader and had not realized that such information had to be kept secret. And indeed, his men had already spread the news through the camp.

Yurchenko reported that about ten kilometres away his group had noticed some Germans. They were moving in our direction.



"We opened fire and they answered, but the rats turned tail right away.... It was moonlight, and we noticed—it looked like one of our detachment fellows was with them—"

"Who was it? Speak up!"

"And who do you think it was?"

"Come on, cut out the riddles!"

It was not without reason that Yurchenko spoke evasively: like us he was hoping that there was a mistake somewhere.

But when he gave the man's name we no longer had any doubts.

It was Isayenko, a schoolteacher from the village of Syadrino.

Yurchenko explained that the boys had noticed a scarf on the man who had been with the Germans, and they were all used to seeing this scarf on Isayenko. He wore it in a special way, too.

"Go now," I ordered. "Go, and keep silent. Not a word to anyone."

I had been told several days before that partisan Isayenko often left for Syadrino to see his father. He asked permission, of course, saying that his father was ill and required attention. But then we received reports from the underground workers in the village that the schoolteacher's father was in favour with the Hitlerites and the *polizei*, that the starosta had given him a bul-

lock and two sheep from the confiscated kolkhoz livestock.

I called in the son, of whose guilt I had no proof. Before me stood a thin man of about thirty with an ingratiating voice and a shifty manner. He answered my questions with exaggerated eagerness:

"I'll tell you everything, honest to goodness.... I'll explain, and if there's anyone who'll understand me I'm sure it's you. You see, Comrade Detachment Commander, my Pa's a very religious man. He's a conscientious objector, so to speak.... He's ridiculously kind to everybody. He received the Germans very politely. Maybe even too politely. The officers, you understand, liked that. They rewarded him for it. Pa didn't dare refuse. And now he wants to turn that bullock over to you, that is, to us, to the partisans...."

"Look here, you're a schoolteacher, after all, and you ought to understand that these doings with your 'Pa' may turn out bad for you. Quit it. Drop it!"

"Allow me, Comrade Commander. I understand everything, honest to goodness. But why draw such conclusions? I'm thinking of drawing Pa into underground work. He's a patriot, I swear it. You know there are even priests who.... I'm even sure his air of submission ought to be used for intelligence purposes. What do you think?"

What Isayenko said made sense. His record was clean, but something told me he was a low-down character. I simply didn't take to him, didn't like him. But that, after all, was no proof of guilt. Nevertheless I gave him a warning.

"Bear in mind that you'll have to put an end to your frequent absences from camp. And leave your 'Pa' in peace. We don't need his services."

We kept Isayenko under observation. For several days he didn't go anywhere. And now, here you are....

We were all certain he wouldn't return to camp. Yet an hour later he came back, and he even wore that same scarf. He was brought to headquarters at once, of course.

"Where did you go?"

"I found out my father was dying. I ran over to see him."

"What's this? Got a private radio service? How'd you find out?"

"My little sister came to tell me. And so I was held up at my father's bedside. I realize it was a breach of discipline, I should have asked my commander's permission. But after that talk with you I was afraid he wouldn't let me go. I deserve to be punished, I understand that, and I give my word of honour that I—filial feelings are out of place when—"

"Did you come back alone?"

"What?" Isayenko instinctively glanced at the door, near which stood Popudrenko and Novikov.

"You rat, you were seen with a group of Germans!" Popudrenko burst out. "Led them to the camp, you snake? Speak up: did you?"

"No, honestly, I—"

"Eight men recognized you. Out with it!"

"I'll tell you, of course I'll tell you.... There were Germans. But I wasn't leading them. They were leading me.... Believe me. I'm not lying.... They caught me when I was returning...."

"And then you managed to escape?" I asked.

"Yes, then I escaped," he hastened to agree. "I took advantage of the mixup and slipped away...."

Novikov suddenly grabbed at his bulging pocket and drew a pistol out of it.

"And the Germans left you this as a keepsake, did they? Oh, you.... The whole truth! The whole of it at once!"

Isayenko crumpled to his knees.

Half an hour later I issued an order for the execution of the traitor in front of the line.

There was whispering throughout the camp.

"There, you see," said Bessarab's supporters. "We warned them.... We shouldn't have taken in outsiders."

"But look," the more sober-minded replied, "that's no argument. According to you, if a traitor

crops up among us that means we should close the doors of the detachments to all honest people who want to fight the fascists?"

Meanwhile our position grew increasingly grave.

The enemy had established himself in all the towns and large villages around us. Well-fed, well-clad, healthy Germans rode about in cars, talked over the telephone, slept in warm beds beneath stout roofs. There were thousands of them right near us, all around our forest. And if need be they could call out tanks, planes, artillery....

The sentries lead a youngster of fifteen up to the headquarters dugout. His clothes are covered with ice. He talks in a loud voice, almost in a shout.

Men come running out of the dugouts.

"What's happened?"

"Who's come?"

"From Kozlyanichi, I think. Name's Vasyuk."

"Which Vasyuk's that?"

"Brother of Fyodorov's adjutant."

"Why's he wet?"

"Swam, he says. Says things are bad there. SS punitive men have come...."

A shaggy pony covered with hoar-frost is drawing a cartload of brushwood. Two old men walk



beside the cart. The commanders step out of their dugout to meet the cart.

"Who are you?"

"Going for brushwood."

The sentry interrupts:

"Don't listen to them. They're going into the forest with brushwood."

"Excuse us, sir. We lost our axe so we're going back for it...."

"What's the matter, lived twenty-four years under the Soviet system and forgot the word 'comrade' after three months of occupation?"

"For that word they beat us—the starosta does and the Germans too."

"Then how does your friend get along without 'sir'? Or don't the Germans beat him because they think he's on their side?"

The second old fellow grins. "Got no teeth. Shed 'shir' once, and they beat me up."

Beneath the brushwood we find a thin Jewish lad and a dark-haired girl of sixteen holding on to one another. Both are trembling....

"What's this, eh, 'shir'? Out with it!"

"Are you really the partisans?"

Then the old men tell their story. The two youngsters ran into their village. Said they were Komsomol members. Brother and sister, Nepomnyashchy by name. From Mena. SS men came to Mena and began to shoot and hang people and

rape the girls. And the local partisans were poorly armed, they'd broken up....

Messengers come running in. Scouts return....

The invaders have occupied Gulino. The cavalry group under Loshakov and Druzhinin has fallen back without offering resistance.

From Dobryanka, eighty kilometres away, arrives a group headed by Marusya Skripka. Marusya also brings bad news. The Dobryanka detachment has been routed after stubborn fighting. Commander Yavtushenko, who was also secretary of the district committee of the Party, was killed in action. The chairman of the district Soviet, Epstein, is gravely, perhaps mortally, wounded.

From Chernigov comes the report that Comrade Tolchko's group fell into the hands of the Gestapo. All were tortured for a long time and then shot. There are scores of gallows in the town. On one of them hang a man and a woman with sacks over their heads, to hide their faces, and with signs on their chest: the name Maria Demchenko on the woman's body and Fyodorov on the man's.\*

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\* Later we learned that the Germans "hanged" me three times in Chernigov, twice in Nezhin and many more times in various district centres.—*Author's note.*

"How's that? Why, here's Fyodorov, standing before you. And Demchenko doesn't come from Chernigov anyway. Besides, she's in the Soviet rear."

The bearers of the news shrug their shoulders. "We don't know."

Balitsky and his men are back from Koryukovka. The fascists set fire to the place. On the way back the scouts visited the spot where the Koryukovka detachment had been located. They found the dugouts smashed and the bodies of several dead partisans lying among the ruins. Where were the others? Had they gone off? Or been taken prisoner?

From all parts of the region people come to us, to our snowed-under dugouts. All we hear are the words: shot, killed, arrested. . . .

\* \* \*

What with the unavoidable upset caused by the bad news in those difficult days, an outsider might not have noticed our fighting spirit or the existence of premeditated action and a firm and co-ordinated plan.

But in the privacy of the headquarters dugout the commanders were stubbornly toiling over the plan of an offensive operation. The top men, myself among them, naturally could not remain calm in face of the alarming reports brought in

by the scouts and messengers. There was only one way out of the situation: to take the offensive.

Strange as it may seem, our trump card was the enemy's self-confidence. Reports came from Pogoreltsy that the German garrison had settled down there with every comfort. The Germans ate and drank a lot, caroused at night, and undressed when they went to bed.

A large number of them were stationed there—no less than five hundred men. We were highly pleased to learn that our scouts had found the Pogoreltsy population profoundly sympathetic and burning with desire to help the partisans. It was only thanks to the kolkhoz people that more and more reconnoitred spots appeared on the plan Rvanov was drawing up: the headquarters, machine-gun nests, parking places, ammunition depot, fuel store and the quarters of Major Schwalbe and Lieutenant Ferrenc.

Our greatest helper was Vasya Korobko, a 14-year-old Pogoreltsy schoolboy. This thin, dark-haired peasant lad had long been begging to be taken into the detachment. Several times he came to see Balabai.

"Take me in, Alexander Petrovich," he would say. "I'll stand up under anything. I'm small, and I can crawl through any place. I'll never be afraid of anything!"

Still Balabai could not make up his mind to take him into the detachment. Then Vasya begged for at least an assignment. He was advised to fix himself up in the German commandant's office, which was located in the building of the village Soviet.

"Shining the Germans' boots?" Vasya asked glumly.

"But you yourself said you were ready for anything."

He really did take to shining the Germans' boots, and he so managed to worm his way into their confidence that they never suspected him when a leaflet from our forest printshop made its appearance on the very door of the commandant's office.

After that there was a terrible rumpus in Pogoreltsy. The fascists tore up the floors in five peasant houses. For some reason they decided that if it was an "underground" printshop then it must really be under the floor.

Through Balabai Vasya sent us a most detailed plan of Pogoreltsy that he had drawn himself. The house in which the commandant lived was depicted in cross-section in this plan.

"That's the bed," Vasya explained. "And this is the commandant himself lying in the bed with his head toward the window. I drew a swastika on his forehead so you wouldn't make a mistake."



The night of November 29 a Young pioneer named Galya Gorbach came to the camp and in frightful excitement told us:

"The most mysterious German's staying at our house. He's an officer. And his orderly is as good-looking as an officer. When the rest are asleep these two whisper about something all the time. They've got a special suitcase and they hide it from everybody; sometimes they cover it with rags and sometimes they put it under the floor boards. Yesterday they took it to the stable and buried it in the manure."

"What do you think is in this suitcase?"

"I don't know. Mama doesn't either. When they whisper to each other we stand by the window and listen. Only it's in German and we don't understand it."

We thanked Galya, of course, and told her to convey thanks to her mama from the partisans. We wanted to send someone to accompany her back but she refused. And she couldn't have been a day over fourteen. Before she left she said, her eyes lighting up:

"Could you give me a grenade? Just one. Polyasha Gorodash has three of them, only she's stingy. She's my best friend, but she won't give me one for anything."

"What do you need a grenade for?"

She smiled slyly. "People say you have for-

ty boxes of those grenades, and maybe more. They're just lying around, but I'd throw—"

Kapranov roared with delight. Wiping away the tears, he said over and over again:

"There's a girl for you, a real partisan!"

I called him over and told him in a whisper to give her some candy. He immediately turned serious.

"There isn't any, Alexei Fyodorovich."

I had to repeat the instruction. He carried it out unwillingly. Oddly enough, the girl wasn't pleased with the candy. She took it, it's true, but she seemed really hurt that we hadn't given her a grenade.

It was a great temptation to tell Galya that we would soon be seeing her again.

On the evening of November 30 an alarm was sounded in the camp and the order drawn up long beforehand went into effect: all the platoons were to pick up and march during the night to the positions of the Perelyub detachment in the Topolev woods for concerted action.

The weather favoured us. A blinding snow-storm arose. The moon came up only after midnight. The march was an extremely difficult one, but then it was just what we had wished for—a complete secret.

At noon on December 1 the partisans of four detachments joined up near the Topolev woods.

The men started making friends. At last the amalgamation had really taken place. Now there were some three hundred men in the united detachment.

But the enemy gave us no chance to rest after the difficult march. An hour later a force the size of a company arrived in trucks, fanned out and began combing the woods.

Of course, the fascist scouts were nowhere around that night. The Fritzes were sure that they would still find Balabai's small detachment here. In ten minutes our joint forces routed the enemy. Leaving sixteen dead on the field of battle, he turned and fled.

Here is where we found out we had a lot of brave men among us. Our boys counter-attacked with such fury, so spiritedly and so noisily, that the fascists took to their heels without a glance backward. An especially good showing in this battle was made by Artazeyev, who had come to us from Dobryanka with Marusya Skripka. At first he fired from behind cover, but when the Hitlerites bolted he rose to his enormous height and set off after them on his long legs. And was his dander up! Before overtaking the fascists he suddenly somersaulted at full speed. We all thought he was wounded. But he jumped up again, ran on, caught up with two Fritzes and belaboured them with his rifle butt and bayonet until both were laid low.

Later we found out that Artazeyev had stopped to take off his boots, which were too large and bothered him, and then barefoot pursued the Germans through the snow.

Then there was Yuly Sinkevich, who had seemed a quiet, modest chap. To tell the truth, we all thought him a coward, but in this night battle he killed three Hitlerites. And what a change in the man! He kept thumping Artazeyev on the shoulder, began to eat more, and demanded a double ration of liquor from Kapranov. That evening, while the rest were singing and dancing around the campfires, Sinkevich gave his rifle a thorough cleaning.

The men did not yet know what awaited them that night. Many were surprised when at ten o'clock they were ordered to throw snow over the fires and take a nap.

At two a.m. we roused everybody. Each company, each platoon and each squad was given a specific assignment. At 4:30 on December 2 we all crawled up to the assault positions. At 5:00 Rvanov pulled the trigger of his rocket pistol.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FIRST SUCCESSES

THE Pogoreltsy operation does not belong to the category of major military operations or very skilfully conducted ones. It was simply a bold raid that took the enemy by surprise. Although we spent a fairly long time preparing for it, I am not sure it went off without tactical mistakes.

However, the operation was of very great importance to us. Later both officers and men often recalled it around campfires and told the newcomers about it. Even now we invariably go over the episodes of that engagement when we get together.

As we crawled toward the village of Pogoreltsy that early morning the commanders and the members of the R.C. were more nervous than anybody else. They realized that the loss of this battle might mean the failure of the partisan movement in the region or at any rate a serious blow to it. If we failed we would have to start all over again from the beginning.



Before us in the snowy steppe lies a large dark village. Through it runs a highway. Seven kilometres from the village the forest from which we emerged two hours before looms black. A late moon hangs low in the sky. It is frosty and there is a moderate wind.

The group with which Popudrenko, Yaremenko, Rvanov and I are crawling is stretched out in a line along the bed of a gully. There are sixteen in our group. In the four groups surrounding the village there are 242 partisans in all. We try not to talk or even to whisper. All the men and officers know the exact location of our command post. This is the kolkhoz storage yard, now neglected, in which a broken winnowing machine, the fly-wheel from an engine, a heap of rusty gears and a worn-down millstone were lying about in disorder.

We peer at our watches. They all say something different. We decide to synchronize them by Rvanov's. Just a few minutes left before the signal.

These few minutes are the tensest. We stare at one spot. A peaceful wisp of smoke curls up from the tall house in the centre of the village in which the enemy headquarters is located. Not only this wisp of smoke but the village as a whole looks as though there were no war going on. Yet there are more than five hundred enemy soldiers

and officers in the village, sent here especially to wipe us out. At the moment they are sleeping, snoring, scratching themselves in their sleep. Or so we imagine. But who knows, maybe they have long since prepared to meet us and are sitting in ambush snickering as they wait for us to give the signal and go into attack.... Twelve persons in the village know that Rvanov will send up a green rocket at 5:00.

Rvanov raises the rocket pistol and pulls the trigger. But there is no report. And just at that moment someone strikes a gong in the centre of the village.

"An alarm, the rats!" Popudrenko cannot contain himself and jumps out of concealment.

I pull him back. A second strike of the gong, then a third. But the village remains as quiet as before. Rvanov astonishes me at that moment: his rocket pistol misfires, but he swears only in a whisper. A fourth strike, a fifth.... Rvanov swings the firing-pin of the rocket pistol down on the millstone with all his might. With a hiss and a sputter the green light soars into the sky.

Later we learn that the gong had not been an alarm but merely the striking of the hour.

A second passes, two seconds. Shots ring out. The partisans rise and run toward the village. To the right, near the church, there is the blast of an explosion. A huge flame shoots up. It leaps

higher and higher, lighting up the village. Now we see the Germans too. Glass tinkles, and white figures tumble out of windows. A German machine gun starts chattering but immediately peters out. Half-dressed Hitlerites by the score dash helter-skelter, all of them shouting at the top of their voices. Their cries merge in an unbroken wail that reaches us through the continuous crackle of tommy guns and rifles.

Fascists run toward us, too, straight toward our command post, screaming one and the same words over and over again:

*"Russische partisan, Russische, Russische, Russische partisan!"*

We were to hear this wail fairly often for the next three years. From out of smashed tanks, burning headquarters buildings, wrecked railway coaches terror-stricken Hitlerites will run shouting as today:

*"Russische, Russische, Russische partisan!"*

The flames leap higher and higher: the boys of Gromenko's platoon have set fire to the fuel dump.

The fascists who run toward us in panic fear we lay low to the last man. After that we cannot hold ourselves back and we follow Popudrenko into the thick of the battle. Now our command post is on the main street of the village. Here it is light and lively. Trucks are burning. Hitlerites jump from them. The battle begins to subside. We

go on and suddenly by the light of the fire we catch a glimpse of a girl standing on a porch in nothing but a dress. Damn it if it isn't Galya!

"Galya!" I shout. "Go and hide!"

She turns to me and says gaily:

"But there aren't any more Germans—they're all dead."

A woman comes running up. "Follow me, I've got three Germans in the bathhouse."

Our men toss grenades into the bathhouse. The firing dies away.

I look at my watch. The fighting has been going on for forty minutes.

Kapranov shouts, calling for people to help collect the booty captured from the Germans and load it into trucks. Novikov comes running up to me. Recognizing Galya, he asks:

"Well, where are your handsome Germans with the suitcase?"

Galya is very much put out: they ran away. She goes down the street with us, examining the huddled bodies. There are many bodies. Two men are counting them; they were specially detailed to do so. Suddenly Galya dashes ahead:

"There's the one, that's him, help me!" she shouts, trying to pull a suitcase out of the stiffened hand of a huge, redheaded noncom.

I lift the big duralumin suitcase which looked like imitation leather, and Balabai opens it with

his bayonet as he would a tin can. Women's collars, karakul pelts, watches, silk garments and even brassieres lie neatly folded inside the suitcase. People gather around us. Here is an occasion for a meeting.

Yaremenko mounts the porch of a house. Partisans and villagers come running up from all sides. Women come running too, many of them with loaves of bread and pitchers of milk.

"This is what the fascist invaders want from us," says Yaremenko, and lifting the suitcase high he shows everybody the contents.

This is more impressive than any speech.

Among the partisans I see newcomers, Pogoreltsy peasants. They stand out because they carry only captured tommy guns and rifles.

Rvanov comes up. "Time to withdraw," he says. "We planned the operation for half an hour and more than an hour has already passed."

But just at that moment up runs Yemelyanov, our feldsher. "Three wounded. One fracture. We need a cast, but we haven't any plaster.... I ran to the hospital—a few Germans with a machine gun are there."

The battle for plaster lasted eight minutes. Rvanov sends up a white rocket from a new German rocket pistol. Cease fire! The partisans come running up. We form into a column and march out of Pogoreltsy.



Half a kilometre out of the village we all begin hugging and congratulating one another and talking nineteen to the dozen.

Above us all towers Popudrenko, mounted on an enormous and very vicious German stallion.

"Call this a horse? It's a devil!" Popudrenko tells me, pounding the stallion on the head with his fist. "Careful there, Alexei Fyodorovich, step aside. He bites like a crocodile."

At my request he orders in a stentorian voice:

"Stop the chatter! Hustle along!"

Someone strikes up "Through the Valleys and Over the Hills." And now we suddenly discover that our boys are splendid, simply marvelous, singers....

\* \* \*

Such is my general impression of the operation. Of course, I haven't told everything. Group leaders came running up to our CP several times. Rvanov reported indignantly that Bessarab's platoon had not managed to straddle the road in time and a good three hundred fascists had got away in the direction of Semyonovka. Every ten minutes messengers reported on the progress of the operation. All three of us—I, Rvanov and Popudrenko—issued instructions.

The actual results of the battle were the following: we destroyed the ammunition depot, fuel dump and supply and provisions stores, two guns, nine trucks and eighteen motorcycles. The enemy lost more than a hundred in killed. Our casualties were three wounded.

The detachment carried through the operation to wipe out the German invaders in the village of Pogoreltsy with a rating of "good." Eighteen men were cited in an order of the day. We drew the special attention of everybody to fighting man Arsenty Kovtun's heroic deed.

A man well on in years, before the war chairman of a kolkhoz, Arsenty Kovtun signed up for the detachment and went off to the forest even before the occupation. His seventeen-year-old son Grisha joined the partisans at the same time. Both were enrolled in the Perelyub detachment.

Arsenty Kovtun was a calm, silent, powerfully-built man who called himself a soldier and really did carry himself like an old, experienced soldier. He didn't push himself forward but when he was given a job he did it well, no matter what it was—whether peeling potatoes, chopping down a tree, digging an excavation for a dugout, or bringing in a "tongue"....

In this battle Kovtun was ordered to remove the sentry before headquarters quietly. He crawled up only to discover that there was a pair of

them: two German sentries were marching around the house. Kovtun waited for the signal. When the rocket rose over Pogoreltsy he flung himself at the nearest sentry, who succeeded in firing a shot, however. The bullet smashed the binoculars hanging about Kovtun's neck but this did not stop him and he came to grips with the German. They crashed to the ground, the German landing on top. The second sentry danced around, not daring to shoot. Later Kovtun said he had deliberately let the German remain on top of him.

When partisans ran up Kovtun instantly threw off the German, sprang to his feet and gave him a tremendous blow over the head with his rifle butt. The butt burst into splinters. The second sentry fired several times; two bullets went through Kovtun's greatcoat. He charged and plunged his bayonet into the German. Then Grisha ran up.

"You all right, Pa?" he asked, excited.

"Yes, son, I'm all right," Kovtun answered as he wrenched the rifle from the stiff fingers of the sentry and dashed into the thick of battle.

All day long the partisans kept telling one another about this encounter. Kovtun himself did not say anything, but when persistently urged he gave sober and precise answers.

"That German that lay on top of you, Uncle Arsenty, was he heavy?"

"He didn't lie on me. He was rolling on me."

"A big guy, was he?"

"Big all right, but that wasn't all of it. He smelled like a distillery. Loaded down with rum, and his tongue hanging out like that dog's over there."

"How did you break the butt? Was his head as tough as all that?"

"He wore a helmet. And his head was hard too. Well, and I had an Italian rifle—the quality's not all it might be...."

Some fifteen kilometres out of Pogoreltsy we heard the echo of distant firing. First machine guns opened up, then came several dull heavy explosions.

"Germans fighting Germans," the scouts soon reported. "Reinforcements for the Pogoreltsy garrison came up from Semyonovka. The Germans that remained in Pogoreltsy thought the partisans had come back and opened fire. And the Semyonovka Germans thought the partisans had entrenched themselves in the village. They began smoking them out with artillery. They fought half an hour."

"There's a just war for you!" said our hero, Kovtun.

Every time we managed to set the fascists against one another after that our men said:

"There's a just war!"

\* \* \*

We returned to the forest in which the regional detachment stood before the Pogoreltsy engagement. Where one hundred men had lived before we now had over three hundred—all the platoons plus the Pogoreltsy reinforcements. It was freezing weather, with a fierce icy wind blowing often. Winter was just setting in. The real frosts were still to come; and besides, the food situation was definitely growing worse—our supplies were coming to an end.

But it was as if we had received a new set of men. They were more disciplined and carried out all orders quickly and willingly. Evenings around the campfires they took apart and studied German rifles, tommy guns and machine guns.

"That's right, comrades. No one will be giving us any weapons within the immediate future. Fighting man Kovtun, answer this question: Who's the main provider of weapons for the Ukrainian partisans?"

"Hitler!" says Kovtun, rising to his feet and saluting.

"As you were, you don't know the subject. Malchik, what do you say?"

Scout Malakh Malchik\* was actually around seventy. He had been a member of the Party since 1917. An ex-forester and ex-carpenter, he was

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\* Malchik means "boy" in Russian.—*Trans.*



agile, quick, efficient and could turn his hand to anything. He came to the detachment with two grown sons, a daughter and a son-in-law. He was thoroughly at home in the forest. In every village he had friends.

"Our main source of supply, Alexei Fyodorovich," he answered with a grin, "is partisan bravery."

"No," Semyon Tikhonovsky interrupted him. Semyon was always sure to think up something. "The main partisan provider is confidence. If you're confident of victory you'll win, and live a hundred years after the war."

"Huh, isn't he the confident guy!"

"Absolutely! Ever hear the story how the partisan and the German argued about encirclement?"

"Tell us, Semyon Mikhailovich."

Tikhonovsky didn't have to be asked twice.

"Well," he began, "a German meets a partisan. 'Surrender,' the German says, 'because I'm going to surround you and wipe you out.' 'You're just a stupid parrot, that's what,' the partisan says. 'How can you surround me when you're all surrounded yourself and haven't any place to go?' 'Ha-ha-ha,' the German says, but he takes a look around. 'I'll get to the Urals,' he says, 'the Führer's leading me.' But again he looks around. 'How can you encircle us and win,' says the par-

tisan again, 'when all you do is keep turning your head, shooting your eyes back all the time? And you can't help looking back because human eyes got you surrounded on all sides, and there's anger in those eyes, and your death.' The German lets out a yell. 'Shut up or I'll kill you!' But he can't help himself and looks around again. And here the partisan ups and lays him low."

So I walk of an evening from fire to fire, listening to the partisans talking, looking over the camp. How everything has changed! Just two days ago the men were walking about silent and glum. In each glance was the anxious question, "What next?"

And now even the forest seems different. Evenings the light of the fires reveals a magnificent, even a majestic, scene. The air is crisp, faces are rosy, there is laughter, noise and gay ringing voices. Some wrestle in the snow, some strike up a song. Steam rises from the kettles—supper will soon be ready....

Bessarab comes up. "Folks, ahem, er, are in a good mood!"

"What do you think is the reason?"

Bessarab twirls his moustache thoughtfully.

"I think, Alexei Fyodorovich, this phenomenon is to be explained by the fact that we, ahem, er, joined forces and struck at the enemy with our combined efforts...."

"So we were right in uniting?"

The man is extremely conceited; he feels he should admit he was in the wrong but he wants it to appear as if he were doing me a favour.

"Labour picks a man up. Now we've laboured. That's why, I think, the men's mood is up to the mark."

"That means we did right in uniting?"

"We chose the right moment. At that moment, ahem, it was necessary to act together."

That ends the talk with Bessarab. Deep down in his heart he still clings stubbornly to his previous views. But the facts are so obvious that he has to make a temporary retreat.

We considered the main result of the Pogoreltsy operation to be a general rise in morale. The men began to have respect for themselves, to have confidence in their strength. Now we frequently heard talk about the need for still bolder and bigger raids. However, in reality our success was much broader and much more significant than we believed.

As I have already said, 242 partisans took part in the Pogoreltsy engagement. Besides, several villagers helped us spy out the enemy's strength. A number of the men who guided our companies to the village were also local people. After the battle almost all of them joined the detachment. But it was not only scouts and

guides who made up the reinforcements from Pogoreltsy.

During the engagement we had many helpers whom we did not know and upon whose help we had not counted.

Later we became accustomed to having scores of nameless helpers fighting alongside with us in every community. A battle is exciting, it stirs even timid souls. When the German flees he is pursued not only by the partisan's bullet. Old women fling pots at him from windows, boys fire slingshots at him from attics, the lame trip him up with their crutches. In this way they give vent to long-suppressed hatred for the enemy.

It was in the Pogoreltsy engagement that we first came to know such helpers. Some of them grew so bold they came out into the open and joined the fight. They snatched up guns dropped by the Germans and used them to kill the enemy.

After the battle many of these comrades came to the detachment. "We simply can't remain in the village any longer," they declared.

The Pogoreltsy reinforcements were quite sizable—more than fifty people.

But as a matter of fact, actually this figure was considerably greater. The day after the operation more than ten volunteers came to our camp. The next day twenty-two came. People came on the third day and on the fourth. And not only

from Pogoreltsy but from Bogdanovka, Oleshnya, Chenchiki and Samotugi. Old men, women, girls and even children of twelve and thirteen came and asked if they could "sign up with the partisans."

In all these villages located within a radius of ten to fifteen kilometres from our camp people tumbled out into the streets that early morning of the Pogoreltsy operation, looked at the glow in the sky and listened with hope to the sounds of battle. Everybody realized this could not be punitive detachments out on a sadistic spree. What could have happened then? Did the Red Army break through? Or did it drop paratroopers? There were all kinds of guesses.

And, of course, the news spread like wildfire. Without newspapers or the radio the people of the remotest villages learned that the partisans had finally emerged from the forest and were giving it to the Germans. The Hitlerites and their henchmen had just been trumpeting high and low that there were no partisans anywhere. "Small groups of Bolshevik bandits are hiding in the forests. They will soon be caught and wiped out," is what they said. And now the Germans were fleeing in panic across the fields and down the roads. Attacking a garrison that size was no joke! No, those were no small groups in the forests but hundreds and maybe even thousands of partisans. And they had machine guns and mortars and cannon!



The fascists themselves set up a howl that they had been attacked by a powerful, well-armed detachment. They couldn't, after all, admit that the garrison had been routed by a group of partisans.

This was the first outstanding partisan action in Chernigov Region. It showed the people that, living and operating side by side with them on enemy-occupied territory, were their defenders, avengers of their trampled honour. Soviet men and women began to lift their heads.

\* \* \*

We fortified our forest positions. Almost daily either Hitlerites or Hungarians attacked us from one side or the other. Sometimes the enemy flung newly-formed police units against us. An alarm would be sounded in camp around ten or eleven in the morning, and two or three companies would set out to meet the enemy.

Occasionally we made raids on enemy garrisons. Not all of them were as successful as the Pogoreltsy raid, but all were sufficiently telling. The invaders seemed to have resigned themselves to our existence and for the time being recognized the forest as a partisan zone.

We soon gathered, though, that at that period the German command was deliberately refraining from throwing large forces against us. It was con-

fident that it would not be difficult to ferret out and annihilate the partisans at any time. It saw its primary task to be the organization of its rule, total enslavement of the population. "Inspire fear in all who survive. The stamp of the German boot must make the Russian heart quake." Such was the task Alfred Rosenberg set the soldiers in the army of occupation.

But this program of terror suffered a fiasco, as, indeed, did everything else the arrogant and insolent fascists thought up.

One day our men brought a "tongue" into headquarters. He was a noncom of the SS troops. We called in Karl Shveilik, an interpreter from Balabai's company, to help with the questioning. Karl was a native of the Ukraine and a real Soviet patriot.

During the interrogation the SS man asked our interpreter if he was a German.

"Yes," Karl answered, "I'm a German but not one who's been doped by Hitler."

The SS man, whose hands were tied, tried to kick Karl. Even after he was given a slap in the face he kept spitting and shouting:

"Fools! You'll all be caught in two weeks and hanged!"

"Why in two weeks? Why not now? Scared?"

"Right now you are useful to our command."

We burst out laughing. But there was a grain of truth in what the SS man said: the occupation authorities thought they would be able to turn the population against the partisans.

In some places the Germans themselves formed partisan detachments.

They issued arms to released criminals and inveterate bandits and gave them a free hand to plunder and kill the population. The bandits were ordered to pretend they were partisans.

This provocative plan was as stupid as it was insidious. Only the very naive fell for it. The majority of the population was able to distinguish unerringly between real partisans and agents provocateurs. . . . It sought protection against these bandits not from the occupation authorities or from the police but from us.

With the help of the population our reconnaissance established that one such band was operating in the village of Lukovitsy in Koryukovka District. The platoon commanded by Comrade Kozik and my R.C. aide, Comrade Balitsky, were given the assignment of wiping out the agents provocateurs.

Our men took the bandits by surprise and after disarming them led them out into the street. All the village inhabitants gathered to watch the trial. Balitsky read aloud the R.C. leaflet "Who Are the Partisans." Then all the loot found on the

bandits was distributed among the victims. The bandits were shot on the spot, in the presence of the villagers.

After the Pogoreltsy operation the German garrisons in the neighbouring hamlets and villages received sizable reinforcements. According to our intelligence reports, the enemy had some three thousand men concentrated around Reimentarovka Forest. They were in no hurry to fight the partisans, preferring the easier "job" of taking reprisals against the population.

Villages went up in flames. In their posters and leaflets the invaders wrote that they were "wiping out partisan nests." Actually they conducted no investigations whatsoever. Punitive units would break into villages and drive all the people from their homes. Those who tarried to snatch up some necessary articles, or who put up resistance, were shot on the spot. After taking the warm clothing, bicycles, phonographs, watches, money and other valuables and driving off the cattle, the punitive expedition would set fire to the houses one after another.

Burgomasters appeared in the district centres nearest us—Kholmy and Koryukovka. Field and economic commandants' offices began "working." The Gestapo arrived and settled down in houses with big deep cellars. Pan Dobrovolsky, chief of police for the Ukraine east of the Dnieper, and his staff



took up residence in the resort town of Sosnitsa, at the confluence of the Desna and the Ubed. In all the inhabited points police squads were set up and starostas "elected" in quick order.

The majority of the starostas put into office by the occupants were bitter enemies of the people. The partisans fought and exposed them and mercilessly put to death the basest and cruelest of them. Sometimes, however, the Hitlerites were unable to find an out-and-out traitor in a village and were forced to appoint as starosta a man they had not fully probed, just so long as he was not a Communist or an especially active supporter of Soviet power. And so, before taking any measures against a starosta we first found out from the inhabitants what sort of man he was. If he proved to be wavering in the least we sent people to him to try and win him over to our side.

Besides, we endeavoured to get our own, tested, men appointed to the post. The reader already knows that one such agent of the Bolshevik underground was Yegor Bodko who had been left behind in Lisoviye Sorochniky by the district committee of the Party. Now we continued selecting new people for this work.

One night as I was returning to the headquarters dugout after making the rounds I heard the loud laughter of Nikolai Nikitich Popudrenko; his laughter was always very hearty and infectious.



Upon opening the door I found Popudrenko sitting by the lamp with two old men whom I did not know.

Popudrenko threw me a glance and again roared with delight.

"You just listen to this, Alexei Fyodorovich!" he exclaimed. "Here's a deputation that's a deputation!"

It was evident the old men didn't share his gay mood. One of them looked downright gloomy. The other rose when he noticed me and declared in a hurt voice:

"If we're weak in the head then explain us what's what. We've come to you for help, for advice."

Popudrenko immediately became serious.

"Repeat it, dad," he said. "Tell it to our commander. Don't feel hurt. It really is an important matter, and you can be sure we'll settle it one way or another. I wasn't laughing at you.... I was simply tickled by what you told me."

The old men exchanged glances. I sat down at the table opposite them and offered them some makhorka.

"We come from Guta village—" one of them began.

"You ought to give orders, Comrade Commander," the other interrupted, "so it'd be easier to get to you. The sentry held us up two hours. And this is urgent."

"We come from Guta village," the first one repeated. "A speaker of yours came to our place—I don't know whether from the Party or from the partisans. That speaker read us the war bulletin—our thanks to him—and told us how things were going at the front and how we ought to fight the Germans and fool them.

"He was a tall fellow, and dark. We don't know his name. But he's a good speaker, gets at your insides. . . .

"Well, how to fool the Germans so they won't pinch us too hard. That speaker said the Germans would come to our village soon to choose a starosta. That they'd hold something in the way of elections. And so your speaker told us to pick one of our men beforehand. For starosta, that is. So that the Germans would think that man of ours was for them but really he'd be for us. That right, Stepan?" The narrator asked his companion, throwing an angry glance at Popudrenko, as much as to say, "What's funny about this, anyway?"

"That's right," Stepan answered. "Exactly right. And he said, besides, that our man ought to go to the commandant and lay it on thick as he's a kulak and all for the fascist order. Is that right, Ivan?"

"Right it is."

"Seven of us got together. We started talking each other into it: you go, Stepan; you go, Ivan; well, then, you go be the starosta, Sergei Vasilye-

vich! Every one refused." The old man inhaled deeply and made a significant pause.

"Yes," I remarked cautiously. "It's a complicated matter. A tough matter. It has to be pulled off so the fascists believe it. Otherwise it's the rope! It's a dangerous job! A very brave and self-sacrificing man is needed."

"What kind, do you say?"

"A self-sacrificing man, I say. A man who's ready to die for his people."

I gave the old man a brief account of the life, work and heroic death of Yegor Yevtukhovich Bodko.

The old men, deeply moved, were silent for a while. Then Stepan said:

"What you said is right. Nowadays death goes around carrying a German tommy gun instead of a scythe. Dying is easy. The hard thing is not to die for nothing. Comrade Bodko who became an assistant starosta had a good story. They checked up on him—and sure enough, here's a man expelled from the Party, so he can be trusted with German affairs. That means he was brave and had brains too. But with us it's different, Comrade Commander—"

"I see you think we're all cowards, eh?" the other old man interrupted. "But that's not so. The Germans aren't so dumb they'll just put anybody in that job. They'll look around and ask questions.

And that's what we did—we sized up our men the way the Germans would. How many men are left in the village? Well, Yeremei, we didn't count him: he isn't all there. Vassily Kozhukh we crossed off the list too: home brew's the main thing in his life. Without them, these batty ones, there are forty-two men...."

"And the men are all right. Good men, all for the Soviet system. Some are better, others worse. Well, we'd help him out. That's not the trouble, Comrade Commander...."

Here Popudrenko smiled again. The old men fell silent. I looked at him and shook my head. He got up and went out.

"What's he laughing about?" one of the old men asked. "Now you, I see, are looking at it seriously."

"Listen some more.... So some of us got together with the ex-chairman of our kolkhoz, and started going over the men—what each one's like. Just like we were filling out a questionnaire for each one from memory: will he do for a German flunkey, will they believe he's loyal or will they find him out and hang him?"

"First we wanted Alexander Petrenko."

"Fellow with a head on his shoulders, and young, not yet forty."

"He ran the kolkhoz auditing commission. And before that, fifteen years back, he was one of the

chiefs in the Komsomol, a member of the Bureau, or something...."

I interrupted the old men. "Too prominent a man. That kind won't do, comrades. He'd be found out right off."

"That's just what we say too. It can't be done—out of the question! So we tried another one—Andrei Khizhnyak. He was head of the commission on state credits and loans. And was active in fighting the kulaks. We voted him down.

"Then came Dekhterenko. He's a quiet man, real old, and he's religious. But his head works all right. 'I don't refuse,' he says. 'I'm for the people. Only there's a hitch.' 'What's the hitch, Pavel Spiridonovich?' 'The hitch is,' he says, 'that my eldest son Mikola's a colonel in the Red Army, and my middle son Grigory worked in the district Party committee in that town called Vilnius, and my daughter Varvara Pavlovna, you know yourselves, was assistant manager of the street railway department in Kiev. So now figure it out for yourselves if their father's fit to be starosta.' So we decided he wouldn't do either."

"Yes, it's a tough situation," I agreed. Now I knew why Popudrenko laughed. I was having a hard time holding back a smile myself.

"Just wait, Comrade Fyodorov. We pick on Gerasim Klyuchnik. He's a gloomy guy, with eye-



brows like a visor. Just the right looks for the job. So Ivan and I go to his house. But he's not in. We ask his wife where he is. 'Don't know,' she says. Just as we come out we see him heading through the gully for the woods carrying a bundle. We shout, 'Gerasim!' He turns around. 'What do you want?' 'Gerasim, serve the people. You've kept quiet all these Soviet years, didn't speak for or against. You're just the man for starosta. You just run things with your mouth shut, don't say anything to the Germans and don't say anything to us. And if it's got to be done, then punish someone as if it's for violating the fascist rules. The main thing is not to let the Germans know what the people are doing. If a partisan comes or a war prisoner son returns to his mother—to keep him out of German sight.'

"Gerasim thinks a while, scratches his head and then he answers, 'I can't.' 'Why not?' 'I can't, and that's all. What are you pestering me for? If I could I'd be glad to.' And again he's silent. 'But tell us, Gerasim, we're your friends.' 'All right,' he says, 'I'll tell you! You know Sokolenko?' 'Which Sokolenko? No one of that name in the village.'

"And Ivan and I look at each other. Why'd he bring up Sokolenko now? All through the Soviet years this Sokolenko used to write things for the papers about our village. There used to be items

signed by him in the district and Chernigov papers and even in a Kiev paper. If there was an embezzlement or if the chairman worked bad or if there was something else fishy—bango, a little article. And he wrote poetry, too, that Sokolenko."

"'Funny guys you are,' Gerasim says to us. 'That Sokolenko was me! Sokolenko was my pen name. See? So what kind of starosta can I be? There's just one thing for me—to join the partisans!'"

"And so, Comrade Commander," Stepan continued, "no matter who we take he has the Soviet stamp on him: this one was a deputy to the district Soviet or a member of the village Soviet, that one was a Stakhanovite, the next one a brigade leader.... No matter where you turn they're all unsuitable."

The old man fell silent. He glanced at me reproachfully and then rose. But I managed to repress a smile.

"Believe me, comrades," I said, "what you've told me is simply splendid...."

"What's splendid about it? The Germans'll put up Petro Gorokh, or even worse, Ivan Solomenny. Why, that one's a thief. Such a rowdy he is, he even breaks his own windows, to say nothing of other people's. He'd agree to be starosta, that one. He likes the Germans."

Popudrenko returned.

"Well, Nikolai Nikitich, what advice shall we give the comrades?"

We puzzled over it a long time and finally came to the conclusion no better candidate could be found than Sokolenko, that is, Klyuchnik. The more so since he really did come to the forest the day before and was enrolled in one of our companies.

The orderly summoned Klyuchnik. He turned out to be a kolkhoz man of fifty-two with a big, heavy face, a sombre, beetle-browed look and compressed lips.

"Too bad you revealed your pseudonym, Comrade Klyuchnik. We've just come to the conclusion that nobody can handle the job of starosta better than you."

He nodded silently.

"What do you think—the people to whom you revealed your pseudonym won't give you away?"

"But there were just the two of us, Comrade Commander!" one of the old men exclaimed.

"Well, that means they won't," said Popudrenko.

Klyuchnik nodded again.

"So you agree it's a job that has to be done and that there's no one else to give it to?"

"Now I see it."

"Then go and get to work. And the main thing—don't get caught. Good luck!"

On that we said goodbye. When a printed partisan newspaper began coming out a few months later it carried fairly frequent items about rural life which bore Sokolenko's by-line. No one ever found out that the author of those items was the man the invaders had set up as the starosta of the village of Guta.

\* \* \*

The survivors of burned-out villages scattered throughout the entire region. Hundreds of families dragged along the roads seeking refuge with relatives, friends or simply kind folk.

But by far not all the homeless turned to relatives or friends for help. Very many went off into the forests. "There's lines at our pickets like outside a box-office," the partisans joked.

Those who came to us were the very Soviet people whose hearts Rosenberg had figured the stamp of the German boot would cause to quake. They brought pistols, grenades and bullets with them. And every one who came promptly told the reason for his indignation.

From the village of Maibutnya came an old kolkhoz peasant named Tovstonog. Some of our men knew him. He rendered the partisans various services such as sheltering our scouts and messen-

gers in his home. He knew the way to the camp. Early one morning he appeared with three girls. One of the girls was leading a cow.

I was asked to come to the picket. The old man demanded to see the chief himself.

"So you're Fyodorov?" the old man asked as he stretched out his hand. "I've heard of you. Your detachment has a fine reputation. Your boys have been at my house. Good boys they are. I'm sorry I have no sons or I'd give them my blessing and send them to you. . . . I'd come myself but I'm getting on in years, feel weary."

As I listened to him I kept glancing involuntarily at the girls. They were all strong-looking and rosy-cheeked. The youngest—she couldn't have been more than sixteen—held a rope the other end of which went around the cow's neck. The cow was tossing her head.

"Rosie," the girl whispered, "you be quiet, Rosie."

"Your Rosie's upset," I said in an attempt to draw the young people into the conversation. "She's not used to wandering about in the woods in winter."

The girl blushed down to her neck.

"It's nothing," she whispered, her eyes downcast.

"Well, what do you think of my girls, Comrade Commander? Here, let me introduce you: Nastya,



my eldest, finished nine grades of school. And the next one, Pasha, she's eighteen but was a group leader in the kolkhoz already. And then there's Shura, her mother's darling, with her friend Rosie...."

"Pa," the girl protested, "don't make fun of me...."

"Here now, we didn't come to cry, did we? It's a gay crowd here, Shura. Anyone here play the accordion? My girls, Comrade Commander, are rare singers.... Well, will you take them in place of sons? And take the cow too. The old woman and I will get along somehow."

I didn't answer at once.

"Don't mind their not being talkative, Comrade Commander," he said in alarm. "They're strong girls."

We enrolled all three girls in the detachment. The two older ones got used to the life quickly, went scouting and took part in battles side by side with the men. They all proved to be fine singers; Shura even became our song-leader. But she was unable to overcome her shyness. Whenever the men began to tell earthy partisan stories in her presence she would get up and go off into the woods. At the beginning we made her a medical orderly. She didn't refuse but she was obviously disappointed. She wanted desperately to take part in the fighting. This small, apple-cheeked girl always

walked around with a medicine kit slung over her shoulder, and the kit was always filled to overflowing.

"What have you got there in your kit, Shura? It's awfully heavy!"

She would redden, avert her glance and say softly:

"Those are bullets!"

Finally Shura got her way: a rifle was issued to her. In her first engagement, when the commander gave the order to retreat—the enemy outnumbered the group of partisans five to one and threatened to encircle it—Shura did not crawl back with the rest but continued firing away from behind her stump.

"Come on, Shura, over this way!" the commander shouted. "What're you waiting for?"

When she joined the others she said by way of excuse:

"But nobody called me. The commander said, 'Boys, retreat,' but I'm not a boy, I'm a girl."

While our detachment stood near Maibutnya old Tovstonog visited his daughters regularly. He always came in to see me, too, bringing a gift—a few eggs, or a pouch of makhorka. I might say I drew my makhorka ration from him. He always questioned me in minute detail about his daughters' behaviour.

"Anybody would think you'd sent your daughters off to school instead of to a detachment, dad."

"Why, certainly," he answered without turning a hair. "Let 'em learn!"

At about the same time a man of sixty-five, a village schoolteacher named Semyon Aronovich Levin, who was not a Party member, joined the detachment. For two weeks he wandered through the neighbouring villages and woods in search of the partisans. And when finally he came upon our trail and reached the camp he was so hungry and tired it looked as though he would be good only for resting and eating and eating and resting. But to everyone's surprise, the very next day he demanded work. He was sent to the kitchen to help the cook. For two or three days he obediently peeled potatoes. Then he went to the company commander.

"Take me on a combat operation," he said, "give me a chance to fight. . . . I know I'm old, but that's all right, try me out. . . ."

Later he fought in several engagements. I recall that when we went on an operation to Semyonovka, over thirty kilometres away, the old man marched the entire way.

"Get into a sleigh," we told him. "You're not a young man, after all. Nobody'll think the worse of you for it."

"Leave me alone, I'm as good as you are," he answered irritably. "Why should I have privileges?"

Once you have accepted me as a fighter then let me be on an equal footing."

Only after he had chalked up a score of six fascists killed did Levin consent to a transfer to the quartermaster service.

We had scores of elderly assistants. Not all of them joined the detachment, nor did we strive to draw them in. They could render us much greater service in their native villages: their homes were often used as secret meeting places.

In the village of Balyasy in Kholmy District lived a foxy old fellow by the name of Ulyan Sery. At that time he was seventy-six. He is still alive today, and tells his great-grandchildren about his partisan adventures.

Ulyan fell into the hands of the Germans and the police three times. Each time they beat him up cruelly.

"Go on, ask the people!" he would shout. "They'll tell you I'm a quiet man! How could I be a partisan at my age, or with my strength? Never set eyes on those forest bandits." Ulyan's abuse of the partisans sounded so sincere that in the end he was set free.

The next day he would again set out for the forest to get in touch with the partisans. I remember the time he came into headquarters terribly angry, fairly shaking with indignation.

"What kind of order have you got here! Just

making game of old people, that's what you're doing! If there's an arrangement carry it out, otherwise what kind of a military man are you?"

It turned out he was angry at Balabai. They had agreed that Ulyan would come to the edge of the forest at two in the afternoon and play on a shepherd's pipe.

"I'm not a kid, I'm an old man. It's hard for me carrying sacks in the snow. I played that pipe and played and played, got up to my chest in snow, and still nobody came. I've brought eight kilos of onions and two of makhorka. Was all in a sweat. Lucky I didn't catch cold after that. You give him a reprimand, Alexei Fyodorovich...."

"But maybe he had a valid reason for not showing up?"

"Well, you find out. That's what you're the boss for."

When he learned that Balabai's men had been busy building a dugout and the sound of the axes had prevented their hearing his pipe, Ulyan agreed to a lighter punishment.

"Still, he ought to have remembered. And don't you give him a single pinch of that tobacco I brought you."

In the village of Perelyub in Kholmy District the landlady of our secret meeting place was a kolkhoz woman of eighty named Maria Ilyinichna Vashchenko, who also collected intelligence infor-



mation for us. She rarely came to the forest, but scores of our men stayed at her home and she fed them and washed their clothes. There was a supply of our leaflets cached in her cellar, and people from distant villages came to her for them.

One day the man on duty reported to me that a picket had stopped four boys in high boots and camouflage capes, with knives and spoons tucked into their boots. I had them brought to headquarters. The kids had really wrapped sheets and diapers over their jackets. The oldest, a boy of fourteen, put his hand to his cap and reported:

"We place ourselves at your disposal as total orphans...."

The youngest, a thin little fellow, imitated the older ones by standing at attention, but he trembled, either from the cold or else because he was on the point of crying. A long drop hung from his nose. Noticing my glance, the "commander" of the group ran up to the little one, wiped his nose efficiently with the corner of a diaper, and coming to attention again, continued his report:

"As total orphans from Ivanovka village, Koryukovka District: Khlopyanuk, Grigory Gerasimovich, born in 1926, my brother, Khlopyanuk, Nikolai Gerasimovich, born in 1930, his friend, Myatenko, Alexander, born in the same year, and

Myatenko, Mikhail, who doesn't go to school yet, six years old...."

I stopped the "commander," pulled all four into the dugout and after seating them ordered hot tea.

A crowd gathered in the dugout and began showering the boys with questions. The boys bolted their food and nodded but did not reply to the questions, casting glances at the older one. The latter did not know what to do. He had made his report already, and he had not come prepared to tell a story. The "commander" broke down first, before his "soldiers" did. True, he had time to flee outside into the forest and only there, with his head pressed against a pine tree, did he give way to tears.

The children told a gruesome story. The chief of the Koryukovka police, Moroz, and policeman Zubov killed Praskovya Yefimovna Khlopyanuk, the wife of a Communist who was a Red Army sergeant, in her own home. They stole everything of value in the house. The children they did not touch, probably because they were too lazy to chase after them. The boys returned home only in the morning.

They dug a shallow grave in the vegetable plot and without the help of adults, without asking anyone to the funeral, covered their mother's body with frozen earth and snow. They had no rela-

tives near-by. The two brothers began to live alone. The small supply of flour and potatoes quickly melted. How were they to go on living? Where could they go?

One night a group of our partisans broke into the village. The boys watched the battle. They witnessed the death of one of their mother's murderers, policeman Zubov. They watched the partisans set fire to the starosta's house. Later, together with the kolkhoz grownups they ran to the granary the partisans broke open. They dashed home a good ten times carrying pails of wheat; they fell asleep right on the grain heaped up on the floor of the room.

In the morning they learned that the partisans had left the village. That same day their neighbour, Natalia Ivanovna Myatenko, was taken to the police station. She did not return. Now there were two more orphans: Shura and Misha. Then word came from the neighbouring village of Sofievka that there the police were killing adults and children indiscriminately.

At this Grisha gathered together his younger comrades in misfortune and made a short speech.

"Let's go to the partisans," he said. "Or we'll be shot dead."

The children were quite practical in preparing for their departure. Into their bundles they packed two changes of underwear each, some wheat and

salt, a frying pan, knives, needles and thread and a box of matches. The two middle boys spied out the lay of the land for the best way to go. At night all four put sheets over themselves and crawled through the vegetable gardens out into the field and from there to the woods.

They wandered in the woods three days, lighting fires and sleeping by them nights. And if they are to be believed, they did not cry once until they reached our dugout.

Nor did the boys cry long here. They were very pleased when we played the phonograph especially for them.... The youngest fell asleep first. And before Shura Myatenko fell asleep he declared in a very serious tone:

"That's all right, kids. If we die here it'll be for our country!"

Two of the children, Grisha and Kolya Khlopyanuk, remained with us as scouts. But when things got tough for us we had to leave the Myatenko brothers in the care of some kind' folk in a village.

Not everybody who came to the detachment had a clear conscience, however. Just about this time a fellow named Timofei turned up. I won't tell his last name—why spoil a young man's life by recalling an episode?...

Timofei was a tall, broad-shouldered lad of seventeen. When he came to us he burst into tears.

"What're you bawling about, you fool?"

"You're going to beat me."

"That means you deserve it, eh? Come on, brother, tell us what we're to beat you for."

"Lead me to the commander."

He was taken to the special counter-espionage department we had set up by that time. This department was headed by Novikov. While Novikov asked him general questions—where he came from, how old he was, who his parents were—Timofei answered quite blithely.

"Now," Novikov said in conclusion, "tell us what brought you here."

Here Timofei again burst into tears.

"What's the matter, want your mama?"

"Take me into the partisans. I can't stand it with the Germans any more."

"There's something on your conscience, Tim, my boy. Out with it now. You joined the police?"

Timofei was taken aback by Novikov's insight.

He was silent a moment. Then he burst out:

"I'm guilty. Beat me. I whipped him, so you whip me."

"Did your chief send you to us?"

"No, I came myself."

He swore by all the gods there be that he had been forced to join the police and that he hadn't done anybody any harm, had just drilled and cleaned his rifle.



"But yesterday the chief called me in and sent me to the shed. There were five or six Germans standing around, and Vasil Kotsura was strapped to a bench. He's a good fellow, Vasil is, a pal of mine. He's our blacksmith. His face was all smashed up and his nose was bleeding. I felt so sorry for him—"

"So you're a soft-hearted fellow, eh?"

"I can't stand fighting, comrade chief. When any of the boys in our village start a fight I always separate them. And the women come to me. 'Go and separate those drunks fighting over there, Timofei,' they say to me."

"So why did the Germans call you to the shed?"

"The moment I walked in the senior German tells the starosta: 'Call the people.' While the people are gathering he mumbles something to the other Germans in his own language, pointing to me. Then he tells me to take off my jacket and he rolls up my sleeve. Then he puts a whip into my hand with the rolled-up sleeve and says: 'Beat him!' "

"And you, you dirty dog, you beat your friend!"

"But listen," Timofei said, and again a quaver crept into his voice. "I say to that German: 'He's my pal, I can't beat him....' Then the German pokes a pistol in my face."

"And so you beat him?"

"What else could I do? The German's got the pistol in front of my nose and he stamps his feet. And the way he barked—my heart sank into my boots. I whipped and cried at the same time. I felt so sorry for Vasil."

"Why did you beat him, what had he done?"

"I don't know. The starosta said what, but I was so upset I didn't get it."

Novikov brought him to me.

"You decide what to do with this creature. Alexei Fyodorovich."

Later quite a few repentent policemen came to our partisan detachments. But he was the first one. His agitation and his tears may have been naive and foolish but they were genuine. He repeated his whole story to me.

"Well," I said, "so you left your whipped friend there? Is that so?"

"No, uncle. I brought him with me."

"Then where is he?"

"In the forest. He was awfully tired. 'Put me down, Tim,' he says. 'I'll rest a bit. Meanwhile you go on to the partisans yourself.' I carried him on my back more than a kilometre. Then he yells: 'It hurts bad. Put me down.'"

"Wounded, is he?"

"No, it's that I beat him so hard...."

When he noticed our cold glances he hastened to explain:

"The German kept poking the pistol in front of my nose. 'Beat him harder!' he said. I beat him as easy as I could. But I've got an awfully heavy hand...."

I sent out stretcher bearers, and they found Kotsura, lying under a bush and groaning loudly. Our feldsher put a compress on his welts. Later Kotsura told us how it had all happened. Despite the strict ban he had played his concertina after dark. The Landwirtschaftsführer had ordered him whipped.

We asked him his opinion of Timofei.

"Tim's a harmless fellow. If he hadn't whipped me they would have whipped him and maybe shot him."

A month later this "harmless" fellow had three dead fascists to his credit. Besides, he had brought in two "tongues." "Tongues" became his partisan speciality. Timofei and Vasil always went out scouting and hunting for "tongues" together.

\* \* \*

Our scouts and messengers and the newcomers who had been in encirclement told us in detail about the fascist terror, which they themselves had witnessed. But if we asked them how the invaders were administering the occupied territory, what methods they employed to enslave the population economically, they gave us only the vaguest in-

formation, taken from German newspapers and leaflets.

Still less did we know then about the mood of the German fascists and their vassals, the Hungarians. To the partisans the enemy was a soulless creature. The appearance of the German fascists, their clothing and everything else about them, roused disgust in the partisans.

One day an odd specimen fell into our hands. Although he was only a lieutenant, and of the quartermaster service at that, the men knew instinctively they had caught a pretty fancy bird.

He stood out from the usual run of German lieutenants by his clothing, his manners, and, I might add, his greater cowardice. His jacket, trousers and boots were all brand new and made to order. Over his regular coat he wore a long fur coat with a beaver collar. He smelt of perfume a mile away. Under his uniform we discovered he wore fine silk underwear bearing a French trade mark.

The lieutenant was a short man of forty-five with thinning hair; he wore gold-rimmed glasses and had a little moustache with a frozen smile beneath it. His life was so precious to him that he agreed with absolutely everything we said to him. After ten or fifteen minutes' questioning almost all the German prisoners usually told us that Hitler was a scoundrel. But this specimen didn't make us

wait a minute: he immediately declared the Russians were wonderful, that Hitler, Goering, Ribbentrop and their entire band were long since doomed and that the defeat of Germany was inevitable. "Believe me, I know it well; I can sense the odour of decay myself," he said. He answered all questions eagerly, but he tried so hard to please us that believing him was impossible.

When the interpreter pulled a thick sealed envelope out of his huge billfold, the lieutenant shrank back as though dodging a blow.

Incidentally, here I should mention that the lieutenant was not captured during a battle. He was travelling in an automobile, accompanied by a German civilian and an orderly. The car skidded off the road and got stuck in the snow. His companions and the driver climbed out to give it a push—and were laid low by partisan bullets. The lieutenant was the only survivor.

On the way to camp he told our scouts in quite passable Russian that he didn't serve in the army. He repeated the same thing when he was questioned at headquarters.

"I am a businessman, I represent commercial circles. Is that clear to you? I am a peaceful civilian. I hold no military position. The uniform is only for convenience in travelling through the districts near the front. I represent a big firm. My job is to establish business connections in the occu-



pied countries—commercial reconnaissance, if you wish.”

The letter we found on him was addressed to his father-in-law in Berlin, who was a partner in a commercial house. Our prisoner apparently also had a share in the firm. He was reporting to his chief and head of the family, giving news about the occupation and sharing his impressions, thoughts and business plans. The letter was frank in the extreme, showing no concern for military censorship.

“After three months in the Ukraine,” wrote the lieutenant, “I have finally come to realize that my knowledge of men extending over many years and my business experience mean nothing at all in this country. All thinking people admit this. Officers too. I mean Nazi officers, up-to-date men who understand that war and personal profit are inseparable.

“Everything here is absurd. You have to stand on your head to get an idea of what is going on. In France, in Belgium and in Poland you could find people ready to do business two days after the army went through. Clever, efficient businessmen who understood that time does not wait and capital must not lie idle. The Frenchman, Belgian, Norwegian or Pole may be a patriot at heart and hate me because I am a German, but if he is a trader or a manufacturer or a banker or even simply an

official you and he can always find a common language.

"He needs me as much as I need him. I offer a consignment of dry goods for the countryside. I promise to take care of rail transportation. And I ask: what can you offer our firm? He offers wool or butter or, as happened to our colleague in Athens, a share in establishing brothels for the soldiers.

"In Russia nobody offers me anything except their services. I find no businessmen, I find no manufacturers, not even officials with business ties. I cannot sell our line of dry goods for peasants. There are no contractors. It is simply unheard of! I have not found a single Russian wholesale dealer, not a single man with capital. During these three months I have not met a single decent Russian, the kind of man for whom the firm might open a credit. The Russian administration, or rather the Ukrainian, as it is considered necessary here to call it, that is, the people whom our army has drawn into participation in governing, is made up of swine to a man!

"They are criminals and bandits who have come back from exile or been freed from prison. All of them or almost all say they were once rich. Some call themselves nobles. Not one of them is in a position to entertain a decent man in his home.

They have no homes. They are a hungry crowd, eighty percent alcoholic. They smell bad."

The lieutenant wrote his father-in-law a good deal more about various types of traitors, from a village starosta to a pretender to the post of governor. He poked bitter fun at them; and it was clear he knew what he was talking about. And we received indirectly an unexpected confirmation of the amazing resistance our social system is capable of; a resistance stemming from the vast economic and social transformations accomplished during the twenty-four years of Socialist upbuilding.

The lieutenant wrote of the fruitless efforts of the Gebietskommissars to get agricultural production going, to prepare for spring sowing and to organize a steady flow of produce to the fatherland. The conclusions he came to were sad:

"We have introduced a card-file system in the Gebietskommandanturs. This may be very good. There will be order. Everything is being registered: houses, cows, half-wrecked tractors, boys and girls, geese and chickens. But, you see, nothing here is permanent. Houses go up in smoke, old people and children die of hunger or from our bombing. Why are our bombs exploding hundreds of kilometres from the front, you ask? Take my word for it—it is necessary. These villages make splendid targets for our young flyers. And the more of these hotbeds of resistance are wiped out the

better. The geese, chickens and sucklings also become fewer with each day. Our officers and soldiers and our officials eat them; I also eat them every day. The army confiscates the cows for meat. The population slaughters them to prevent our getting them and gives the meat to the partisans.

"Oh, those partisans! Hasn't our glorious army wiped them out yet, you ask? My reply is that they are increasing in number all the time! And not because we are plundering. We plunder everywhere. We cannot but plunder. What else does the soldier fight for? No, the whole trouble is that we are unable to come to terms with a single authoritative person among the people. It's the same old story.

"In France and in Belgium, in the Netherlands and in Scandinavia we have at the head of the government and as burgomasters politicians whom the man in the street knows. Members of parliament and ex-ministers urge their people to obey us.

"Our occupation authorities have not found a single popular Russian or a single politician the least bit known who would come over to our side. The deputies to the Soviets and the Party functionaries are either underground, in the army or else head detachments of partisans. We appeal to them, we promise them land and estates, we promise them power and wealth. But these men are politicians without property. They have been brought



up to despise it; the only thing to do with them is wipe them out!

"I look into the future and involuntarily turn to the past. Nobody—neither the British in India, nor the Dutch in Indonesia nor the Americans in the Philippines—faced such problems as will fall to the lot of our countrymen after the war. Trade with the Russians, or colonize the Russians? That is a utopia. There is only one course: to annihilate them. Let a few score Russians remain on reservations. Let everything happen the way it did with the Indians in America. This is the best solution to the problem.

"I am now near an ancient Russian town, Chernigov. Right after Christmas General Fischer's troops launched an operation for the ruthless annihilation of the local partisans. For two weeks now their main forces, together with their Bolshevik leaders, have been surrounded in the forests. During this period there has not been a single day when the temperature was less than thirty degrees below zero. The general told me that bonfires prolong the agony. He assured me that the Chernigov partisans do not have a thousand men left without frostbitten hands or feet. 'I'm very glad,' the general said, 'that they're not surrendering. I would have to waste ammunition on them and then bury their corpses. The ground is too hard; it would mean a lot of work for our soldiers. In the



forest they themselves bury those who freeze to death.' "

The letter was a long one. We published excerpts from it in our wall newspaper.

The lieutenant offered to pay ransom. He assured us that his father-in-law had very close connections with Krupp, was practically a relative of his. But no connections of any sort could now save Mr. Businessman from execution.

During an engagement in Savenki we captured a suitcase belonging to a staff officer named August Tulf. It contained plans, maps and various official memoranda. There were photographs in a big dark blue leather album of a plump lady in lace, men in evening dress, several skinny young misses, groups of children in thin white dresses, and of the owner of the album from the age of one to thirty. One of the last pictures taken before the war showed him with a sugary smile on his face and his arm about the waist of a lean maiden with a long, doleful face. Then there was a heap of unmounted frontline photos. They showed August Tulf fixing a noose about the neck of a Polish peasant woman; August Tulf shooting a bound man in the back of the head; August Tulf standing among a group of officers toasting Hitler's portrait. . . . And, finally, a big enlarged photo of Tulf making merry with about a dozen friends. Tulf was the oldest in the group. The others were

Hitlerite youth. It was apparent they were officers from the abundance of drink and the variety of food shown. As for the "pals," they were naked to a man. And they had taken the most unnatural and disgusting poses: one held a knife between his teeth, another had ruffled his hair and was spitting furiously, a third was urinating into a carafe, a fourth—well, even the memory of it is revolting.

That Hitlerite officers went in for pornography was by no means new to us. But this was no longer simply pornography. The character of the fascist officer, his entire rotten being, lay revealed in that photograph.

At that time we had not yet heard of Majdanek and Oswiecim, nor did we know that the Germans had invented the murder wagon. But we had seen villages burned down by punitive units, the bodies of army men and peaceful inhabitants who had been tortured to death, and slaughtered children. Each one of us knew that if we fell into the clutches of the enemy we would be inhumanly tortured before being killed.

In the early part of December a group of our scouts found the body of a woman in the forest: It was Marusya Chukhno, an employee of the Koryukovka sugar refinery, a Communist and an underground worker. Partisans of the Koryukovka detachment used her apartment as a meeting place.

It was the burgomaster of Koryukovka, Baranovsky, a former engineer at that refinery, who gave her away to the enemy.

We counted sixteen stab wounds on her. One eye had been gouged out. The butchers had taken her body to the forest to inspire fear in us partisans and underground workers.

We gave Marusya Chukhno a solemn burial. Hundreds of partisans attended her funeral. I saw no signs of fear on their faces.

No, we could not see anything human in the invaders, nor did we want to. As long as they were here, on the territory of the Soviet Union, they were not human beings but only enemies.

But one must know the enemy in order to fight him successfully. We required the chiefs, and especially the political workers and men of the intelligence department, if not all the partisans, to make a careful study of every German document that fell into our hands. How could we enlighten the inhabitants or penetrate into the apparatus of the occupation authorities without knowing their ways?

The majority of the comrades studied this subject most unwillingly. "What the devil kind of laws are these?" protested those who were against such studies. "The 'new order' means plain arbitrary rule. Any commandant can do what he wants. Take the law on the disbanding of Communist organiza-

tions and the confiscation of their property. Why study it? Isn't it clear to every Soviet person this isn't law but lawlessness?"

That was true. Here is a document very indicative of that period, a notice issued by the military commandant and posted in Kholmy:

### "NOTICE

"1. Going into the woods is forbidden. Whoever does not obey this *will be shot*.

"2. Whoever maintains contact with the partisans, feeds them or gives them shelter, *will be shot*.

"3. Whoever does not immediately report to the nearest military unit the names and places of residence of partisans whom he knows or the arrival of strange partisans or Communists *will be shot*.

"4. Whoever has weapons or any other military equipment in his possession *will be shot*.

"5. Whoever spreads false rumours tending to alarm the population, or prevents people from working, or *in any other way* interferes with the common good *will be severely punished*.

"6. All starostas must promptly submit lists of strangers to the commandant's office in Chernigov.

"7. Parents, teachers and the village starostas are held responsible for the youth. They will be meted out the full measure of punishment for all crimes committed by minors.

"8. Whoever does not prevent sabotage when he is able to do so *will be punished by death*.

"9. *Severest measures* will be taken against villages failing to obey this order, and their inhabitants *will be held responsible collectively*.

"Military Commandant."

What this meant was that anybody might be shot at any moment. The occupation authorities issued a multitude of instructions, orders and laws. Some of them promised various benefits, such as security, fixed rates of taxation, and so on. But the only promise the Germans kept was the one about hanging, shooting and punishing in other ways.

For all that the R.C. adopted a decision obliging the officers to study the invaders' system of military, economic and political organization. A special study circle was arranged. As I recall the studies in that circle I cannot help laughing. Weary partisans, with faces red and sweating from the effort, sit memorizing:

"The Gebietskommandant's office is in charge of agriculture. The Landwirtschaftsführer has charge



of four agricultural artels or associations. The Landwirtschaftsführer is subordinate to the Gebietslandwirt. The Gebietslandwirt is subordinate to the Kreislandwirt. The Kreislandwirt is subordinate to the Gebietskommissar. The Gebietskommissar is subordinate to the Gauleiter...."

After a lesson in this circle the men were wild with rage; they could be sent out on the most risky operations.

\* \* \*

There are still people today in the district centre of Koryukovka, Chernigov Region, who are ready to take an oath that on December 6, 1941, partisan planes dropped hundreds of leaflets on the town.

We ourselves learned of this raid made by "partisan aircraft" from documents captured from the enemy. A report by the district commandant, couched in highly alarming tones, told of the partisans having not only light arms but also machine guns, artillery and aircraft. As proof of this were cited depositions made by German soldiers and officers and the records of interrogations of Koryukovka residents.

Later we really did have machine guns and ordnance, captured in battle from the German invaders. Later planes did come over to us from the Soviet rear. They took our leaflets and scattered

them over villages and towns in the region. But all this took place much later than December 1941. And so when we read the Hitlerite report we had a good laugh, and nothing more. Fear has a thousand eyes: commandants and garrison chiefs often exaggerated the strength of the partisans in their reports in order to get reinforcements.

But after a while we learned what it was all about. Our leaflets really did drop from the sky over Koryukovka on December 6. The day was overcast, and it was easy to assume that planes had flown past high above the clouds. A noteworthy detail is that Koryukovka was filled to overflowing with occupation troops at the time. Hundreds of Germans and Magyars had arrived the day before. And on December 6 the Germans drove the entire population to the town square to present the new district authorities: the burgomaster, the police chief and the commandant.

It was then that hundreds of partisan leaflets showered down from the sky calling upon the people to fight the invaders.

This was the work of Petya Romanov and Vanya Polishchuk, two daring scouts of ours.

On December 5 they were sent to Koryukovka on a liasion assignment, and were given a thousand leaflets run off in the forest printshop of the underground R.C.

Petya Romanov himself gave us an account of this mission, and he enjoyed universal confidence, rightly being considered one of the boldest and most resourceful scouts in our detachment. Petya was not what you would call a quiet or over-modest person, but like many men of true courage he simply couldn't stand exaggeration. He was all for justice, and always demanded that everyone receive what he deserved. In appraising both his own exploits and those of others this young partisan was always very restrained.

Petya Romanov met his death in June 1942 when he and two of his comrades were surrounded by several score Hitlerites. They fought off the enemy to the last. Petya's comrades were killed, and his last bullet he put into his own temple. But that was later. Here is his account of what happened at Koryukovka:

"We had several jobs: first, to go to Doctor Bezrodny in the hospital for prescriptions for our sick men; second, to stop at the drugstore to have them filled and get bandages; third, to hand over leaflets at our secret quarters. Besides, we had to find out how the Germans were acting and whether they intended attacking the detachment.

"The doctor took care of us in a jiffy. As usual, he was worried. 'Why do you come to see me with such a quantity of weapons?' he says. 'Get it through your heads I'm not a partisan, and I'm scared.' But he gives us the prescriptions all the

same. In the drugstore we have to raise our voices a bit to get them filled fast. They fill them, all right. We go farther. The next thing is to go to the secret quarters and turn in the leaflets.

"‘Look,’ Ivan says, ‘they look like Germans to me.’

"He’s right. There’s no less than a company down at the end of the street. We turn around, and we see Magyars on horseback. This doesn’t suit us at all. And we can’t run because our pockets are full of bottles of medicine, and we’ve got grenades and pistols at our belt. And then there’s the leaflets. What’s to be done? It doesn’t look so good. There’s a lot of them and only the two of us.

"‘Ivan,’ I say, ‘let’s try this gate.’

"‘That’s dangerous,’ he says, ‘what if a stinker lives there?’

"‘I don’t think so,’ I say, ‘As I remember it, a machine and tractor station mechanic and a baker lived there before the war. Come on.’

"We go in. There’s a dog in the yard. Comes for us, the devil. ‘Susie!’ I say to her—but the devil only knows, maybe she’s Rover or something else. All of a sudden she begins wagging her tail and we go by right under her nose. Everything’s fine. She doesn’t bite. But they won’t open the door for us. Some woman or girl there. Screeches and doesn’t open up. And we can already hear the Fritzes going into the other yards.

"‘See, Petro,’ Ivan says, ‘there’s a hole in the fence. Let’s crawl through.’

"‘Let’s,’ I say.

"Crawling through I tear my pockets bad and the bottles fall out. But how can I leave them there? The sick men need them. Ivan gets nervous. ‘Just the same,’ I say, ‘if we’ve got to die then it’ll be right to die for medicine too. You do what you want, but I’m going to pick them up.’

"He grumbles a bit but he helps me pick them up. Then we land in another back yard. Here it’s quiet. We come out into a side street. From here I know the road to Bukhanov’s. He’s a worker, an old fellow. Worked all his life at the sugar refinery. He can be trusted. I used to go around with his daughter at one time. Doesn’t matter what her name is, it wouldn’t make any difference to you anyway.

"Ivan breaks a bottle. I give him hell. I give him such hell he even gets sore.

"‘You blockhead,’ I say, ‘don’t you see, if we lose all the medicine and the leaflets besides, what kind of partisans and scouts are we? We won’t be worth a kopek then. Right?’

"The medicine turns out to be the kind that smells strong. It’s clear if they put bloodhounds on our trail we’re sunk.

"But we’re lucky. Simply in luck. Bukhanov’s home. Just imagine—all that going on around him and he’s sitting there swigging home brew. ‘Don’t



you fellows feel bad if I don't give you any,' he says to us. 'Little enough for myself as it is.'

"He's a funny guy! Always talks that way. Then he loosens up and pours us out a glass apiece.

" 'Well, boys,' Bukhanov says, 'we won't lose any time, I'll help you out of your fix.'

"We do as he says. He takes us through back yards and along paths. All of a sudden we see we're on the grounds of the refinery. How'd that happen?

"Bukhanov laughs and says, 'The devil himself couldn't find you here. Not even Baranovsky.'

"The refinery was hit by fire pretty bad. Ruins all over, and soot. And they were looking for us, they were definitely after us. How come they recognized us right away and started after us? That I don't know. Probably somebody in the drugstore said suspicious-looking characters had been in. A customer there got sore when we pushed him aside and were served first. 'What's the matter,' he said in a funny way, 'trying to act like partisans?' I gave him a proper answer, and then Ivan added a few strong words.

"I guess he's the one who set the Germans after us.

" 'Let yourselves down here,' Bukhanov says.

"There was some kind of ladder in the ruins. And then pipes. Under the refinery there's all kinds of corridors and big underground pipes. I don't

know the mechanics of it. But the fact is there's passages and exits and some kind of furnace doors. Bukhanov knows them all. But he had to get back in a hurry, the kids were home.

" 'You fellows go in as far as you can,' he says. 'Sit tight and you'll be as safe as can be. But don't leave the place without me.'

"Well, all right. He goes away. But our position is not so hot. For one thing it's blowing hard from some place. For another, it's as dark as the inside of a sack. No matches, and the lighter won't work in the wind. No, it wasn't only we wanted a smoke, but we wanted to see something. We didn't know anything about the place, might drop through somewhere.

"We couldn't sit there and wait, and so we felt our way to the end of the tunnel. There we saw light.

" 'Let's take a look out,' Ivan says.

" 'Right you are!' I say. 'How long are we going to sit here? I want a smoke, and we haven't eaten a thing since morning. Let's go.'

"Everything's quiet. Ahead there's clean snow. But the minute I poke my head out there's a shot. I back up. Then another shot. So of course we go in deeper. And then the devil knows how many of them come running up. We squeeze into the tunnel or pipe or whatever you call it. . . . So do those rats. They tell us to surrender. And so far

the pipe is without a turning, so if they begin to shoot we're done for.

"We have to go in deeper and find a turning.

" 'I'm going to throw one,' Ivan says.

" 'Go ahead,' I say.

"I pull a grenade off my belt too. But there's no room to swing. We take off the rings and pitch the grenades underhand in turn and start running back on all fours. The air wave catches us pretty hard, but up ahead we hear screams and groans.

" 'You just catch us!' we yell. 'Just try it! Partisans die but they don't surrender!'

"It turns out that Baranovsky himself, the burgomaster, is with them. Before the war he used to be an engineer at this refinery.

" 'Crawl out!' Baranovsky yells. 'I know this place backward and forward. I'll smoke you out of here!'

"We answer and lay it on in a way a sailor would envy. He's afraid to crawl in, though, and so are the others. We go in deeper, how far I don't know. We crawl around in those pipes and tunnels a couple of hours. The trouble is we've got pieces of glass in our clothing. The blast broke almost all the medicine bottles in our pockets. We empty our pockets along the way.

" 'How's Bukhanov going to find us?' Ivan says.

"'Let's go back to the place where he left us,' I say.

"We crawl back. But we forget about the broken bottles, and I cut my hands.

"In a little while we smell smoke.

"'They're burning straw,' Ivan says.

"'No,' I say, 'I think it's manure.'

"We get into a big argument. We crawl on and we keep arguing.

"'A lot you know about manure,' Ivan says. 'Manure makes heavy smoke; it'd drift downwards.'

"'What kind of down or up is there here?' I say. 'It's a round pipe.'

"The next day Bukhanov tells us Baranovsky brought up several loads of straw and had it burned till night. Then Baranovsky told the police that as a specialist he was certain we had choked to death long ago. Some engineer he is—doesn't even know how much straw you have to burn to fill the refinery cellars with smoke.

"But that was later. We didn't choke to death because we figured out that if the smoke doesn't stay in one place that means there's a draft. We crawled in the direction of the draft and landed in the boiler room.

"On the outside it's all blocked up by rocks thrown there by an explosion. You can't get in and you can't get out. The furnaces are wrecked too. But the smokestack is in place. We'd seen that

before, from the outside. That's a famous stack there in Koryukovka—more than fifty metres high. The draft's terrific. Believe it or not, but it almost pulled the cap off my head. That's why we could sit in the boiler room peacefully. All the smoke went out.

"The base of the stack was part broken, and the smoke went out through the hole.

"We even slept a little in a corner of the boiler room. No, it's not that we were reckless, it was just that we were all worn out. The smoke helped too. Then the cold wakes us up. By that time there's no more smoke.

"Our heads ache like we'd been on a binge; we even feel sick to our stomachs.

" 'That's all to the good,' I say. 'Otherwise we'd feel hungrier.'

" 'Just the same,' Ivan says, 'I could put away a couple of pots of potatoes without any trouble.'

"We get into another big argument.

" 'Any doctor'll tell you,' I say, 'that you mustn't eat after coal gas poisoning.'

" 'My organism can take food at any time,' Ivan says, 'even before execution.'

"But it's time to put an end to the show some way or other. No Bukhanov. Maybe he got caught. When he left he told us Baranovsky trusts him. But suppose they asked him, 'What are you doing here in the ruins and why did the partisans run through



your yard?' Ivan and I, we argued a lot, but this doesn't mean we weren't worried.

"Meanwhile there's light coming into the boiler room through the cracks. And when you looked up the stack through the broken part you could see a white spot way up. And the draft's still whistling through.

"'You know, Petro,' Ivan says, 'your whole face looks dark. You probably cut more than your hands. You can get blood poisoning. Wipe yourself with this gauze.'

"He tears off a piece from what we bought in the drugstore and without asking my permission starts wiping my face.

"'I'm very grateful to you,' I say. 'Only I think it's blood from my hands.' I snatch the piece of gauze from him and throw it away. The draft catches it right away and pulls it up inside the stack. It disappears in a flash, right into the sky.

"'Now if we could fly up like that and right into the forest,' Ivan says.

"'Wait a minute, wait,' I say, and I start unbuttoning my jacket.

"He laughs; he thinks I'm really going to try it. But I'd got a real good idea. I was unbuttoning my jacket so as to get out the leaflets from under my shirt.

"And what do you think! I take a handful of leaflets and throw 'em down. Ivan stands there

watching. The leaflets whirl around and fly up. Ivan catches on and unbuttons his jacket too.

"We throw up a little at a time, about thirty. It's clear the leaflets are flying out, and at that height they'll scatter all over Koryukovka.

"We laughed so much and felt so good our heads stopped aching. Ivan forgot all about eating.

"That was the way Bukhanov found us. We were so excited we didn't hear him coming. True, he was in felt boots.

"Bukhanov laughs. 'They're going crazy out there,' he says. 'They're saying the partisans are flying over Koryukovka. The police are hiding. They expect a bombing. That was a marvelous idea of yours.'

"Then we had a smoke. Bukhanov didn't have a lighter but a flint and steel. That's the best thing in a wind.

"Ivan says, 'I'm completely happy, comrades.'

"Bukhanov and I, we laugh at him. Some happiness! How're we going to get out of the place? If we fall into the hands of the fascists they'll make mincemeat of us.

"Bukhanov becomes serious and says, 'I'll have to get out a different way now myself. They've got suspicious of me. Probably they're watching me. I'll crawl out with you. But it's a very nasty exit, and besides we'll have to wait till night.'

"When he tells us what kind of an exit it was, Ivan and I start feeling blue.

" 'That's out of the question,' I say. 'The boys'll make fun of us.'

" 'Nothing will happen, I swear,' Bukhanov says. 'It's all frozen over.'

" 'You can do as you like,' Ivan says. 'I'm going to fight my way out before I go crawling through muck.'

" 'That's dumb,' Bukhanov says. 'The sewer hasn't been working for months. You boys are young, you have a long time to live yet. You've got a lot of Germans to wipe out. You're just prejudiced. How about the plumbers? Come on, stop being fussy.'

" 'Just the same we checked on the other exits and saw for ourselves there were Germans all over.'

" 'They're waiting for me, the rats,' Bukhanov says. 'They're sure you fellows choked to death in the smoke.'

" Ivan takes a grenade in his hand and starts moving to the edge of the pipe like he's made up his mind. But Bukhanov jumps at him and pulls him back. He got so sore he wanted to punch his nose for him.

" 'You,' he says, 'are still wet behind the ears. You're going to listen to me. I'm the head of a family and a man of experience. I'm going to give the orders around here!'

"He tells Ivan a thing or two, and Ivan gives in. Then I decide I'd better listen to Bukhanov too.

"The sewer was fairly dry but still it wasn't pleasant. We crawled maybe an hour. Crawled out into a swamp. And when we reached the forest you can imagine how happy we were! Not only because we'd escaped. No, the main thing was we'd put one over on those rats.

"We cleaned up with snow and went to the camp. Bukhanov went home to Koryukovka."

And that's Petya Romanov's story. A few days after this adventure he went off to Koryukovka again with leaflets. He wanted to distribute them in the same way and was terribly disappointed when he learned the Hitlerites had blocked up all the pipes and tunnels of the refinery.

\* \* \*

The man in charge of our radio news was Yevsei Grigoryevich Baskin. Every morning he read the Soviet Information Bureau communiqué out loud to the line. Then he summarized the other news and the main newspaper articles. Baskin was no less popular with us than the well-known radio announcer Levitan.

When he caught a good piece of news in the ether he would come running to headquarters with it at once. Then we ourselves went from dugout to

dugout; spreading glad news was a very pleasant occupation indeed.

I recall the memorable day of December 13. There was a blizzard blowing and the temperature was twenty below. That day we learned that German punitive detachments had destroyed Reimentarovka and occupied Savenki. The men were in pretty low spirits.

At two o'clock in the night Baskin came running in.

"Alexei Fyodorovich, Nikolai Nikitich, Comrade Yaremenko! The latest news! Several German divisions have been routed near Moscow. The Fritzes are running for all they're worth."

You can imagine what happened. Of course, we roused the entire camp. The men went around hugging one another and tossing their caps into the air. Kapranov issued a glass apiece above the ration without a grumble.

It was a full two hours before we went back to our places. Now no one could fall asleep. Everything pointed to the fact that the Red Army had taken the initiative and started a big offensive. Somebody—I don't remember who—suggested we immediately form several groups of fifteen men each and send them off to the nearest villages that very night.

I went along at the head of one of the groups. We rode into the village of Khoromnoye on horse-



back and started pounding on doors and windows. Everybody's nerves were on edge; trembling voices asked who we were and what we wanted.

But in some fifteen minutes a crowd had gathered around the bonfire we lit before the building that used to house the village Soviet. It turned into a sort of meeting. I announced the news. Then came a shower of questions. There were no Germans in the village and the few recently-recruited *polizei* were hiding. One of them ran off to the neighbouring village where there was a company of Magyars. But by the time the Magyars arrived there was no trace of us.

Almost all the groups had already returned to camp by the time we reached it. The men were in high spirits. Our news-spreading sally proved extremely effective. Everywhere the peasants thanked the partisans, begged them to come again and said that if the news was good they might wake them up at any time.

Of course, it didn't go off without some incidents. At first everything went well in the village of Churovichi, which Druzhinin's group visited. The villagers began congratulating one another, and someone even struck up "Land of mine, Moscow mine, you I love the best," accompanying himself on a concertina, when suddenly a shot rang out. All were put on their guard. The partisans took cover to be ready for battle, and the local girls ran off into the

gardens. About three minutes later came a woman's cries from the same direction as the shot. Then some children came running up laughing.

"The starosta's shot himself!" they announced.

"When he heard the Red Army was advancing he probably decided forward units were already in the village and so he grabbed up a pistol and put a bullet through his head. That's his wife bawling."

Popudrenko was the last to return to camp. His group had gone to Radomka. On entering the village they saw lights in a big house, and since they knew that neither Germans nor Magyars were in Radomka they boldly went up to the house. Popudrenko told the others to go rouse the villagers, while he himself pushed open the door and walked in. There were some young men, eight in all, sitting around on benches. At the sight of Popudrenko they sprang to their feet and gaped.

"Comrades, the Red Army is chasing the fascists for all it's worth!" Nikolai Nikitich cried. "Five enemy divisions laid low near Moscow, and the offensive goes on. Hurrah, comrades!"

"Hurrah..." the young fellows muttered timidly.

"What's the matter, had no oatmeal for a week? Repeat after me: Hurrah for the Red Army and Comrade Stalin!"

This time their "Hurrah!" was louder.

When the meeting began Popudrenko noticed that the fellows who had repeated "Hurrah" after him were not present. He asked the kolkhoz folk where they were.

"The oldest had a moustache and wore a tall fur hat."

"We don't have any boys like that. He's an instructor from the district police office. He's here recruiting and training young policemen. They were holding a conference. They're afraid of the partisans and meet mostly at night."

Popudrenko was furious.

"It can't be. That fellow with the moustache shouted 'Hurrah' louder than anybody else."

"You just take a look at yourself: five grenades on your belt, a tommy gun over your shoulder, and a Mauser in your hand. Yelling 'Hurrah' if you meet a guy like that is nothing—you're more likely to yell for help!"

"Follow me!" Popudrenko ordered his men and ran toward the house. "Give 'em grenades, the rats!"

But the house was dark and empty.

When he had finished his story Popudrenko shook his head and said vexedly:

"Not enough vigilance, comrades!"

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE R.C. IN THE WOODS

WHAT actually was the underground R.C. of the Party at that time?

An outsider would have said it was a small group of people who didn't seem any different from the several hundred partisans about them. Not all the members of the R.C. held high positions. In dress, in bearing and in mode of life they were partisans just like the rest.

But when this group got together in private everyone around knew it was deciding questions vital to the entire detachment, and perhaps more than just the detachment; questions not necessarily of a secret nature, but certainly highly important.

When the R.C. summoned a partisan, whether he was a Party member or not he would pull himself together, collect his thoughts, look through his notes. . . . And if he felt he had done something wrong he was apt to shake in his boots.

When a summons came to a meeting of the R.C. not only rank-and-file partisans but officers too,

intrepid fighting men, would promptly put aside whatever they were doing and set out, no matter what the time of day or night or how far away they might be.

The R.C. might even summon a man from a detachment not under our command or from villages near which there were no partisans whatsoever. And if the man really hated the fascists and loved his country, if he wanted to take an active part in the fight against the enemy, he would leave his family and, at times at the risk of his life, make his way to the forest where the R.C. was then located.

Just who were they, these R.C. members? Who gave them such a hold on the minds of men?

Of course, of no little significance was the fact that the members of the underground R.C. had been members of the peacetime Chernigov R.C., and that later many of them were confirmed by the Central Committee of the Party as leaders of the people's struggle in the enemy rear. However, this only partly explains the authority and influence they acquired among the masses.

The overwhelming majority of the Soviet people who for one reason or another had remained in occupied territory realized that there was only *one force, one organization*, capable of rousing the millions of Soviet men and women for a heroic struggle against the invaders. That force was the *Communist Party*.



That was why the members of the underground R.C. of the Party enjoyed such authority among the partisans and exercised such a strong influence on the masses.

Communists were the commanders in thousands of partisan detachments and resistance groups. If there were Communists among a group of men who had broken out of encirclement, or of escaped war prisoners, or of peasants who, outraged at the atrocities of the Hitlerites had taken to the forest, then as a rule it was they who became the leaders.

Life in occupied territory brought out with especial clarity the qualities of a true Bolshevik in a man; it was a test of his convictions and his devotion to the Communist concept.

The people understood this very well; they always appreciated the Bolsheviks' frankness, daring and consistent pursuance of the program they had marked out.

About the men from encircled units and the escaped war prisoners who came to join the detachment we knew nothing.

Questioning newcomers was not among the duties of the sentry at the picket: all he had to do was bring them to the officer on duty or else summon the commander. Nevertheless the sentries usually did put a few questions to the newcomer, and the first was:

"Are you a Party member? Or a Komsomol member?"

All the partisans, including those who were not Party members, were sincerely glad when the answer came in the affirmative. They were glad because a Communist meant a staunch and devoted comrade; and also because in the affirmative answer they sensed courage and nobility. After all, it would have been quite a simple matter for a newcomer to hide his membership in the Party. He would only have to say he was not a member. Admitting that he was a Communist immediately placed special obligations on a man. Everyone knew that the Communist always received the most difficult assignment. And in the event of capture he would be the one to get the first German bullet.

Party membership did not give a partisan any advantages over those who were not members. We did not even have such an elementary mark of membership as the Party card. By a decision of the R.C. all who came to the detachment with Party or Komsomol cards turned them over to the commissar. We put all the Party papers into a safe and buried it in one of the caches. The secretary of the detachment Party organization, Comrade Kurochka, had a list of the members and candidate-members of the Party, and the secretary of the Komsomol organization, Marusya Skripka, had drawn up a list of the Komsomol members.

Entry in one of these lists meant a newly-arrived comrade was recognized as being a Communist or a Komsomol member.

During the whole war we had only two cases of men hiding their Party affiliation when joining the detachment. Usually Party members and Komsomol members went to the secretary of the primary organization and asked to be registered just as soon as they were enrolled in the detachment.

A fairly complicated procedure had been established for this. As a rule, the newcomer did not have his Party or Komsomol card with him. He was not blamed for this. But to prove his membership the comrade had to find three Party members who could testify to his having belonged to this or that primary organization.

One day four men from the 1st Platoon came up to me with an odd complaint. A dark-haired young fellow was the first to speak:

"We've come to you to complain about Ivan Markianovich Kurochka."

"But Kurochka isn't your commander. What've you got against him?"

"We've come to you as the secretary of the R.C. . . ."

They were all non-Party men. I expected to hear a complaint about some shortcomings in the camp or some personal wrongs. But it turned out

they had come about a strictly Party matter, an inner-Party matter, in fact.

"Do you know Vlasenko, Alexei Fyodorovich?" asked the dark-haired fellow.

"Yes. The machine gunner?"

"That's the one. Petro Vlasenko from Karpovka."

"We all come from the same village," a second man put in. "He's been in the detachment almost a month now. He was put in our unit and lives in the same dugout we do. We notice Vlasenko's going around looking down in the mouth. One day passes, then another, and he's still the same. Even in battle he's a different man. As fellow villagers and friends we question him: 'What's the matter? Maybe you need more liquor, the ration isn't enough? Maybe you're seeing Marusya the cook in your dreams?' He doesn't give us a straight answer, tells us not to pester him. But we finally got to the bottom of it. 'Remember, boys,' he says, 'how I was taken into the Party in '39?' Sure we do. 'And now,' he says, 'they don't consider me a member. Kurochka won't register me. I buried my card when we were getting out of encirclement. I'd go back there and get it but it's a good three hundred kilometres, no less.'"

The third man took up the story heatedly:

"Kurochka's just indulging in a lot of red tape."

"He ought to see it hurts the man, Comrade Fyodorov. We confirm it: he really was a member. He was active in village affairs: spoke at meetings, explained current affairs from the newspapers to the truck garden brigade, was always ready to help a man out. I, for one, saw Petro studying the History of the Party before the war. We told Party secretary Kurochka all this. But that made it even worse."

"He didn't take your word?"

"No. 'You haven't got the right,' he says. 'If Petro Vlasenko was really in the Party he wouldn't come to you non-Party members on such a matter.'"

I said: "But you don't know the circumstances. Vlasenko was in the army. Maybe he did something wrong and was expelled from the Party then."

The fourth man, who hadn't said anything until then, now decided it was time he had his say:

"I was with him when we broke out of encirclement. We were in the same platoon. I didn't hear anything about any expulsion. Your supposition isn't right, Comrade Fyodorov. Vlasenko didn't get reprimanded either."

I asked the men why they so ardently pleaded Vlasenko's case.

"First," they said, "because the man's upset. We sympathize with him."

"And secondly?"



"Well, and secondly, the main reason is because we don't have a single Party member in our squad. That's of some importance to us, isn't it, Comrade Fyodorov?"

I told them the procedure by which Communists were entered in the list. "Unfortunately, comrades, there's nothing I can do about it either. I have no right to break the rules laid down by the R.C."

It seemed I hadn't convinced them. They went off dissatisfied. Five minutes later the man who had come out of encirclement together with Vlasenko returned.

"Tell me, Alexei Fyodorovich, if I join the Party may I speak for Petro then?"

"Is that the reason you want to join the Party?"

He gave me a surprised look and answered in all seriousness:

"I guess you're joking, Comrade Fyodorov. You'd have to be pretty stupid to apply for Party membership just because of that. I wrote an application back in the regiment, but I didn't have time to hand it in. I still have my recommendations."

"Where were you surrounded?"

"Near Kiev. Petro and I wandered around more than three months before we found the partisans."

"And you carried those recommendations around with you all the time?"

"I did."

"So Vlasenko buried his Party card and you kept your recommendations?"

"That's right."

Realizing that this put his comrade in an unfavourable light he hastened to add:

"But there's a difference, Alexei Fyodorovich. Petro had a membership card and all I had was an application for candidate-member."

"Well, let's have a look."

He took off his coat, ripped open the lining on the back and took out his papers, neatly folded and wrapped in waterproof paper. Among them were three certified recommendations and an application for candidate-membership of the Party.

"They got crumpled, Alexei Fyodorovich," he said apologetically. "That one was written by Lieutenant Voronko; he's dead now. That one the colonel himself, Comrade Gotseridze, gave me, and the third is Vlasenko's. He was No. 1 man in the crew and I was No. 2. He's the one who persuaded me to apply for membership."

I examined the papers and then looked the man in the eye. No, it couldn't be that all this had been thought up beforehand, the more so since together with the application and the recommendations were a photograph of his wife and children and an honour certificate from the district Soviet for excellent work in the kolkhoz.

"Well, you boys are certainly simpletons. Look, here's the proof." I showed the man Vlasenko's recommendation. "There's even the number of the card and the year he joined—it's all here. Call your pal and tell him he ought to thank you."

You should have seen how happy these words made him.

"Yes, yes, we really are fools. You can see why we were so upset, Alexei Fyodorovich. He's a good fellow, and it wasn't fair to be counted out of the Party like that."

When he left me he walked slowly at first, then he quickened his step and finally broke into a run.

"Petro!" I heard him shouting. "Come here, Petro!"

\* \* \*

About the middle of December the political instructor of one of the platoons came to detachment commissar Yaremenko with the question:

"What is a partisan?"

Yaremenko gave him a puzzled look.

"You're kind of late in asking," he replied. "But if you want it in a few words—an avenger of the people."

"That I understand. . . . But you see, Comrade Commissar, it's this way. I was having a talk with the men about the tasks facing us today, what we are to strive for. You say—avenger of the people.

That's the way I explained it too. But some of the men don't quite get it. They think the partisans are in a special position. One of them put it this way: the partisan has no future, and compared with the Red Army man's his position isn't worth a thing. Besides the fact the partisan has no place to retreat to, he has no place to advance to."

"But that's not so. We do carry out offensive operations. There's Pogoreltsy...."

"I said that. They protest. That wasn't an offensive, they say, but a tip-and-run attack. We make an attack and then hide in the woods. And then what, they ask? The forest is surrounded, after all. And again the comparison: now the Red Army's conducting an offensive at Moscow and is developing it from day to day. There the men are having a good time."

"As they see it, the partisan has nothing to do with what the Red Army does, is that it? You should have explained, Comrade Political Instructor, that although we're not in touch with the army right now just the same we're a part of it. The Red Army offensive is our offensive too."

"The men realize that, Comrade Commissar. But take Nikifor Kallistratov, for example,—he's a machine and tractor station mechanic. His questions always go deep. Before the war, he says, everybody knew his production plan and he worked to fulfil it. Now, he says, he doesn't want to depend

only on the Red Army; as he puts it, he wants to have his own dream, a plan for partisan development with a specific task for each man."

Comrade Yaremenko told me and the other members of the underground R.C. about this conversation. There was something to think about here. Indeed, our Soviet man cannot live without a plan, without a clear prospect. Planning has become a necessity, a habit and second nature to him. This is one of the main differences between the Soviet man and the man in capitalist society. This necessity is felt to a greater or lesser degree depending upon a person's development. Mechanic Nikifor Kallistratov was quite right in fusing dream and plan. The Soviet man is already used to the idea that his dream is feasible and can be expressed in figures and time limits.

The difficulty was that many simple truths self-evident under army conditions had to be revised as far as the partisans went.

For instance, under our conditions the size of a detachment did not always determine its strength. At times a small group of bold and skilfully concealed men could deal the enemy very telling blows.

This gave rise to the question: should we, or should we not acquire horses and carts. Riding was certainly far more pleasant than walking. But perhaps there was no need to ride anywhere at



all? Wouldn't it be better to operate in our own district as a small, close-knit group? We had an excellent knowledge of the district, had studied all the forest paths. . . .

Now not only ex-partisans but indeed everybody who has read books about the partisan movement in the Patriotic War knows very well that partisan detachments were either local or *mobile*. The first operated within their own districts, while the second were constantly on the move, making marches of hundreds and even thousands of kilometres.

But in 1941 not even the commanders knew of such a division. The tactics of constant movement, in other words, long-distance raids, were prompted by circumstances.

Occasionally people say that some partisans sat tight in the forest over long periods. Yes, there were instances when small detachments limited themselves to defence and did not appear in inhabited points or on the roads for months. But I do not know of a single detachment of Soviet partisans that spent all the years of the occupation in the forest simply hiding and not doing anything.

Naturally, not all the detachments were equally active, not all fought equally well.

The main prerequisite of success was political organization of the masses. The districts in which the invaders received the most telling blows were

those where the Communists succeeded in maintaining their leading position, where they did not lose touch with the people but called them, rallied them to the struggle. In such districts the partisan detachments became an impressive military and political force.

It goes without saying that the detachments in which the Communists were organized and cohesive never simply lay low, were not inactive.

Popular resistance to the German invaders increased in direct proportion to the strengthening of the Communist influence among the masses, the expansion of underground agitational work and the intensification of partisan blows at the enemy. And these blows were nothing more nor less than *Party military activity* in the enemy rear.

We didn't get the idea of how best to carry on underground work right off. Far from it. In the first period of the struggle, when many counted on its lasting a short time, there were among us some who would have liked to hide, to wait, sit it out. This mood began to pass after our first few offensive operations, when confidence in our strength became greater.

The turning point for us was the Pogoreltsy operation.

By the middle of December there were more than five hundred men in the united detachment, with more and more desirous of joining. Every-

where our speakers were calling upon the people to resist the enemy. The first R.C. leaflet, which our printshop put out in an edition of several thousand copies, was entitled, "Who Are the Partisans and Whom Are They Fighting?" In it we said, "Fight the fascists, join the partisan detachments." And people did join us.

However, there came the time when we could no longer take in new people without the risk of *depriving the detachment of manoeuvrability and combat efficiency*.

Most newcomers brought their own weapons with them. They came with grenades and pistols and other arms easy to conceal. But we already lacked automatic weapons and even rifles. There was an acute shortage of bullets. Our supply of TNT was also running low. Most of those who joined us had not had any training and had not been under fire. A good deal of work had to be done with them before they could be allowed to go into action.

The cold grew more severe, and by no means all the new arrivals had warm clothing. There were more and more cases of frostbite. Building dugouts took up no less of our energy than combat activity.

A radio apparatus had been cached at the base of the Repki detachment. The radiomen had been killed, and no one knew where to find it, but we continued hunting. Our best pathfinders combed

the section of the forest where the base was located and dug something like twenty holes. They found nothing.

There was no sense in sending men across the frontline. It was too far away. Not one of those we had sent earlier had returned.

We needed instructions from the Central Committee of the Party and the Supreme Command; we needed to be sure our actions were coordinated with the actions of the Red Army, that we were fighting shoulder to shoulder with the entire Soviet people. And then, we needed ammunition, modern arms, TNT and mines. The German invaders were restoring the railways; the first enemy trains were already moving past us toward the front. Yes, contact, contact at all costs!

Using insufficiently trained reserves in battle increased the number of wounded. And medical aid was our weakest spot. I must confess that when we were forming the regional detachment back in Chernigov this angle had slipped our minds; we had even taken very little gauze and medicine with us. That we had no doctor with us we discovered only when we were in the forest. We had a pharmacist, Zelik Abramovich Yosilevich, and we had several trained nurses, but we had no doctor, not even an inexperienced one, not even a young one fresh from school, and there was nowhere to get one.

The Perelyub detachment had a feldsher, Anatoly Yemelyanov, whom we appointed chief of the medical and sanitation service of the united detachment. He was very painstaking and willing, but he was only twenty-five. The wounded appreciated his fine character, but what they wanted from him was medical assistance, not kindness.

Thus, three important problems stood before us: to ensure manoeuvrability for our detachment, to establish contact with the Mainland, and substantially to improve medical aid to the sick and wounded. And solving these problems would mean carrying out the plan of partisan development which the mechanic Nikifor Kallistratov rightly demanded of us.

First of all the detachment had to be ensured maximum mobility. I obliged the platoon commanders to acquire one horse and one good sleigh for every five men.

At first this order was carried out poorly. Not so much because acquiring horses and sleighs under our conditions was no easy matter as because many simply failed to understand *why* the order had to be carried out, did not understand it was part of a big plan and that fulfilling it meant beginning *our offensive*.

Only after solving the main problems facing us could we permit a further increase in the size of the detachment.



I use the word *permit*, though as a matter of fact, we wished to form a partisan division. In addressing the men and in talks about our future, the R.C. members and officers not infrequently said:

"Just wait till we number several thousand!"

Meanwhile, however, we numbered only a few hundred, and some of the officers already feared a further growth. As for the Hitlerites, there were thousands of them around us. After the rout at Moscow the occupation authorities received orders to do away with the partisans as quickly as possible: reinforcements were needed at the front. And so they brought up artillery, tanks and planes against us. Their hopes that we would fall to pieces by ourselves had miscarried, just as had their hopes of isolating us from the population.

The German invaders had brought up hundreds of pairs of skis for their soldiers; the *polizei* were teaching the Magyars how to ride in sleighs; German range-finding shells were landing on our camp grounds. The Hitlerites felt so strong they didn't even trouble to hide from us their preparations for an offensive. They dropped leaflets advising us to cease our "hopeless resistance, come 'out of the forest and surrender."

Not a single one of us was frightened by the enemy's threats. The leaflets were used as cigarette paper and for various other purposes.

However, we could not help but realize that to

remain where we were was becoming more dangerous with each passing day.

At this time the underground R.C. of the Party held a meeting that determined our path of development for a long period ahead.



Besides the R.C. members—Popudrenko, Novikov, Kapranov, Druzhinin, Yaremenko, Dnieprowsky and myself—meetings of the R.C. were attended by chief of staff Rvanov, by Balitsky, who was assistant to the secretary, and sometimes also by platoon commanders and secretaries of district Party committees.

The R.C. met in the intervals between operations. We held our meetings in most unexpected places. Most often we met in the dugout; when the detachment was on the march we would hold a meeting beside my sleigh, around a campfire or simply as we walked along.

One or another of the comrades would sometimes have to break off to issue orders, or leave the meeting. Every now and then one of the men would come running up to tell us about some event.

The meeting I shall now describe was held with innumerable interruptions during which we took part in battles.

I shall not weary the reader with details of the situation, nor shall I recall the various speeches

made. The questions we discussed were very serious ones. There were no few arguments, but the decisions we took were unanimous.

Experience had shown us that by uniting, the detachments had gained in fighting efficiency. The successful Pogoreltsy operation had inspired and heartened many. But when it became clear that expansion of the detachment necessitated constant movement, when it became evident we could no longer remain at the old place without running the risk of complete rout, many began to grumble.

"We're giving up our native places, ahem, er, our bases!" Bessarab cried.

Gromenko unexpectedly sided with him. "I won't go anywhere! We know every spot around here, it's all explored. Leave me here: my boys and I'll get along by ourselves. . . ."

He was all worked up, and in a voice quivering with emotion he cried: "Only over my dead body. Better to die in an unequal battle!" and so on and so forth. But when we told him that anarchistic behaviour might force the R.C. to raise the question of his Party membership, Gromenko pondered over the matter.

"Comrades," he said, "I submit to Party discipline."

But restraining people only by the force of an order or a Party decision, that is, relying exclu-

sively on the discipline inspired by the authority of the command and the Party leadership, could not be done for long in underground work.

We had resolved to create a big detachment. When I say "we" I have in mind the R.C. of the Party. But perhaps there were some who regarded this decision as a whim of the chief, as a desire, contrary to all common sense, to subordinate as large a number of people as possible to himself? Yes, there were such comrades, and they said:

"Fyodorov's head has been turned by the scale of his work before the war. He's an ambitious man, and he can't reconcile himself to having only such a small group as the regional detachment under his command."

"Why Fyodorov?" others protested. "The decision was taken by the R.C. of the Party."

"We know that," answered those opposed to amalgamation. "All the R.C. members are subordinate to Fyodorov because he's the commander of the detachment. He holds first place in the R.C. too. Who'd dare go against his opinion?"

Only people who lost their heads in the heat of an argument and who did not understand the basic principles of Party leadership, could reason that way.

No, it was not anybody's vain whim that made the Chernigov underground R.C. hold firmly to strengthening the detachment. In taking this deci-

sion the R.C. kept foremost in mind the main organizational task set it by the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party: drawing the largest possible number of Soviet people into the struggle against the invaders.

Comrade Stalin teaches us that to make proper use of the forms of struggle and organization of the proletariat certain necessary conditions have to be fulfilled first, including:

"To locate at any given moment that particular link in the chain of processes which, if grasped, will enable us to hold the whole chain and to prepare the conditions for achieving strategic success.

"The point here is to single out from all the problems confronting the Party that particular immediate problem, the answer to which constitutes the central point, and the solution of which will ensure the successful solution of the other immediate problems." (J. V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, Moscow 1947, p. 77.)

At that moment the particular link for us was *the creation of a powerful partisan formation*. This had to be a formation whose actions would be known to tens of thousands of people in the occupied districts and which would attract the largest possible number of Soviet men and women to join the partisans at the call of the Party.

Naturally, no one had the intention of merging



*all* the detachments in the Ukraine, or even *all* the detachments in a region, but at least one partisan unit in the region had to be strong enough to:

1. Deal the enemy heavy blows.
2. Maintain constant contact by radio with the army and with the Soviet rear.
3. Have a landing field for planes sent, from our Soviet rear.
4. Have groups of capable speakers who could grasp the complicated political situation of that time, explain to Soviet people the tasks facing them, and keep the population well informed of the real situation at the fronts.
5. Maintain a printshop and print and distribute leaflets and newspapers.
6. Serve as an operational base for the Party political centre directing the entire underground and partisan struggle in the region.
7. Serve as a model of staunchness and discipline for all the local detachments and the resistance groups in the surrounding towns.

It was clear that all these problems could not be solved by small detachments, which had only one advantage over big ones: the possibility of hiding easily.

Some of the comrades, expressing the opinion of politically backward partisans, objected to the intention of the R.C. to take leadership of the partisan movement in the region upon itself. "If you

set up a big detachment," they said, "you'll attract the attention of the German command and make it concentrate punitive and regular forces in the area where the detachment operates. In this way you only increase the burdens and sufferings of the population, you increase the scale of executions, incendiarism and plunder. The value of the partisan movement," they said, "lies just in the fact that it's a movement of the people arising spontaneously and suddenly out of indignation at the atrocities committed by the invaders. Knowing how bitterly the occupation authorities hate the Communists, the peasants will be afraid to help partisan detachments which are openly led by the Party."

Here we had to remind these advocates of spontaneity of the following words of Comrade Stalin:

"The theory of worshipping spontaneity is decidedly opposed to lending the spontaneous movement consciousness and system. It is opposed to the idea of the Party marching at the head of the working class, of the Party raising the masses to the level of class consciousness, of the Party leading the movement; it stands for the idea that the class-conscious elements of the movement must not hinder the movement from taking its own course; it stands for the idea that the Party is only to heed the spontaneous movement and follow in its tail. The theory of spontaneity is the theory of belittling the role

of the conscious element in the movement, the ideology of '*khvostism*'—the logical basis of *all* opportunism." (J. V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, Moscow 1947, p. 27.)

The R.C. condemned the "khvostist" mood of certain Communists. It recommended that I, as commander of the united detachment, should act with a view to the further growth of the detachment and take all measures to make it mobile and ready to pick up and leave at any moment.

\* \* \*

On the night of December 21 the detachment set out for new positions. With the men all in sleighs and the commanders on horses, it moved in a column. For an hour and a half we kept winding through the deep snow. When we had gone a good fifteen kilometres from the old camp the guides led the head of the column out onto the road and the well-fed horses started off for all they were worth.

The sleighs coming in our direction swerved off the road. They probably took us for Magyars. It was no joking matter: more than one hundred and twenty sleighs dashing down the road, and in them men armed with rifles, tommy guns and machine guns. Besides, about seventy men on horseback. At that time neither the enemy nor our friends ever dreamed the partisans could move in such a powerful column.

Under the pressure of superior enemy forces we were withdrawing from our old positions, from our accustomed places, but this withdrawal was at the same time a victory for us.

When we called a halt in the morning, some thirty kilometres from our old camp, we heard the distant rumble of gunfire.

I called over Gromenko and Bessarab. "How many guns firing?" I asked.

There were a lot of them. Then five bombers went over in the direction of the forest, and we felt the earth shake. The planes flew over us, but the fascist pilots had no way of knowing, of course, that it was partisans moving along the road in such a column.

There had been no such partisan detachments before.

I asked Rvanov to give Gromenko and Bessarab the information brought in by the scouts. More than two thousand Hitlerites had set out to attack our deserted camp. Let them try and catch us now. . . .

"Do you see now that a withdrawal can be a victory too?"

"Ahem, you should have said it before! We'd have, er, got it. . . ."

"The detachment commander isn't a kolkhoz chairman and isn't obliged to render you an account, understand?"

We made a brief halt in a grove and ate without lighting fires. The men gathered around the headquarters sleigh and listened in silence to the crescendo of the artillery preparation.

"Who's got good eyes?" Popudrenko asked when it grew quiet. "Who can see what's doing there?"

With a serious mien Vladimir Nikolayevich Druzhinin pressed his binoculars to his eyes.

"They've gone into a skirmish line," he reported without a trace of a smile, as though he really saw something. "They're hiding behind trees. Now they're digging in. They're up, now they're running, they're crawling. Now they're down. They seem surprised nobody's answering their fire. An insignificant-looking officer is calling over some men. Three are crawling up to him. They're probably the bravest. He is pointing out something to them...."

We could just picture the duped enemy, and every word of Druzhinin's called forth a roar of laughter.

"There, the Germans are finally in the camp," he went on. "They see the half-naked corpses of their fellow countrymen tied to trees. In their fury they throw grenades into the empty dugouts. The enraged officer slaps his scouts on the cheeks and then sends them off in all directions. And when the Germans get ready to bury their brothers-in-arms, the ones staring at them with their dead



eyes, when they start untying the bodies from the trees, they'll be blown to pieces by mines!"

Yes, that was a victory for us. The morning of December 22 the Hitlerites hurled an entire regiment against our abandoned dugouts. Artillery, tanks and planes were all brought into action. And telegrams had been sent off to Berlin beforehand announcing the rout of a big detachment of "forest bandits."

By noon we were already more than fifty kilometres from the old camp, and we raced into the villages of Maibutnya, Lasochki and Zhuravleva Buda. Without stopping to find out what it was all about the inhabitants hid or scattered into the fields and vegetable gardens. The starostas came out to meet us and wished us "Guten Abend!" with a Ukrainian accent.

The *polizei* lined up before us. Their chiefs stretched forward arms with armbands above the elbow and together with their subordinates chanted: "Heil Hitler!"

They were quite surprised, of course, to find themselves face to face with partisans.

When the inhabitants learned the villages had been taken by partisans they immediately returned to their homes. The children poured out into the streets. The girls dragged their finery out of their hope chests. And our boys got out their concer-

tinias. Singing and dancing began in the homes and out in the streets.

We had not expected such a reception. It was a real holiday both for us and for the peasants. It was a long time since we had eaten such delicious borshch and such wonderful cheese dumplings served with clotted cream. It was a long time since we had enjoyed ourselves so whole-heartedly. And although every inhabitant knew that we were sure to be followed by the occupants, no one mentioned this or even appeared to think about it.

We did not celebrate long, though. On the very next day the peasants saw that the partisans were serious folk. We set up positions, sent out pickets and began drilling and conducting political talks. We remained in those villages two weeks. From that new base of ours we carried out several attacks on enemy garrisons in the neighbouring villages.

It was from Zhuravleva Buda that on January 3, 1942, we sent our first radiograms, contacting the Southwestern Front and Comrade Khrushchov personally.

\* \* \*

What I have now set down in a few words was really the result of a big collective effort.

Where did we get our sleighs and horses? How did we at last acquire a radio transmitter?

In Book One I noted that in their call to the population the underground R.C. and the regional headquarters of the partisan movement had advised the kolkhozes to distribute the collectively owned livestock among the peasants and to give their best horses to the partisans. Many kolkhozes did just that. Knowing that the occupants would take the best livestock, the chairmen of kolkhozes turned over the most spirited, best-fed and strongest horses to the partisans.

Unfortunately, however, the invaders were sometimes quicker than we. While arguments were still going on in the detachments about whether they should be mobile or local, whether they should have cavalry and baggage trains or limit themselves to horses for the scouts, the Germans and Magyars were confiscating hundreds of kolkhoz horses.

Of the two hundred-odd horses we possessed by the end of December approximately one-half had been captured from the enemy. Our booty included not only peasant horses but dock-tailed, fat-rumped Hungarian and German horses. They were pampered and capricious, and in the forest they died off as monkeys do in the North. The partisans couldn't stand them, especially because they had to talk to them in German or Hungarian. They willingly exchanged the well-fed "foreigners" for ordinary peasant nags.

The other half of our horses we got from the kolkhozes. Our "contractors" rode out to surrounding villages in which the fascists had not yet had time to settle down. For the most part they returned to the detachment with sleighs as well as horses. Peasants in Yelino and Sofievka started making sleighs especially for the partisans.

However, there were instances when our men encountered unexpected resistance. Who does not know the peasant's attitude toward horses! And now he had to part with the very best of them. The majority of the peasants understood that this was a military necessity and that in the hands of the partisans the horses would serve the cause of the people, but still. . . .

In the village of Perelyub the head of the kolhoz stables was a man named Nazar Sukhobok, an evil-tempered, self-willed fellow. I knew him before the war. In fact, almost all the regional officials who used to visit this district in line of duty knew Nazar as a squabbler and a gossipmonger. Many even thought he had kulak leanings.

Indeed, every time regional or district representatives were carrying out some measure or other in Perelyub, Nazar Sukhobok was sure to come forth with a malicious speech at the meeting. Still, he was a good worker and—this was the main thing—people respected him and feared his sharp tongue.

He was close to fifty and for that reason had not been taken into the army. Balabai's men made their first attempt to get horses in that kolkhoz back in November. The chairman gave his permission, and two of the men went to the stables. Nazar met them with a string of oaths. When the partisans began unhitching the horses just the same, the old man let himself go in earnest and went at them with a shaft.

"Partisans—huh!" he shouted. "You're just a gang of deserters and idlers out there in the woods! Didn't join the army and now you want to get onto the neck of the peasants! Come on, get going!"

They retreated before Nazar that time.

The next time they came to him was at the end of December. The kolkhoz people, Nazar included, now knew that the partisans were fighting the Germans in earnest. Just the same Nazar again refused, although this time he was approached by Balabai himself and five decidedly determined lads. And Nazar's horses, incidentally, were splendid ones.

"Look here, Sukhobok," Balabai said to him. "We've got an order from the chairman, so don't you go stringing us along. I've known you going on for ten years. You always did love to cook up something. . . . You know me, too. Step aside, now, while you're still in one piece. Take the horses, comrades!"



Nazar grabbed a shaft to try to frighten them off again. But when he saw no one was paying the least attention to him he calmed down.

"What am I going to do here in an empty stable?" he muttered. "If you take the horses take me along with them. I promise. . . ."

He did not finish saying what he was going to promise.

Balabai told me afterward that he agreed to take Nazar along with them against his better judgment, so sincere and touching had he felt Nazar's mutterings to be. The old man said farewell to his family then and there—and there were eight members in it—harnessed the horses to sleighs and moved off with the partisans to the forest at the head of the column.

I want to note here that Nazar looked after the horses in the detachment as zealously as he had in the kolkhoz. He also proved to be a brave and resourceful soldier. A month later he perished when he went to Perelyub to visit his family. The Hitlerites captured him at home during the night. He put up a stiff resistance: he managed to bash in one Fritz's head with a stool and to maim two others in the legs. In the end he was overcome and was executed that same night.

And as not infrequently happens, it was only after Nazar's death that we saw the man in his true light. His fellow villagers now recalled that

Nazar had never deceived anyone. Whenever he undertook a job he always completed it on time. As a young soldier in the first imperialist war he had won a reputation for bravery. He had never been rich. During the long time he had been a hired labourer, he was as industrious as ever and obeyed his master unquestioningly; that is why many had considered him to have kulak leanings. He bore a grudge and began to go around saying that horses were better than people. Nazar was gentle with horses, but with people he was deliberately sharp and rude.

The memory of himself which Nazar Sukhobok from Perelyub left behind among the partisans was a good one.

Incidentally, in the partisan detachments not only every person but almost every object too had its own history, and quite an involved history it often was.

This holds good for the way in which we obtained our first radio set. There are some who will say: "Accident, luck, a happy coincidence." It seems to me that "accident" is like the ball coming to the player.

After we took up our position in the village of Zhuravleva Buda scouts reported that there was a small partisan detachment commanded by Vorozheyev on the other side of the Snov River, in Oryol Region. We had known about the existence of this

detachment before. Soon the commander himself and his staff called on us. Later we often received such partisan guests. Vorozheyev was the first of them. He was an excellent conversationalist and boon companion, and after dinner he dwelt at length on the way Alexander Vasilyevich would have acted in our place.

"Alexander Vasilyevich, you know, wouldn't bother with trifles. You know, he'd tackle the main German commandant's office in these parts. Alexander Vasilyevich would make a bold and proud assault!"

Only after about fifteen minutes did it come out that the Alexander Vasilyevich to whom Vorozheyev referred so often and with such familiarity was none other than the great Field Marshal Suvorov.

About the doings of his detachment the guest spoke mostly in general terms. I had already marked up the evening as hopelessly wasted when suddenly Vorozheyev told us that in the village of Krapivnoye, some thirty-five kilometres away, a scout from the Southwestern Front, a captain, had been hiding out for more than two weeks now with a group of men, a radio transmitter and an operator. Vorozheyev even described the house in the attic of which the captain had taken refuge against the occupants. They were hunting for him, and Vorozheyev thought they had already got on his trail.

"Have you tried contacting him?" I asked, concealing my excitement.

Here was a real chance of finally getting in touch with the front and perhaps with the Central Committee of the Party too.

"Yes, we're never at a loss, you know. I sent a few of the boys over, but it turned out the transmitter doesn't work. No juice."

Talk of the captain soon bored Vorozheyev and he began telling anecdotes about Suvorov.

I excused myself and stepped outside. To make a long story short, by morning our boys had brought Captain Grigorenko, the two soldiers accompanying him, the operator and the transmitter all to Zhuravleva Buda.

Captain Grigorenko turned out to be a close-mouthed fellow. He wasn't at all sure we were the right kind of people. His main argument against us was this:

"The command of the front knows nothing about the existence of detachments in these parts. I'm under no obligation to believe you."

"You mean to say that if the intelligence service of the front has no information about us we aren't a partisan detachment but a mirage? Is that it?"

"Maybe even something worse than a mirage...."

Meanwhile some lads had been sent out on a new assignment: to get batteries for the transmitter at all costs. It took us two days to prevail upon Captain Grigorenko to report our existence to the

command. We resorted to everything from tender words and pure alcohol to flattery and curses.

"I'd be glad to," Grigorenko said finally. "But you can see for yourselves there's no juice."

He was astounded when we confronted him on the spot with about thirty batteries from smashed German trucks. Our boys had scoured the locality over a radius of twenty kilometres and loaded up their sleigh with batteries.

Then the captain demanded we give him special quarters and that no one should come within thirty metres of the transmitter while he was working. We fulfilled all his demands.

The next time we met, Vorozheyev said bitterly:

"You made use of my information and got Grigorenko away right from under my nose. You know, I call that some cheek. Suvorov would never have done a thing like that."

On January 9, 1942, Grigorenko picked up an answer from the Southwestern Front. The radiogram addressed to me was signed by Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchov and Marshal Timoshenko.

\* \* \*

The impression made by the radiogram from the Mainland was one of the most powerful we experienced in all the time of our partisan life.

While up until this time we had been alone and dependent only upon ourselves, now that we



had got in touch with the Red Army and the Central Committee of the Party we became part of the common anti-Hitler front not only morally but organizationally as well.

The text of my radiogram was as follows:

"N. S. Khrushchov,

"Chernigov R.C. carrying on on own territory. Detachment of 450 under R.C. Report on results of struggle will follow.

"Fyodorov."

The reply read:

"Fyodorov.

"Convey greetings to men and officers. Report requirements. We await details.

"Khrushchov, Timoshenko."

These few words called forth wild rejoicing in all our units. Although we got the radiogram late in the evening, hundreds of men came running up to headquarters. Together with the partisans came civilians—old men and women, young women, boys. Many of them didn't even know what it was all about but they couldn't help being affected by the general mood of rejoicing.

Incidentally, someone had already managed to spread the rumour that Fyodorov had spoken to Khrushchov by radio telephone for a whole half-hour. There were even "witnesses" who related the contents of this imaginary conversation in full detail.

The audibility, they declared was bad and Fyodorov had to shout so much he lost his voice.

Several days later our scouts intercepted an amusing document. They caught a messenger on his way from the village of Yelino to the district centre, and in his pouch they found the following memorandum from the starosta to the district burgomaster:

"I wish to report that on the night of January 9 there was a great deal of noise and shouting in the villages where Fyodorov is now staying, namely, Zhuravleva Buda, Lasochki and Maibutnya. Many bonfires were lit, there was a lot of dancing and singing, hats were thrown in the air and there was also kissing. I took steps to find out the reason. Trustworthy people inform me that Fyodorov will receive strong support in arms and also men from the front. Planes carrying infantry and guns are expected. To mark this occasion the partisans were celebrating. Another trustworthy person supplied the information that Fyodorov is in constant touch by radio with Stalin and with Khrushchov, who promised all this. That person said planes had already landed and brought some things. On the other hand, no one has seen any planes yet.

"Hence urgent steps must be taken to surround and exterminate these bandits; otherwise it may be too late.

*"Starosta Ivan Klyuv."*

At first this memorandum had us considerably worried. Novikov decided that there was a traitor among us; one who, moreover, had access to the detachment headquarters.

But it wasn't, of course, that the starosta had received any secret information from our headquarters. The hopes of the partisans, voiced loudly at meetings and in talks among themselves and with the peasants, and the great uplift everybody had experienced—that is what gave the starosta his information. Hiding such "information" was impossible, and indeed, was it worth while hiding?

When I received the radiogram in reply I underlined the words "We await details," and in my own radiogram the words "Report on results of struggle will follow." These two phrases became the subject of an animated discussion first at headquarters and then at a special meeting of the R.C.

We had kept some sort of account, but to tell the truth, only from time to time. During the Pogoreltsy engagement I assigned two men to count the number of Germans killed. However, no count at all was kept during many other engagements. We kept no account of the materiel captured from the enemy, and we probably wouldn't have been able to say offhand how many operations our united detachment had conducted. As for what each detachment had done in the "pre-historic" period, so to say, most likely no one could remember.

We hadn't felt it especially important to keep such an account. The results of the offensive operations naturally interested everyone. Everyone wanted to know what we had achieved in them. In the defensive engagements, which usually broke out unexpectedly, we were happy to beat off the enemy's attack and simply had no time to estimate the losses we inflicted on him and the number of his men and officers we killed.

In short, we had not yet really begun to keep an account of the captured materiel. Some got called down for this. At the R.C. meeting the comrades told me a thing or two also. They were right when they said that this was the business of the detachment headquarters. I attempted to shift some of the blame on Rvanov. But it turned out he had been trying to establish it on a proper basis for a long time but had received no support from the commanders, Fyodorov included.

We admitted our mistakes and resolved to keep a scrupulous account of the number of Fritzes killed and the amount of materiel captured. And in order to draw up a record of what had been done up until that time, we called in the officers and instructed them to question the men immediately and borrow their diaries, in this way collecting all the information possible.

By the evening of January 11 we had all the figures.

We approached the matter very cautiously. The figures handed in by the officers known to have a predilection for boasting were cut, sometimes by half. Unfortunately, we were able to collect information only from the detachments which had joined ours. And even after cutting down every figure which seemed the least bit exaggerated, we were amazed at the total.

On January 12 we radioed to Comrades Khrushchov and Timoshenko in care of the Southwestern Front the following summary of the combat activity of the regional detachment and the detachments which had united with it:

"In the course of four months the partisan forces killed 363 Germans. We captured rich booty. We wrecked 29 motor vehicles, including 2 staff cars containing documents, also 18 motorcycles and 5 ammunition depots; we captured 100 horses and 120 saddles; we blew up 3 railway bridges. The R.C. printed and distributed 31 leaflets comprising a total of 40,000 copies."

We asked Comrades Khrushchov and Timoshenko to send us arms. Our modest request was as follows: 20 trench mortars, 15 heavy and light machine guns, 1,000 anti-tank grenades, explosives, and tommy guns and as much ammunition for them as possible.

In reply we received a long congratulatory



radiogram in which Comrade Khrushchov promised that all our requests would be granted.

\* \* \*

A much more difficult job was summarizing the activity of the underground groups and individual underground workers scattered throughout Chernigov Region. We did not receive bulletins, accounts or monthly reports from them, nor could we. About some of them we either knew nothing whatsoever or at any rate a great deal less than we did about those groups in towns and villages that had been organized before the occupation.

These groups had varied histories.

Frequently our messenger would find only ashes and smoke-blackened bricks where a secret meeting place had been. Going to a village to convey an R.C. directive to an underground group he might at times fail to find not only the group but the village itself; the only tenants of the demolished houses would be cats, now turned wild. Then our messenger would go in search of the underground district committee, only to learn that the organization had fallen through, the secretaries had disappeared without a trace and the district committee members had long since been captured and executed by the Gestapo.

"Here, read what the German commandant says," he would be told by trustworthy people. And they would show him a poster or a leaflet naming the leading Communists of the district and telling when and where they were hanged. "We saw the bodies ourselves, with name plates on their chests."

"But their faces were hidden by sacks, weren't they?"

"We didn't see the faces," the witnesses would admit.

We were not the least surprised when a month later the "hanged" secretaries of the district committee let us know they were residing and operating in another village. Circumstances sometimes forced an entire district committee to abandon its district, go off deep into the forest and there start working all over again.

This was natural and quite logical. If a traitor gave away your bases, meeting places and the organization's roll to the fascists it would be foolish to wait until they caught you and really took you to the gallows.

The R.C. learned that in the village of Buda or the little town of Mena, let us say, leaflets appeared regularly on the walls of houses and a German ammunition depot recently went up in the air. As far as we knew there weren't any underground workers in either of these places. That means a new group has been organized there. But the messenger

we sent returned to tell us that they were old friends who have moved in from the neighbouring district.

However, new underground groups did spring up, of course. Let us suppose that a small number of men who were in encirclement, or escaped war prisoners, find shelter in some village. There are sure to be energetic men among them. Communists and Komsomol members. They want to fight. And they recruit supporters in the village, they arm themselves.

We naturally didn't shy away from such groups. On the contrary, we endeavoured to help them by word and by deed. We demanded that the Communists and Komsomol members take the lead and set their comrades an inspiring example.

The most favourable conditions were enjoyed by the underground workers in districts where partisan detachments operated. It was for this reason that the Central Committee had recommended beforehand, even prior to the occupation, that not only underground Party bodies but also partisan detachments be formed. They helped and complemented each other. The underground workers obtained weapons for the partisans and collected important intelligence information for them. And when faced by the threat of exposure and arrest they could always take to the woods and stay with the partisans.

At the beginning of 1942 there were three underground district committees—the Koryukovka, Khol-

my and Semyonovka—operating in the forests of Kholmy District with the support of the regional detachment. Their secretaries, Korotkov, Kurochka and Tikhonovsky, and also their members served in the detachment and at the same time directed the underground groups in their districts.

The underground workers of these districts carried on a bold, lively and varied activity.

Underground worker Matsko, who really was an excellent cook, managed to get a job as chef in the Koryukovka restaurant in which burgomaster Baranovsky, Moroz, the chief of the district police, and the German commandants drank and gorged themselves almost every day. They used to call on Matsko to bake and fry and cook for them at home. When in their cups these local chiefs blabbed incessantly. Matsko tucked it all away in his mind, and as a result we came to know all the plans of the traitors and the invaders beforehand.

Not a single punitive expedition undertaken by the Koryukovka police came to us as a surprise. In the end the partisans killed police chief Moroz himself.

Our first printshop owed its existence to the Koryukovka underground workers. They stole type in the district centre and turned it over to us.

In addition to their intelligence and agitational work and the collecting of arms for the partisans, the members of the Koryukovka group succeeded in arranging substantial aid for the wives of Red Army

soldiers and officers who had worked at the sugar refinery before the war.

This is how they did it: several of the boys, dressed as peasants, would drive up to the market on Sunday with about twenty sacks of flour.

In those days barter had replaced money transactions at the markets. The townsfolk offered bed linen, lamps, tables and chairs, and in exchange the peasants gave them meat, flour and potatoes. The families of factory and office workers still had some money: before the men went off to the army they had collected their regular and dismissal pay, and this they left with their wives; when the refinery closed down its entire personnel received three months' pay, in addition to the current pay.

As soon as the cartload of flour appeared at the market, customers lined up. But the "peasants" announced they weren't taking any articles, that they weren't bartering their flour but selling it, and only for Soviet currency. The customers dashed home for money. And since the refinery settlement was near the market, it was the refinery folk who got back first.

The underground workers sold no more than ten kilograms of flour to a person and kept strictly to the prewar state price. A remarkable thing is that every time they did this, the peasants who had brought in flour also began selling it for money. A rumour immediately went the rounds: "Once they're



taking Soviet money that means it's curtains for the Germans soon."

Where did the underground workers get this flour? At first from the partisan caches, and then from outlying flour mills after doing away with the German guards.

In the course of September, October and November 1941 the underground workers and partisans of Koryukovka District supplied the families of servicemen with more than 43,000 kilograms of flour, 1,600 kilograms of meat and other provisions.

With the coming of winter these "supply" operations unfortunately had to be stopped. The stocks at our caches gave out, and the number of partisans was growing steadily. The provisions we captured from the Hitlerites were no longer enough to feed even ourselves.

With each passing day the activities of the Komsomol organization in Kholmy which called itself "Thus Life Began" grew more extensive. The nine members of the committee of this organization—Kolya Yeremenko, Nastya Reznichenko, Shura Omelchenko, Fenya Vnukova, Katya Dyachenko, Leonid Tkachenko, Fenya Shevtsova, Nadya Galnitskaya and Fedya Reznichenko—became a real headquarters of the young underground workers, agitators and scouts.

They printed leaflets containing the Soviet Information Bureau bulletins and news of district life

with the regularity of a newspaper and faithfully delivered them to specific addresses. There more copies were made by hand and passed on. In the course of the previous few months they had printed and distributed thousands of such leaflet-newspapers.

Sixteen-year-old Lena Tkachenko, a ninth-grade pupil who headed a group of scouts, managed to establish a relay system of communication with us. In each village en route to the detachment Lena had her boys and girls; when they received a message they would immediately set out and pass it on to the runner in the next village. All the while we were in Kholmy District they knew our whereabouts.

The latest assignment of the Kholmy Komsomol members, set by the Southwestern Front and transmitted through us, was to reconnoitre the enemy's lines of communication. They coped with this job brilliantly too, although there was not a single army man among them.

During that time the group sent us several revolvers, about a hundred grenades and thousands of rounds of ammunition. At the request of the district committee of the Party they dug up four radio sets and batteries for them and turned them over to the partisan detachments.

At the beginning of January, Katya Dyachenko and Fenya Shevtsova came to the detachment bringing bad news. Gestapo agents had got on the trail

of the group. The youngsters had decided to go off to the forest for the time being, but on the way had been caught by the police. Katya and Fenya had escaped.

A few days later, however, messengers reported that the others had managed to save themselves. They had been detained not by the district police but by the village police, who let them go on the condition that they return home. They actually did return to Kholmy and resumed their work. . . .

In the same month of January a young Communist named Nastya Patanok, a veterinary's assistant from the village of Syadrino who had not managed to evacuate into the Soviet rear, came to us. There were no other Communists in that village. At the beginning Nastya did not know anything about the existence of an underground organization in the district and she operated on her own. She wrote leaflets by hand and pasted them up in prominent places at night.

Oblivious of the existence of an underground Party organization, Nastya signed her leaflets "District Party Committee," "Red Partisans," and "Red Avengers." She sent notes to traitors threatening punishment. To waverers on the point of joining the police force or going to work for the district commandant's office, Nastya sent letters in the name of the partisans advising them to stop and think before it was too late.

Nastya showed us some of her leaflets. They were naive and often unconvincing. One said the fascists were fleeing from Kiev and Red Army units were approaching Chernigov.

"The fascists lie, so I do the same. Only my lying helps our cause and comes from the bottom of my heart."

We explained to her that there was no need to resort to lying. The truth, no matter how bitter it might be, always worked for us and against the invaders. We gave Nastya several leaflets for distribution among the population of the villages near Syadrino. A short time later she organized a small underground group.

\* \* \*

We were told that in the home of an old woman on the outskirts of the village of Alexeyevka, in Koryukovka District, a Jew who had escaped miraculously from the fascists lay dying of typhus. In his delirium he was said to have often repeated the names of Fyodorov, Batyuk and Popudrenko.

Could that be Yakov Zusserman?

I had made inquiries about him a long time before, immediately after coming to the regional detachment. No one knew anything about him. I had since reconciled myself to the thought that he must have fallen into the hands of the Hitlerites on his way from the Ichnya detachment to the regional de-

tachment and been killed. This was a very painful thought indeed, but a war was on, after all, and many were meeting their death. . . .

One evening when matters were not so pressing I took a group of men and together with Gromenko, the commander of Company One, set out for Alekseyevka, which lay thirty kilometres from our camp.

The scouts we sent ahead reported there were no Germans in the village and the *polizei* were keeping quiet like the cowards they were. We went straight to the indicated house. A dim light was burning in the window. I told the men to take up posts around the house and then I knocked.

The door was opened by a girl of twelve. She looked out and planted herself on the doorstep to prevent us from entering.

"Grandma Sidorovna's sick," the girl said. "She's shaking all over and she told me not to let anybody in. Who are you? The police?"

"We're relatives," said Gromenko.

The girl threw him a suspicious glance.

"That's not true, Sidorovna hasn't got any relatives except mama and me. You'd better not come in, there's typhus here. My mama left me to take care of Grandma Sidorovna. I feed her, I cook porridge for her."

We went in just the same. The girl followed us steadily with her quick, unusual eyes. It was cold and dreary in the house. The moon furnished more



light in the house than the lampion. The walls were smoke-stained, and the stove had not been white-washed for a long time. In a dark corner someone stirred. A senile voice queried hoarsely:

"Is that you, Nastya?"

"Some men have come, Sidorovna. They say they're relatives."

"They're not. Chase them out."

Without saying more she turned over with a sigh, rustling her straw pallet, and again either dozed off or else fell into a coma.

"See?" the girl said.

"Who else lives here?" And without waiting for an answer I sang out in a loud voice: "I am Fyodorov, Alexei Fyodorovich Fyodorov, and my comrade here is a partisan too."

A pair of thin bare legs promptly swung down from the stove shelf.

"Oh, it's you!" I heard a weak voice say. "Alexei Fyodorovich!"

Yes, it was Yakov Zusserman, the comrade of my wanderings. He climbed down from the shelf with difficulty, and supporting himself against the stove with long, weak arms, managed somehow to creep over to the bench. It was apparent the short walk had exhausted him. He gasped for breath and smiled a timid shaky smile. His huge eyes gazed upon me with joy.

I looked at him with involuntary horror. Before

me sat an emaciated old man with a long beard. And Yakov was only twenty-six at the time. . . .

"Alexei Fyodorovich," Yakov repeated. "So you're alive. I'd heard that, but I didn't believe it. Some one came in and said Fyodorov wasn't far from here, but I'm very sick and afterwards I thought it was my delirium."

As we listened to his words Gromenko and I looked at Yakov as one looks at a doomed man, with sympathy and ill-concealed pity. Yakov must have noticed this.

"Don't think I'm dying," he said. "I was on the point of death twice and was almost killed about five times, but now I think I'm getting better. Typhus. And they're so kind," he went on, trying to say as much as possible in one breath. "The old woman and this girl."

He took a few deep breaths, wiped the sweat from his face with his sleeve and went on:

"I swallowed Batyuk's letter. There was nothing else to do. I'm very sorry it turned out that way; the guilty deserve to be punished, but I guess I'm too weak for that."

We had brought a little flour, a chunk of salt pork and some sugar, of which Kapranov still had half a sack in his storehouse.

Yakov laid out these riches on the bench, stirred his hands and then said with unexpected desire in his voice:

"May I eat a little now? You know the appetite one has after typhus. . . ."

He sank his teeth into the pork. The paper package of sugar he handed to the girl.

"Here, Nastya dear, this is for you. . . ."

I asked Yakov, if he had the strength, to tell us in consecutive order all that had happened to him. He began at once. Every once in a while he would catch his breath and get down to the pork; then he put it aside again and talked, talked and talked. . . .

Gromenko said he would wait for me out in the street. The room was stuffy and had the sweetish smell of a poorly-ventilated hospital ward. I didn't feel so well myself. I suggested to Yakov that he leave for the camp with me on the spot.

He shook his head. "I don't think I have the right. Now I have to support and nurse this woman who's been so good to me. Don't go thinking Yakov doesn't want to be a partisan. I want to live so that I can avenge the sufferings of the population, and my own too. I don't believe any longer that my wife and son are alive. No, don't try to persuade me they are. I'll be sure to come to you just as soon as the old woman gets well.

"Anyway I haven't the strength yet to lift a rifle, to say nothing of firing it. Now just stay and listen, if you can. This'll be a story of such suffering!"

I sat down on a wobbly stool. I had to hear Yakov's story. His garrulousness irritated me, but I realized this was a result of his illness and his long solitude.

"Isn't there any danger?" asked Yakov. "Or have you got a guard? Why any more victims? If you get caught because of me it'll be the most awful thing in my life. But of course I don't want you to go. It was like this. When I left the Ichnya detachment I happened to remember that Israel Feinstein, my wife's uncle, lived in Koryukovka. He was a harness-maker at the sugar refinery. He used to come to Nezhin on his vacation, and the two of us put down a lot of vodka together. We were gay in those days. He was the picture of health and had an iron constitution. He was an elderly man. He'd taken part in the October Revolution, had seen Shchors and even helped him by supplying information. I got the crazy idea in my head that maybe my wife had gone to him from Nezhin and hadn't been captured by the punitive expedition at all. So I turned off to Koryukovka. The peasants told me there were no Germans there and the partisans had the upper hand. That made me terribly happy. But it turned out just the opposite. Actually the partisans had been forced to retreat under pressure of superior forces. There were no fascists there, though. They didn't show up for another few hours. Maybe they were afraid to come in right

away. There wasn't a soul on the street—just like before a big storm when the lightning's flashing.

"I went into the drugstore. 'If Israel's still in town,' I thought, 'they're sure to know it in the drugstore.' The druggist was a good friend of his. But the druggist wasn't there. 'Hide, quick,' the old watchwoman told me. 'All the Jews are hiding at home, they're afraid of atrocities.' 'What about Israel?' I asked. 'Do you know anything about him, maybe?' She told me Israel and his wife and kids had left for Nezhin. It was just the other way around, like in a novel.

"Just as I was thinking that, motorcycle troops came down the street. You know, at that time I didn't have a beard yet, and with my moustache I looked more like the Ukrainian type. I remembered from Nezhin that the motorcycle troops race along to make a lot of noise and scare people, but they don't stop for trifles. So I stepped right out into the street again. Where should I go? I wondered. I went to Israel's house. It's right next to the hospital. Are you listening to me, Alexei Fyodorovich, or have you gone to sleep already?"

"You'll get tired, Yakov," I said. "Eat, and don't hurry."

He wiped the sweat from his face again, then chewed on the pork for a long time. Sidorovna groaned in her corner. The girl placed a few sticks of wood in the stove and asked me for a match.



I gave her my cigarette lighter. When she got the fire going she stretched out her hands toward it and stood that way for a long time without looking around.

"The terrible thing is that the landlady's caught it from me," Zusserman said. "She's paying a big price for being kind. She's over sixty, and what kind of a heart can she have! There's nothing worse than a bad heart when you have typhus. She may die. That's some sacrifice on her part. But you note, Alexei Fyodorovich, that I warned her. But she said only God knew the answer to such a problem. If he wanted to take her soul then it couldn't be helped. I'd have gone away, only I couldn't move because of the fever."

Yakov talked for no less than an hour. He didn't omit a single detail. In brief the rest of his story is like this:

The very next day the invaders posted an order for all the Jews to gather at an appointed place, taking all their valuables with them. A lot of troops had arrived, and getting out of the town was extremely difficult.

The drugstore watchwoman's sister, who was an attendant at the hospital, persuaded Doctor Bezrodny to let her put Zusserman into the hospital. At that time he was still entirely well.

But it so happened that that night the fascists decided to inspect the hospital with a view to

turning it into an army hospital. They pushed aside the man at the door and started going through the wards. Zusserman heard them questioning the patients in the neighbouring ward:

"Where are you from? What's your nationality?"

Running away was impossible. The window opened onto the street, and the door led into the corridor, where Hitlerites were milling around.

"I'd already said goodbye to life for good, because I knew what appearing for registration meant. I quickly ran my eyes over Batyuk's letter to remember what he wrote you and then hurried to chew it and swallow it down. I choked over it but the Germans didn't hear. Just then in comes the relative of the drugstore watchwoman with another attendant and a stretcher. 'Get on, you're a dead man now!' they whispered. I did. They covered me with a sheet and carried me past the Germans and the policemen. 'Who's that?' I heard a voice ask. 'Just died of typhus,' one of the women answered calmly, just as if she was speaking to somebody at home. A policeman lifted the sheet. I was so pale I must have really looked like a corpse, because he said 'Ah,' indifferently, and I was carried out into the yard. There were soldiers there too. The women lugged me into the morgue and put me down on a slab next to three corpses.

"I lay there quiet as a mouse among those dead

men, worse off than they. I lay there like that more than an hour. And for nine days after that I made a dash for the morgue and lay down there in that horrible company every time Germans came near the hospital. Nights I sometimes managed to get into town and urge the Jews to run away instead of registering.

"On Shevchenko Street, in house No. 19, I think it was, I found good people. They were in touch with one of your partisans, a girl named Marusya Chukhno. She told me I must have patience. Meanwhile I helped her write leaflets. One day when I came to that house from the morgue after a nap I found it in ashes. People told me the fascists had taken Marusya Chukhno down the street together with the Jews. Three hundred Jews and the Russian girl Marusya Chukhno were shot.

"That evening my temperature was thirty-nine. I decided that nothing mattered now. I got the courage of desperation. The next morning I went openly into town with a grenade in my pocket and my finger on the trigger of my revolver.

"Right on the outskirts I met two mounted policemen. I let them come up close the way we were taught in the army and then fired at one of them. The other fired at me. He missed. I ran to the side and flung my grenade at him. At any rate, the horse galloped off without a rider. Maybe the

patrolman jumped off out of fright. I ran out into the field too. No one came after me."

Ill and running a fever, Zusserman wandered along the road and in the forest without knowing where he was going. Finally he lost consciousness and collapsed in a ditch. Passing peasants put him in a cart and took him to their village. When he came to he was in Sidorovna's cottage.

"She fed me milk and she fried potatoes for me. And now she's caught it. Ah, Alexei Fyodorovich, I know I'm to blame all around. When I get well and join the detachment you'll give me a talking to, or maybe something stronger."

He told me the contents of Batyuk's letter.

"Yasha, that is, Comrade Batyuk, dictated it in front of me. His sister Zhenya took it down. She told me it would be better if I could learn it by heart, like an actor, but there wasn't time then. While I was on the way I really did try and I managed some of it but not all. Before I got sick I knew the beginning like I know the multiplication table. Wait a minute, Alexei Fyodorovich, maybe I'll recall it."

Zusserman closed his eyes and was silent for a long while. I sat there in silence too. The girl continued to stand with her back to us, warming her hands over the stove. We could hear her sucking on a lump of sugar. Nothing seemed to concern her.

Zusserman still said nothing. I was already

wondering whether he hadn't fallen asleep when suddenly Nastya turned, hastily swallowed her sugar and said in a calm, businesslike tone:

"It begins like this: 'Comrade R.C. secretary, our organization is in the embryo stage....'"

Zusserman sprang from the bench and stared at Nastya with unconcealed horror.

"What?" he exclaimed, "How do you know it?"

Nastya immediately saw the reason for his fear.

"Uncle Yakov," she said hastily, "you've forgotten. When you were sick and thought you were going to die you yourself asked me to learn it by heart. You said it out loud so that either I or Grandma would remember it and then would try to pass it on to this uncle in the detachment." She pointed to me.

Yakov sat down again and smiled faintly. With a sigh of relief Nastya sat down beside him.

"Poor girl," said Zusserman. "You can imagine, with two sick people in a row. At least Grandma's quiet, but I was violent."

"Just like you were drunk," Nastya confirmed. "You wanted to run away, but I put you to bed."

"So I read the letter out loud, did I?"

"Yes, you did. And then once you went on as though Uncle Fyodorov was here in the house and you read it out loud again. I wanted to write it



down but you wouldn't let me, you said I was a fool. But one mustn't get angry at sick people."

"Well, thanks, Nastya, thanks. That's right, it does begin like this:

" 'Comrade R.C. secretary.' At first Batyuk dictated your name, Alexei Fyodorovich, but then he had her take down the letter from the beginning again. He said mentioning it was dangerous. 'Our organization is in the embryo stage. So far there are twelve Komsomol members and other young people in the group. There are older people too. They are all burning with a desire to work. Unfortunately we have lost touch with the district committee of the Party. We take down and distribute Soviet Information Bureau bulletins, print leaflets and carry on agitational work—among our acquaintances for the time being. We feel this is not enough and hope that soon we shall be able to do more. We sincerely ask the R.C. of the Party to count on us for anything it may need. Only death can halt us. . . . ' "

Zusserman fell silent.

"I don't know any more by heart, Alexei Fyodorovich," he confessed.

"Do you remember what it was about?"

"Batyuk asked me to tell you that you should absolutely take his physical condition, that is, his blindness, into consideration. No, he's not asking for easier work. Just the opposite. He says he's got

an advantage in secret work. Because he's blind they think he's a helpless invalid. 'Let the R.C. give me any assignment,' he said. 'I'm young and strong and I've got stamina.'"

"But what else was there in the letter? Only what you recited and nothing more?"

"Oh, no, Alexei Fyodorovich, of course not! There were important questions. It's hard for me to recall them but I'll try. Here's one thing that comes to mind, for example. The first question was like this. The Germans are letting people go in for handicraft industry: all kinds of artels—food products, woodworking and things like that. The army supply department and the commandant's office promise orders. So Batyuk asks if they should make use of these workshops. He himself wants to organize an artel so as to group his people around it. Would that be the right thing to do? Especially because after all they'd have to turn something out and hand it over to the Germans."

"In other words, should legal forms be used for rallying our supporters? Is that right?"

"Exactly. Then there's another question. They, that is, Batyuk's group, could carry out terrorist acts against the commandant, the burgomaster and other German henchmen. But Batyuk said in his letter there were comrades who objected to this. They pointed out that Marxists-Leninists are against personal terror."

"Individual, you mean?"

"Yes, that's right, that was the word. And at the end Batyuk again says that he's waiting for your instructions. They'll do everything the Party orders them to."

The old woman stirred in her corner.

"Water, Nastya dear," she whispered. Nastya jumped up and handed her a cup. After swallowing noisily a few times the old woman muttered in a fairly loud voice:

"Third time you've woken me up. Is that proper? Let me die in peace at least. . . ."

"Forgive us, Grandma," I said. "We're leaving right away. Maybe you'll come with us after all, Yakov, eh?" I proposed again. "It's not bad at our place. We're staying in a village. Our feldsher's got a whole cottage. When you get well we'll fight the enemy together. For we may pick up and leave one of these days—and then just try and find us."

"I really do want to, that's my dream, but you understand. . . ." He nodded toward the corner where the old woman lay.

She could not have seen his nod but she guessed what we were talking about.

"Go, go, Yakov. You've lain around here enough. Go off with the partisans. Take him, chief, we haven't got anything to eat ourselves." After these rude-sounding words the old woman added in the same tone of voice, "Only you have to wrap him

up. His coat's too thin. Yakov'll catch cold in the frost."

I said I had a long sheepskin coat in my sleigh.

"Then go, and God be with you. Give him his cannon, Nastya. It's wrapped in a rag behind the icon of the Chernigov Virgin."

The girl brought a pistol from a dark corner, handed it to Zusserman and helped him put on his coat. He pulled down his garrison cap with trembling hands and took several steps toward the old woman.

"Don't come close, no need to," she warned him.

"Praskovya Sidorovna!" Yakov exclaimed. "You've been a mother to me! I'll never forget—"

"All right, Yakov," answered the old woman. "I'm not your mother and you're not my son. I did what I could. But not for you—for our country it was. Keep well, don't fall ill, and if you fight the Germans let them have a bullet apiece for me and for Nastya."

The girl came outside too to help us get Zusserman into the sleigh. But the men came up, and she stood silently on the steps, shivering in her shawl.

"Goodbye, sister of mercy," I said.

"Goodbye, Nastya dear, thanks again. And if we meet again whatever I have is yours!" Zusserman said with feeling.

Nastya shook hands ceremoniously with Yakov, myself and all my companions. Then she said softly:

"Uncle Fyodorov...."

"Speak up, speak up," Zusserman said encouragingly.

"You're in the woods.... If you only can send Grandma in a little firewood. 'If only,' she says, 'we could have it warm once before I die.' I'd go myself but it's not good to leave her alone."

I promised to send some firewood the very next day, of course. But it so happened that the next morning the occupants went at us hot and heavy. We fought them till late at night. The day after was a very tense one too. I was able to send some men with firewood only two days later. Besides the wood the men took her half a sack of flour, some rusks and some meat.

On their return they reported that the old woman had died and her house was boarded up.

And so I never had a chance to see her. I had only heard her hoarse senile voice. I was terribly conscience-stricken at not having carried out her last wish on time.

\* \* \*

Batyuk's letter reached me two months after it was written, and even then it wasn't the letter



itself but a recital of its contents. What had happened in Nezhin during this time? Was the group organized by this brave and gifted blind man still operating? Was he still pondering over the questions he had asked the secretary of the R.C. of the Party to answer? And, finally, was he still alive at all?

Neither I nor the other R.C. members knew.

If we answered Batyuk today and gave him clear instructions when would he receive our answer? We didn't have either telephone, radio or mail service. Our messenger couldn't get to him either by train, automobile or on horseback. He would have to go on foot, and not so much go as make his way, risking his life at every step.

For this reason our underground R.C. wasn't always able to give operative guidance, that is, react quickly to events in remote districts, furnish advice, men or arms in good time. We ourselves, together with the regional detachment, were forced to change our whereabouts from time to time. Messengers from district committees went to Reimentarovka and some even to Gulino, only to find traces of our having been there and nothing more—deserted dugouts, empty cartridges and German corpses. Some messengers gave up their search for us as hopeless and returned; the more persistent questioned the peasants about where we were, but as the reader already

knows, the peasants did not supply such information very willingly.

Only at the beginning of January, after a three months' absence, did Kuzma Kulko return from Yablunovka District. He reported that Comrade Boiko, an underground worker appointed by the R.C., was heading a small group of Communists and Komsomol members in the district. They printed leaflets on a hectograph and distributed them, conducted oral propaganda among the peasantry, and regularly cut the telephone and telegraph wires between Yablunovka and Piryatin. The group had put to death two starostas who were traitors. Just recently someone had informed on Comrade Boiko, and the Germans had arrested him. He managed to escape but they caught up with him in the forest and shot him on the spot.

Now a candidate-member of the Party named Zlenko was head of the Yablunovka primary organization. The group was small and was having a hard time. Its activity was limited at the time to tuning in on the radio and putting out leaflets containing Soviet Information Bureau bulletins. It was hard for the comrades not only because the Germans and the police were after them but also because there were many out-of-towners in the group.

"They want to know this," Kulko said in his report to the R.C. "How can they earn a liveli-

hood? The partisans can capture supplies from the Germans. But the underground worker, if he doesn't have a little plot of land or a craft—what can he do? He has to go to work. But where is there work nowadays? It'd be all right on a sovkhos or in a factory, where there's a chance to conduct agitation, to explain the real situation to the masses, to go in for sabotage, and so on. But the trouble is no factories or mills are working in Yablunovka. The Germans closed down the sovkhoses too. They've turned the kolkhoses into communes consisting of ten families each, and they only take in local folk. So what's to be done?"

"What did you advise them?"

"There's only one way out—and that's help from the people. Like the way you get food on a journey: either you beg your way or else you take advantage of the generosity and hospitality of the peasants. Only remember, it's one thing when a man's passing through a place and another when he's settled down to stay."

Incidentally, Kulko had changed greatly by this time; he had lost weight and grown coarse. Now he smoked a lot, and since he was a guest it was not polite to refuse him; he smoked up my ration for two days while he was making his report.

A few days later Kulko went off on another liaison assignment. Zusserman went with him.

Though he had barely got on his feet, he himself volunteered to go to Nezhin, pointing out that no one knew the road better than he. At first I hesitated, but he persuaded me. It was indeed easier for him to locate Batyuk's group than for anyone else.

I let Zusserman go with a heavy heart. But he was in good spirits, seemed fit and was very eager to set out on the assignment.

At the beginning of January, after wandering about a long time, Savva Grishchenko, a member of the Oster underground district committee of the Party, stumbled on a picket of the regional detachment. He was worn out, ragged and hungry. But when he learned the underground R.C. was with the detachment he immediately brightened up. Food was brought to headquarters for him, and he told his story while he ate.

Grishchenko described the difficult position of the Oster underground district committee. A partisan detachment had been organized in the district before it was occupied. It helped Red Army units emerge from the encirclement but then was unable to make its way back into occupied territory. Most of the comrades went off with our troops. Only a small group, headed by the district committee secretary, Glushko, crossed the frontline and returned to the Oster woods.

There they learned that the location of the food caches and the secret store of weapons had been betrayed to the police by a truck driver who had turned traitor. This made it impossible to form a new partisan detachment, and the district committee directed all its efforts to building up rural underground groups. It set up six groups, each consisting of four to eight members. These groups copied out Soviet Information Bureau bulletins by hand and distributed them. Actually, they were the core of a future partisan detachment. They foraged for arms in the woods and in the fields. They already had twenty boxes of grenades, more than one hundred rifles, two hand machine guns and more than ten thousand rounds of ammunition at their common forest depot.

"Ah, comrades," Grishchenko said, "if we knew for sure that the R.C. was carrying on as before, how much easier it would have made our work!"

"Why?" asked Popudrenko. "How could we have helped you?"

"Is help everything? Look, you've just told me you got a message from Comrade Khrushchov. But so far you haven't received any help either, have you? It's the same with us Communists in the districts—it's very important for us to know that the R.C. exists. Why, you must see that yourself, don't you, Nikolai Nikitich?"



"And you really didn't hear a thing about our detachment?"

"We did. In fact, we heard about two big detachments. Orlenko's and Fyodorov's.\* As for the R.C., we last received a directive from it back in November."

"Did the directive come in handy, was it what you needed?"

"A lot of new things have cropped up since then. For instance, there are Communists and Kom-somol members in the district who don't belong to any groups. Some of them have registered with the police. Those who did this voluntarily are cowards and traitors; but there are some who just couldn't help registering."

"Well, look here, nothing could ever force me to register!" Druzhinin exclaimed indignantly.

"The same with me—in our case it's different," Grishchenko protested. "But take the following case. Remember the mechanic at the *Chervonoarmeyets* Kolkhoz? You ought to remember him—Nikanor Stepanovich Gorbach. An AI mechanic. He made an appeal last year through the regional newspaper from the pre-schedule repair of farm machines for spring sowing. His picture was on the

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\* On more than one occasion I heard that there were two detachments operating in the region, Orlenko's and Fyodorov's. It was not in our interests to deny this rumour.—*Author's note.*

front page—with a moustache, a pipe in his mouth and a big mole near his nose. That's the man. A candidate-member of the Party. But the main thing is he's known everywhere for his skill. And besides being a mechanic he's a blacksmith and a turner, a self-taught craftsman. He knows tractors inside out, and he can fix any motor, any machine. A born mechanic. Many's the time the machine and tractor station asked him to come and work for it, but he wouldn't go. He liked his village; he had beehives there. And the main thing was he loved the kolkhoz and was proud of it. A real Soviet man, anybody would say, and then he goes and registers."

"That means at heart he wasn't that. You Communists of the district failed to see he was a kulak at heart."

"That's not it at all, Alexei Fyodorovich. He even shaved off his moustache and wanted to have his mole removed to disguise himself. But nothing can help him, the same way it can't help you, say, or Nikolai Nikitich either. Once the people know a man, that's all there is to it! No matter what you put on they'll always recognize some part of you. I, for instance, would remember Nikolai Nikitich's nose, if you'll pardon my saying so, and you his ears. If one doesn't recognize you then another will. Besides, you can always tell an old blacksmith by his hands. Right?"

"Nikanor Stepanovich didn't want to evacuate into the interior. Said he'd rather be a partisan. But we had to return from the woods, as I already said. We told him that since he was in the public eye we'd send him to some remote village. He didn't argue. He picked up his old woman and went off to live with relatives in Zelyonaya Buda. They took him in, of course. In the kolkhoz, or the association, as they call it now, they were simply overjoyed at having him. What did that mean? That they'd recognized him, of course. But then he told them he couldn't work. He bandaged up his hand on purpose. 'That's nothing, you'll get well,' they said to him. He let us know he wanted leaflets. 'There are good folk here,' he said. 'And if you need it, I have a big cellar that'll do for a printshop.' When he met one of our men he suggested they bring him the printing press from the woods piecemeal. He'd figure out how to make it work. The press, by the way, was intact. When the police raided the caches they only damaged it a bit. They threw rocks at it.

"To make a long story short, just at that time we learned he'd registered. He went to the police and said he was a candidate-member of the Party and signed a statement saying he gave up all resistance. And according to the rules, he promised to inform them about everything he learned.

"When we heard all this we felt pretty bad.

Whom could you believe then, if not a man like that, one of the most devoted kolkhoz men, so to say, and a member of the board! It turned out we had to take revenge on him, we had to kill him. After all, Nikanor Stepanovich knew the addresses of the meeting places. Besides the members of the district committee he knew the relatives of all the members. Suppose he took it into his head to do what he promised the Germans in that statement?

"But none of us wanted to kill him. We couldn't conceive of his being a traitor. And naturally he wasn't. He came and hunted us up of his own free will and explained it all. But we expelled him from the Party. We refused to recognize him as one of us.

"How did all this happen, you ask? One day the Landwirtschaftsführer and a fellow who used to work in the district land department—now he's fixed himself up in the economic commandant's office—came to see him. 'You're so and so, aren't you?' they say. He tries to deny it but that fellow knows him by sight, it turns out. 'You shaved off your moustache,' he says. 'Well,' says Nikanor Stepanovich, 'you've got me there.'

"They put him in their carriage and take him to a threshing floor thirty kilometres away. There they order him to repair the stationary engine at once. They'd started threshing. A German soldier—he was a mechanic too—is poking around the en-

gine but it seems he doesn't know the workings of our machine. He can't do a thing with it. Nikanor Stepanovich points to his hand to show them he can't work. They say he doesn't have to do anything himself. All he has to do is tell them.

"And can you imagine, the old fellow got carried away. 'I don't understand how it happened myself,' he said later. 'Why, I kept saying to myself, you bald-headed devil, don't you do anything. They fuss around the machine this way and that way but they can't get anywhere. Then they start making fun of me: how come a famous mechanic like you and you can't fix it either, they say. I couldn't stand it and I played right into their hands; or maybe it was I wanted to show the Germans who was better. My hands reached out by themselves, so to say, and before I knew it the machine was going. Think what you want of me,' he says, 'I was never an underground worker before in my life, but I've been handling machines more than thirty years.'

"After that matter of the engine they tell him the occupation authorities know he's a Communist but that doesn't count, all he has to do is register. They take him to the police station. And there he signs that paper I told you about. A couple of days later he comes to us and asks us to consider it all a trick, and says he hates the fascists and is ready to give his life for our cause. So you see, comrades, how it turns out sometimes."



"But that's a rare case, after all," we protested.

"Each case is rare in its own way. A certain comrade, also a new Party member, a schoolteacher, looks us up and says, 'I may be guilty, I may not be worthy of being called a Party member, but don't let me stop being called a human being. Give me an assignment, try me out. I confess that the whole picture of the retreat crushed my spirit at the beginning, and I lost my head. But when I thought it over, when I saw the strength of the people's spirit, I realized death was better than this sort of life.'

"We told him to get the lay of the land on the railway. For some wrecking work, we said, although we had nothing to do such work with. And so we sent him to the station, which was under a very heavy guard. Just think, he crawled under the barbed wire at night and afterwards drew us a detailed map of where the sentries stood, where the shells were stored.... We felt sorry for the man—all that crawling for nothing. No, after all, you can't go calling everybody a rat just because he got scared once. As time goes on more and more people like that schoolteacher will come over to us."

"But what about the mechanic?" asked Druzhinin, whose interest had been aroused. "So you expelled him from the Party and drove him away?"

"The old man's taken to drink. It's just terrible the way he's drinking. He's set up a still and makes

real 100 proof stuff. And he's learned how to get the rawness out of it. When you add a little water it's just as good as Moscow Extra Refined."

"So you've tried it, eh?" Popudrenko put in with a laugh. "And yet you say you have nothing to do with the old man. It appears he's still useful to you in some ways, doesn't it?"

We joked a bit but the questions raised by Grishchenko, and before that in Batyuk's letter and in Kulko's report, were without any doubt serious questions which agitated the minds of all underground workers.

Indeed, just who were the rank-and-file underground workers in the Patriotic War? What were they supposed to do? Whom might they accept into their groups? Should they become professionals, that is, devote themselves exclusively to underground activity? What material conditions did they have for this?

In the towns the underground groups were made up of factory workers and office employees, students of higher schools and schoolchildren. In the rural areas they consisted of kolkhoz members, workers of machine and tractor stations and sov-khozes, doctors and schoolteachers, and schoolchildren too. The groups were headed by comrades sent by the R.C. or the district committees.

Practically nobody had any experience in underground work, except for older men who were

Party members before the Revolution or were Civil War veterans. But in the first place they were just a handful, and secondly the present conditions in the underground had little in common with the conditions under which these comrades once worked.

I imagine Batyuk's question as to whether they should go in for terrorist acts was suggested to him by one of the older people.

To get down to it, were we fighting to overthrow a social system? The German invaders hadn't introduced the bourgeois system in the occupied Ukraine, nor could they introduce it, although of course they were trying to. All they had succeeded in doing was occupying territory, and at that only temporarily. The war was still going on. The fascists were fighting not only the Red Army but the entire Soviet people. We partisans and underground workers were all soldiers. We were fighting. Wiping out commandants, Landwirt-, Gruppen- and all other kinds of *führers* was our duty as soldiers. Was wiping out traitors to the people—*starostas*, *burgomasters* and *polizei*—was that terrorism? Those dregs of humanity were criminals whom we were putting to death according to the laws of our country.

The underground workers in the Patriotic War were partisans just like the rest. This division into partisans and underground workers meant simply that the former lived and operated in sizable mili-

tary groups, while the latter had to live separately and operate more secretly.

The Soviet people in occupied territory knew very well who their enemies were. Even the most backward peasants couldn't, of course, take seriously the attempts of the Hitlerites to put themselves up as "liberators." There was only one thing the Hitlerites did succeed in doing, and that was to impress a considerable part of the population in the occupied countries with an exaggerated idea of their strength.

This they managed to do to a greater degree in the countries of Western Europe than in the occupied districts of the Soviet Union. But it must be confessed there were people, especially during the first year of the war, who had too high an opinion of the enemy's strength and clearly underestimated their own strength.

We paid very dearly for this horrible mistake.

The resistance of our men and women who remained on occupied territory would have been many times greater if they had known the entire truth about the fascists at that time, if they had known, at least, that already in the first year of the war there were more dead Hitlerites in the Ukraine than live ones.

Hence the main task of the underground workers, that is to say, the Communists and Komsomol members who had not gone off to the woods but

had been left in the towns and villages, *was to spread the truth.*

By telling the population the real situation at the fronts, by regularly distributing Soviet Information Bureau bulletins, by exposing the tactical manoeuvres of the occupants, such as their land laws, their playing at being "friends of free Ukraine" their nationalistic propaganda and their other moves, the underground workers raised the people's spirit and helped build up partisan reserves.

The underground workers in the towns and villages had to do everything in their power to prevent fascist laws, orders and instructions from being carried into effect; they had to plan acts of sabotage at the factories and in the agricultural associations; they had to expose traitors; they had to collect arms and ammunition and turn them over to the partisan detachments; they had to carry on intelligence work for the headquarters of partisan detachments and for the Red Army.

I would hardly be able, though, to enumerate here all the duties of the underground fighter. His rights and his concrete opportunities were quite another matter; they were much more limited. Our reply to the underground workers of Yablunovka as to how to make a living could only be: Seek work, comrades, and don't look down on any kind of job. Lead the same sort of life as the people, always be with the people. If need be, become



hired labourers for the newly-baked kulaks and landlords, join artels, go to work on the railway or in the Hitlerite administrative and economic institutions—we have to have our own people everywhere if we want to blow up the German occupation machine from within. But remember, you may go to such places only if the Party assigns you.

As for those Communists and Komsomol members who out of fright or because of some kind of “personal reasons” registered with the Germans and went to work for them, there can be no justification for them and never will be. No matter how likeable the mechanic Nikanor Gorbach was, the Oster Party organization did quite right in refusing to consider him a Communist. The schoolteacher whom Grishchenko told us about also had to be expelled from the Party at once.

There was only one way for them to redeem themselves in the eyes of the people, and that was by joining a partisan detachment. As for reinstatement in the Party, they should not even dream of that for the time being.

\* \* \*

Why such strictness? the reader will ask. After all, both Nikanor Gorbach and that schoolteacher who admitted he had been lacking in courage came to the district Party committee of their own accord to confess their guilt. After all, they had wavered

for only a moment. Should they be considered traitors?

If they were traitors they would have been shot. The question of allowing them to fight in the ranks of the partisans would not have come up, then. As for the men about whom Grishchenko told us, we not only confirmed their expulsion from the Party but asked the district committee to make as public as possible the fact they had been expelled. A Communist may not strike a bargain with his conscience. Not for a moment has he the right to forget that the people see in him a representative of the Party at the helm.

The fascists made a big show about registering Communists. They posted large signs saying "Registration of Party and Komsomol Members Here." The purpose, however, was not to list the Communists. Only a handful came to register. The fascists naturally knew that only traitors and the faint-hearted would come, and that these weren't dangerous anyway. There was quite a different purpose: it was an attempt to strike at the Communist Party's authority among the people.

Later on the mechanic Nikanor Gorbach did prove that not only wasn't he a traitor but that he was even a brave man. He joined the detachment and despite his advanced years acquitted himself well in action. He told us later how his touched pride would not let him bow to the German me-

chanic. His professional pride as a mechanic, it turned out, had been stronger than his pride as a patriot and a Communist.

But what the people prized most highly in those days was the indomitable civic pride of the Soviet man. How could we forgive a Communist even the slightest wavering toward the side of the Hitlerites when hundreds and thousands of nameless heroes, workers and peasants who were not Party members, went to their death simply to show their scorn for the invader?

In kolkhoz cottages, at the ashes of burnt-down villages and around partisan campfires one could hear the deeds of these heroes recounted. I have noticed, incidentally, that the people dearly love to hear stories about selfless courage, stories about men and women who meet their end with a supreme scorn for death, stories about what Maxim Gorky called the madness of the brave. The people told such stories over and over again, built them up, passed them on from mouth to mouth.

There was, for example, the story of old man Mefodyevich of Orlovka. I myself heard this story no less than ten times. It is based on an actual case which took place at the beginning of 1942. Mefodyevich's last name, however, I never did find out.

Once three of our scouts, Komsomol members Motya Zozulya, Klava Markova and Andrei Va-

zhentsev, set out on a tour of some villages to collect information the command needed. With them they had about five hundred leaflets, some of which they were to scatter on the way and the rest hand over to trustworthy people for distribution.

In the big village of Orlovka they walked down the street—two ordinary peasant girls and a young lad. They met old men and women, and girls and fellows just like themselves. The scouts greeted them, asked the way to the flour mill and inconspicuously thrust little squares of paper into their hands.

When they asked how far from there the Germans were they were told that everything was all right, that those fiends hadn't been around for a long time.

Just at that moment several trucks filled with German soldiers burst into the village with the speed of fire engines. Our trio of scouts couldn't run away. If they tried they would be sure to attract general attention, and then, of course, the Germans would start out after them. They continued strolling down the street, hoping the fascists would take them for ordinary peaceful villagers.

But the German soldiers behaved very strangely. They sprang out of the trucks, scattered to all sides, grabbed whomever they could lay hands on—old men, old women, youngsters—herded them

to the trucks and with their rifle butts forced them to climb in. They didn't search anybody, didn't ask any questions or give any explanations. When they had filled the trucks they set out at full speed in the direction of the town of Kholmy, the district centre.

The scouts landed in the last truck, in which about twenty-five pale and frightened villagers stood holding on to one another. At first they only exchanged glances; but after about five minutes they began whispering, "What can it mean?" "Where are they taking us?" "Why did they grab just anybody?"

They were tossed from side to side in the speeding trucks; they fell against one another; they were flung to the floor. Girls shrieked, old women complained.

"Nadya, stop bumping into me so hard!" a woman cried. "You know I've got a bad knee, you devil."

"Never mind, women, get used to it," came a cracked old man's voice. "Be thankful they're not collecting fare for the trip. You used to have to shell out thirty rubles to get to Kholmy, but our German benefactors are delivering us to the noose at their own expense...."

"There, our actor's started off again," a woman's voice responded. "Be better if you shut up, Me-fodyevich, it's bad enough without you."



The old man retorted with a joke. Several of the villagers burst into ready laughter. That Medfodievich must have been one of those jolly old fellows who never lose their heads and are never short for a word.

The scouts were not listening; they had other things on their mind. They stood by the sideboard discussing in a whisper what they were to do. Each had more than a hundred leaflets in his bosom. There wouldn't even be any need to search them; a shake of the collar would be enough. . . .

The trucks were making no less than forty kilometres an hour. They raced through the villages with horns tooting. There were no soldiers in the backs of the trucks, but tommy gunners stood on the running-boards. They chatted with the men inside the driver's cab, but every once in a while they glanced back, and of course they would have noticed anyone trying to jump out.

Motya Zozulya was more experienced and more resourceful than her companions. She studied the people standing around her, then, winking to her friends, she cautiously pulled out a pack of leaflets, held her hand over the side and flung them to the ground. The wind suddenly caught them up and whirled them about behind the truck.

Motya blushed and shrank back as though expecting a blow. No one in the truck said anything. The leaflets disappeared from sight, but the people

in the truck kept silent, casting searching looks at one another.

Then the old man spoke up again in his cracked voice:

"So besides arresting people the Fritzes spread leaflets at the same time, eh? Like a factory on wheels!"

The engine was roaring and the truck creaked as it jounced over the ruts, yet it seemed to the scouts they could hear a general sigh of relief.

It is doubtful whether anyone in the back of the truck believed that it was a German soldier who had flung out the leaflets. But be that as it may, the tension was lifted. They started talking again.

Meanwhile Mefodyevich had risen from the floor of the truck and crawled over to the scouts. He proved to be a skinny little old chap. The wind toyed with his short grey beard and his nose was red from the cold, but he wore his cap cocked, one side of his moustache curled upward belligerently, and there was a twinkle in his eyes. He went off into a long monologue again, apparently saying anything just so as not to keep quiet.

"Why, gentlemen," he exclaimed, twirling his moustache, "we're now having a ride together with foreigners! Did I ever even think or dream of such a new order-o?"

While someone rejoined he quickly moved over to Motya and whispered:

"Don't throw them out into the field for nothing, child. They're intended for the people, right? So you scatter them where there's people. Throw 'em out next time we go through a village."

When the truck entered a village Mefodyevich began poking Motya in the ribs excitedly.

"Throw 'em, what's the matter with you! Don't be afraid, I'll take the blame!"

The trio scattered part of the leaflets in the village. But this time everyone in the truck knew what was up, of course, but as though by common consent they pretended not to notice anything.

Boys ran after the truck, trying to catch the sheets whirling in the air. The people in the truck roared with laughter. All of them, young and old, were enjoying the game. When the Germans on the running-board turned suspiciously, a woman with a long sad face shouted:

"Watch out there!"

The head of a soldier appeared over the side of the truck. The German understood nothing. He stared in wonderment at those queer Russians. "What're they laughing about?" He spat angrily, swore, and then turned around. But now they couldn't throw out any more leaflets. The occupants felt something was wrong and kept a steady eye on them.

Mefodyevich let himself go. He was in his element.

"Give them to me," he begged when he learned that the scouts still had three hundred leaflets left. "Now don't you be afraid, I'll get away with it somehow, give them to me, hurry up now. They'll read them in our village."

He thrust the remaining leaflets inside his shirt, buttoned up his leather jacket and smiled a satisfied smile. He screwed up his eyes in such a sly manner that everyone could see he was up to something.

Indeed, he made a scramble for the front of the truck, practically climbing over people's heads.

"Let me through!" he yelled. "Let me get past, good people, I can't wait any longer."

Nobody knew what he had in mind, yet they made a path for him. When he reached the front he pounded madly on the roof of the cab. Everyone fell silent. The truck braked sharply.

Fields lay on either side of the road, and near the roadside ditch grew a few scraggly snow-covered bushes. The soldiers jumped down from the running-board. The men in the cab hopped out too, and they all gave vent to guttural shouts.

Mefodyevich nodded toward the bushes, bent over double, clasped his stomach and twisted his face into such a pitiful, suffering grimace that even the Germans couldn't help bursting into laughter.

"Wait a minute, wait, *bitte, bitte*, it'll just take

a minute, right away," he mumbled as he hastily climbed down from the truck.

The Hitlerites continued to laugh. They stood and waited, and meanwhile Mefodyevich hid the leaflets behind the bushes, squatted there a minute or so and then returned with a happy, naive expression of satisfaction on his face.

One of the Germans went so far as to pound him on the back. "*Gut, gut*, good kolkhoz," he said. "Fine!"

When the trucks drove into Kholmy and stopped at the square it turned out that on orders of the Gebietskommissar peasants had been picked up at random in dozens of villages of the locality and brought to town to hear him deliver a speech. The scouts, realizing that they were free, tried to slip away from their companions: they preferred to be as far away as possible from people that might be witnesses against them.

But a cordon had been set up around the square, and the orders were not to let anyone out until the meeting was over. The scouts moved over to the side, choosing a spot from which they could make a quick getaway. Some ten minutes later several Hitlerites mounted the wooden platform. One of them began to speak.

The Gebietskommissar swore, waved his fists, threatened someone. He held forth in German but the people knew very well that he had nothing



good to tell them. Then the interpreter, also a German, spoke:

"We call you here for you to tell your relatives and friends that we Germans absolutely do not like jokes." Someone in the crowd gave an unnaturally loud sneeze. "We do not like jokes," the interpreter repeated. "Our agents when they go to the villages do not get a happy welcome from the peasants. What is this? This is a sign there is agitation by the forest bandits who do not advise them to give the Germans food products, hogs and grain. This is considered by us sabotage. This is considered by us a sign of obedience to the destroyed Bolshevik government. We do not desire to pardon such signs any longer and we hasten to destroy the nests mercilessly. Shoot down. Execute--"

In exactly the same tone of voice, just as though he were continuing the interpreter's speech, someone in the crowd said:

"Chop up and pickle...."

"What was that said there?" the interpreter asked sternly.

Nobody uttered a word.

"I ask emphatically to repeat. I did not hear enough. Who said that?"

A hand was raised in the crowd, and the scouts saw it was Mefodyevich's. The old man had got into the spirit of the thing, apparently, and couldn't stop. His success in the truck had inspired him.

"It was I who said that, Herr interpreter."

"What meaning did you wish to give those words?"

"I wished to support your idea. You said 'shoot down and execute,' but I think that's not enough, because there are people who obey incorrectly, who mix things up a bit, who swing to the opposite, and so on. They're harming the peasantry and the new authorities, who.... In general I support your measure with all my heart...."

It's unlikely the interpreter understood everything Mefodyevich said. But he evidently decided there was nothing objectionable in the old man's words.

He went on with his speech, and Mefodyevich shouted from time to time, with a singularly solemn face:

"That's right! Let it be like that! Very *gut*. Very *bitte*!"

When he finished the speech the interpreter discussed something in a whisper with the Gebietskommissar, the burgomaster of Kholmy and a policeman. Then he beckoned to Mefodyevich with his finger. The old man climbed up on the platform. He stood before the Gebietskommissar like a tsarist soldier, with his chest out and his eyes glued on the authorities. The interpreter whispered something in his ear. Mefodyevich's face expressed

agreement and willingness. Then he turned to face the crowd and began to speak.

At first the peasants took him for a German toady and listened sullenly.

"Citizens!" exclaimed Mefodyevich in the best oratorical style, but then suddenly turned to the interpreter and said, "Excuse me, it popped out out of habit. Gentlemen!" he began again. "Respected peasants! What are we told? We are told that Germany wishes to do the people well by ending the war fast and smashing what's left of the Red Army. Herr German commissar is right when he says to do this we must all put our shoulder to farming and spit on politics. But what do we see? We see the people are helping the forest bandits, brothers and sisters and children of ours. Do you call this a new order? I propose we support the Herr commissar's proposal and from today on if one of your kin, or my son or brother comes from the forest then grab him by the collar and drag him to the police. And if he resists wipe him out on the spot as a bandit who interferes with our benefactors the Germans."

All this Mefodyevich said with an amazingly serious expression on his face, every once in a while glancing at the Hitlerites. He had noticed, of course, that the interpreter knew Russian poorly. The people quickly caught on to what the orator was up to. Faces brightened up. Here and there

people smiled. But some with more prudence made signs to the orator not to put his foot in it, not to go too far, or else. . . . But Mefodyevich did not heed the voice of reason.

"I feel," he went on, "that though we have become gentlemen now, still we don't understand yet that the Germans have brought us liberation. It's time we stopped hating, and instead give the victorious German everything he wants. When the Germans came to take my cow, my pig, my geese and my chickens do you think I fought with them? No, I gave it all away cheerfully. And yesterday they came asking for warm clothes so the German soldiers wouldn't freeze fighting near Moscow. So I understood and I gave them a pair of my pants gladly, and if the Germans need them I'll give them my underdrawers. Because I'm proud the German will fight the Red Army and the partisans with my hen in his belly and wearing my pants."

Almost everyone in the crowd was now smiling, and some could barely refrain from laughing. The Gebietskommissar kept throwing puzzled glances first at the speaker, then at the interpreter. Mefodyevich turned to the Germans and said:

"I ask you, Herr interpreter, to tell the chief that the Ukrainians won't begrudge either their pants, their hens, their wives or their children for the victory of the German army. . . ."

He waited while the interpreter fulfilled his request. The Gebietskommissar evidently regained his composure; he smiled and clapped his hands. Methodyevich smiled too. Then, raising his voice, he went on:

"As a truthful old man I've got to tell you in a spirit of self-criticism that I myself haven't shown the Germans as much love yet as I ought to. If I were younger, say, like that fellow over there, or that girl," he pointed to persons in the crowd, "I'd go to the forest and start wiping out the rats who are destroying our happy life!"

Now no one in the crowd was smiling. They listened to the speaker attentively and very earnestly. The interpreter glanced questioningly at Methodyevich, but the latter said:

"I'd volunteer for the police force, I'd get a rifle or a machine gun, and I'd show those Bolsheviks who are hiding in the woods that they're not the only ones who can use a gun. If I was younger I wouldn't sit at home with my old woman putting down vodka like some of those *polizei* do, I'd show the Germans that we Ukrainians know how to treasure liberty, that there are still brave people among us!"

The burgomaster, who was a Ukrainian from some western region, didn't understand the old man's mixed Russian and Ukrainian too well but still he sensed there was something wrong about



the speech. He bent toward the interpreter and whispered to him. The interpreter gave him a scornful smile. He was convinced he had a splendid command of Russian. Meanwhile Mefodyevich got more and more into the part he was playing and forgot all caution. There were several *polizei*, with armbands, in the crowd. That they went in more for sprees and robbing the population than for fighting the partisans was a fact, and the old man's words stung them to the quick.

"Hey, old man, what are you doing—agitating?" one of those standing not far from the platform yelled. "You cut out that self-criticism!"

But Mefodyevich wasn't flustered. He turned to the interpreter and said indignantly:

"Herr officer, isn't what I said right? We've got to fight more for our victory, right?"

"Very fine," answered the interpreter, "*gut*, but that's enough." He motioned to Mefodyevich to get off the platform.

But the old man pretended he hadn't understood and shouted triumphantly to the *polizei*:

"See? I'm right when I say they shouldn't have given you rats any guns. You're afraid to go out and fight the partisans. All right, what are you shaking your fist for? Maybe you'll tell me that's not true? Why were the pants they took from me not sent to the battlefield near Moscow but instead are covering the backsides of the chief

of police? You don't know, do you? Why did they take old woman Filipenko's down shawl? For the German army, was it? No, you can't fool me!"

"Stop!" the interpreter said irritably. "Complaints against the police are received at the commandant's office from one to two in the afternoon on Tuesdays."

"Tell him not to butt in, Herr interpreter. I'm talking to the point, and he butts in. I tell you right out loud in front of everybody that the police are nothing but crooks and rats. If they were honest men they wouldn't be afraid of self-criticism and wouldn't try to shut me up."

The *polizei* gathered in a group and started up to the platform after the old man, but the Gebietskommissar motioned them away.

"Excuse me, I got excited," Mefodyevich murmured ingratiatingly. "May I continue?"

"*Nein, nein*, go away."

Mefodyevich marched past the *polizei* with a triumphant, self-satisfied smile. The crowd made a path for him and then immediately closed in. The small thin figure was quickly lost in it.

"The meeting is finished," the interpreter shouted.

The people began to disperse. The scouts didn't lose any time either, naturally. They had already gone some two hundred metres when a shot rang out on the square. They turned around to see *po-*

*tizei* running—obviously after Mefodyevich. The old man was zigzagging away from them like a fox.

The *polizei* shouted and fired after him.

The old man ran up to a high fence and started climbing over it, but he was felled by a bullet. He managed to straighten up and shout:

"Butchers, Hitlerite scum, damned rats!"

The *polizei* were now near him. Several more shots rang out. The old man fell silent.

On the way back the scouts picked up the leaflets Mefodyevich had hidden behind the bushes.

Not a single one of them went for naught.

\* \* \*

Every time this story was told around a partisan campfire arguments arose.

Some said the old man shouldn't have let himself go, that he shouldn't have stuck his neck out. He had forgotten all about the leaflets, hadn't he? There hadn't been anything sensible or sound about his behaviour.

"But it was grand!" others exclaimed. "He put it over on the Germans and on the *polizei* too!"

I remember how Sanin, before the war a militia officer and now a political instructor in one of the platoons, got a good calling down from Popudrenko.

"If I were in the leadership," Sanin had said impressively, "I'd issue an order putting an end to such demoralizing stories. It's got to be stopped, comrades. There was a total lack of consciousness and discipline in his actions...."

"Go on, go on," Popudrenko shouted to him. "Go on, let's hear your reasons."

Sanin didn't grasp the challenge in Popudrenko's words. He thought the latter agreed with him, and went on with even greater importance:

"That old man, he's simply, what would you say—"

Popudrenko could not restrain himself. "Give us your reasoning instead of calling him names," he said. "Anybody can do that. What did you want to say? That the old man acted on his own, that if he'd lain low he'd have lived to be a hundred? Can't you understand that spitting in the fascist's mug in front of a big crowd of people is educational work, and then some!"

Sanin rose and waved his hand, but then he caught himself and walked slowly away from the fire.

"No!" Popudrenko shouted after him. "Come back here. Argue it out with me, have the courage to go on."

"I haven't got the right to argue with you in front of people," Sanin said sullenly. "I'm a politically educated man and I'm disciplined."

"But I give you permission to argue; I order you to!" Popudrenko exclaimed. "And if you can't argue then listen. And get this through your head, political instructor, that scorning death, that dying for the truth in front of the people is a great deed. And it takes brains, too. That old man Mefodyevich had brains, and that he died a splendid death is a fact. Could you go into a battle without hoping to live through it? Have you got that gift? You're keeping quiet. Well, he had that gift. Maybe he spent his whole life cracking jokes in public. But he died a hero. And the fact we're telling what he did means he's made a place for himself in history!"

Popudrenko wasn't given to talking calmly and dully. He loved drawing people into an argument. I saw that Druzhinin was losing his patience, and that Yaremenko was getting ready to pitch into the debate too.

But just at that moment the man on duty cried out:

"Planes!"

When we heard the drone of enemy planes approaching the village we extinguished the fires.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BIG DETACHMENT

OUR detachment was on the brink of disaster on several occasions. And I mean the detachment as a whole, not separate platoons or companies.

Each time we found ourselves within a hair's breadth of utter rout we were saved not by some miracle or, it goes without saying, by any display of indulgence on the part of the enemy. What saw us through was cohesion, native ingenuity, the skill of our officers, mass-scale heroism, conscious discipline—in short, everything that can be defined in the two words of Bolshevik organization.

The reader already knows that the first time the Chernigov detachments landed in a desperate situation was at the end of November 1941. The reason was not so much an actual threat of military defeat as our organizational weakness and lack of confidence in our own powers. It was then that the R.C. united the small partisan groups into one large detachment and led it into an offensive.

Now began our second and far more serious trial, which lasted until the spring of 1942.

We had established ourselves most satisfactorily in the villages of Maibutnya, Lasochki and Zhuravleva Buda, from which we had made quite a few successful raids lately on neighbouring police garrisons. We had succeeded in contacting the Mainland; in totalling up the results of our combat operations and reporting them to the Central Committee of the Party. Additional arms had been promised us by plane.

There was no doubt that we had become stronger. Our men were seasoned fighters; they had gone through a good practical school of partisan warfare. Many had finally torn themselves away from their wives and children. This was of no little importance, for a soldier always fights better the farther he is from his family.

Our officers had accumulated substantial combat experience. The incompetent ones, appointed only on the basis of the positions they held before the war, had been weeded out. As for the majority of the officers, they had passed the grim test of battle with flying colours; and most of them fought well right through to the end of the war. The five months of partisan warfare had not been a waste of time for Bessarab either.

It was at this point that the occupants began pressing us. They made several air raids on the

villages in which we stood and began shelling us from heavy guns.

After a sober appraisal of the situation, headquarters decided that the detachment had to quit the villages and go off into the woods. Some were against this decision, though. Indeed, leaving warm houses and ploughing through the snow with the thermometer at thirty below wasn't easy. Without saying that out and out, some of the comrades began to assert that we had no right to leave the villages we had lived in so long without putting up a fight, that we should defend both ourselves and the inhabitants. If we went away, they said, we would be leaving old people, women and children to the mercy of fate.

Putting it mildly, this "theory" was not valid. The enemy possessed such superiority in men and materiel that to entrench ourselves in these villages, which were exposed on all sides, meant running the risk of complete annihilation of both the detachment and the local population.

We got into our sleighs and set out for the section of the Yelino woods where the detachment of our new comrade, Vorozheyev, had been stationed for some time. From what he said there ought to be dugouts there. Our scouts, though, had already found out there was nothing except a long and not too well-built trench—but that was better than nothing. The main thing was that the trees there

were dense and tall, mainly firs. The Germans would have a hard time spotting us from the air, and driving us out wouldn't be easy either.

We let the horses go at a trot, and from time to time at a gallop. At that snappy pace we covered a good twenty kilometres. The officers wore sheep-skin coats or else good leather coats, and felt boots. The wounded were covered up warmly too. But not all the rank and file had warm clothing. Some wore torn boots or shoes and puttees. They would jump out and run along the road, holding onto the sleigh. A few began asking that we stop for an hour to build fires and warm up. But here circumstances suddenly arranged themselves in such a way that we warmed up without bonfires.

At the edge of the forest Hitlerites blocked our path. They had camouflaged themselves well, and our scouts had let us down. This time the fascists used our own tactics. They hid in the forest and attacked suddenly.

However, either they weren't used to these tactics, or else they felt ill at ease in the Russian forest, for one way or the other they opened fire two or three minutes before they should have. And there was another thing these gentlemen hadn't taken into consideration: the cold had so roused our boys that far from wavering they were overjoyed at the chance of a fight.

It was not so much the cold, though, that helped

us as Dmitry Ivanovich Rvanov. During our stay in those villages he had not wasted time but had required the company commanders to conduct systematic combat training.

I myself was amazed by the lightning speed of our reply. The fascists gained no advantage from the suddenness of their attack. None of us lost our heads. The officers rapped out commands and the men quickly fanned out and lay down.

Within two minutes we replied with such a hail of machine-gun and tommy-gun fire that the Hitlerites promptly took to their heels—and there were no less than two companies of them.

The battle lasted only ten minutes. Then we moved on, keyed up, gay and proud of our success. A few hours later we finally turned off the road into the forest. Here we began floundering in the deep snow. The men would spring out of the sleighs to help the horses, but both they and the horses often found themselves up to their necks in the soft virgin snow.

We reached our new positions around three o'clock.

Vorozheyev's detachment had been here more than a month before, and we had a hard time finding his abandoned dugout. The entrance had caved in. We cleared it and entered a long, dirty trench in which there proved to be neither tables nor benches. But worst of all, the stove had caved in.



It was a good thing we had stove-setters among us. An hour later Grisha Bulash lighted a fire in the stove he had hastily set up, and half an hour after that it was hot in the dugout. Probably not so much because of the stove, however, as of overcrowdedness.

The dugout was intended for fifty people, and we had forty-five sick and wounded alone. Some of the men had got frostbitten on the way; they too had to be warmed up in a hurry. Then the chiefs and the medical personnel and the more energetic lovers of warmth so filled the dugout that some had to be asked to leave.

The cold, incidentally, is no ally of the partisan. Maybe it did hold the Germans back from an offensive, but we suffered from it to a much greater degree. And in those days the cold launched such an offensive on us that we had to keep a firm hold on the commander's reins.

When I now recall those few days and nights of bitter struggle to clear the snow I somehow picture them as being cheerful, practically gay. Man's memory readily casts out dramatic episodes and, on the contrary, long retains all that is happy and amusing.

When we ex-partisans get together now and recall how frozen, hungry and ill-tempered men burrowed in the snow, for some reason we become uncontrollably hilarious.

"Remember how Bessarab yelled? Icicles hanging from his moustache, his beard white with frost, steam pouring out of his mouth, and he yelled: 'I, ahem, don't want this! What did I ever get into this for? We've got fine dugouts back in Reimentarovka!'"

"And remember how Arsenty Kovtun dug himself a bear's lair in the snow, sealed up the entrance, lay down and began to snore? By morning it was all snowed over and we couldn't make out what had happened to Kovtun. We only found him by his snoring."

"And remember? Kapranov got the nurses together and said: 'Whoever of you girls starts crying won't get any liquor. So keep a stiff upper lip, girls, and show you're as good as the men!'"

And in truth, not once did a single one of our girls give way to tears. They weren't interested in the liquor, however; they used to turn over their ration to the men.

Yes, now we recall only the lighter side. But actually, at times we were in a very difficult position. In the entire detachment there were only seven shovels, five axes and one crowbar—and the earth was frozen more than a metre deep. The men would build bonfires, keep them going for a couple of hours, then move them to another spot and attack the warmed ground. After digging down half a metre and striking a frozen layer they would

again light a bonfire, and so on endlessly. This was good training in the development of patience.

Short of hands though we were—for men had to be sent out on picket duty and on scouting and supply missions—in the course of slightly over a week we built sixteen roomy dugouts outfitted with bunks, stoves, benches and tables.

To be quite candid, living in those dugouts wasn't any too comfortable. They were dark and crowded. For lighting we used oil lamps or spills, or simply sat up close to the stove. Evenings, even in the heaviest frosts, we gathered as usual around campfires and talked.

We lived in the Yelino woods, which went down in our annals as Forestville No. 2, until the end of March. That winter, as everyone recalls, was a severe one. It was almost always more than twenty below. We had no thermometer, but among us for a short while was an old granddad whom we called our thermometer. I don't believe he had ever seen a real outdoor thermometer in his life and probably had a very vague idea of degrees in general. But if you asked him what the temperature was, he would answer without hesitation: "Twenty-four degrees."

"How do you figure that, old man?"

"From what the frost fastens onto. If it's my ears then it's twenty degrees, if it's my nose, then

twenty-three, and when the big toe of my right foot starts tingling I know it's over thirty."

That winter dragged on for an agonizing length of time. There had been long, snowy winters in Chernigov Region before, but I couldn't remember one as long as this.

To all the rest of our deprivations was added humiliating poverty. I have already told how we worked with just a few axes. But I forgot to mention that we had no nails at all.

We didn't have enough pails. Almost every day the officers had to settle arguments between squads as to the ownership of a pail. Cups, spoons, pots—all these had to be picked up during the heat of battle. The partisan always bore in mind that besides the dead Hitlerite's tommy gun, boots and overcoat it was a good thing to take his matches, knife, spoon and flashlight too.

We washed using snow, most of the time without soap. Washing clothes was simply agony. We couldn't do it out in the cold, of course, and it was also out of the question in the dugouts, where people sat almost on top of one another, and as it was the air was foul. We built a combination bath-house and laundry but for a long time we couldn't get either a boiler, a washtub or basins. Finally we began to use German helmets for basins; wash-tubs we fashioned out of thick logs, and a boiler



from an iron gasoline drum. All this cost us a tremendous amount of time and labour.

It was very hard on our women and girls. I must confess that not all of us realized or wanted to realize that they were in a special position. Upon returning from an action the men would go off to rest, while the girls got down to cooking or washing clothes. The men had been ordered to do their own laundry, but the girls didn't like to have them washing clothes in the bathhouse side by side with them. It embarrassed them, and some felt sorry for the men. They would smile at the way the men fussed helplessly around the tubs and finally would drive them out with: "We'll manage ourselves." This was just what the men had been waiting for....

It was in the Yelino woods that we had our first taste of hunger. True, later on there were worse periods, but then we were still accustomed to a plentiful and varied diet, and we had a hard time enduring the long stretch of underfeeding. Our supplies had come to an end. There was nothing left at the partisan caches, not even salt.

Of course, if we hadn't taken newcomers into the detachment we could have undoubtedly held out until spring. The comrades who had been against taking in new men now tried to prove to us that they had been right. But for this kind of being right they got it good and proper from the command, and they voiced their thoughts only in



whispers. However, even this had highly disagreeable consequences: our first cases of desertion. We had to issue an order warning that desertion would be punished just as it is in the army—by the firing squad.

Justice requires me to note that men like Bes-sarab, Loshakov and Sanin did not lend deserters the least support.

Naturally, there was no sense to their losing men. And going off with their companies was something they did not consider seriously, for they realized very well that under the existing conditions it was better to be part of a large body. But from time to time they did talk about it being easier to get provisions at the old places, near their "own" villages.

But here too the local residents didn't refuse us support. For example, the peasants of Yelino gave us everything they had, including cattle and stocks of potatoes and extra clothing. A heroic village it was! The most cohesive of all those I came in contact with. The German invaders didn't get a single kilogram of grain out of Yelino. Not a single Yelino inhabitant joined the police. When the invaders burned down the village the entire population went with us. The children, old folk and others unable to bear arms were later settled in other villages. The able-bodied men and women remained with us as partisans until the Red Army came.

In the Yelino woods our detachment increased to 900 people in one month, the reinforcements comprising mainly residents of Yelino.

The people of the other villages in the locality also supported us the best they could. But the Hitlerites had picked them so clean that they themselves lived exclusively on potatoes. They were ready to share even their potatoes with us, but getting them to the detachment was extremely difficult, almost impossible, in fact. Yelino stood at the edge of the forest, and the occupants made raids on it but were afraid to station troops there. However, in Turye, Gluboky Rog, Guta Studenetskaya and other villages within a radius of twenty to sixty kilometres from us they had concentrated a total of about three divisions.

There was a battalion of Magyars in Ivanovka, and a strong police detail in Sofievka; these policemen, incidentally, had been recruited in outlying districts, so that the population wouldn't be able to strike up any friendships with them.

This time the occupation troops drew a rather tight ring around the forest and patrolled its edges. We obtained provisions only by fighting for them, and to get two bags of potatoes we sometimes had to lose three men in killed. Naturally, it would have been unwise to embark upon a large-scale operation, say raiding a big enemy garrison, just to get food. We preferred lying in ambush

and falling upon German supply trains. The Germans avoided using forest roads, however.

Feeding 900 people was not so simple, the more so since they worked a lot in the open air and didn't suffer a bit from lack of appetite. Even the frailest fighting man easily put away a kilogram of bread, and if you gave him as much horse meat he would eat that too. Vegetables came our way less and less frequently. It was a long time since we had tasted milk or butter. We were forced to live chiefly on horse meat; there wasn't anything to feed the horses.

At this time our pharmacist, Zelik Abramovich Yosilevich, began brewing a drink from pine needles. I issued an order obliging absolutely everybody to drink it. In this way we safeguarded ourselves against scurvy.

This pine needle brew was our only inexhaustible supply of medicine. A few months later when the snow melted Zelik Abramovich began to gather grasses, which he boiled and then steeped in alcohol. Meanwhile, falling ill simply wasn't advised.

Actually, though, cases of illness were quite rare. Even old ulcers of the stomach left their owners in peace. Hardly anyone ever came down with such common illnesses as the flu, malaria or angina. Before the war, I, for one, used to have angina every once in a while. After the war, inci-

dentally, it began again. But during the entire time I was in the woods I never had it once. Like winterers in the Arctic, our most frequent ailments were rheumatism, scurvy, pellagra, boils and toothaches.

Oh, those toothaches. We didn't have anything to pull teeth with, let alone treat them. Once I didn't have a second's sleep for five days in a row. The gum was already becoming inflamed, and I don't know what else. The feldsher, the pharmacist and various self-taught medicos from among the men hovered around me and poked all kinds of junk into my mouth. I was saved by Georgy Ivanovich Gorobets, our gunsmith, ex-director of a ship-repair yard. My thanks go to him for getting the idea of using a pair of blacksmith's pliers; he pulled out two teeth in one jerk. I fell asleep almost at once and woke up twenty-four hours later a new man, refreshed and unusually gentle.

Indeed, Gorobets did a lot for our sick and wounded. When we were threatened with typhus he fixed up a clothes steaming machine out of a gasoline drum. This enabled us to delouse the entire detachment in two days.

Gorobets was a carpenter, cabinetmaker and mechanic. With the help of several partisans he dismantled a roomy peasant cottage in Yelino and brought it to the camp. We set it up in the midst



of our dugouts and turned it into a hospital with beds and clean linen and improved feeding. Unfortunately, this was not enough, however. Not only didn't we have a surgeon then, but we didn't even have instruments for the simplest operations.

It was at this time that an event occurred which may be cited as an example of boundless courage and iron endurance. Fighting man Grigory Masalyka blew up a headquarters bus on the highway and wiped out thirty German officers. However, one of them managed to fire at him, fracturing a bone in his left hand. For some reason or other Masalyka didn't go to the hospital at once. He continued to go out on demolition jobs with his injured hand, and he came to the feldsher only two weeks later, when his arm had turned black to the elbow.

The only hope of saving him lay in amputation. That meant sawing the bone, but with what? Gorobets learned there was a blacksmith in Ivanovka, made his way there at night and begged a hacksaw from him. The hacksaw proved to be rusty. The feldsher and Gorobets polished it with ashes, boiled it and then sawed off the lad's arm, without any anesthetic, of course. They sawed in turn. When the patient could endure it no longer he took the saw himself and finished the job in a few strokes. I was present at the operation. Masalyka scowled, sighed and sometimes groaned,



but not once did he cry out. Two weeks later he was back in action again.

This incident, I repeat, is a singular example of courage and endurance. Still it would have been just as well to get along without such examples. How much better when there is a skilled surgeon, proper instruments and reliable anesthetics. The soldier fights more boldly if he knows that should he be wounded a competent doctor will treat him and that the doctor has everything he needs for any kind of operation.

\* \* \*

People who are encircled in the forest and forced to exist almost exclusively on booty risk more than just their lives. No less frightening is the danger of demoralization. This applies first of all, of course, to weak-willed, unstable people with a poor or insufficient political education.

By this time the partisans who had been chosen by the Party to remain in the enemy rear were a minority in our detachment. It now consisted in the main of men who had broken out of encirclement, escaped war prisoners and peasants from the neighbouring villages. These newcomers were by no means an inert body. They produced fine officers and excellent fighting men.

But there were all kinds of men among the escaped war prisoners. Some had voluntarily sur-

rendered to the Germans. Later, when they saw what the fascist promises were worth, when they had been eaten up by lice in the camps and had become sick and tired of being punched in the jaw, they repented and escaped to join the partisans. Not all of them, by any means, told us the whole truth. And of course very few of them admitted they had surrendered of their own free will.

These men joined the partisans only because there was nothing else for them to do. They didn't want to go back to the Germans, but on the other hand they didn't fight them any too energetically.

Some of the formerly encircled men who joined us had been "hubbies." These were soldiers who for one reason or another had fallen behind the army and been taken in by peasant women without menfolk. There were some fine fellows among them. I recall one of them, a wounded lad whom a kolkhoz family had given shelter. Immediately he recovered he started searching for partisans, and he joined our detachment as soon as he could. However, among the "hubbies" there were specimens who would have been glad to sit the war out behind a woman's skirt, but the Hitlerites would either drive them off to work in Germany or else make them join the police. After turning this over in his mind such a guy would come to the conclusion that, after all, joining the partisans was more advantageous.

Repentant *polizei* began to come to us too. We ourselves invited them through leaflets. If they didn't leave the police force, we wrote, we would shoot them down like dogs. When they came to the detachment they were held under special observation for a long time. The men kept a watchful eye on them.

Unfortunately, these were not the only ones whom the danger of demoralization threatened.

Necessity forced us not merely to take booty in battle but to go *hunting* for it especially. And this is where the trouble lay.

The partisan, it goes without saying, went into battle not to enrich or feed or clothe himself. He was a warrior in the people's cause, a people's avenger. How often in those days did we dream of the partisans being supplied the way the army was. But that was out of the question, of course.

It was very hard for the men to get used to wearing German and Magyar outfits. Later, when planes began to deliver Russian clothing, they joyfully threw off the green jackets and breeches and stamped them into the mud or tossed them in the fire.

But at the time about which I am now writing planes weren't coming to us yet. We lived exclusively at the expense of the Hitlerites. When we captured a food or a goods train we felt we had won a battle. And we actually did, for the enemy

had been dealt a blow and we got weapons, uniforms, flour, rum, chocolate and cigarettes.

The main body of the men usually realized this was not looting but warfare. But there were specimens among us whom the actual process of taking booty afforded pleasure. This was especially dangerous whenever an operation was conducted in an inhabited point. Taking things from the home of a policeman or a starosta was capturing booty, but taking even a jug of milk from an honest peasant was the lowest form of plunder. It had to be punished mercilessly, and publicly, to teach others not to do the same and to show the population that the partisans were honest people.

Recalling it is unpleasant, but there were cases when men took a pig or a calf from a peasant's barnyard. We first came up against this in February 1942. The worst thing was that some defended these marauders. "What's all the fuss about?" they said "The boys are hungry. What difference does it make who takes the peasant's cow—the Germans or the partisans?"

It was in that phrase "what difference does it make" that lay the main danger. Such unprincipled views were preached by one of Bessarab's former friends, Jan Polyansky. He was a platoon commander. Once one of his men stole a suckling from an old woman. I demanded the name of the



offender. Prompted by a false sense of loyalty, the men with whom the thief had shared the suckling resolved to conceal the crime.

I summoned Polyansky.

"Demote me," he said, "Punish me any way you want, but I won't tell!"

We demoted him to the ranks. But in the eyes of the platoon he had "suffered for a just cause."

It was only about two weeks later, when Polyansky himself had been caught showing an excessive fondness for watches, that the men realized that their former commander was a marauder who had been leading them along an abominable path.

We had to execute him, of course. I was drafting an order to this effect when Polyansky shot himself.

After this it became especially clear to us that the only way to inculcate in the men an abhorrence both for marauders and for their protectors was through a well-organized system of political instruction.

The R.C. adopted a resolution to intensify educational work in the detachment, especially among the new contingents. That winter, when the Yelino woods lay deep in snow, our printed militant sheet *Death to the German Invaders* began to appear once a week. No less than once in ten days each company issued its wall newspaper.



I feel certain that the reader will find my telling about wall newspapers rather boring. "What's special about this?" he will say. "Where aren't there wall newspapers, anyway? Every kolkhoz has one, every tea house, every children's nursery and, of course, every company in the Soviet Army."

But let the reader imagine for a moment that he lives in a village occupied by the fascists, that day in and day out toughs with swastikas on their sleeves jeer at him and the traitorous starosta and the police dog his every step. They have ordered him to forget all about the Soviet system and its ways. But finally he succeeds in running away. He goes to the forest to join the partisans, he freezes, he flounders in snowdrifts, he hides behind every tree. Men with red ribbons in their caps lead him to a small clearing where the snow has been stamped down by hundreds of boots. There in that clearing his eye is immediately caught by a big sheet of paper covered with writing in coloured pencil, on a board nailed to a tree. A wall newspaper, a modest, familiar particle of Soviet life! And he immediately feels that he has reached home, he has reached Soviet soil.

The first wall newspapers made a tremendous impression on our men. Afterwards they took a calmer view of them, but still they impatiently awaited each issue, actively contributed items, and

were very much afraid of being the subject of a cartoon in them.

Toward spring we—that is, our actors, poets and journalists—began putting out a talking newspaper too, which was merciless toward slackers, cowards and would-be parasites. This was a regular variety program, gay and electrifying.

\* \* \*

We received a report from Moscow that planes carrying men and arms would soon be reaching us. Hence a landing field had to be built. But while everything could be put into code and radioed to us, the art of building a landing field could not.

We all saw that the first thing to do was smooth off a field. It had to be carefully concealed from the enemy, which meant it must be far from any inhabited point. But what size should this field be? How should the landing marks be laid out? Could planes land in soft snow? About all this we knew absolutely nothing.

At this point we remembered that lying in our hospital under feldsher Yemelyanov's care was a real live pilot, and a plane commander besides. The only trouble was he hadn't been able to walk a step for five months.

The story of Volodin, the commander of a heavy bomber, and the three members of his crew

was indeed a remarkable one. In our detachment they were called the men who dropped from the sky.

On October 3, 1941, that is, before I came to the regional detachment, the partisans noticed three heavy bombers with red stars on their wings flying in the direction of Gomel.

"Comrade Balabai," the man on duty reported excitedly to the detachment commander, "our planes!"

The partisans had not seen any Soviet planes for a long time. These they followed with ecstatic eyes; they shouted and waved their caps, although they realized the flyers couldn't see them.

Balabai was about to start out to hold a meeting in a neighbouring village, and the planes had come over at just the right time. The Germans were ranting that they had destroyed the Soviet air force. Now the inhabitants could see for themselves that the Soviet air force was alive and was fighting!

The detachment commander had mounted his horse when our bombers again appeared overhead. Now they were returning, but there were only two. Five minutes later the third came into view, flying at an altitude of no more than two hundred metres. Its right wing was dipping. The partisans noticed one of the motors was not functioning.

The frontline was no less than one hundred and fifty kilometres away.

"Will they make it or not?" the partisans wondered.

The plane disappeared from view and the men went about their affairs. Balabai and the commissar went off to the meeting.

Half-way there, anxious partisans caught up with them and announced that the plane had crashed some fifteen kilometres from the camp, near the village of Pogoreltsy.

The meeting was cancelled, of course. Balabai took a group of men with him and galloped off to Pogoreltsy. At the edge of the village, not far from the church, they found a big, twin-engined plane with its nose buried in the ground. Both wings had been torn off by trees on the way down. The fuselage had split down its entire length, and white bundles lay scattered on the grass. Every once in a while the wind would lift square sheets of paper and send them flying up.

The youngsters were gathering them up by the armfuls. They were leaflets.

Balabai immediately stationed a guard near the plane. Feldsher Yemelyanov crawled inside, but the flyers were no longer there. It appeared that some peasants had taken them to the village hospital. A messenger returned from there and related:

"Blood all over the place! Two of them got busted heads, and their chief's legs are like macaroni. Only one can walk around. But he acts as

if he's got the plague; he screams and keeps shaking his head and his eyes are like a dead man's, like buttons. . . . The fourth one just grinds his teeth. Oh, it's awful! No doctor, and the nurses are all scared."

A crowd had gathered outside the village hospital.

"Any Germans around?" Balabai asked.

"A car drove up, but as soon as they heard partisans were here they turned around and went back."

The elderly feldsher told Balabai that the plane commander's condition was very grave.

"Both legs are fractured and he has deep head contusions. He's been unconscious forty minutes now. His comrade is unconscious too; his spinal column is injured."

A young fellow in peasant dress came to attention at the sight of Balabai, who wore a Red Army officer's uniform but without insignia.

"Permit me to address you, Comrade Commander," he said. On receiving permission he uttered in a pleading voice: "Take us to the woods, Comrade Commander. Don't abandon us. Look, the boys are in a bad way."

"Who is 'us'? And who might you be?"

The fellow snapped to attention again, saluted, and said:

"I am gunner-radioman Maximov."



"Why aren't you in uniform, Comrade radioman?"

The fellow glanced down at his clothing, blinked, remained silent for about five seconds, then seized Balabai by the hand and said hurriedly, in a quivering voice:

"You don't believe me, do you? Come with me and I'll show you the house. Come, come, oh please, Comrade Commander! My papers are there, everything's there—my uniform, my watch, with an inscription on it. I'm gunner-radioman Maximov."

"Calm down, Comrade Maximov, and tell me it all from the beginning."

Maximov himself, however, didn't know any too well what had happened to him, how he came to be in that village or when he had changed clothes. But when he had calmed down a bit he told Balabai the whole story.

Just after the plane crashed to earth and Maximov realized he was alive and could move his arms and legs, he squeezed through the cracked fuselage and ran off to the nearest house at breakneck speed. He dashed in and without answering the owners' questions quickly stripped to his underwear.

"Come on!" he yelled.

He flung his watch and his billfold with his money and papers on the table. "Come on, give me something, quick! Save a Soviet flyer's life, what are you standing there for?"

They gave him a pair of old pants, a cap, a pair of torn boots and a quilted jacket. He climbed into these and raced back to the plane. He must have been acting not quite consciously, under the effect of a nervous shock.

Now he was himself again and able to give Babai a coherent account of the crash.

"At fourteen hours today our flight of bombers took off from an aerodrome near Ivanovo. We had orders to bomb enemy trains on the Gomel-Bryansk line. We bombed them and were on the way back when we noticed the right engine was in flames. The commander of the plane managed to put out the fire by banking sharply, but the engine went out of commission. We began losing altitude. We saw we wouldn't make our side of the front. 'Better let's crash than fall into the hands of the Germans,' our commander, Comrade Volodin, proposed. We agreed. Volodin steered the plane toward a wood. But it turned out to be a thin orchard and we weren't killed...."

Here navigator Ragozin interrupted. He had got away with just bruises, but he couldn't walk yet.

"Comrade Commander, how many men are guarding us?" he asked softly. "Just three? Should be more. Please give orders to reinforce the guard—"

"Comrade Commander, set up a machine gun on the hospital roof, take it from the plane," Ma-

ximov broke in. "We've got a large-calibre gun there. . . . Don't you see, we're flyers, and the Germans'll tear us limb from limb. And there's a radio set in the plane. Take it and send a report. . . ."

Anybody might have taken the gunner and the navigator for frightful cowards. But as we later learned they were seasoned army pilots who had been on twelve bombing missions deep behind the enemy lines. Their state is to be explained simply by ignorance of the situation. They had a completely distorted idea of the situation in occupied territory. They thought the place teemed with Hitlerites, that they would have to keep looking behind all the time, and dropping to the ground and crawling. And now they were certain the Hitlerites would break into the hospital any minute.

This ignorance cost us dearly. There were cases of flyers taking their own lives after a forced landing on occupied territory because they didn't have a clear picture of the situation there. Volodin and his comrades had been seeking death too; it was only by a miracle that they were alive.

An hour later Yemelyanov, the detachment feldsher, arrived with two carts. Balabai ordered all four flyers to be taken to the camp. He also had all the armaments removed from the plane. The radio set unfortunately proved to be shattered.

Volodin came to beside the campfire. When he realized he was among Soviet people his joy was

boundless. He wanted to express his gratitude to the partisans in some way, and asked that his suitcase be brought. Fighting down excruciating pain, he opened it and took out cigarettes, chocolate and recent Moscow newspapers. After distributing these gifts among the partisans he lost consciousness.

Maximov and Ragozin soon recovered. They were sent back across the frontline. Ryabov, the second pilot, was walking about, but not Volodin; after four months his legs were still in casts.

We put a horse and sleigh at his disposal, and thus, reclining, Volodin rode out to the forest clearing in February 1942. From his sleigh he directed the construction of the airfield.

Two months later Volodin was getting around with a cane. He had become very attached to Yemelyanov, whom he called his saviour. Our young feldsher has spent many a night by the flyer's cot and indeed had saved his life. But unfortunately he hadn't been able to put the cast on right and Volodin's bones knitted improperly.

In November 1942 he was flown to Moscow. There skilled surgeons broke his legs again and reset them correctly.

Volodin returned to the front in 1943. By the end of the war he had flown hundreds of missions.

\* \* \*



The landing field was ready. We had cut down a couple of dozen trees, levelled out the snow-drifts, and appointed guards and equipped them with little flags. But then we realized that planes weren't likely to come in the daytime, and so we armed our guards with lanterns. Volodin vetoed the lanterns. He advised plenty of torches instead.

"That's simple," he said. "Wind some rags around sticks and soak them in oil or kerosene."

He himself laughed as he said this. We had all the sticks we wanted, of course, nor were rags hard to find, but as for kerosene or oil— The men spent several days scraping resin from fir trees, then melted it down and dipped sticks with rags wound around them into it. If Volodin had said that rugs had to be spread out all over the field or else planes wouldn't land, we would have managed that too.

We laid out heaps of brushwood according to a design transmitted to us by radio. The branches, you may be sure, were the very best obtainable, and beneath them lay the very best straw, ready to flare up at the slightest spark. Then, a cup of alcohol stood next to each heap. The guards had strict orders not to drink a swallow of it: they were to pour it over the dry brushwood as soon as they heard the drone of planes. . . .

We waited a long time. Several nights in a row all the members of the R.C. and headquarters



rode out to the landing field, which was located five kilometres from our camp. But no planes appeared.

It is rather quiet in the forest in winter, especially at night. But when a person has been waiting tensely for several nights running he is apt to take for the hum of an approaching plane the wind tossing the treetops, or the subdued conversation of the guards, the ticking of a pocket watch, or even the thumping of his own heart.

Despite all his experience, Volodin himself made a mistake. On his orders the alcohol was poured over the branches one night and bonfires flared up. . . . All except one. It turned out that the man on duty beside that heap had fallen asleep, and Volodin had taken his snoring for the drone of an aeroplane engine.

"Expect plane tomorrow," we were informed over the radio. "Why didn't it come yesterday?" we asked. The answer to that was, "Expect plane tomorrow." We realized that there might be various reasons, and that we didn't have to know all of them.

The night of February 11 we heard a loud, steady drone. A joyful alarm was sounded in the camp, where volunteer lookouts had heard it too. The wounded, even the severest cases, made their way out of the hospital in order not to miss the long-awaited moment.

Rockets shot up into the night sky: two green ones, one red and three white. This meant: "Aerodrome in order, landing is possible." It also meant that if the planes didn't land we would have to engage the Germans in battle the next day to get more rockets.

For some reason the planes didn't land. They came down low, circled twice over the forest, turned around and flew off. We saw nine bright, twinkling little stars fade away from us. The hum of the departing planes was dying away, and someone had already sworn in disappointment, when suddenly a voice shouted:

"Parachutes!"

Heading straight for one of the bonfires, and fairly fast, was a man in new white felt boots, a padded suit and a big fur hat. He was shouting something and waving his hand to us.

Then we noticed another man. He was pulling at the shroud lines of his parachute in a frantic effort to avoid the crown of a fir tree.

"Keep to the right!" we shouted.

Nevertheless he got caught on a branch and hung there, three metres from the ground. He also wore a padded suit and white felt boots. When the men ran up to him he asked in a dispirited voice:

"You partisans?"

"We're friends, brother, friends!" they replied. We could hear him heave a sigh of relief.

"Well, then get me down, damn it!" he barked in quite a different tone, "and let me warm up at the bonfire. Those planes aren't heated."

After the men, boxes, bundles and bags began descending from the sky. They had been dropped with good aim, within a radius of no more than two kilometres. We picked up twelve packages that night.

Both parachutists proved to be radio operators, fine young lads. Did I say fine lads? Why, they were angels in padded suits, they were simply a miracle. We all hastened to slap them on the shoulder or at least to pinch them and convince ourselves that they were really ordinary human beings. Only Kapranov maintained complete composure: he promptly ordered the parachutes folded; he counted them, and I'm not sure but what he ticketed them too. On finding holes in the silk he shook his head in distress. As for the boxes and bags, he forbade anybody to touch them.

Only after all the packages were piled together in one place did he allow them to be opened.

We received many fine gifts. They included two latest model radio transmitters with batteries, eight light and three heavy machine guns, several anti-tank guns and a dozen tommy guns. We got bullets, grenades and rockets of various colours.

On learning that most of the packages contained food and clothing, the men were a bit put out.

After all, we realized that people in the Soviet rear were by no means getting all the things they had sent us as gifts. They sent us real smoked Moscow sausage, fresh caviar, canned fruit and excellent cigarettes. Of course, we would not have minded getting makhorka instead of the Kazbek cigarettes, the more so since it would have taken up less room than the attractive boxes with the picture of a horseman in a tall Caucasian fur cap galloping against a background of blue mountains. What did we need such boxes for anyway? I must say, though, that later on they came in handy, and strange as it may seem, for agitational purposes. . . .

Once while on the march we rode into an unfamiliar village. When a group of old men had gathered around me I opened a new box of Kazbeks. It made an enormous impression. I let the box travel from hand to hand so that they all could read the trade mark "Yava, Moscow" on the back.

"So that means you're really in touch with Moscow, eh?"

A single concrete piece of evidence is more convincing to the peasant than a thousand words.

Of the gifts we received that time, the five boxes of TNT and three bundles of recent Moscow newspapers gladdened us most of all.

Among them was that day's *Pravda*. No, that's not right, the paper was dated the 11th and we opened it at five in the morning on the 12th. But

since no one in the camp had slept that night we felt it was one and the same day, a happy day, filled with anxiety though it had been.

This was indeed magic. There we were in the forest, heaven knows how far from Moscow, and we were reading the latest *Pravda*. Even in Chernigov in peacetime we rarely got the Moscow newspapers that fast. And then *Pravda* and *Izvestia* were printed from matrices flown to Kiev.

I hadn't seen any newspapers of any kind for more than half a year and I couldn't tear myself away from these until I had read them from the first to the last line.

The partisan camp turned into an enormous forest reading room. The very next day I ordered three hundred and fifty of the four hundred copies of the Moscow papers that we had received to be sent out to the various districts. Fourteen messengers departed with a special issue of our leaflet announcing that contact by aeroplane with the Mainland had been established. They also carried that most powerful of explosives, our Bolshevik newspapers.

Our other explosive, TNT, made it possible for us to start planning substantial demolition operations on the railways. We formed a special demolition squad, which set out soon after for the Gmel-Bryansk line.

\* \* \*



The German invaders continued drawing up troops toward our forest. German and Magyar units were rushed in by train and in trucks from Novozybkov, from Gomel and from Chernigov. Our scouts reported that they didn't tarry in Shchors, Novgorod-Seversk and Koryukovka: after a day's rest they were promptly sent out to villages in our vicinity.

It was not hard to guess that a decisive attack was in preparation.

At Rvanov's proposal we decided on the following tactics: to tackle the enemy groups singly, and in the main newly-arrived units which had not yet had time to acquaint themselves with the situation.

On the night of March 7 we routed the police garrison in Guta Studenetskaya, a big village six kilometres from our forest. In this battle we captured and executed Moroz, the chief of police of Koryukovka District. Among his papers we found instructions from a German major pointing out that the police units were to act under Senior Lieutenant Kemer, the commander of a Magyar battalion, who would have his headquarters in the town of Ivanovka.

Our scouts went there at once. They brought back the news that there were no less than 200 Magyars in Ivanovka.

On March 9 and 10 a fascist scout plane ap-

peared over our camp repeatedly. I forbade bonfires to be lighted and stoves heated.

At four in the morning on March 11 three of our companies headed by Popudrenko climbed out of their sleighs some seven kilometres from Ivanovka. From there the men went on foot through the deep snow. Most of them had to plough through snow up to their chests; we didn't have enough skis to go around. But all these difficulties were more than worth it, for the Magyars were taken by surprise. It took a full forty minutes before the enemy began putting up a stiff resistance.

It was a very tense battle. The enemy had at least six heavy machine guns, two small-calibre field pieces and several mortars. Besides, they had many more tommy guns than we. And by the end of the battle they had managed to summon planes and reinforcements from Shchors.

The reinforcements got a good drubbing too. The Magyars and the *polizei* fled. We gained complete control of Ivanovka and captured rich booty: four heavy and eight light machine guns, twenty thousand rounds of ammunition, a good supply of provisions, and, what came in most handy, some hundred and fifty wool blankets.

We counted more than one hundred and fifty dead soldiers and *polizei* on the streets and in the houses.

Our losses were twelve men, among them Gromenko, commander of Company One.

He was killed while leading his men into attack. A bullet pierced his forehead, and he fell on his back into the snow.

Lysenko, the company's political instructor, took over command and led the men forward. The company carried out its assignment brilliantly.

On the night of the eleventh we buried our comrades-in-arms.

The coffin containing the body of Sidor Romanovich Gromenko was wrapped in parachute silk. Pine torches lit up the forest. All the R.C. members and the officers took turns standing in the guard of honour.

After speeches about the lives of the dead comrades had been delivered, volleys fired by four hundred rifles rang out over the open brotherhood grave.

Then the men went to their dugouts, and an unusual silence fell over the partisan forest. They were exhausted after the many hours of fighting and the difficult march. But despite their weariness they couldn't fall asleep for a long time.

The general mood of solemn grief was especially marked in the dugouts of the company Gromenko had commanded. The women wept. On the faces of many of the fighting men, both young and old, one could read puzzlement, and even dismay.

Popudrenko, Yaremenko, Druzhinin, Rvanov and I went into the dugout in which Gromenko had lived. His papers had to be collected and looked over. But to tell the truth, we simply wanted to imagine Gromenko alive again, to have another look at the little corner that had been his.

In the dugout, which housed forty men, a rough-hewn trestle bed stood separated from the common plank beds by a passage one step wide. One corner of the bed was trimmed unevenly. Near its head the round side of a grey boulder stuck out of the earth.

A pine root jutted out near the boulder. It had been scraped clean and its ends trimmed, but it was still alive. It branched out and curved upwards, looking like a pair of antlers. Popudrenko recalled that Gromenko had said the root continued growing, and had grown five centimetres in two months.

On the root hung a map case and the grey summer cap Gromenko used to wear back in Chernigov when he was manager of the seed control station.

A few books on the bed took the place of a pillow. They were covered with a clean, though unironed, tunic. A length of black cloth served as a blanket. On it lay a plastic soap-dish he had forgotten to take along in his hurry before the battle. In it, besides a little makhorka, was a short piece of a file, a charred, tightly twisted bit of

cloth and a fragment of quartz: this was a common contraption for making fire.

Here lay all the property of Sidor Romanovich Gromenko, in peacetime an agronomist, in wartime a partisan officer.

In the map case we found a copybook half filled with brief pencil notes, a photograph of his wife and a copy, folded in four, of *Pravda* of July 4, 1941, with Stalin's speech and portrait.

On our return to the headquarters dugout we looked through Gromenko's books. They had all evidently been picked up in wrecked houses after battle. There was the second volume of *War and Peace*, a book on bee-keeping, Fadeyev's *Defeat*, and an agricultural handbook....

The copybook contained outlines of talks Gromenko had delivered to his men, plans of operations which we had conducted, and brief personal notes, obviously jotted down in haste. I at once recalled conversations I had had with him long ago. The first time I met him I saw nothing of the partisan in him, and I decided he would never make a real officer.

I must admit I was mistaken.

Gromenko proved to be a very brave, resolute and intelligent officer. What I want to stress, however, is not so much this as the fact that he was a completely new type of partisan officer.

By calling Gromenko was neither a partisan



nor an officer. He was an agronomist, a builder of life. It wasn't the war that had pushed him forward or that had revealed his abilities. But in the war he continued serving the people the only way in which he could—honestly, selflessly, heart and soul.

Gromenko's place was taken by an educator, a man who used to head the regional department of education. The commander of Company Two was a school principal, a teacher of history.

Company Three was commanded by a district committee secretary. They all learned to endure privations, to command men, to fight the Germans. Like Gromenko, they fought out of necessity. They became good partisan officers because they were deeply cognizant of this necessity. They all, of course, would have preferred to be engaged in peaceful constructive pursuits.

Here are several excerpts from Gromenko's copy-book. I have selected those I feel might give some idea of his character.

"December 14. Interrogated a German. He kept saying 'Kamerad.' Said he's a worker, and a metal worker at that. Showed us his hands. Yes, black calluses. But there wasn't a drop of mercy for him in my heart. He shouted 'Thaelmann, kommunistische, Karl Marx.' 'Why did you betray your Thaelmann?' I asked him through the interpreter. He

said he couldn't have done otherwise. they made him. I asked him: 'What will you do if we let you go?' He said he'd start preparing for the revolution. And under his nose he had a moustache like Hitler's. and there was a Nazi party card in his coat lining.

"December 19. Was summoned to the R.C. Got a roasting that made me sweat, even though it was more than twenty below. First Nikolai Nikitich tackled me. Started yelling good and loud. But I'm not the least afraid of his yelling. He's a kind soul. Seems to me only an enemy could be afraid of him. He yells a while, and then he's sure to smile. Gets over it fast. Everybody likes him. I like him too. He went at me for not wanting to leave the Reimentarovka Forest. 'Think we're going to baby you?' he says. 'Just listen to him—has a dissenting opinion. the supreme court justice has.... Rvanov gave you the order about getting ready to leave, didn't he? Then why are you delaying?' But I stuck to my opinion and said I wasn't going to leave. Fyodorov turned his big eyes on me and said: 'Admit you don't want to leave because your family's not far from here. Comrade Gromenko, don't you go thinking up reasons. Keep in mind that if you do you may find yourself out of the Party.' Well, of course, I put up my hands.

"Why? Did I get scared of Fyodorov? At that moment I myself didn't realize clearly that the

reason I wanted to stay was that the family was near. I gave other reasons, but it was in the back of my mind that I had to go see the folks every once in a while. Nothing for it, the diagnosis was correct. After the R.C. meeting a wise guy came up to me and whispered: 'What's it matter if they expel you from the Party? They'll be the losers. Your platoon's one of the best. The fellows'll go with you. You'll be your own boss....' I cursed him up and down. Don't know why I didn't sock him. As to organizational measures, that's up to the R.C.

"January 9. Gave it to the *polizei* in Pogoreltsy. This was the second time we looked in there. Population met us like brothers. The ceiling of the room where the platoon commander lived was full of bullet holes. 'What kind of men are these *polizei*, Grandma?' I asked the woman who owned the house. She twitched her mouth and said, 'They're shameless hooligans, they've drunk away their conscience and forgotten their God. Look what my Nikitka thought up.' She pointed to an icon riddled with bullet holes. 'That Nikitka any relative of yours?' I asked her. 'We shot him, you know, Grandma.' 'He died the way he lived,' she said. 'He used to be a grandson of mine.' 'So you're disowning him, eh, Grandma?' She looked at me gravely and answered, 'I used to curse him. Even when he was just a boy he used bad words. They

threw him out of school, the scoundrel, and out of the Komsomol too. He was the laziest fellow in the whole kolkhoz. Only place he was a member was the saloon.'

" 'You talk about God all the time, Grandma,' I said. 'I don't believe in God either. Communists and Komsomol members, you know, don't believe in God.' 'Everybody knows that,' she said. 'The Tatars, they have a different God, but some of them are real good folk.' 'We don't recognize the Tatar God either,' I said. 'That's all right. You recognize human beings. See how nice you're talking to an old woman. How we waited for you, waited and waited! Sit down now, please, and try some cheese....'

"February 1. Had a talk with the commander of Company Two, Balabai. A good person. The war hasn't unhumanized him one bit. He's got a dagger more than half a metre long, and I've seen him run it right through a fascist, slaughter him like a pig. 'What do you think, is the war spoiling you, roughening your character?' I asked him. 'After all, you never killed people before.' He smiled. He has a kind smile. He answered like this: 'I couldn't kill a man now either. Do you understand?' I asked him to explain. He thought a bit and then added: 'Let's suppose I become terribly poor. Even so I couldn't become a bandit or a murderer. Or if I quarrel with a comrade I'm not going to attack him



with a knife; nor would I kill a woman out of jealousy, or hurt a child.' I persisted. 'In that case what influence has the war had on you; has your character changed?' 'What a question, of course it has.' But here he was called away. I thought about it afterwards: just how have we changed?

"I never imagined I would make a partisan. In the first place, I was happy to find out I wasn't a coward; in the second place, that I can take orders, acknowledge the authority of a superior officer. Even when it's very difficult and I think he's wrong I fight down this feeling and afterwards I don't let anybody complain. T. was egging me on against Fyodorov, trying to start a squabble. I told him to stop it. And the main change is that all of us, even Fyodorov and the commissar, who are Party workers, have become still better Communists. We're going through a course in practical political education.

"February 2. No, it's time and love of country that are making commanders of us. Take Fyodorov. Was he ever a commander? He's a working man; when he was trimming logs with the men for the dugout yesterday he fell into a gay mood right away. The worker and the peasant, they're always builders. And besides, we've been taught to see the future. The war, of course, isn't the main thing in our lives, and I won't tell my grandchildren about it on principle.



"February 8. Am rereading *War and Peace*. Don't understand those people. They don't think about the future at all, about how to build life after the war.

"March 3. Mishka brought me a chicken he'd roasted over the fire. That was about three hours after the battle. He'd fought like a lion and I praised him in front of his comrades. Was this the reason, I wonder? He gave me the chicken on the quiet. 'Where'd you get it?' I asked him. He said it was running down the street without its head; probably a mine splinter'd taken it off. He forgot that about two weeks ago he told me the same story about a goose, that a mine had taken its head off too. I took the chicken and went over to the fire. I told the boys I thought the matter was a political one. I asked them what they thought. All of them were hungry, and they looked at that chicken with shining eyes. Kotsura spoke up. 'That's a double crime on Mishka's part,' he said. 'A lie, and then trying to make up to his officer.' 'What about chicken stealing, doesn't that count?' 'Before the war a chicken cost three rubles in the village,' Kotsura answered. 'Didn't we earn that three rubles in the battle?' Then political instructor Lysenko took the floor and spoke long and convincingly about how the peasantry judges us partisans on the basis of trifles like that. Everyone agreed. Mishka asked to be forgiven. Then I asked the men

what to do with the chicken. They all yelled, 'Eat it, Comrade Commander, no use dividing it.' I threw it into the fire. Mishka snatched it out and ran off. The fellows ran after him but couldn't catch up with him. Later we learned he took the chicken to the hospital and gave it to the wounded. Try and figure it out.

"March 4. I told my young men about Academician Lysenko's experiments, then about the harvests of the future in general and of how the Soviet Government was working for high productivity of labour. I quoted Lenin about labour productivity being in the final analysis the most important thing for the victory of the Communist system. That brought us up to what Communism is. They listened very attentively. Svistunov, a boy of nineteen, said, 'Now I or Vasya Korobko, maybe we'll live to see it. But you and Popudrenko and Fyodorov can hardly hope to. Fifteen five-year plans, no less, is what is needed to reach Communism, isn't it?' 'Less, what d'you mean, Svistunov!' the fellows yelled out right away. Vasya Korobko quickly multiplied. 'Fifteen by five makes seventy-five, and so you won't live to see it either, Svistunov.'

"'Each five-year plan will be fulfilled in four or maybe three years, so I'll live to see it,' Svistunov protested. Then Vasya Korobko added, 'Scientists are working for longevity. You'll be sure to live to see Communism, take my word for it,

Comrade Commander.' I caught on: the boys wanted to smooth over Svistunov's tactless words and comfort me. 'Thank you, comrades,' I said. They thanked me too, for the talk. One really does want to live to see it!"

\* \* \*

On March 23, after blocking off all the roads and paths leading out of the Yelino woods, the German invaders launched a decisive attack against the partisan camp. Seven thousand Germans, Magyars and *polizei* went into action to encircle and wipe out nine hundred partisans.

The command of the occupation forces had spent a long time preparing this blow. We had prepared for it too. However, there was quite a big difference in the preparations.

I was told about Bessarab's gloomy witticism on this account. He compared the Hitlerites with hangmen and us with the victims.

"Both, ahem, er, are preparing, but the difference is one is soaping the noose and the other is twisting his neck."

That the Hitlerites were hangmen was beyond all doubt. They called their offensive against the partisan camp a punitive expedition; of its success they were certain; and they really were soaping nooses for us. But we had no intention whatsoever of putting out our necks.

What were the preparations of the fascists? During the previous months of occupation they had established their commandants in all the district centres and large villages, set up a police force and woven an espionage and intelligence net. They now had a starosta and a deputy starosta in every village. Groups of auxiliary police had been formed in almost all the villages.

The enemy's attempts to send spies into the partisan detachments and establish regular contact with them had invariably ended in failure. We caught the spies in short order. The Germans didn't know the plans of our command, the location of our headquarters, landing field or radio station, or the secret partisan paths.

Concerning the detachment's size, armaments and organizational structure they had highly contradictory information.

They knew, of course, approximately where the borders of our domains were. Such information could not be concealed. The plan of the German command was extremely simple: to cut off the district in which we were stationed, mass forces, draw a tight ring around us and comb the forest, thus putting an end to the largest group of Chernigov partisans.

Our intelligence service operated with much more success than did the German. We almost always had most accurate information about the invaders' intentions and even about the dates set



for the operations they planned. They themselves admitted as much. Here, for instance, is what Colonel General Szambathaj chief of the Royal Hungarian General Staff, wrote in a letter of instructions which we intercepted:

"The intelligence, information and communication service of the partisans is well developed. It works with exceptional speed and reliability. They receive information about what is going on at the front sooner than the units guarding the occupied territory, and the smallest movement of our units is no secret to them whatsoever."

Elsewhere this letter reads:

"There is no need to obtain detailed and thorough information about the partisans because by the time the intelligence data reaches the command of the units assigned to clear the given territory and the units go into action, the various partisan detachments are sure to be notified through their exceptional information system of the approach of our units and will no longer be found in their previous locations anyway."

We learned of the enemy's intentions on March 22, but instead of slipping away in good time we decided to give battle.

The Germans and Hungarians may really have imagined that more than three thousand partisans were concentrated in the Yelino woods. Actually there were 923 of us, counting the wounded and



the sick. We were hungry and poorly clad, and we were short of ammunition.

How could we have let things go so far that the Hitlerites were able to surround us and launch an operation to wipe us out? Was this an error of judgment on the part of our command, the result of carelessness, or, still worse, a realization that our position was hopeless?

If these questions had been put to the Hitlerite officers who were throwing their soldiers into action against us, they would have answered, of course, that the partisan tactics had failed and that the partisans' hours were numbered.

This was just what we wanted. Let the fascists think we were stupid and overconfident.

The basis of partisan tactics is movement; not simply movement from one place to another but movement which the enemy doesn't expect. Always in the minority, the partisans can't get along without using cunning. Not only their offensive must be unexpected but their retreat too.

The word "retreat" as understood in the army, though, was not applicable to the partisans. We had nowhere to retreat. We could only *slip away*.

This is easy for a small detachment of up to a hundred men. But how is a detachment of almost a thousand fighting men, with machine guns, trench mortars, a hospital, baggage train and a printshop, to slip away unnoticed?

If such a detachment were in a forest stretching for hundreds of kilometres it would be able to make a night march of thirty or forty kilometres and the enemy wouldn't be able to find out immediately to what section of the forest it had moved.

Although the Yelino woods are considered one of the largest in Chernigov Region, they really aren't so very big—approximately fifteen kilometres by twenty. They come up almost to the woods of Oryol (now Bryansk) Region, and are connected by coppices with the Reimentarovka Forest and the Gulino woods, in which we had been located before. But a detachment like ours couldn't move unnoticed from one forest tract to another, especially at that time, when in every single village in the area there was a punitive unit ready to clash with us. I have already mentioned that while these units were being massed we worried them singly. Then they had had poor ties with one another and had been unfamiliar with the locality. Now the ring around us had been drawn together, the forest was patrolled, and enemy planes circled overhead from dawn to dusk. Pushing our way through meant giving battle.

We could have broken through, of course, and gone back to the Reimentarovka Forest or the Oryol woods, but then we should have had to do heavy fighting on the march. The enemy would have done everything he could to engage us on

open terrain, where he could use his tanks and where German planes would have a much easier time dealing with us.

There was still another way out: slipping through the enemy's fingers in small groups. At a conference of the officers there were several who favoured this way out, but we rejected it. Agreeing to it would have meant jeopardizing the very existence of the big detachment, for the groups might easily lose track of one another. The idea of splitting up into small detachments arose every time serious difficulties confronted us.

The R.C. of the Party held firmly to the viewpoint that the big detachment had to be preserved. And as if to confirm the correctness of our stand, we received a radiogram from Moscow saying that on the night of March 22 six planes would bring us ammunition, guns, provisions and reinforcements. We were told to keep the landing field in full readiness.

At an R.C. meeting and later in headquarters we adopted the following plan: We would let the enemy units penetrate into the forest. We would set up three defence lines. On the first two we would open fire after letting the enemy come within fifty to seventy metres. We would mine all the roads, paths and lanes. Mines going off would be the signal the battle had begun. Only after the enemy reached the third defence line, that is, the very camp

limits, would we begin to withdraw. The companies would withdraw in turn, according to an order issued, at intervals of no less than fifteen minutes.

Yes, we decided to go away, after all. Since, according to our calculations, the majority of the village garrisons of Germans and Magyars would be taking part in the operation, toward the end of the battle we wouldn't be apt to meet especially active resistance along the path of our withdrawal. Besides, we planned to confuse the enemy and give him a false idea of the route by which we were withdrawing.

The main thing, however, was to give the Germans a reception that would kill any further desire on their part to try and encircle our detachment. We had to deal the enemy a powerful counter blow, spread confusion in his ranks and take advantage of this confusion to move to new positions in full strength.

Spring usually begins in Chernigov Region at the end of March. But that year there were no signs of it yet. Of course, it was milder than in February, but still it never got milder than fifteen below. The cold served our purpose, though. If a thaw began we naturally wouldn't have been able to make a quick move, for we were planning to use sleighs; we hadn't had time yet to acquire a single cart.

All the men knew of the coming battle. Each unit knew the exact section it would defend. Na-



turally, we couldn't say we were planning to withdraw, for that might have put the men in a bad frame of mind. The order read: fight to the death, defend the camp to the last bullet.

By the way, a few words about bullets, and about ammunition in general. In recent battles we had captured a considerable number of guns, but we had very few Russian cartridges and mines left. We kept informing Moscow that we weren't complaining about food and expected more guns and ammunition.

But no planes had come to us for about a month.

The night of March 22 none of us closed his eyes for a minute. Actually the fighting began on the 22nd. At about three o'clock in the afternoon a group of *polizei* approached the camp from the direction of Yelino. We sent out Bessarab's company to meet them. He outflanked them by a clever manoeuvre, took them by surprise and mowed down almost the entire group with machine-gun fire. Thirteen *polizei* surrendered. When questioned they confirmed that the occupants were launching an offensive not later than the next morning. Toward evening the enemy occupied Yelino.

All of us were on edge. The men were nervous. There was a crank who started saying goodbye to his comrades as though he were going to his death. To do the comrades justice, they gave this panic-monger such a workout that he groaned all night



long. This funereal mood may have gripped no more than two or three persons, but they kept their mouths shut. Bessarab was so raring to go after his success that he suggested going out and attacking the Hitlerites first instead of waiting for them to attack us.

The men were nervous chiefly because they had to wait patiently; this had to be done to give the enemy the impression we didn't know a thing. Toward morning we lit bonfires on the landing field. There and then the men slaughtered three horses, boiled big chunks of meat in pails and ate almost their fill before the battle. True, there was nothing else to put in the soup, nor did they manage to salt it properly. Nonetheless, they had a square meal. There was just one fellow, poor chap, who couldn't stand horse meat in any form. He had begun to swell from hunger. Luckily the captured *polizei* happened to have a little bread.

German planes appeared above the bonfires and dropped a few bombs. Fortunately there were no casualties. The German flyers must have thought us complete idiots that night. But we couldn't put out the fires. The previous time we lit them when we heard the sound of our planes, but now German planes were droning constantly overhead and we feared we wouldn't hear ours.

Meanwhile time was passing. Dawn was drawing near and still our planes hadn't come. Though

we tried to keep up our spirits, we realized very well that if they didn't come and drop us ammunition our position would be desperate.

We did not admit this to one another at the time. Not even at the conference of officers or among the R.C. members had anyone mentioned the fact that our only salvation lay in support from Moscow. Our aeroplane contact with Moscow was not yet regular and we had no right to pin our hopes on it. But hope we did. Everyone gazed up into the black starry sky and listened intently. On all sides the men could be heard saying:

"Ours aren't like that; ours hum quietly, without a whine."

"Fritz goes ooo-ooo-ooo but ours make a nice cheery sound."

The sky began to pale. Now we all realized no help would be forthcoming, that we would have to hold out with the forces we had. I caught myself thinking that after all it was a pity we hadn't moved away in good time. If the detachment had mustered all its forces that night and struck on one sector we would have broken through the ring and would now be a long way off, in comparative safety.

But I said nothing to the comrades and they said nothing to me. Only a few days later did they admit they had been thinking the very same thing at that moment.

Shortly after six o'clock explosions rang out on the side of Guta Studenetskaya. That was the Hitlerites stumbling on a mine field. Nikolai Nikitich immediately jumped on a horse and galloped off in that direction. The hustle and bustle of battle started. Solitary rifle shots rang out on all sides. A gun boomed. The first shell sped by over our heads. A machine gun began chattering. The sound told us it was our Maxim. And suddenly from my command post I saw a parachute floating slowly earthwards.

No one had reported yet that the planes had come. How did I miss them? Rvanov, Balitsky and Yaremenko, who were at the CP with me, missed them too.

"Maybe it's a German landing party?" someone cried out.

The parachutes came down in a bunch. That meant they had been dropped from a low altitude. Two messengers ran up to us at the same time. One of them said the German scout planes had turned tail the instant our planes appeared. The other, coming from Company One, reported that Hitlerites were marching along a forest lane at full height and were yelling; they were clearly drunk. No less than fifty of them had already been laid low.

Still another messenger came running up, from Balabai at the first defence line. He said the boys

were holding out well and swore our planes had dropped several bombs on an enemy group.

"One of them came hedge-hopping and opened up with a large-calibre. Did he give it to those fascists with tracers!"

The men instantly picked up this news and spread it through all our units. I could judge by my own reaction how heartening it was. That really was something—planes from the Mainland joining in the battle together with us!

The bags and boxes that fell from the sky were opened up in a flash. The machine guns and trench mortars were put together right on the spot and moved up to the firing line at once.

They were heavily greased, and each part should have been carefully cleaned with a rag before assembly. But in the haste and general excitement no one looked for rags. The men threw off their padded jackets and caps and hurriedly wiped the guns with them, then put their grease-stained things on again and plunged into battle.

The ammunition carriers took mines and bullets right out of the boxes that had dropped from the sky. One machine gun in a thick canvas bag got stuck in the top of a tree. Three men climbed up after it at the same time.

The boys fought well that day! Every tree, every little hollow became a pillbox of ours. We had no snipers in the strict sense of the word, but we had



plenty of good shots. They scrambled up trees like squirrels and fired at the enemy from there.

The Germans and Magyars advanced from all four sides. After about two hours they forced us to fall back from our first defence line. But this compelled them to cease artillery fire lest they hit their own men. Even so they had lost no less than two hundred in killed by that time. We also lost many men. Arsenty Kovtun was killed. So was squad leader Mazepin. One of our best nurses, Klava Markova, brought in nine gravely wounded men, and when she crawled out for the tenth she was cut down by a bullet.

The Hitlerites pressed forward stubbornly regardless of their losses. They drove the *polizei* and the Magyars into the line of fire and moved up under cover of their dead bodies. The battle had already been going on for several hours. We had no opportunity whatsoever to prepare anything to eat. No one opened the food packages the planes had dropped. Kapranov had difficulty finding men to gather them up and load them into sleighs. The wounded suffered most, of course. There wasn't even time to bandage them properly.

By two o'clock we had succeeded in finding a gap in the line around us and in getting our baggage train out through it. We led fifty sleighs out of the forest and sent them to Gulino, the first stopping place of the regional detachment. We managed this



only because at the same time twenty sleighs moved off in the opposite direction, toward the Bryansk woods, thus distracting the enemy's attention.

In those twenty sleighs were only sixty men, headed by the political instructor of Company Two, Nakhaba. A team of our best horses was harnessed to each sleigh, and they carried them along at a spanking pace. This group had a special mission. Much depended on how it was carried out. Scouts brought in the news that the group had managed to shake off the Germans following it. So far everything was going as planned.

The fascists continued to advance. Around three o'clock they succeeded in breaching our second defence line. However, they didn't dare to comb the forest; they preferred to keep to the lanes and paths.

A little past four, when it began to grow dark, the fascists cooled down. After ten hours of fighting they still hadn't managed to reach our camp. The fact that the attacking forces preferred to keep to the clearings and lanes resulted in the German command not knowing where their front or their rear was, the more so since our men made their way to sections the Germans had passed through and fired at them from behind.

And now the final part of *our plan* began to go into operation.

The Hitlerites started hastily drawing back some of their companies and massing them in the north-

eastern sector. This meant that political instructor Nakhaba's group had fulfilled its mission.

This group had been ordered to drive through six or seven villages on the road to the Bryansk woods, start a panic there and spread the rumour that Fyodorov had been smashed, that he and Popudrenko had flown off to Moscow in the morning and that the remnants of the routed partisans were fleeing in disorder toward the Zlynka woods.

The Hitlerites fell for this. They packed several companies into trucks and sent them to cut off the "flight."

Now we could breathe more freely. I issued an order for the men to withdraw from battle platoon by platoon with the fall of darkness and make for Gulino in the wake of the baggage train.

Since we had mined all the exits from the forest and it was impossible to look for the mines in the dark, each group of partisans drove a horse and sleigh ahead of it. The unfortunate horses were blown up, thus clearing the way. The men were so famished that they cut off chunks of steaming raw horseflesh and ate it.

Some twenty-five kilometres from the Yelino woods we halted in a deep gully overgrown with bushes to wait for all the units to come up. The men were completely exhausted. Kapranov ordered his commissary platoon to open the food boxes. This time he himself went around distributing makh-

orka, canned goods and smoked sausage. But more than anything in the world the men wanted to sleep. They flung themselves down on the snow and went off to sleep at once.

We had to appoint special sentries to nudge the sleepers, for it was more than fifteen below. In the heat of battle many of the comrades had thrown off their quilted jackets and left them in the forest. Fires were out of the question. When they lit cigarettes the men covered their heads with their jackets, for German planes were still circling in the dark sky.

Within two hours all our companies had gathered. We should have moved on without a minute's pause, but the men were completely worn out. Even the hardest began to beg for a rest.

And here a miracle occurred.

Men lying flat in the snow, weak and numb with weariness, rose; the wounded stopped groaning, and some of them surmounted their pain and climbed out of the sleighs. I was so exhausted myself that I felt I couldn't lift a hand or turn my head, but a few minutes later I was up and dancing with the young ones. . . .

This is what happened. Our radiomen had been groping around in the ether, trying to pick up the news, when suddenly they tuned in on a request concert for partisans. This was the first time we had picked up a concert of this kind. The loud-speaker was at once fastened to the nearest tree, of

course, and a crowd gathered around it in an instant.

We had sent in requests by radio long before, and our impatience as we waited to see if they would be played was understandable.

The announcer said: "We're playing Dunayevsky's *Song of My Native Land* for partisan Seme-nisty, of the detachment commanded by Comrade Kovpak."

After that: "We're playing *Kakhovka* for partisan Pyotr Glushik, machine gunner in Batya's detachment."

Piano chords floated to us through the ether from Moscow. The Pyatnitsky choir sang for the partisans. Valeria Barsova trilled like a nightingale, and Konstantin Simonov recited his poetry. "We're playing for the partisans of Saburov's detachment; of the Shchors detachment commanded by Comrade Markov; of the Khrushchov detachment commanded by Comrade Sychov...."

The concert lasted a long time. After each number came the name of another detachment. Only at the very end did the announcer say:

"For Karpusha, platoon leader in the Stalin detachment commanded by Comrade Fyodorov, we're playing a Ukrainian hopak."

And then it began! The boys yelled "hurrah," cleared away a square of snow in an instant and pushed Karpusha into it. A few minutes later prac-



tically the entire detachment was dancing. It was a good thing the hopak was soon over, otherwise I'm sure our fellows would have danced till morning. I'll confess I loosened up my limbs too and clicked my heels against the frozen ground a few times. Where on earth did we get the energy?

If only the fascists could have seen how the partisans whom they were pursuing in exactly the opposite direction were now dancing by the light of the moon!

When the concert ended we climbed into the sleighs, gay and excited, and pushed on to the site of our new camp. By morning we were already in the Gulino woods, where we picked up this radio report from Berlin:

"On a sector of the Central Front a powerful group of forest bandits numbering 3,200 men has been defeated and wiped out. Twelve commissars were taken prisoner. The leaders succeeded in escaping by plane. . . ."

This was us, of course. The occupation authorities had reported an obvious lie to Berlin. They had not taken a single prisoner. They had not accomplished what they set out to do; they had not managed either to encircle us or comb the forest. As a result of almost twenty-four hours' fighting they lost around five hundred men in killed and succeeded only in having us move from one forest to another.



But this was what *we had wanted, not they*. We had carried out our plan.

At roll-call we found our losses amounted to twenty-two men killed and fifty-three wounded.

We had got away from the enemy and covered our tracks. Now we could light fires, rest up and eat, and tackle our next problems.

\* \* \*

Thus the *big detachment* was built up.

The March battle was the decisive test for our big detachment. It was a very tough battle, that one. But now we all knew for a fact that the invaders could not get the better of us.

We had become a strong military *organization* that acted according to a plan, received aid from the Red Army and the Soviet rear, and constantly drew reserves from the population at large.

Above I have cited excerpts from a letter of instructions written by Colonel General Szambathaj, the chief of the Royal Hungarian General Staff. We seized this highly confidential document at the beginning of April when we blew up a Hungarian staff car on the Gomel-Chernigov highway. After reading it our self-respect as partisans rose considerably. We discussed Szambathaj's instructions at political classes in all the units of our detachment.

Here are these instructions in a somewhat abridged form:

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PRESENT WAR  
IN BRIEF

(Through March 1942)

PARTISAN WARFARE

Chapter I

*A General Outline of the Partisan Movement.*

"The struggle against the Soviets has brought us face to face with a peculiar and ruthless means of warfare—the 'partisan' movement. The fanaticism, scorn for death and endurance which we have seen the Russian people display in this form of struggle are amazing; the scale on which the Russians are employing this form of struggle is staggering.

"The partisan movement, spreading over more and more territory, is already assuming the form of a people's movement.

"The partisan movement is a people's movement behind our frontline; not only immediately behind the front but several hundred kilometres behind it, in the rear. . . . Partisan warfare flared up with special intensity when the Russian army launched offensive operations at the beginning of the winter. Defence against the actions of the partisans means difficult days, weeks and even months for us."

We were particularly pleased by this admission that the invaders had to defend themselves against the partisans.

In the section entitled "Types of Partisan Detachments. Manpower Reserves. Replacements," Szambathaj wrote:

"The soul of the partisan movement are the Communist leaders who were left behind deliberately. . . . The strong, purposeful and fanatical Communists . . . are exceptionally dangerous. In the districts where partisans are operating a lenient attitude toward Communists is absolutely impermissible.

"... Every Jew, regardless of sex or age, sympathizes with the partisans. There is no place for mercy toward the Jews either!

"The women who help the partisans must be put down as a separate group. The young generation of women brought up by the Communists is a determined stratum of assistants of the movement who do not give in before anything."

In the second chapter, entitled "Defence Against the Partisan Movement," Szambathaj presented a cynical program, which boils down to the usual principle of the fascist invaders: "divide and rule." He recommended impressing it on the Ukrainians that they were more cultured than the Russians, that "in origin and traits they are much closer to the cultured peoples of the West than are the Russians. Under

the new order in Europe a lofty calling awaits the Ukrainians. . . . They can reach a finer and happier destiny only on the side of the axis powers."

Further, in the section on "How to Fight the Partisans," he said:

"It should be clear to us that the patriotically-minded strata of the Ukrainian population do not feel they have any common destiny whatsoever with the authorities of the central powers. In the final analysis our authorities and units are enemy invaders and foreign masters to them. . . .

"Fighting the partisans means not only destroying separate partisan detachments. They must be deprived of the possibility of further organizing, of acquiring supplies and of replenishing their manpower and material resources. Such being the case, there is no room for mercy toward anyone at all. Only a merciless annihilation of the population will lead to achievement of the goal. . . ."

How could it happen, people often ask, that an army which had conquered so many countries, which was equipped with first-class armaments, and which had already acquired substantial experience in occupying other countries, did not nip the partisan movement in the bud? Why did the invaders allow the partisan movement to grow into a formidable force?

It is easier to answer this question today than it was in 1942. Many partisan commanders now

publishing their memoirs are attempting to do it. I am also trying to answer it in this book. Of course, at the period of which I am writing we pondered over this question too.

There was a skit composed by an unknown partisan author and staged by our amateur theatre in which two German commandants meet and have a talk. The skit was rather amateurishly written, but the partisans enjoyed it.

The first commandant favoured all kinds of promises, persuasion and "reforms." All the second one knew was "shoot 'em down." They got into an argument as to which method of struggle was the more effective, as to which of them would finish off the partisans first.

Toward the end it turned out that both methods were worse, as they say. The partisans kept growing in number in the districts governed by both the commandants. They attacked the village, and the commandants clutched at their heads and fled with cries of *Mein Gott!*

The partisan movement arose and developed not because the invaders allowed it to—they did not give us any opportunity at all, of course—but because, no privations or difficulties halted the Soviet men and women, because the people did not wish to endure fascist slavery and they rose to fight the invaders. The number of detachments and their size increased with each passing day.



After the March battle the regional detachment encountered a series of new difficulties. The enemy soon discovered us and started after us again. We took a decision not to settle down in the Gulino woods, and a few days later we moved over into the Reimentarovka Forest. From there we returned to the Yelino woods. Now we didn't remain in any one place more than five or six days, following the tactics of almost constant movement.

Spring came, and the rivers rose. We had to get busy at once acquiring carts, carriages and drays. This took no little time and energy. Only by the end of May did we have enough wagons.

Instead of improving in the springtime, the partisans' food situation became still worse. The peasants were hardly able to help us at all. Their stocks had given out too. Planes now came to us very rarely because of the mud and the almost incessant rains.

Nonetheless, the detachment grew. For a time we even had to limit the number of new people we took in. We were short of ammunition, chiefly for Soviet weapons, as always, yet we clashed with the enemy almost daily.

The tactics of frequent movement confused the Hitlerites. They thought partisans had appeared in all the Chernigov forests, while really it was our regional detachment on the move. When the snow

disappeared, finding our trail became much more difficult. Then, around the middle of May, the leaves came out, making it still easier for us to conceal ourselves.

The first time we learned for certain that the number of partisan detachments was very large was when we heard the partisan request program after the March battle. Of course, we had presumed that there were detachments, that they couldn't help but exist. But now we had certain knowledge that partisans were operating in the Oryol, the Kiev and the Byelorussian forests, in a word, wherever a group of armed men had the barest possibility of hiding from enemy eyes.

After the March battle the invaders realized they weren't able to surround and comb the forest. The only thing left for them to do was set up a blockade around the places where the partisans were massed. From the summer of 1942 on, the experienced, so to say, seasoned, occupation officers in the captured Soviet districts understood they wouldn't be able to wipe out the partisan movement, as Hitler demanded.

From time to time, after receiving orders to that effect, the invaders tried to attack us. But now they bent their efforts in the main toward controlling at least the towns, villages and the roads. They worked out an intricate system of guarding the railways and the main highways. In the towns

and villages, especially in those where occupation units were quartered, they cut down the trees and bushes; they broke down the fences and replaced them with barbed wire.

Now the Hitlerites were compelled to keep quite large forces in the rear and along the roads leading to the front. Each post was guarded by no less than a platoon. At the railway junctions, even such secondary ones as Priluki, for example, there was an entire regiment.

At the beginning of the war German soldiers considered it great luck to land in a rear unit. Now the situation had changed radically. Now it was those guilty of infractions of discipline who were sent to serve in the punitive and guard duty detachments. And particularly unwilling were the German soldiers to go to rural localities or small district towns, which the partisans raided frequently.

The partisan detachments had become a formidable force. At the beginning of 1942 a Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement was set up in Moscow. Every sizable detachment in the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Oryol and Kursk regions, and later on in the southern districts as well, established regular radio communication with Moscow, with the Red Army Supreme Command, and received instructions and the needed aid from there.

I have not set out to write a history of our detachment. This book tells only how the Chernigov Communists who remained behind to work in the underground overcame all difficulties and organized and headed the people's resistance to the invaders, how the R.C. of the Party *built up a big detachment*.

At the end of March the detachment of Oryol partisans commanded by Markov joined us. To be more exact, it was not Markov who came to us but we who came to him in the Zlynka woods. There we met up with another fairly large group of partisans, under Levchenko. This group also began operating in coordination with us. A partisan garrison had been set up for the first time.

We adopted this name in order to preserve internal autonomy for the detachments that had just joined us. Both of them had come into being long before, and had their own traditions. Besides, we didn't wish to take the step of merging detachments from various regions right off, although this wasn't of great importance as a matter of principle. Since I commanded the largest detachment I was made chief of the garrison; Yaremenko, Markov and Levchenko were appointed my deputies.

At a joint meeting of all the commanders and the Chernigov R.C. of the Party it was decided that our main task now was to organize attacks on the roads feeding the front.



At the head of the demolition squad we placed Alexei Sadilenko, the tallest man in our whole detachment. He had come to us from an encircled army unit, in which he had been a mine layer and demolition man too. His squad was subordinate directly to headquarters. The core of the squad was made up of volunteers, men of reckless courage. The first volunteers were: Sergei Koshel, a twenty-two-year-old sapper and a Komsomol member; Misha Kovalev, also a sapper, and Vasya Kusnetsov, a nineteen-year-old lad from Siberia, a gold prospector.

Others to sign up were secondary school principal Tsimbalist, paratrooper Nikolai Denisov, Vsevolod Klovov, a senior lieutenant of the engineers, our old friend Petya Romanov and Volodya Pavlov, a student of the Moscow Institute for Transport Engineers.

For demolition operations a group of twenty to twenty-five men headed by one of our officers was usually set up to support the two or three or, at the most, five men who planted the mines. They went long distances from the camp, sometimes more than one hundred kilometres, and going out on such expeditions without a supporting group was too risky. Besides, the German trains were accompanied as a rule by a guard of thirty or forty Tommy gunners and two or three machine gunners. Hardly any of our railway operations ever went off without a skirmish.



Grigory Vasilyevich Balitsky, a man of exceptional bravery, became the moving spirit of the demolition expeditions. Sometimes he went off for two or three weeks with his group. Once he didn't return for over a month.

In May and June 1942 our demolition men derailed twenty-six trains. Balitsky's group accounted for eleven of these.

At first some comrades were opposed to demolition activity. "Of course, if we have the chance, why not blow up a train," they reasoned, "but it's no good to do it often. The Germans won't stand for it. It'll be the same as telling them: look for us here. The detachment gets nothing out of it anyway. Blasting and burning don't bring it any booty."

It was true that the demolition operations did not bring us any large booty. The munitions usually exploded, and most of the time the provisions went up in smoke. Even if something did remain intact, the demolition men couldn't take it with them. Besides, they had to leave as soon as they completed the operation: the invaders immediately sent a trainload of troops to the scene of the catastrophe.

After all, however, we were carrying on demolition work not in the interests of the detachment but of our country. Each train we derailed weakened the enemy considerably. Everybody understood this, of course; but it was necessary

that everybody feel it in his heart, become enthusiastic about each demolition operation our men successfully carried out, take pride in it.

After its first big successes the demolition squad was flooded with applications, especially from the youth, of course.

In 1942 our demolition operations were as yet weak; we were just learning. It was a different matter in 1943 and 1944, when we began working according to a schedule and derailed as many as ten trains in one day. But that is a topic for the next book. In the summer of 1942 we couldn't even dream of dealing such powerful blows.

Even at that time, however, our demolition men accomplished quite a bit. In March, when the snow was still on the ground, they set out for the railway line at points dozens of kilometres from the camp and under difficult winter conditions waited for trains for days on end. At that time traffic had practically stopped because of snowdrifts. The demolition men had to occupy themselves with what they called "common labour," which they didn't like: blowing up bridges, the railway bed and drain pipes.

This, of course, also inflicted telling losses on the invaders' economy. In March and at the beginning of April our boys blew up five bridges and more than three hundred sections of railway bed.

In May we took up positions in the Zlynka and Novozybkov forests, not far from the railway. The snow was gone by that time, and traffic was normal. Up to sixty trains were passing along the Gomel-Bryansk line daily in the direction of the front. The activity of our demolition groups forced the Germans to cancel night traffic and reduce the daytime schedule to eight and at the most ten trains.

Our demolition men steadily extended the scope of their sallies. Whenever the detachment raided a town of any size they put the industrial enterprises, power stations and warehouses that were housed in brick buildings out of commission.

During an operation in the district centre of Gordeyevka which lasted only half an hour the demolition men blew up the distillery, creamery, electric station, a food warehouse and several tractors and trucks while the other companies and platoons were waging battle.

In Koryukovka, men of the demolition squad wrecked the railway station, blew up the railway track in twenty-four places, destroyed all the frogs, switches and communications and signalling apparatus, and blew up and set fire to the sawmill, lumberyard and fuel and fodder stores.

\* \* \*

After planes started coming to us the men began to write letters. For a single sheet of writing paper some of the comrades offered enough makhorka to roll a big cigarette. A tremendous number of letters had collected but not once did a plane land. Meanwhile many of the partisans wrote serial letters to which they devoted all their free time. I had occasion to read one of these serial letters, written by Volodya Pavlov, one of our intrepid demolition men.

Volodya was not yet twenty at the time. He came to us from Markov's detachment, and before that he had been a paratrooper, a member of a group which met with misfortune. Left alone, he wandered about for two months and finally landed in the Oryol woods, where he joined the partisans.

Before the war Volodya had been in his first year at the Moscow Institute for Transport Engineers. With us too, as you see, he dealt with transportation problems, only not with the building and operation of railways but their destruction.

After the war, a Hero of the Soviet Union, he resumed his studies at the institute.

At the time, I kept the letter from which I cite excerpts below. Volodya gave too many "technological" details about demolition in it. Now, of course, the letter contains no military secrets of any sort.

*"June 14, 1942.*

*"Dear, precious Mama,*

"I don't know whether I'll ever be able to send you this letter or whether it will go on lying around in my pocket.

"I remember you always loved details and said I should describe my surroundings to you. I am writing this in a tent. Only it's not like an ordinary tent, the kind you've seen in army or Pioneer camps. Our tent is small and very low. You can't stand up in it, and even when you're sitting your head touches the top. I live with Volodya Klovov. He's a grand fellow. That is, he's an engineer, not just a fellow. He's a few years older than I am. He's gay, clever and lively, and the main thing is he's brave. He's friendly and treats me like an equal. That's very pleasant. I can learn a lot from him. By the way, his name is Vsevolod, but somehow everyone here calls him Volodya, and so do I.

"He was the first one to tell me about demolition operations. I'm grateful to him no end. It's interesting and absorbing work. The demolition men are looked up to here more than anybody else. Not just because it's dangerous. Don't you think for a minute, Mom, that it's any more dangerous than other partisan work. We're looked up to because we deal the enemy heavy blows.



"Don't fret because I jump around so. It's hard to concentrate. Next to me the boys are sitting playing cards. Only please don't go thinking it's for money. That can't happen here. We don't have any money at all. It's absolutely unnecessary.

"I started telling you about the tent. It's made like this: wooden posts with parachute silk stretched across it, and on top of the silk there's fir-tree bark. We cut off the bark this way: one of the boys stands on another's shoulders and makes a deep cut almost down to the bottom with a sharp knife. Then we cut around the tree at the top and the bottom. We chop off all the branches flush. Then we carefully take off the bark together with the skin—you know, that slippery stuff underneath. . . . The bark turns out to be like a sheet of bent plywood. It has holes in it from where the branches were, but we stuff them up. Then we put the bark on top of the silk. No downpour can get through a roof like that. The tents are made very low on purpose. I'm writing lying down. . . .

"Now, Mom, I want to tell you about how I went on my first distant railway operation. You doctors call an operation intervention with the aid of the surgeon's knife. We cut the railway track—not with a knife but with explosives. . . . Before that I'd taken part only in blowing up bridges and German cars. I'd already been assigned to laying mines to blow up German manpower, that is, in-

fantry. But that's easy. You could learn how in half an hour.

"I went on my first railway operation not as a demolition man but as a plain fighter. Fyodorov went with us. But the head of the group, its commander, was Grigory Vasilyevich Balitsky.

"He's a very brave man. A regular daredevil. The only thing he's really afraid of is that someone sometime might suspect him of being a coward. Besides us, there were twenty more men in the group. All different kinds. There was one girl among us, and a wonderful guide, an elderly kolhoz man named Pankov. He knows all the forests and all the roads, paths and animal tracks. Like Leatherstocking. Remember Fenimore Cooper?

"When we were seen off on the operation the girls cried. Why? Because, Mom, they're more sensitive than men. 'It's just as easy for women to cry as to sneeze,' Pankov said. When we'd gone about four kilometres from the camp Balitsky told everyone to sit down on the grass. He sat down himself, remained silent for some time, and then told us to listen to him attentively.

" 'I warn you. Whoever isn't sure of himself, go back to camp. Afterwards it'll be too late. We can't have any unnecessary talk or any complaints about difficulties. Boldness, discipline, and unconditional fulfilment of all my orders! Is that clear? For the slightest violation, for cowardice—execution on the

spot. I'm not trying to frighten you; it just can't be otherwise. So please, whoever wants to can go back; no one will hold it against you, and no one will laugh at you.'

"Not a single person said he wanted to go back. Even though Balitsky assured us no one would laugh at those who returned, nobody believed him. Actually, everybody in the camp scorns and even hates cowardice. Going back would mean confessing you were a coward. For that you might get it in the wall newspaper.

"Then we stood up and went through the forest, along paths. We had to cover twenty-five kilometres in all. In some places we crossed highways and dirt roads. We crossed them walking backwards. We were specially taught to walk that way. We had to walk fast, without stopping, and so there would be normal steps. Do you know why? If the Germans saw the footprints they'd think we went in the opposite direction.

"Once we had to wait while some German trucks passed. There was a whole column of them. We didn't bother to get into a fight with them. We had a different job.

"Each one of us carried the charge of explosive, in other words, the mine, in turn. It doesn't weigh much—twelve kilos. But a partisan doesn't like to have his hands occupied. Each one tries to arrange his load so that it's on his back or else at his belt.

Your hands have to be free so that you can open fire at any moment. We don't carry tommy guns the way the Red Army men do either. Ours are slung over the left shoulder, handy, with the muzzle facing ahead.

"The homemade partisan mine is simply a wooden box about forty centimetres long and twenty centimetres wide and high. Inside the box there's a chunk of explosive about the colour of dry mustard, only it's not a powder. So that you won't be afraid for me, I'll tell you it can't explode by itself. It explodes by detonation. A square or round hole is cut out in the charge, and just before the mine is planted a detonator pin is put in there. Then there's a spring, a firing-pin and a capsule.... You wouldn't understand all this business without a drawing, and besides you don't need to. It's unlikely you'll ever be using one of these things.

"We halted about six kilometres from the railway, not far from the village of Kamen. A messenger of our detachment serves in the police force there. It's a rule that the group mustn't go into any town or village under any circumstances when it's on the way to an operation.

"But one or two scouts had to go into the village absolutely. This time Pankov went. He found out from our messenger that it was fairly quiet at the moment on the Zlynka-Zakopytie section, and



there weren't many Germans there. Besides, he learned the safest route to the railway.

"Balitsky was very upset by one thing Pankov told him. It seems that just a short while before a gasoline train had passed on the way to Bryansk. You see, Mom, it makes a difference to us what kind of a train we blow up. True, even if a train with not a very important load goes up on a mine it puts the line out of commission for a few hours. But we are economical with explosives—each kilogram counts. It's considered a big thing to blow up a troop train or one with tanks, trucks, planes or gasoline. That's why Balitsky was upset. He thought that if one gasoline train had gone through another one wouldn't be coming along soon.

"We reached the line safely. The forest ended about two hundred metres from the track. We lay down and hid in the grass and bushes along the fringe of the forest. Balitsky had us lie ten metres apart. That's so if we had to open fire we could cover the entire length of the train at once.

"You see, blowing up the engine and derailing the cars isn't enough; the freight has to be destroyed. And if the train is carrying Hitlerite soldiers, we have to kill off as many as possible. The minute the engine jumps the track and the train stops, we all open fire at the cars—and mainly at the last car, especially if it's a freight train, because the guard always rides at the end of the train.



"As you read this now in Moscow you're probably anxious to know how I conducted myself, whether I didn't disgrace myself that first time. If I was alone maybe I would have been afraid. But all the boys were fine fellows. We had a good time on the way and joked a lot.

"Mama, if only you could see your Volodya now! I look just about as much like a city student as a bear looks like a lamb. I have a dashing appearance. I'm dressed in the partisan fashion: a Hungarian fur-lined vest—what's called a 'Magyar-ka'—high boots with the tops rolled down, and over them hang wide wine-coloured pants made out of a German woolen blanket. I wear a cap with a broad red ribbon on the crown. There are grenades at my waist and a tommy gun on a strap. It would be fun to have a look at myself in a full-length mirror.

"Now I'll tell you a funny thing, by the way. Once the partisans attacked a German garrison in a village, and while the fighting was still going on several of the boys got stuck in the starosta's house for a long time. The orders were to set fire to it, but the biggest partisan dandies had got into that house. They crowded around a full-length mirror and kept pushing one another aside to admire themselves. I didn't take part in that operation. But Fyodorov gave those boys a laying-out I didn't envy. He called them coquettes, and that's what

everybody calls them now; they get teased every evening.

"Stop. Can't write any more. An alert.

*"June 18*

"You know, Mom, the minute I start writing to you I think of Moscow. What's it like now? Several paratroopers were sent to us, and two of them had been in Moscow. They said there was a fuel shortage in the wintertime. Poor thing, you must have frozen! Just the same I miss Moscow very much. I'd like to take just one look at it. And if I was allowed to go on the condition that I crawl all the way there on my belly, I think I'd do it.

"I just reread the first part of the letter and will go on. I hadn't seen a railway for several months. We'd just lain down and taken cover when along came a trackman, an old fellow with a beard. He had a rifle over his shoulder but when the boys went up to him he put up his hands and didn't even try to undling it. From where I was I watched them searching him. Suddenly everybody began running toward him. But there hadn't been any order. Balitsky ran too, swearing all the way.

"Hal a minute later there was a thick cloud of smoke above the whole group and everybody had a happy face. Now do you get what it's all about? It turned out the trackman had a full pouch of makhora. And we'd been smoking all kinds of

junk for a long time. We'd tried smoking moss and buckwheat straw and dry oak leaves. When we manage to get hold of some makhorka or tobacco or a cigarette we smoke it in turn, each one taking a couple of puffs. We have expressions like 'cover my lip,' 'leave me the butt, I'll throw it away,' and 'it's burning my lip and roasting my nose but it's a pity to throw it away.' We've even written a song that goes like this:

*Good tobacco is a treat,  
But we haven't any,  
Oak-leaf dried and rolled up neat  
Fills the pipes of many.  
Birch-bark, buckwheat, straw or hay,  
All the woodlands tender.  
Smoke to drive the blues away,  
Spirits buoyant render.*

"Don't be surprised, Mom, that I write Ukrainian. I've learned it. Incidentally, you could learn all the languages of the U.S.S.R. here. We have Georgians, Armenians, Kazakhs and even a Yakut. Everyone has to know Ukrainian. Otherwise how'd we get along in the villages?

"Well, we all got it from Balitsky, of course. It was lucky he himself was dying for a smoke. We tied up the trackman and took away his rifle. We didn't kill him. He said the Hitlerite would have shot him if he hadn't taken the job.

"Then we lay down again. After lying there an hour and a half we heard a train coming. It was still far off, but we couldn't mistake that click on the rails. My heart began pounding; I never was so excited waiting for a train before. My heart was beating all over my body; I could even feel it in my fingertips, I was squeezing my tommy gun so hard.

"Seryozha Koshel dashed out to plant the mine. He dug it under the rail very fast and ran a fuse to the forest to set it off. Planting a mine is an honour but it's not very pleasant. In your excitement you may get tangled up in the fuse and blow yourself up.

"Seryozha had just managed to hide when the engine appeared around the bend. That's the tensest moment: will it come off or won't it? Your nerves are as taut as strings. The mine may fail to explode. There's all kinds of reasons.

"Writing it takes much longer. There it all happened in a second. The train was coming fast. It was a very long one.

"The explosion wasn't so loud. There was a burst of flame under the engine, and the engine went over. Then there was an awful crash and grinding from the cars piling up on each other. We all opened fire right away, at the drums. I forgot to say that it was a gasoline train again. We were lucky: it was the second one in a row.

The Germans ship gasoline to the front not in tank cars but in iron drums because it's easier to fill tanks and trucks from them. The drums are piled up in several layers on flatcars with high sides. We fired at the bottom drums. They exploded and threw the top ones up a couple of metres into the air. Everything was in flames.

"Suddenly I saw Balitsky running up to the rear of the train, looking gruesome against the background of the fire. He ran shouting 'Follow me!' As soon as he came near the last car he began shooting. He doesn't have a tommy gun but a light French rapid-firing carabine, and he holds it not pressed to his shoulder but in his outstretched arm with the butt against the inside of his elbow. Very dashing indeed.

"The Germans were in the last car, a passenger coach. They fired out of the windows from tommy guns and machine guns. The flames went higher and higher, and the whole train started burning and crackling. The passenger coach caught fire too. On top the flames were black. They gave off tongues fifty metres long in all directions, like solar prominences. They went fifty metres straight up too.

"The German guards screamed in agony. They began firing less and less. Then Balitsky ordered the withdrawal, and we ran off.

"When we got together in the woods we found only two of our men were wounded. Our nurse



quickly bandaged them. We marched back singing, simply drunk with joy.

"We were in marvellous spirits. On the way back we kept turning around to look at the fire. It was blazing stronger and stronger. Imagine, even in the camp they saw the smoke. We marched along fast, talking loud, each one trying to outshout the other. We hardly tried at all to escape notice. We were all in a fighting mood, raring to go; we were ready for anything.

"We walked into that big village of Kamen. There's a mill there. We made straight for it. Without taking any precautions—right down the street. The *polizei* all ran away; I don't know how many of them were there. But at the mill we shot two who were guarding it. We broke the locks on the grain and flour warehouses and called the inhabitants. They came running up to the mill and dragged the stuff away in bags, boxes and pails; women took it also in the hems of their skirts. The kids hung around too; they poured it into their caps.

"We shouted, 'Take it, comrades, and hide it! When the Nazis come put all the blame on us partisans! We can stand it!'

"We held a meeting. I took the floor too. You wouldn't even suspect what a fine speech I got off. Honest to goodness, when I'm excited I'm a regular orator. They congratulated me and said I

ought to be transferred to speaking. That's nonsense, of course. Now I wouldn't give up demolition work for anything.

"But you don't worry. Mom, it's not at all so dangerous. I think watching on the roofs in Moscow for them to drop bombs is lots more dangerous. There it comes so suddenly, doesn't it? And there you can't answer the enemy's fire. No, don't you worry. Honest, nothing'll happen to your Volodya!"

## CHAPTER FIVE

### UNITED FORCES

THE German invaders were waging an offensive in the south, and the radio brought us sad tidings. The Red Army was withdrawing to Stalin-grad. One would think that the invaders might feel more at ease in the Ukraine than ever before. One would think that so deep in the enemy's rear the population might finally submit.

But instead of submitting to fascist slavery, Soviet men and women were increasing their resistance. More and more partisan detachments were rising to fight the German invaders.

The Germans were advancing on the Caucasus, but the people felt they would soon be routed and put to flight. Every Soviet person who was in the enemy rear at that time could not help but note numerous signs of the military and economic weakening of the German army.

Now our detachment, or, to be more exact, the several Chernigov and Oryol detachments which had linked up their destinies, very frequently

made long-distance raids in Chernigov and Oryol regions and the northeastern districts of Byelorussia. The total number of fighting men in our detachment had long since topped the thousand mark. When local partisans joined in with us we numbered no less than two thousand men. On the march our column extended a kilometre and a half. Sometimes we made our way surreptitiously, through swamps and forests, but more often we moved about openly and we readily halted in villages. In almost every village we held rallies, distributed leaflets, and went into the houses and talked with the peasants.

The peasants met us with open arms. They were proud of the partisans, and at times they exaggerated our strength. Meeting us raised their spirits, they admitted. This was indeed so. Our meetings with the people gave us, in turn, greater confidence in the righteousness and invincibility of our cause.

I remember once talking with an old man and half-jokingly reproaching him for not joining the partisans. He was a strong healthy man of about fifty-five. My reproach apparently cut him to the quick.

"That's not true, chief, that I'm not a partisan," he said in a hurt voice: "Take a look at our fields, chief. Look at how the people are working in the communal yards. They're doing only half

or a quarter as much as they could and sometimes the opposite of what should be done. Why aren't we partisans, chief, when the enemy can never let go of his tommy gun or his whip?"

The old man spoke the truth. A glance at the peasant fields was sufficient to show how badly things were going for the invaders. Traces of wholesale sabotage lay over everything. A year hadn't passed since the German invaders entered these districts, yet agriculture was so rundown it was clear it was being laid waste deliberately.

The story of this devastation is as follows. Before the German fascists came the kolkhoz folk managed to harvest and ship out part of the 1941 bumper crop. The grain remaining in the fields was trampled and burned down by the armies. There was so much of it, however, that the Hitlerites got some. They didn't harvest it themselves, of course. They made the peasants do it by threatening them with all kinds of punishment. Then they confiscated it. The peasants were left only with what they had managed in one way or another to conceal from the invaders and traitors.

In the autumn of 1941 the front was still close and winter wheat was hardly sown anywhere. But when the front moved on the Hitlerites consolidated their rule, put through a so-called reform and began organizing agricultural production their own way.



The peasants followed the efforts of the Gebietskommissars and the newly-baked landlords with puzzlement and with steadily growing scorn. In their newspapers and leaflets the invaders ran down the kolkhozes, sovkhoses and the entire system of socialist agriculture as much as they could. And, of course, they lauded their own organizational abilities.

"Just watch how we'll get things going on the basis of German experience, German industry, German accuracy, precision and culture," they told the peasantry.

All this turned out to be blather, of course. First of all the invaders took the grain. Then they took almost all the draft horses, leaving the peasants only oxen. But how many oxen are there in a kolkhoz village? Could spring ploughing ever be done with them? Could the vast kolkhoz expanses be harrowed and sown in this old-fashioned way?

The machine and tractor stations had been evacuated, and almost all the tractors that hadn't been shipped east had been put out of commission. During the winter the invaders tried here and there to get tractor repair shops going, but they didn't succeed. In their newspapers they wrote that thousands of splendid new machines would soon be coming from Germany. A general mobilization of tractor drivers, mechanics and truck drivers was announced.

But when spring came the Gebietskomissars and Landwirtschaftsführers demanded that the peasants work the fields with oxen and cows. The invaders shipped in neither tractors nor trucks, of course. As for the truck drivers, mechanics and tractor drivers who had been mobilized, they were herded into freight cars and transported to Germany under guard.

"What kind of managers are they?" said the peasants. "They fight for land because their Germany is too small for them and now it's lying fallow and growing over with weeds, and they're shipping our boys and girls to Germany to plough the land there."

The Hitlerites did bring in seed grain to some associations and appointed controllers to supervise its expenditure, but it was inferior, poorly selected seed full of mites and weeds. The peasants worked in the associations only when forced to. Some sabotaged deliberately, because they didn't want to work for the invaders; others simply didn't see any sense in working. The invaders had promised to give the best plots of land to those who distinguished themselves and who fulfilled the sowing quota. But no one any longer believed a single word of theirs. The Hitlerites forced the *polizei* to till the associations' fields. But even the *polizei* worked indifferently.

Harvest time came. Passing across the fields in

the summer of 1942 we saw a scene of frightful neglect. The crops of the associations hadn't been weeded. Besides, no more than half the former kolkhoz acreage had been sown. Only in their back-yard plots, and then not everywhere, had the peasants tended their crops, and then surreptitiously harvested the grain and threshed it with flails in their yards or even in the cottages. They staked their hopes on potatoes, which the invaders went after less eagerly.

The peasants said:

"They're a flop, those Hitlerite snakes. They don't know how to manage. What kind of managers are they if all they do is grab and they don't look after the land? They came and they grabbed everything, trampled and burned everything. They can't even handle what they've got yet they're going to other places to steal."

The fascist economic policy in the towns also amounted to plunder. All the big factories and mills were closed down. A few of their departments now housed tank, auto and aeroplane repair shops. In the summer of 1942 the invaders began mobilizing young men and women wholesale for shipment to Germany. The first to be sent were skilled workers.

This was a sign of the obvious weakness of the fascist state. The Ukrainian people were living through a tragedy, but at the same time they

couldn't help seeing that the Hitlerites were growing weaker day by day. .

The people were stiffening their resistance to the enemy. New hundreds and thousands of men and women went off to the woods to escape mobilization, transportation into Hitlerite slavery, slave labour on German estates.

Not everyone who came to the woods joined the partisans, however. Some groups had simply run away from the invaders. Lacking the strength and the resolution to attack enemy supply trains, they turned to the villages for food, and the peasants found themselves with a fairly large number of dependents. The trouble was that some of these groups were led by men who weren't politically staunch. Sometimes they stole chickens, geese and even calves from the peasants, thereby unconsciously doing the partisan movement great harm.

The R.C. discussed the problem of these groups. It was a dual situation. The very growth of the forest population testified to increasing resistance to the invaders. But people who simply hid in the forest weren't yet partisans. We decided to draw them into the regional detachment and conduct political education among them.

On July 28 the uniting of the partisan detachments was officially completed in the Reimentarovka Forest.



Already back at the end of 1941 life had pointed to the need for uniting the groups of Chernigov detachments. First they became platoons and later companies in one big detachment named after Stalin. In March 1942 we operated in the Zlynka woods in conjunction with the Oryol partisans under Markov, Vorozheyev and Levchenko. We set up a partisan garrison at that time to coordinate our defensive and offensive operations. Vorozheyev and his detachment left us. But from that time on Markov and Levchenko accompanied us everywhere. Then another fairly large detachment, commanded by Tarasenko, joined us. In addition, as I have already said, small groups of forest dwellers joined us, but it was too early to call them partisan detachments.

Why didn't we just make them companies or platoons of a single detachment? This, after all, would appear to be the simplest and most natural solution, the more so since some of the independent detachments were smaller than a company and some even smaller than a platoon.

It wasn't advisable, however. The point is that many of the detachments had been formed outside of Chernigov Region. Each had its glorious history. Each had ties with the district of its origin and often received replacements from there. Kolkhoz peasants who went off to the woods searched for their "own" detachment. This alone was reason



enough for us to have all the detachments joining up with us keep their old names.

A second and no less important reason was that the words "*united forces*" showed the small detachments and groups which were operating separately in the nearby forests that they too might *unite* with us. This name contained a formulation of our constitution, as it were.

I was appointed commander of the united forces, Druzhinin commissar and Rvanov chief of staff. Popudrenko became commander of the Stalin Regional Detachment, of which Yaremenko remained the commissar. The united forces comprised the Stalin Regional, the Voroshilov, the Kirov and the Shchors detachments. The following services were set up in the united forces: demolition, reconnaissance, mortar battery, quartermaster department, special department, communication department, propaganda section and cavalry group.

On the establishment of the united forces a ceremony was held at which all the detachments took the partisan oath.

By this time some of our men and officers had been cited by the Government: on May 18, 1942, forty-six of our partisans were decorated with orders or medals; the title of Hero of the Soviet Union was conferred on me.

At the end of July we learned that Hitler had ordered the partisans to be wiped out by August

15 and had specially assigned sixteen divisions with tank, air and artillery support for this purpose.

New fascist units indeed soon began arriving in the Ukraine. Now there were not only Germans and Hungarians among them but also Finns and Italians.

Naturally, Hitler's order wasn't carried out. But the enemy now began to hunt us with large forces. Clashes became more frequent and more violent. Besides, the newly-arrived troops set about burning down villages and plundering the population with special vigour, which immediately aggravated the devastation and famine. Hence our food situation grew worse too.

Beginning with the latter part of July the enemy gave us no respite. We were almost constantly on the move, and now and then we landed in a bad fix. In the second half of August we had a particularly hard time of it. We lost a good number of our horses in the swamps, and many of them we were compelled to eat. Lack of batteries deprived us of contact with Moscow and the front for some time. Yet we didn't slacken our blows at the enemy.

On orders of the command, an operations journal was started in each detachment of our united forces. "Chroniclers" were appointed by the detachment commanders to serve for a period of a month,

but there turned out to be some who liked the job so much that they became full-time historians, so to speak, of the struggle we were waging. Naturally, they weren't able to do their writing at any regular hours or days but only when the situation permitted. In choice of facts they had freedom. All the command required of them was absolute veracity.

At the halts our "chroniclers" would interview men and jot down notes; then at the big stops they would write them up. We managed to preserve the journals of almost all the detachments. Establishing who is the author of one or another excerpt, however, is now absolutely impossible.

The journal of the regional detachment describes the period from the end of July to November 1942 in sufficient detail. I shall cite it, beginning with the noteworthy day of July 28 when the united forces were set up and the oath was taken.

### OPERATIONS JOURNAL.

OF THE STALIN UNITED REGIONAL PARTISAN FORCES  
UNDER HERO OF THE SOVIET UNION A. F. FYODOROV

*"July 28.* After the orders were read out and the oath was taken there was a home talent program. It was got up by partisans Khmury, Kononov and Isenko, formerly of the Shevchenko Regional Theatre in Chernigov.

"We expected planes that evening and lit bonfires. But no planes came.

"Scouts reported that a large number of Hitlerite troops had arrived in Kholmy and Koryukovka. In the afternoon a group of Magyars and Germans advanced from the direction of Bogdanovka. Under pressure from the partisans the enemy retreated, abandoning a large-calibre machine gun and losing several men in killed, including one officer.

"*July 29.* Fighting began at the river crossing near Savenki. The enemy shelled our defences with guns and mortars but we didn't let him cross. Before our eyes a Nazi officer shot a soldier who refused to carry out an order of his.

"During the night the Germans occupied the villages of Reimentarovka, Savenki, Samotugi, Zholtiye, Syadrino, Oleshnya and Bogdalayevka. We heard the roar of motors all night long. Tanks arrived in Savenki.

"*July 30.* The Germans went over to the offensive and advanced as far as one of the pickets of our camp. Fierce fighting broke out near Bogdalayevka, where Company Two of the Stalin detachment, commanded by Balabai, was stationed. The 2nd Platoon of this company, under Bystrov bore the brunt of the engagement. "Bystrov didn't let the Germans reach the camp. He was wounded in the leg in this engagement. Fighting men

Popov and Goncharenko fired at the Germans point-blank from the Savenki side.

"One mortar annoyed us especially, and our mortar gunner Mazepin entered into a duel with it. He came out the victor.

"Tanks went into attack, but they got bogged down in the swamp and couldn't get out. By night the enemy had the camp surrounded with ambush groups. We were running out of bullets. Company Four was sent to the aerodrome to meet the planes, but the Germans turned out to be there. It had to fight its way back. It manoeuvred all night long and reached the woods toward morning.

"Men dropped to the ground from exhaustion and fell asleep. No one had eaten anything for twenty-four hours.

"All of a sudden we heard a German command yelled out. The enemy had come right up close to us, but before he had time to open fire the partisan guns went into action. The Germans fired haphazardly. Finally they fled, leaving behind their loud-mouthed officer with a bullet hole in his head.

"The order came to set up a defence ring. We could hear the rumble of trucks around us all the time as the enemy prepared to attack the camp from the direction of Zhukli. Mounted scouts came into sight. They took a look through their binoculars and returned to the village.



“At around eleven o'clock a German column came into sight.

“The men camouflaged themselves well. Vaska Pugnose (everyone called him that—only headquarters knew his real name) of the Kirov detachment froze to the grips of the heavy machine gun Avksentyev had captured from the Magyars some time back.

“The column came closer and closer. We let loose a hurricane of fire. The Germans fell, ran, crawled, searched for cover. The men went into attack and drove the Fritzes to the village of Zhukli.

“On the way back we picked up enemy equipment and peeled the uniforms off the dead Fritzes.

“We picked up two company mortars, three light machine guns and about two thousand rounds of ammunition. We counted more than sixty dead Fritzes. There were no losses on our side.

“A gun began shelling us from Zhukli. The shells fell not far from the camp. Nobody paid any special attention to them because dinner was just ready and everyone was busy appeasing his hunger.

“At nightfall we broke camp. The artillery intensified its shelling of the place where we had spent the day. The boys showed the Fritzes what part of their anatomy to kiss.

"There were some cry-babies and they got scared. We laughed at them and didn't answer their many fear-inspired questions. Most of the cry-babies were newcomers.

"The old-timers were sure the command would get us out of the encirclement. There'd been worse times.

*"July 31.* We took up positions between Kister and Zhukli. The day passed quietly.

"An order was issued to put aside carts for the wounded, abandon the rest of the carts, and set out at nightfall, without making a sound.

"We passed between Bogdalayevka and Chenttsy and halted at the old camp near the village of Budushcheye.

"At noon we heard shots and the roar of motors from the direction of Radomka.

"The enemy was pursuing us.

*"Night of August 1.* Followed our old route to the Bleshnyansk woods and stopped for the day. Around twelve o'clock we heard artillery fire. The Fritzes were shelling the Topolev woods thinking we were there.

"'Keep it up. You've got enough ammunition,' the boys joked.

*"August 3.* We crossed the Snov River and came out into the Solovyovka Forest, in Oryol Region, where we called a halt. We were following an old and familiar route.

"At twenty hours we set out through Solovyovka. The inhabitants gave us partisans a hearty welcome. The peasants treated us to bread and tobacco and asked if the Red Army would be coming soon. They were happily surprised to see so many of us.

"Balitsky was the officer of the day. When the column had passed out of Solovyovka he returned to make sure there were no stragglers in the village. He ran into an old woman and said to her:

" 'Auntie, were there any partisans here?'

" 'There were.'

" 'How many?'

" 'A million.'

" 'Say, auntie, do you know how to count to a thousand?'

" 'What are you pestering me for? Maybe it wasn't a million, but the earth shook anyway.'

"That day in the woods we discovered holes in the ground in which bullets lay hidden. Soon their owners, a group of paratroopers who had recently come down, joined us.

"At nightfall we moved on and we pitched camp between Sofievka and Velikiye Lyady.

"Through August 14 there was fighting on various sectors of our defence positions. Our supply of ammunition dwindled. The enemy occupied all the surrounding villages.

"Our provisions ran out. We ate horsemeat. Two hundred grams per person.

*"Morning of August 15.* Before we had time to finish off the next horse the Germans began artillery preparation from three sides at once. They pounded us from mortars and guns. Then soldiers with bloodhounds appeared.

"We gave it hot to the Fritzes and their hounds and didn't let them get to the camp.

"The commander of the united forces, Hero of the Soviet Union Fyodorov, issued an order to abandon the carts, put everything into packs, and make stretchers for the wounded. The order was quickly carried out.

"When it was all dark we set out. We crossed the Voronova Guta-Sofievka road and made our way through a swamp.

"We carried the stretchers with the wounded on our shoulders. The wounded groaned and begged us not to jolt them.

"We crossed a road and halted in the woods. We all immediately lay down to rest after posting pickets and patrols. The cooks began boiling horse-meat. They had to go to a ditch two kilometres away for water.

"After resting and eating some meat, many went to the ditch to wash up and do a laundry.

"Quartermaster Kapranov was happy. 'I certainly did feed the boys today—gave them five hundred grams of horsemeat each!' he said.

"Meanwhile Goebbels' pals were running

around in our abandoned camp and photographing the carts we had left behind so they could publish their current fraud in their newspapers: 'The partisans are wiped out to the last man. This is all that remains of them.'

"*August 18.* Scouts got the lay of the land along our further route. We halted for two days and then struck north through a thick swampy forest. We crossed the railway line at the village of Krasny Ugolok.

"While we were crossing it an eastbound train passed but the situation was such we couldn't even fire at it.

"We halted in the village of Medvezhye to dig potatoes. We dug them out with our bare hands and filled our pouches, sacks and pockets. We hadn't had potatoes for a long time.

"*August 21.* The scouts spent a couple of days looking for a place to ford the Iput River. We finally had to turn to an old forester. We watched his every step because he had a son serving in the police force.

"On orders of the command the united forces push on farther. A group headed by Balitsky is being left here to divert attention and to carry out demolition work.

"*August 23.* We said goodbye to Balitsky's group. By 19:00 we were ready to set out. At 19:30—forward march.



"The column advanced in complete silence; only the crackle of dry twigs underfoot was to be heard every once in a while. We marched through swampy terrain. It was hard going; each partisan carried his own gear, and ammunition and weapons. After eight kilometres we made a halt near the forester's lodge. Here the crossing of the Iput began.

"The horses, exhausted from their heavy loads and the march, gave out and floundered in the swamp. Some of them were unable to get out at all. The packs were taken off these horses and distributed among the men.

"Around midnight we reached the river. The men stripped to the skin. The river was more than a metre and a half deep, and they had to carry everything above their heads.

"We got safely across the river and came out on Byelorussian soil.

"Morning came. The men gazed hopefully at a village, where a chunk of bread or a boiled potato might be obtained. But no one had the right to leave the ranks without permission.

"Soon we reached our stopping place for the day. The detachment began to pitch camp. After that we dug wells and peeled potatoes. Some lay down to rest.

"A detail sent to the village surrounded the *polizei* dormitory and opened fire at it. The *polizei*

were taken unawares. The partisans' accurate fire wiped them out mercilessly.

"Political instructor Leonenko was killed in this skirmish. Misha Yegorov was wounded and machine gunner Yesentimirov was missing.

"The men took rich booty: butter, bread and honey. We had an abundant and tasty breakfast.

"On the way we came across a lot of ashberries. We picked them hungrily and ate them.

"*August 25.* We crossed the Besed River. The detachment didn't call a halt in order to get away from the enemy, who was bringing up forces. The boys could hardly move their feet. Every 200-300 metres they dropped to the ground from exhaustion.

"The command permitted a four-hour halt to make dinner.

"We had chopped firewood and dug wells when suddenly the order came: 'Stop cooking dinner; the halt will be only two hours.'

"Not knowing what was up, the men began swearing. But orders are orders. There was nothing for it but to lie down on the wet ground. Just the same we slept like the dead.

"An hour and a half later the order rang out: 'Get ready to move.'

"That was the third day we'd been marching and fighting day and night without hardly any food or sleep.

"Fyodorov, Popudrenko, Druzhinin, Yaremenko and Rvanov were marching along with us. They had given their horses to men who couldn't walk.

"Around ten kilometres from the Chechersk woods a village came into sight. The command decided to put through a foraging operation.

"A detail headed by Kudinov, political instructor of Company Three, was assigned this job. Despite their extreme weariness the men went into action with joy. After the very first shots the *polizei* fled. The men found out from peasants where the house of the *polizei* and the house of the starosta were.

"In the deputy starosta's house the scouts discovered a barrel of honey. In the storeroom they found two more barrels. Then another five. They brought the honey to the camp, where it was distributed among the units.

"August 26. We entered the Chechersk woods and pitched camp between the villages of Yamitsk and Vysokaya Griva. Untended cows were wandering about in the woods. Quartermaster Kapranov greatly rejoiced at this.

"The owners of the cows proved to be Svetilovich and Chechersk partisans whose commander had crossed the front line after a lost battle. Left without leadership, the detachment had broken up into small groups which were hiding from the Germans.

"The commander of the united forces managed to round up these groups and form a Svetilovichi and a Chechersk detachment. They joined our forces.

*"September 3. Crossed the Pokot River.*

"We blew up several German trucks on the Chechersk-Sidorovichi road.

*"September 11. Had a skirmish with the enemy. We took cover at the edge of the woods south of the village of Sidorovichi. Soon a column of Hitlerites came out of the village. We let them come within fifty metres and then opened up machine-gun, tommy-gun and rifle fire. They took to flight. We mowed them down; the wounded screamed.*

"Nurse Valya Protsenko kept a close watch on the Fritzes crawling across the field and shouted, 'There, there's one, shoot him!' Valya was wounded in the shoulder. A bullet rent machine gunner Sasha Shirokov's ear.

"On the road, near the bridge, we planted a mine in such a way that a peasant cart could get past safely but a truck would be sure to be blown up. Machine gunners lay down in ambush. A truck appeared. Its left rear wheel ran over the mine.

"There was a deafening explosion and the truck, carrying ammunition, flew into the air.

*"September 12. Our column moved northward in pitch darkness and a pouring rain. We halted several times along the way to wait for the laggards. Not to get lost we had to hold on to the horses' tails.*

"The rain kept up in the morning. We halted near the village of Guta Osipovskaya to cook dinner. A cloud of smoke rose over the forest. The Fritzes noticed it. Shells began flying into the camp. One of the men from the supply unit ran over to the demolition squad and hid from the shells behind some boxes of TNT. That made everybody laugh.

"In the evening the column set out again. We marched through the settlement of Krinichny, south of Mikhailovka. German horses were grazing out in the meadow there, and the boys took advantage of the opportunity to exchange their worn-out ones.

"We skirted Larnevska on the south, turned northeast, skirted the village of Medvedi on the south and captured flour from two windmills there, as well as the *polizei* on duty.

"September 15. Stopped in the woods southeast of the village of Poporotnya. There was no water and we had to dig deep wells and wait until water flowed in. Fighting man Lopachev related: 'I was down in the well, and on top there was a pail almost full. I'll put in one more dipperful, I thought, and then I'll take it to the kitchen. I dipped it out, straightened up and saw a skinny nag staring at me. Beside her was an empty pail....'

"September 16. The woods ended. On a clear moonlit night we came out on a field and went



on to the Besed River between Khotimok and Kiselevka. The grass was white with early morning frost. We started crossing. The men quickly stripped and entered the water without making a sound. All that could be heard was the water splashing, and some of the fellows' teeth chattering.

*"September 19.* Rested two days and began preparing for a big operation. Everybody was eager for action; those who for some reason or other weren't allowed to take part were very disappointed.

*"September 23.* In the evening a group of about 300 partisans under Popudrenko left camp with the objective of routing the garrison in the district centre of Gordeyevka.

"Besides, they had orders to destroy the distillery in the settlement of Tvorishino.

"A Voroshilov detachment company headed by Markov set out for the distillery.

"The main blow at Gordeyevka was dealt by Company One and Company Two of the Stalin detachment. Several groups from the Shchors detachment lay in ambush by the road.

*"September 24.* By 4:00 the units were at the jump-off line. Telegraph poles were toppled to the ground and communications cut.

"There were still two hours before the beginning of the operation. Almost all the men lay down

in a roadside ditch to rest and to get some shelter from the cold autumn wind.

"The officers gathered around Popudrenko, who gave them last-minute instructions.

"Soon they got their units up. Shivering with the cold, the men took their places.

"At 6:00 our battalion mortar opened up. This was the signal for the attack. The men broke into the village and scattered down the streets. A window in one of the houses crashed and a policeman jumped out of it. He ran a little way and then hung on a fence like a dress put out to dry.

"The partisans ran up to the house of the chief of police. He dashed into the next apartment and jumped out of the window.

"Vasya Kozlov shouted: 'Stop, don't shoot, boys!' and ran after him for all he was worth.

"The traitor was caught and executed on the spot.

"Company One came up to the commandant's office. The Fritzes, hiding behind a brick garage, started throwing grenades over it.

"Mazepin cleverly picked off one of the Germans who had been throwing grenades and shouted: 'Boys, the Fritzes are beating it! Follow me, quick!'

"They took the commandant's office.

"The remaining fascists fled to the mill, where they too met their death.

"In the main the battle was over. In the back gardens and at the edge of the village partisans were still smoking out Fritzes and their henchmen. A beer-bellied burgomaster was caught too.

"We freed the people who had been arrested. Among them was a schoolteacher whom the Hitlerites had arrested for playing Soviet songs on a phonograph to schoolteachers whom he had called together for a district conference at their orders.

"Almost all the inhabitants came out into the streets without waiting for the battle to end. The peasants eagerly asked us about the front, about the Soviet Union and the Red Army and willingly helped us ferret out Nazis. One resident stuck a pitchfork into a Hitlerite examining judge.

"They showed us an enemy leaflet promising 50 hectares of good land and 50,000 in cash for Fyodorov, dead or alive. Besides that they promised salt, matches and a choice of an unlimited quantity of rum or vodka. For Popudrenko—30,000 in cash. For medium officers—10,000 apiece. For a rank-and-file partisan the price was 5,000 plus salt, matches and kerosene.

"'Who wants to make some money?' Popudrenko asked the people gathered around. They burst out laughing.

"We opened the warehouses and distributed salt, matches and other items among the population.

"*October 3.* Rested after the operation and turned

back. The enemy fired at our column from ambush. Companies One and Two of the Stalin detachment immediately deployed.

"Avksentyev's machine guns opened fire. Ser-yozha Mazepin peppered the enemy accurately with his mortar. The enemy fled, leaving behind forty dead and four trucks on fire.

"Our losses were two killed and three wounded.

"After quickly crossing the bridge and then the railway our column bypassed the hamlet of Sokolovsky and halted at the camp of local partisans commanded by Shemyakin.

"We remained there about ten days. Everybody rested up. In the evening the partisans danced to an accordion and sang songs. The propaganda department put out a new issue of our talking newspaper.

"Everyone especially enjoyed the couplets about a man from the supply department, Zyama Davidovich, who had shown fear during the operation but had gone around collecting eggs and chasing chickens when the enemy was smashed.

"For a long time after the men chanted:

"*'Zyama chick-chick, Zyama chick-chick.'*

"Companies One and Two of the Stalin detachment wiped out an Italian garrison in the village of Botayevo.

"They captured a lot of wine, cookies, candy and the like from the Italians.

"A neat and foppish Italian came riding into

our camp. From his saddle hung a shiny nickel-plated coffee pot. He had come to join us in fighting against the Hitlerites but that coffee pot prevented us from taking him seriously.

"Here too a group of war prisoners headed by Kostya Lysenko joined us; they came with thirteen rifles and three light machine guns.

"Soon we left that hospitable forest and set out via Osinka, Vyukovo, Sadovaya and Kotolino, where we again crossed the Iput.

"*October 27.* Balitsky's group caught up with us. We hadn't seen our tip-top demolition men for more than two months, and of late hadn't even had any news of them. We gave them a grand welcome. The officers kissed each man in turn and presented each of them with some Italian wine; those who asked for it got alcohol too.

"The intrepid commander of the demolition men read out his report to the command of the united forces in the presence of all the men:

" 'Between August 23 and October 25 the demolition group which you assigned to the Bakhmach-Bryansk and Gomel-Chernigov lines accomplished the following: 1) Killed 1,487 German invaders, including 327 officers and one general. 2) Wounded 582 enemy soldiers. 3) Destroyed 9 enemy trains, 10 locomotives and 125 railway cars. 4) Held up traffic on these lines for a total of 191 hours. 5) Blew up 5 trucks and 1 passenger



car on the highways. 6) Executed 10 starostas and policemen.'

"November 3. The forest we entered is called the 'Kletnya Woodlands' by the local people.

"It is fairly big and is solid, merging on the north with the Mukhin woods and on the east with the Bryansk woods.

"As soon as we arrived we began building dug-outs and auxiliary structures.

"Besides our united forces there were many other detachments based in this forest, forming a huge partisan camp.

"On all sides roads and paths led to the neighbouring detachments: Shemyakin's, Shestakov's, Apanasenko's, Zebnitsky's, Yeremin's, Gorbachev's, Antonenko's, the Kletnya district detachment, the Mglin district detachment and others.

"We saw with our own eyes the sweep the partisan movement in the enemy rear had taken. Thousands of indomitable souls had gathered here to take vengeance on the hated enemy for their defiled land, for the blood of their people.

"An area of several hundred square kilometres was a veritable partisan region. In dozens of villages and settlements people lived the life of free Soviet citizens, immune to fascist oppression.

"The population helped the partisans out with food, warm clothing and means of transportation.

"A watermill in the village of Kotalin with a

daily capacity of almost five tons catered to all the partisan detachments.

"In the village of Nikolayevka a wool-carding plant had been set up. The inhabitants of the villages in the locality gladly gave the partisans grain, potatoes and hay, and milk for the wounded. Partisan hospitals were quartered in village houses.

"In their turn the partisans did garrison duty in all the villages, safeguarding the labour and the tranquillity of peaceful Soviet citizens.

"The village lads helped the partisans do garrison duty. The girls knitted mittens and made camouflage cloaks.

"The partisans delivered newspapers to the population, regularly supplied them with Soviet Information Bureau bulletins, and when contact with Moscow was established began demonstrating films and arranging lectures by qualified speakers who flew in from the Soviet rear.

"An aerodrome was laid out on a field near the village of Nikolayevka. The 2nd Platoon of Company One was put on guard there. At an agreed signal bonfires were lit at the aerodrome every night.

"*November 10.* All the preparations had been made to receive the first plane to land. At eleven in the evening came the drone of an approaching plane. The gigantic silhouette of an aircraft was

outlined against the dark sky. After circling several times in greeting the huge craft landed on our aerodrome. A loud 'Hurrah' rang out.

"The partisans rejoiced. The flyers eagerly told them about the Mainland, about Moscow, about the factories and kolkhozes, and treated them to Moscow cigarettes.

"At the height of the conversation the commander of the united forces, Hero of the Soviet Union Fyodorov, rode up.

"He took in the gathering with a happy glance.

" 'Well,' he said 'goodbye and good luck,' and he quickly climbed up the steps into the plane.

"The engines roared, and the plane's bright lights flashed on. The plane ran down the level white length of the field, took off easily and after circling several times in farewell headed east."

\* \* \*

The gunner-radioman lifted in the ladder and slammed the door. I rushed to the window but only had time to catch a glimpse of a bonfire. The engines started roaring and the plane gave a jerk and began bumping over the snow mounds. Our aerodrome, after all, was very far from perfect. A few seconds later we were off the ground.

We had taken off from Little, or partisan, Land, and if the flyers were to be believed we should be in Moscow in three hours.

I found it very hard to believe this even now when the plane was picking up speed and the icy chill of the heights was penetrating to my skin.

My feelings at the time were much more complex than that, though. Wild joy, exultation and gay boyish enthusiasm were somehow illogically mingled with thoughtfulness and even fear.

Yes, I was afraid—not of an accident or of death, but that I might not reach Moscow. Closing my eyes, I saw Red Square, the Bolshoi Theatre, Gorky Street. . . . I saw Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchov rise from his desk, I saw the door open and Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin come in. . . .

To tell the truth, I had greatly envied Kovpak, Saburov and all the other partisan commanders who went to Moscow in August. I knew that I too had been among those invited to attend a conference of partisan commanders at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks). But there was no radio communication with us at the time, as the reader knows. The Central Committee and partisan headquarters sent two groups behind the enemy lines one after the other especially to locate our detachment. One of these groups landed in the enemy's positions and went heroically to its death; the other, after wandering about in the woods for a long time finally managed to find us at the end of October. These comrades brought us a new portable radio

transmitter and it was they who told us about the August conference in the Kremlin with Comrade Stalin. But even if the messengers had arrived in time I still wouldn't have been able to fly off to Moscow: the enemy was pressing us so hard at the time that we couldn't have taken the chance of letting a plane land.

Of course I, like all of my comrades, had been greatly excited by the news that a conference of partisan commanders had been held with Comrade Stalin. The messengers naturally couldn't give us any details of this conference. But we saw that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) and the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of the Ukraine were worried by the break in radio communications with us and the absence of regular information about our situation and our operations. We also saw that the Party and Comrades Stalin and Khrushchov personally were awaiting a detailed report from us.

We all realized that in a week or two, or in a month, as soon as there was an opportunity, a plane would come to us from the Soviet rear, take on the heavily wounded and perhaps bring me an order to fly to Moscow to deliver a report.

Indeed, no more than two weeks had passed, and I was already on the way to Moscow.

In the heavy map case resting in my lap I



was carrying a report to the Central Committee of the Party on the combat and political activities of our underground R.C. During the previous two weeks the R.C. had met frequently, despite difficult marches and constant clashes with the punitive forces that were pressing us hard. Now in a farmhouse on the outskirts of a village, at night, now around a fire out in a field, we had discussed each page of the report at length. And once, when we had taken shelter from the autumn rain in an abandoned Italian van, we had gone off into daydreams. . . . Yes, daydreams, although we were drawing up a report. We already knew by that time that Kovpak and Saburov had received some sort of new assignment from Comrade Stalin. We realized that a report is not only a summing-up of the past but a glance into the future as well. Upon how the Party, how Comrade Stalin, evaluated our combat activities and our work among the population would depend what we could be entrusted with in future.

I opened the map case and leafed through the report. In its terse and laconic lines were embodied all our thoughts and feelings, our hopes and our dreams. . . . I again saw Moscow in my mind's eye, and again fear gripped me at the thought that something might happen to the plane.

Meanwhile, however, all was going well: we were flying through inky darkness; inside the

cabin a tiny bulb burned dimly; I could hear the muffled voices of my companions.

I kept glancing at the dial of my watch but I couldn't make out how much time had passed. No matter how hard I tried to remember the time, when I brought the watch to my eyes I saw I had forgotten again.

The co-pilot opened the door of his cabin and announced that we were flying over the frontline. I went in to the pilots, and all of a sudden I saw the front. We were flying at an altitude of four thousand metres. It was a clear night but there were no stars—or perhaps I didn't notice them for the many bright lights flashing above the earth. On all sides green, red, violet and yellow rockets were streaking through the darkness. Long sharp beams crept along the ground in various directions.... I didn't immediately grasp that these were headlights. Never in my life had I seen such a blinding display of fireworks....

The co-pilot shouted something in my ear, and at the same instant a whole sheaf of rays rose in the air. The silvery wing of our plane glistened, and red globes began bursting around us, quite close. I gazed at them in fascination for quite some time before I realized they were anti-aircraft shells—the very thing we had to fear most!

The plane was evidently climbing. It became unbearably cold. I returned to the big cabin and

knelt beside a window. All the rest, except the severely wounded, also had their faces glued to the panes. Soon the bursts became fewer. Now breathing was easier: the plane was losing altitude fast. My heart stopped hammering, but I suddenly felt all my muscles aching.

Another forty minutes passed. The co-pilot again opened the door of the cabin and said we were approaching Moscow.

The aerodrome was lit up very dimly. Strange faces surrounded us. I kissed someone with whiskers, then everybody moved aside and a woman in uniform stretched out her hand: she evidently didn't intend to kiss me. Her handshake was abrupt and firm. She introduced herself in a loud voice:

"Lieutenant Colonel Grizodubova."

We went with her down a park lane lightly powdered with snow. A door was opened, and I saw a bright light, dozens of tables covered with white tablecloths, and a crowd of men in flying suits and fur jackets.... Everybody shook hands with us. We ate, drank toasts, answered a multitude of questions, laughed heartily.

This was the airmen's messroom at an aerodrome outside Moscow. Here, it appeared, men returning from distant missions could get a hot meal at any hour of the day or night.

A little after six in the morning Lieutenant

Colonel Grizodubova told us that cots had been made ready for us and we could take a rest. I asked her how our wounded had been fixed up and said I would like to visit them. She replied that all of them were now asleep in the aerodrome hospital.

In my little room I undressed and lay down between two amazingly white sheets, though I knew very well I wouldn't be able to fall asleep. As I stretched out and breathed in the fresh smell of clean linen I felt extraordinarily light. And then I burst into laughter: on the chair beside me hung very strange gear: an enormous hat with a ribbon across it, a Magyarka, or jacket of thick Hungarian lambskin, and a leather coat. Also a tommy gun, four spare drums, a Mauser, an automatic. . . .

A minute before all this had been on me. Probably no less than fifteen kilos! That was why I felt so light now.

Comrade Grizodubova had said rooms were reserved for us at the Moskva Hotel and that cars would call for us.

We waited and waited, and then Volodin, who was an old Moscovite and knew his way around there better than any of us others, suggested that we take the suburban electric train into town.

The idea appealed to us. We quickly dressed, said goodbye to our hospitable aerodrome hosts and set out for the station.

\* \* \*

At first the car wasn't crowded. Only a few women and some schoolchildren got on at the same time we did. Then an old factory worker sat down beside me.

As the car filled up we noticed that the passengers were staring at us. The old man was the first to speak to me.

"Say, son, where do you come from?"

"What do you mean where from, dad?"

"Can't make you out—from the guns you're carrying you look as if you're going into battle. But from your clothes you don't look like soldiers...."

A grimy-faced trade school boy sitting opposite said in a clear voice:

"They're partisans!"

"How did you guess?" Yaremenko asked.

"The German tommy guns, the moustaches and the ribbons. Anyone who knows anything can see that. I bet you shaved off your beards, huh?"

That set conversation going. A minute later we were the centre of attention. The passengers showered us with questions.

"Is there a Morozov among you by chance?" an elderly woman called out over the heads of the people in front of her. "Victor Nikolayevich Morozov? They broadcast over the radio that he's serving in a partisan detachment but they didn't say where."



The Moscovites displayed an interest in absolutely everything pertaining to partisan life. Every time one of our boys spoke, the people in the car fell silent, as if they were at a lecture. We were stirred and touched by this attention. We observed that the Moscovites had an exaggerated conception of the danger the partisans come up against. When we tried to belittle it, our audience protested:

"Come, you're being modest. We know. . . ."

I told the trade school boy that we had more than twenty youngsters his age in our detachment. At first he got all excited.

"Can I join up with you, really? How I'd like to! I've got two brothers at the front, and I'd be helping them!"

The people around laughed. The boy flushed in embarrassment.

"No, I understand," he said, looking out of the window, "altogether different people are needed."

"That's right," the old man confirmed. "You have to be a hero. The partisans, my young man, are men of a special mould. You and I, we haven't eaten enough spinach."

This conception of the partisans as some kind of legendary giants—essentially a very harmful conception—had been drummed into people by newspaper feature writers. Later, after reading newspapers and magazines in Moscow, I

saw that the stories about partisan deeds were often inventions. The heroes in these stories were so boundlessly brave and so extraordinary that it was hard to believe they were real human beings. And it is no wonder that the average reader thought: "how can I compete with such daredevils?"

I often regretted that we didn't have a writer in our ranks, who might have truthfully told how *the most ordinary* of Soviet men and women were 'battling in the forests, how heroism was becoming an everyday necessity for them.

We in turn were also surprised by everything we saw. No doubt the way I scrutinized a tall thin woman in glasses seemed not at all proper. On her shoulder, like a rifle, she held a spade wrapped in a cardboard folder.

Noticing my glance, she smiled and said:

"Why do you stare at me so?"

"Frankly speaking, it's not at you but at the spade...."

"Really? Why, yes, that's true, it must seem funny if you're not used to it. But just take a look around you...."

I followed her advice, and only then did I notice that almost all the passengers carried spades wrapped in cloths or paper. And almost all of them had heavy sacks or baskets.

"Potatoes—the staff of life," a young working woman explained gravely. "We're heroes of the spade, comrade partisans.... And why not?" she went on, warming up to her subject. "I guess everybody here dug trenches all around Moscow with these same spades, and how much sand we carried up into the attics!"

"Now you're letting your tongue run away with you," the old man put in, interrupting her. "Moscow doesn't put any stock in tales of woe. Men are risking their lives out there, and you talk about spades...."

We stood up for her. What we had heard in the car evoked our admiration, and a thirst for vengeance, and respect for the courage of the ordinary Soviet working people.

When we had been riding for some time I felt like taking a smoke. I rolled myself a cigarette and got up to go out on the platform.

"That's all right, dad," said the conductress. "Smoke in here, you're a guest. If it comes to that I'll explain to the inspector."

I looked at her with interest. She couldn't have been a day under thirty.

"I don't think I'm old enough to be your dad," I said.

"How old are you?"

"Forty."

"Well, well! It's hard to believe it. And you probably wouldn't believe I'm twenty-two. So figure it out yourself."

We both laughed. Everyone around broke into a smile. Why? You'd think we ought to feel blue. . . .

"That's what we are like, we Russians," the old man remarked thoughtfully.

When we came out on Komsomolskaya Ploshchad the general attention we attracted made us throw out our chests. We formed ranks without even being aware of it and marched off in step. We marched into the Metro station that way too.

Ten minutes later we were exchanging kisses with Strokach, Korniets, Spivak, Starchenko and Grechukha. There were many top men of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party and the Ukrainian Government living in the Moskva Hotel at the time. Leonid Romanovich Korniets arranged a gala breakfast.

As I listened to the speeches and toasts, I could hear the clang of streetcars and the honking of automobile horns out in the street. . . .

"Look here, comrades!" Balabai suddenly cried, interrupting everybody. "Why, this is Moscow, dammit all! We're in Moscow! There's the Kremlin over there, and Comrade Stalin's there! So let's drink to Moscow and to Stalin's health!"

After this toast it became so noisy that of

course I could no longer hear either the street-cars or the autos.

To my regret, Comrade Stalin wasn't in Moscow at the time.

"Wait a day or two," I was told, "Joseph Vissarionovich will return...."

But Comrade Stalin was delayed by battle-front affairs, and I didn't get to see him.

I had to content myself with what Comrades Grechukha, Korniets and Strokach related. They had been at the Kremlin reception together with Kovpak and had heard Joseph Vissarionovich's message to the partisans. What Grechukha and Strokach related prepared me for my meetings with Comrades Kalinin, Voroshilov and Malenkov. Many of the questions I had planned to ask were already answered.

Knowing how busy the members of the State Committee of Defence were, I thought my meetings with them would be brief and strictly official.

Functioning in Moscow at that time was the Ukrainian Partisan Headquarters, the actual chief of which was Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchov. Notwithstanding the great deal of work he conducted as a member of the Military Council of the South-western Front, and later of the Voronezh and First Ukrainian fronts, Comrade Khrushchov personally directed the partisan movement in the Ukraine. The chief of staff of the partisan movement



was Comrade Strokach. Also functioning in Moscow was the Central Headquarters, the chief of which was Comrade Ponomarenko, secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Byelorussia. In charge of the headquarters was Klimenty Yefremovich Voroshilov.

During my meetings in Moscow with officials of the Central Committee of the Party and of the partisan headquarters I came to see how large the partisan forces were, what a gigantic scope the people's resistance movement in the enemy rear had acquired. What was perhaps even more important, I came to see and to feel that the partisan movement occupied a significant place in the total armed forces of the country, and that it was being planned and directed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) and by Comrade Stalin personally.

In the Central and Ukrainian headquarters I made the acquaintance of highly-qualified officers who were maintaining regular operative contact with the remotest partisan districts. After talking with Strokach and Ponomarenko I learned that when we lost contact with Moscow it had been a misfortune not only for us: the Central Committee of the Party had searched for us and headquarters had sent alarm signals into the ether twenty-four hours a day.

I learned that on an assignment given by Comrade Stalin numerous specialists were working day in and day out on new types of partisan weapons, were designing mines and silencers for firearms. If we hadn't then got lost we would have received some of the new inventions by this time.

I learned that thousands of volunteers in all parts of the country were sending in applications to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) and the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of the Ukraine requesting, and some even demanding, to be sent to the partisans. These weren't only Ukrainians and Byelorussians anxious to take a direct part in the struggle for the liberation of their native soil. Applications were being filed by men and women of the most diverse nationalities inhabiting the Soviet Union.

All these applications were forwarded to the partisan headquarters. Here the applications were carefully studied, and very many applicants were summoned to Moscow.

I learned that schools training the volunteers in the act of partisan warfare already existed. These schools trained radio operators, demolition men and officers and gave advanced training to flyers working on partisan airlines.

I learned, finally, that there was a special partisan hospital in Moscow. Hundreds of our

comrades-in-arms had already been treated in this hospital and had flown back to their detachments.

I will say it frankly—in Moscow my self-respect as a partisan rose greatly, especially after I became acquainted with some of the overall results of the partisan struggle. These figures took my breath away. It goes without saying they could not be published at the time. But I very much wanted to hurry back and tell the men in the detachments what the partisan movement really was.

Yes—to tell the partisans what the partisan movement was. Actually they knew very little about it: only what they saw and were doing themselves. Yet in Moscow every person I met asked me one and the same question when he learned that I came “from out there”: “What is the partisan movement? Tell us in detail....”

On November 12, 1942, I was received by Comrade Voroshilov. After Ponomarenko had introduced me, Klimenty Yefremovich shook my hand and said:

“Be seated. Deliver your report—as fully as possible.”

\* \* \*

I reported for more than two hours. Actually it wasn't a report but an animated and informal conversation. It was Klimenty Yefremovich himself

who set the informal atmosphere. At the very beginning of the talk he said to the generals and officers who were present:

"I must warn you that Comrade Fyodorov is not a military specialist but an R.C. secretary. On certain specifically military points he is entitled to make mistakes."

I strove not to abuse this right, of course. Klimenty Yefremovich asked me a host of questions, and although I had prepared long and earnestly for the report, some of them took me unawares.

When I finished reporting, Klimenty Yefremovich rose from the table, looked searchingly into my eyes and said:

"You probably realize that the fate of the war is now being decided at Stalingrad and that . . . in the near future the front will come closer to you. The Red Army's offensive will be sweeping. Have you thought about how partisan tactics should be revised to correspond to broad offensive operations by the Red Army?" Without giving me a chance to reply he went on: "Your aid will be very much needed by the Red Army."

Klimenty Yefremovich stepped out from behind the table and led me up to the wall, which was almost completely covered by silk draperies. Drawing them apart to reveal a big ten-kilometre scale map which was marked up with coloured pencils

from top to bottom, he took a pointer and drew it around the districts where Gomel, Chernigov and Oryol regions met. I probably wasn't able to hide my surprise at seeing that the entire course of our movement for the previous half year was indicated on the map by blue arrows. What especially surprised me was the fact that the very latest data, which I had submitted to headquarters only the day before, were already indicated.

Noticing my surprise, Klimenty Yefremovich smiled.

"Just about correct? Well, don't you think it's time for you to move from here toward some big railway junction, straddle that junction, become the master of the situation there and not let enemy trains through to the front?"

I didn't know what to answer right off. Comrade Strokach spoke ahead of me.

"May I, Comrade Marshal? The Ukrainian Headquarters considers that Fyodorov's united forces ought to return to Chernigov Region from the Kletnya woods as soon as possible."

"Bakhmach?" Klimenty Yefremovich put in animatedly. After a moment's thought he continued:

"The Bakhmach junction will do, but so will the Korosten or the Shepetovka.... Incidentally, Comrade Fyodorov, do you know that Kovpak and Saburov have set out on a long-distance raid west?"



That's not a bad thing, either. Here the proximity of the front will hamper you. Wouldn't it be better to withdraw a bit deeper? There's a smaller concentration of occupation forces there.... Have you the forces for a long-distance raid? We will give you some help, naturally.... Very well, don't answer at once, think it over. Only bear in mind that it's time to intensify demolition work considerably. That's the main thing now. In his talks with us Comrade Stalin directs our attention to this activity. Your united forces have some experience already, haven't they?"

"Forty-six trains," I said.

"What do you use? Where do you get your explosives?"

"We received TNT. We make the mines ourselves. Lately we've been getting explosives too from German shells and from dud air bombs."

Klimenty Yefremovich evinced an interest in our homemade products. I told him how we melted down TNT from shells and how we hunted for dud bombs.

"The Hitlerites, Klimenty Yefremovich, are training their flyers in precision bombing and are sending them out to bomb separate hamlets, flour mills and small villages. Many of these bombs don't go off. As soon as our demolition men spot a group of such 'trainees' they immediately gallop off to 'catch bombs.' The villagers even get angry at the

boys. 'You devils,' they say, 'you're glad when they bomb us.' Of course, it's no great joy, but we need the TNT."

"You mean to say they bomb just like that, by way of training? Not even as punishment for partisan operations?" Shaking his head, Klimenty Yefremovich added: "We must write about such facts, tell the people, the soldiers. . . . But let us get back to our conversation. And so," he continued, "what do you need so as to be able to make a long-distance raid? You have already thought the question over and agree that you ought to?"

I really had come to such a decision but had resolved to list our requirements before saying so. I asked for more tommy guns, machine guns and anti-tank rifles, for several field guns, radio stations and mobile printshops, and spoke about our everyday needs as well. But it so happened that I forgot to mention explosives.

"You see, Comrade Ponomarenko," Klimenty Yefremovich said to the chief of staff, "your commanders underestimate demolition work."

It was a regrettable slip, all the more regrettable since I was fully cognizant of the importance of demolition work. There was nothing for it but to set myself right.

"Discuss with Comrades Ponomarenko and Strokach which sector to choose, and plan your route," Klimenty Yefremovich said.

Then he returned to details of partisan life. He asked how the men's rest and recreation were taken care of, how the food was, and how the partisan hospitals were functioning. He paid especially great attention to ties with the population.

"Build up partisan reserves and Red Army reserves along your route. You understand what I have in mind? The impression you leave with the people as you pass through and your propaganda and agitation work will prepare thousands of helpers for both you and us. That is an important phase of your activity, very important."

In parting Klimenty Yefremovich said:

"You would probably like to see your family, wouldn't you? Will you visit them?"

I replied that I hadn't tried to as yet and that I didn't even know their exact address, but that if I could find the time I would certainly visit them.

"Wouldn't it be better, perhaps, to bring your family here, to you? Really, Comrade Strokach, arrange the matter. I will issue instructions about a plane. Is such an arrangement agreeable to you, Comrade Fyodorov? Well, that's fine.... Get ready for the raid, and don't forget anything...."

With this we parted.

Two days later I met my wife and daughters at the Central Aerodrome.

Incidentally, they claim they recognized me from the window of the plane, although I had

changed frightfully and was wearing an outlandish partisan sheepskin coat. They also said that when they climbed out of the plane and rushed up to me my right cheek worked like a telegraph key.

I still don't know whether to believe them or not.

Some time later Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchov arrived in Moscow. He invited me to a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of the Ukraine. At this meeting I delivered a report on the year and a half's activity of the Chernigov underground R.C. and the combat operations of our united partisan forces. It was decided at the meeting to split our forces in two and to send one detachment on a raid deep into the Western Ukraine.

Kherson-Moscow,  
June 1947-July 1948

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