WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

THE SOVIET MAN AND OUR STRUGGLE

Report of the delegation of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to the Soviet Union in 1944

Publisher's Note

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THE SOVIET MAN AND OUR STRUGGLE

What was completely new to me in the Soviet Union — despite having read so many books and articles and heard stories from those who had been there — was the Soviet man.

There is no doubt that the deep roots of the characteristics of today's Soviet people lie in the historical development of Russia, the Russian state, and especially Russian culture, which has given humanity an indelible sense of soulfulness, a feeling of justice and selflessness. But it would be incorrect not to add that the Soviet system, the Party and the Komsomol, having grown from the deepest and most intimate aspirations of the people, have developed and nurtured these very qualities in Soviet people.

The Soviet man is warm-hearted, joyful, straightforward and selfless. No one responds to love like he does — with love. He is justifiably distrustful of foreigners in general, and justifiably hates Germans. But even this distrust and hatred are not inherent traits of the Soviet man; they are not an integral part of his inner, emotional and psychological characteristics, but have emerged from painful experience.

This distrust and hatred are of a special kind.

The distrust is the result of prolonged and persistent hostile actions from abroad. In our time, it is normal for one state to act against

another. But in the case of the Soviet Union, these actions have always aimed to change the internal social order, which is deeply intertwined with the life of the people, having emerged from three great national revolutions. Later, when the storm of war began to loom, these foreign actions became closely linked with plans to conquer the Soviet Union or to annex parts of its territories, involving all sorts of diplomatic and military manoeuvres. Of course, the Germans were at the forefront of this, but they found support, and even continue to do so, among certain groups in all countries, groups that from time to time had lesser or greater, and sometimes even leading influence.

And yet, this distrust would still be incomprehensible if one does not see or understand how inseparable the Soviet system is from the life of the people today. The vast Soviet state apparatus, the government, and the Party are deeply connected to and have grown out of the people. For example, I saw collective farms and village soviets that were almost automatically, by the force of a law that had become natural, unforced and self-evident, restored after the Germans retreated. To me, this seemed as natural as a person thrown into the water, upon surfacing, begins to breathe again. It is impossible to distinguish, without deeper conversation, a Party or Komsomol member from an ordinary Soviet citizen — what the Party speaks of, what *Pravda* writes, comes from the heart and mind of the average Soviet citizen, elevated and made

into a matter of national importance. Every Soviet citizen feels what *Pravda* writes, but perhaps couldn't articulate it in the same way. When I say that, at first glance, it is difficult to distinguish a Party member from an ordinary citizen, I mean to confirm that the cause of the Party has become, completely and unreservedly, the cause of the Soviet man, and not that a Party member is in every way equal to an ordinary citizen. One does not become a Party member through privilege or favour, nor for career advancement, but through selfless dedication to the work for the people, through persistent struggle for the realization of the people's aspirations and interests.

In the USSR, I saw countless Soviet people, from our cook Grigory Ivanovich, our driver Panev and the girls who served us during meals, to soldiers from the Second Ukrainian Front — Aksyonenko and Gurikov — from ordinary citizens, workers and collective farmers, to higher officers, officials and enterprise directors. I saw countless people in all positions and professions, and in the first encounters, I could hardly distinguish who was a Party member and who was not. They were all so connected, so fused with the Soviet system, and the policies of the Party and government so clearly expressed and guided their thoughts and desires.

During a break at a reception with Stalin, Molotov asked me about my impressions of the USSR. I briefly told him that what impressed me the most was the Soviet man, and that I hadn't seen anyone naked or barefoot. He re-

plied that the war had prevented people from having everything they needed and that their clothes were very worn. "You see," he added, "they might choose a worker who has excelled in his work to preside over an assembly, but he asks not to be on the podium because his pants are patched." Molotov thinks about the worker with the patched pants, but that same worker, somewhere in the Urals, knows that Molotov, the Party and the government think about that too, and knows that the war will pass and there will be even more of everything again.

Since the October Revolution, conspiracies have frequently been hatched abroad against such a system, such a Party and government, and against the life of the Soviet peoples. Hence the distrust towards foreign countries. However, this is not, so to speak, distrust in the literal sense of the word; it is not really distrust at all, but caution, acquired through long, often costly experience. The Soviet man is not inherently distrustful or suspicious, but rather of an open and warm-hearted nature. And when love, warmth and trust come to him from abroad, he returns them a hundredfold; then you won't see even a shadow of distrust in him.

To prevent any misunderstanding, I want to emphasize, particularly concerning England and America, that I did not meet a single person in the Soviet Union who did not wish to maintain warm, friendly relations with these countries even after the war.

The selfless struggle of our people in

this war, our liberation war without political speculation, without — so to speak — hidden agendas, has created an unlimited trust among all Soviet people in our moral worth, in our inexhaustible heroism and selflessness. The wide, boundless soul of Russia has opened fully to our people. In the darkest hours of the Soviet Union, somewhere in the gloom of the European prison, in the gloom of a Europe whose forces the Germans had turned eastward, a small country was fighting "the right way," as the Russians would say — beyond its government's actions, beyond all expectations, without any treaties, selflessly, steadfastly, sincerely and tirelessly. This has been felt and is still felt today by the noble, selfless and sincere Soviet man. We encountered in the Soviet Union the same love that our people feel for the great Russian people, for the Slavs of the USSR. At times, it seemed to us, when coming into contact with Soviet people, that it wasn't they — the Soviet people — who were speaking about us, but rather one of our own — a partisan from the 1st, 13th, 19th or any other brigade, a peasant from Krajina, Dolenjsko, Lika, Zagorje, Durmitor or Kosmaj, a fisherman from the Adriatic or a boatman from the Sava and Danube — who spoke, pouring out their love for the Soviet Union.

Our fight against fascism for the liberation of our country has earned the trust of the Soviet man; in response to our love, the Soviet man has answered with his selfless love, with the sole desire to help us in every possible

way to achieve victory and live happily in a free, independent state. The love of the Soviet man, boundless and open, which is his natural characteristic, can be earned through honourable, selfless struggle and love — and we have earned it.

The hatred towards the Germans is also of a particular kind.

There is nothing animalistic or primitive in it. The Soviet man knows nothing of hatred and intolerance toward other nations. He has been raised in the ideas of humanism and internationalism. This is how he entered the war, and this is how he will emerge from it. But something has changed in the Soviet man: he has realized that there are nations whose reactionary classes can, in certain periods, almost entirely mobilize them. This happened with the German people. The masses blindly following Hitler and his generals are not just the Junkers and capitalists, but workers, peasants, intellectuals — in short, the Germans. This mass has been steeped in crimes for three years, without even a moment's awakening of what the world knows as human conscience. The Germans, unanimous in their crimes, are guilty of provoking such unanimous hatred among the Soviet people. This hatred is terrible; it has risen like a storm in the souls of millions, it has become a terrifying material force — and it will crush everything that stands in its way. In the Soviet Union, one feels that the Katyushas, cannons and machine guns are spewing the fury and hissing with the anger of the offended masses... Indeed, here it

is more a matter of outrage than hatred; the Soviet man was momentarily stunned: are there really people who can kill children and rape young girls? And when the Soviet man saw such creatures on his own soil, he rose to destroy them and cleanse his land.

Such is the nature of that hatred.

Let me add this as well.

In a conversation with Senior Sergeant Yesmukov, a Chuvash, on the Second Ukrainian Front, I asked him — what would he do in Germany, would he take revenge for the murdered Soviet women and children — on the German women and children? The question surprised him. Could such a thing even be imagined? "I can't even imagine that one of our people would kill a woman or a child."

We talked little about the Germans with the Russians. A few words, a glance — and we understood each other. What they did in the Soviet Union was identical to what they did in our country, in alliance with their zealous pupils — the Ustaše and Chetniks. The Germans, both in our country and in the Soviet Union, waged war against the people — against men, women and children. And they provoked the entire population and the people's hatred against them. Just as in the Soviet Union, in our country too, this is a war for survival, fought with the same ruthlessness and severity, with the same methods and feelings. The Soviet man knew this either through the radio and newspapers, or — much more often and naturally — through his own suffering, efforts and trials, sensing it with his noble soul.

In the struggle against the same soulless enemy, like the Soviet people, we too have been filled with hatred, sharing the same fate, the same steadfastness and persistence in the fight, the same noble ideals for the liberation of our homeland, and the solidarity of the Slavic man against the German invasion. This love, which grew in the hardest of times for both us and them, the selflessness — both ours and theirs — in the war, has made it so that today our people in the Soviet Union truly feel at home. At the front with General Koroteyev, General Polbin and Bragin, we felt as though we had come to our own partisan military leaders. We spoke with them as with our own, more or less on similar, "our" topics, spontaneously avoiding all that was taken for granted — how the Germans were behaving in our country, whether we would fight to the end, to the final destruction of Hitlerite Germany, whether our people loved theirs and theirs ours, etc. In these long conversations, we found nothing that separated us, no thoughts or desires that differed, no difficulties, doubts or trials that this all-encompassing war had not brought both to us and to them. And I heard that a soldier, after talking to us, said: "They are just like us."

This war against fascism, our relentless struggle, whose significance can only be fully felt from abroad, and especially from the Soviet Union, where the rest of the world does not seem so large as from our small and undeveloped country, this war has swept away in the relations between our and the Soviet

man, between our and their country, all that had stood in the way — in their distant past, and especially in our recent past — so that we could go, people to people, without intermediaries, to meet each other.

It can be said with a clear conscience that today in the Soviet Union, from the deepest masses to the farthest reaches, there is a nationwide sentiment and love for the Yugoslavs.

When the first Soviet plane was set to fly to Yugoslavia, to explore the route through which aid could be delivered to us, a crew was requested to volunteer. Over a hundred crews volunteered, and the general struggled to turn the others down. When Lieutenant Colonel Comrade Švob from our military mission visited the base from which material was being sent to Yugoslavia, the brave Soviet pilots told him: "You see, if they would allow us to fly during the day from Moscow, so we could see the terrain... We fly at night, we can't see anything, and yet we so want to see your country."

In the Ukraine, in recently liberated areas, I saw Soviet peasant children playing "Yugoslavs and the Germans," which naturally ended with our victory. When *Pravda* reported that Stalin had received us, it published large pictures of our leaders on the front page. Knowing the mood of the masses, *Pravda* increased its print run that day. People in the streets were scrambling to get a copy of *Pravda* to get our pictures. They carried them in their notebooks, framed them and hung them on the walls of their homes. Today, our leaders are the most beloved and popular foreign

figures.

Flying at night during the German attack on the Supreme Headquarters near Drvar, the Soviet pilots saw the fiery ring around our units. They asked to fly again next time, but with bombs: "We'll drop them on the Germans. It may not have much military significance, but the partisans of Yugoslavia need to see that we are with them."

Indeed, in the Soviet Union, as soon as our people set foot on Soviet soil, they felt that the Soviet peoples, Soviet individuals and Stalin unwaveringly supported our fight against the German conquerors.

In the units of the Red Army, at every conference, the speaker must talk about Yugoslavia, presenting and analysing all that is new with us. This is the same in the rear lines. Speakers are bombarded with countless and diverse questions from all sides. The Soviet people know much about our fight and its nature, although they do not know much about our country, its history or its culture.

To what extent our struggle inspires the Soviet people is best illustrated by these two examples.

At an anti-fascist rally of Soviet youth in May this year, speakers urged the Soviet youth to look up to the heroic youth of Yugoslavia. Our speaker, Lieutenant Comrade Bogdan Popović, barely finished his speech due to the applause. He sat to the right of the president, and to the left was a representative of the partisans from the Ukraine.

The All-Slavic Committee is overwhelmed

with letters from doctors, nurses, engineers, students and Red Army soldiers — all asking to go to Yugoslavia to offer their help. The committee's president, the pleasant and cheerful General Gondurov, jokingly told me: "If we recruited volunteers for Yugoslavia here, the Red Army would have to relocate there."

The love of the Soviet man is selfless and noble.

The love of the Soviet people for our country in specific is selfless and noble, it is the love of people for people, of one nation for another, born in the fight for human dignity, for the independence of both our homeland and theirs. Nowhere and with no one have we noticed any tendency to interfere in anyone's internal affairs, not even in ours. When we asked the Commissariat of National Defence to introduce the title of commissar in our military unit in the USSR, they presented many counter-arguments: that such titles did not exist in Czech and Polish units, political considerations, etc. Finally, the matter reached Stalin. He resolved it, as usual, simply and briefly: "It is their army, let them do what they want with it."

In the Soviet Union, we were often asked, as we talked about our battles, how we could fight the way we did and whether we had any doubts — when the Germans were near Moscow and Stalingrad. No, our people, like theirs, never doubted that Russia could fall or that the Red Army could be defeated. During the Fifth Offensive in our country, the people of Moscow constantly asked each other what

was new from Yugoslavia. From the press that carried news from foreign agencies and *Slobodna Jugoslavija,* it was clear that our situation was difficult. Everyone sensed that something big was happening. "We were very worried about you then," one Russian told me, "but we could never believe that you could fall, that they could destroy you. We saw that the people were fighting there, and the people are invincible and indestructible."

We believed in the immortal Slavic Russia, and we were not mistaken. Today, the Russians believe in our people, and we will never let them down. Brotherhood with the Soviet Union was our salvation in this war, and the most cordial relations with them in the future are the strongest guarantee of our state and national independence in the face of the threat of a resurgence of German imperialism. Our costly and bloody wartime experience teaches us this.

During the fiercest battles in Stalingrad, the Red Army soldiers constantly asked about Yugoslavia, about the battles there. In Stalin's city, where this war reached its most intense and significant point, the Soviet man felt that somewhere far away, in the Balkans, small brotherly nations were selflessly and devotedly helping, through their fight for liberation, to crush the German scum of history and save their homeland. In the noble soul of the Soviet man, immortal in its love for people and nations, a joy flared — knowing that there were such nations in the world as ours, and such people as the partisans of Yugoslavia.

And that joy, that love for us, born in the darkest hours, burns and will burn for centuries with an inextinguishable flame.

June-July 1944

WITH THE RED ARMY

ABOUT A CITY THAT BECAME SMALL AND ITS PEOPLE

Nothing can be as bleak as a city after an occupation. Neglected streets and lawns, houses with wounded walls, people in tattered clothes. Everything seems empty, bare, mutilated.

One such city is Uman, in western Ukraine.

It was immediately obvious as soon as our plane landed smoothly, without a jolt, as Soviet pilots always do. By the side of the vast airfield, chimneys and iron skeletons of buildings and hangars were sticking up. The Germans, retreating, had destroyed them. And once, it is clear, there had been green lawns, parks, aviators' clubs and avenues where, as the Ukrainian summer evening descended like a silk scarf, joyous Soviet youth strolled.

The impression of destruction, of life that was once joyful and thriving, came upon us as soon as we landed, and it remained throughout the city. Everything felt strangely familiar. Everything resembled what had happened to our small towns, so we felt both sadness and something warm and close. We pitied the ruined innocence of the city, full of springtime growth, its mutilated trees, its disfigured lawns and gardens. But it was also dear to us, familiar, like seeing our own wounded city, our own suffering people who once rejoiced in life, thought, loved and dreamed.

Yet, in that wounded, devastated city, in

that bleak atmosphere, the people did not give in. A month after the Red Army's arrival, they began to restart their halted lives, to heal the wounds that the Germans had inflicted on the city and its people.

The people we met there did not allow the sad image to settle in our hearts. Instead, they filled us with immortal, creative strength, the kind that does not yield to any evil. It is the strength that overcomes not only the enemy on the battlefield — in bunkers or airplanes — but also resurrects the life that had died, rebuilding, creating and restoring what the enemy had destroyed. From the dead, lethargic state the Germans had thrown the city into, with few hands and little strength, they moved on to creative work, whose powerful currents lifted the weary and suffering people back to their feet.

At the airfield, we were greeted by Soviet officers, including two major generals — Nasetkin, from Marshal Konev's staff, and Bragin, the deputy commander of an aviation unit. Nasetkin was a calm, quiet, gentle man with a soft smile, while Bragin was lively, brimming with jokes and energy.

They took us around the vast airfield. Even there, there was much to see. Fragments of destroyed German planes, shot down by Soviet attack aircraft, lay everywhere. There were also two of the largest German planes, the so-called "Giants," six-engine monstrosities that could carry over 100 soldiers — a handy invention for escaping German command posts. Scattered around were countless

German bombs, "five hundred pounders" and "thousand pounders," like fat slaughtered pigs, and many smaller ones, resembling piglets. The cheerful Bragin explained: "I've tested these German bombs. Not all of them go off with German fuses. But with ours, every single one! A German bomb with a Russian fuse — just the thing for a German — sausage with Russian salad!"

After we toured the airfield, we headed into the city. There were few people on the streets, mostly women, poorly dressed with weary faces, wearing strange smiles on their lips and in their eyes — simultaneously joyful and sad, a smile so immediate, so painful and blessed with suffering that it immediately captured the soul and remained unforgettable. Such an expression, such a smile, was on everyone in the newly liberated territory.

As we passed, we were shown a huge, half-destroyed building, without a roof or windows, and a courtyard surrounded by barbed wire. "This is where the Russian prisoners were held, in the dead of winter, during the worst frosts... Most of them were killed," Nasetkin told us as he approached. Now, in the courtyard, sat German prisoners in tattered, familiar olive-green uniforms, so dull and expressionless that none of them stood out from the others. They were waiting to be sent elsewhere, and for now, they were experiencing the comforts of the camp they had built themselves.

Bragin told us, "The Germans are strange beasts, even among themselves — real ani-

mals. Look at the prisoners. When one of them gets sick, even before he dies, the others strip him of his trousers and boots. They have electricity for the whole barrack, for example, and some will cut the wire to tie their pants."

It was a warm May day, and I imagined how it must have been for the Red Army prisoners, wounded and hungry, while blizzards howled through that enormous hollow building and the curses and shouts of drunk German guards echoed.

In the middle of the street, at the entrance to the city centre, stood huge iron monsters — a "Panther" and two "Tigers." There, in front of the tortured citizens, in the heart of the city where they had sown terror, they had been immobilized by the hand of the Red Army. Now, they were dead, dull, as expressionless as their captured masters...

They put us up in a house on the outskirts, where everything remained intact, except for the furniture. There was even a piano, out of tune, its polish eaten away by alcohol — the Germans hadn't had time to take it.

The owners of the house, a professor, his wife and their children, had been killed.

Around the house was a garden, full of apricots and cherries, blooming lushly — purple, white and pink. We had pleasant conversations with the people we had just met and so easily understood. Young Ukrainians, newly mobilized, marched through the streets, their footsteps echoing, their voices filling the air with military songs. It would have been a beautiful scene if not for the memory of the

professor and his family, a memory awakened by everything around — the garden he had tended, the piano his eldest daughter had played on. The Germans had lived there, taken and destroyed everything they could, but there was still the shadow of the family's presence, while nothing remained of the Germans except the traces of alcohol on the light polish.

In the evening, we explored the city, sprawling across the hills around the river; it was larger than it had seemed to us at first, and it wasn't small at all. There were just a few people left in it: the Germans had killed 23,000.

The Germans had looted all the valuable buildings and houses, and they had managed to do so. They had also destroyed the bridge over the river, but the citizens had repaired it themselves during the fighting, allowing the Red Army to immediately continue pursuing the enemy. The suffering city did everything to prevent the Germans from escaping it.

Uman had felt the power and fury of the German invaders, but it had also seen their misery and cowardice. They had fled through its streets barefoot, throwing away their boots to pull their feet from the mud faster. They left behind tens of thousands of motor vehicles and tanks. And now, in the streets and gardens of Uman, there lay massive amounts of rusted metal, formless — it was clear that the Soviet attack aircraft had indeed worked precisely.

We spent the evening in the company of

Uman's intelligentsia. There were people of various professions and ages, from an old Russian doctor who had come to Uman before the Revolution, to the bishop and the president of the city council.

The Germans had imposed a feudal state on the village. In some places, they "distributed" land to the peasants. But only in some places, because the German overlords knew that this would ruin rural agriculture and yield less plunder. They preferred to give entire collective farms to deserving Hitlerite butchers, newly minted barons and counts. The baron was supposed to provide tribute to the German army by killing and beating his slaves. Or they simply prescribed a certain amount of grain and meat for the collective farm to deliver, under the threat of destruction. The Germans found "elders" (village leaders) among the remnants of former classes or, where there were none, among the peasants. And it must be said that not all of these elders sided with the Germans; some sabotaged them and helped the people and the partisans.

In the Soviet Union, there were traitors, but there was no Fifth Column. Such a massive and brutal war, with such a deceitful enemy, revived remnants of the former classes and broke people of weak character. But these were individuals, not a movement, organization or current, like in the rest of the world. The Germans could create spies here and there in the USSR, but never a quisling military organization or government. The Ukrainian emigres, the so-called "nationalists" that the

Germans brought along with them, came to a land that no longer recognized them, where they had long since lost their roots. They spoke Ukrainian, but to the people, they were Germans, worse than the Germans — people who had learned the language of the people only to torture them more easily and assist the conquerors.

The Russian Orthodox Church was heretical to the Germans, and the bishop told us that he had spent six months in prison because he refused to speak against Patriarch Sergius. "The Germans," said the bishop, "wanted to turn our holy Russian church into a mouthpiece that would repeat Goebbels' propaganda and pray for the Führer's health." An elderly doctor told us about the atrocities the Germans committed against the wounded, about the destruction of medical facilities and the Ukrainian people. And so on... The president of the city council, a young, small, thin man, with great concern visible in his weary eyes, told us about everything — about the difficult days of occupation, organizing partisans, the underground life and struggle. "There were about 8,000 partisans in our region... In many areas, the Germans advanced before mobilization could be completed, and we partisans were mobilized under occupation and sent thousands of people to the ranks of the Red Army. I was elected president of the council after the arrival of the Red Army, and there is much work to be done — we must rebuild our shattered lives..."

And they had already begun to rebuild it...

Some factories, hospitals and schools were operating again, ruined homes were being restored, streets were being cleaned...

In the morning, we visited a beautiful park, one of the most magnificent in Russia, built by Prince Potocki. It is an enormous complex in the woods, with lakes, statues, secluded corners for reflection, all constructed in ancient allegories. Massive stones were brought in, caves and stone hills were made, and thousands of serfs perished in the gruelling labour that Count Potocki undertook to recreate, in the Ukraine, the ancient Greece of the Greek woman he had won in a game of chance. The descendants of those serfs preserved its beauty and freely enjoyed it.

The Germans neglected the park and desecrated it with their cemetery on a vast field on a hill. But the Ukrainians levelled the cemetery, and now fine Ukrainian wheat grows there.

In the park is also the Agricultural Institute, a hundred years old. Anticipating that the Germans might burn it, the diligent scientists, who had spent their lives among plants and flowers to make life easier and more beautiful for people, took on a different task — political struggle, mobilizing the staff, forming underground Komsomol and Party organizations to bury the invaluable library. And they buried it.

In the greenhouses of the Uman Institute, rare plants from all continents bloom. The Germans tore out the flowers, but the hungry, ragged scientists and staff restored and main-

tained them. "We knew the Red Army would come, so we preserved every plant," the director told us. And an old woman, who had been tending the flowers for 40 years, all light and transparent from work and years, gave us a bouquet and said, "Our own have come and saved everything. The German is like a pig, he knows only how to destroy, but he got what he deserved, and he'll get more until he never dares to come here again."

The Soviet people do not succumb to any evil or hardship. In the park, women, poorly dressed, some even barefoot, were cleaning and tending the paths. Plants flourished under the careful care of the elderly, the scientists and the students in the gardens of the Uman Institute. Everywhere the Red Army had passed, things were blooming again. And the people of Uman, who had not faltered during the occupation, in poverty and suffering, were rebuilding their happiness, their joyous free life, full of flowers and fragrance.

GERMAN WAR MACHINERY GRAVEYARDS

The Ukraine is a beautiful land. We saw it in the spring when its gentle forms were shaded with the greenery of groves, birch forests, pastures and fields.

From Uman, we travelled through the villages of Pomojniki and Mankovka to the Potash railway station. The vast Ukrainian fields, green, were crisscrossed with tank tracks and riddled with shell and bomb craters. On this

warm greenery, all of it resembled living, open wounds.

It had not even been a month since the Red Army swept through here like a storm. Everywhere were traces of the German defeat.

It is one thing to read in a Soviet Information Bureau report that a German armoured division has been destroyed, 6,000 trucks captured or destroyed, an ammunition depot seized and so on. But how magnificent it looks in the fields on the battle paths! How ordinary everything appears in the well-organized trophy weapons exhibit in Moscow, where not only all kinds of German military weapons are on display but also all their gear — from uniforms and radios to paper bandages and straw winter boots from 1941. How insignificant all that seems compared to the gigantic displays of wrecked German war machinery scattered across the fields of the Ukraine! Imagine a vast collective orchard where hundreds of trucks, cars and tanks, loaded with fuel and ammunition, have caught fire. Bare, scorched trees peek out from the enormous pile of shapeless, burned-out metal, overturned like an avalanche. Imagine ten kilometres of road with one, two, sometimes five or ten rows of wrecked trucks, tanks and motorized artillery, overturned to clear the way for the advancing Red Army. And farther away, out in the fields, you'll see a truck or tank sticking out of the wheat — its owner had thought that by veering off the road and hiding in the field, he could avoid detection by Soviet tank crews and pilots. But this cowardly trick was far too

shallow. Now they lie there, like scarecrows, in the Ukrainian wheat.

And all of this is just the equipment that couldn't be immediately repaired or reused, the items that haven't yet been hauled away to Soviet factories. Soviet work battalions for repurposing trophy equipment are still at work, creating one functional vehicle from ten wrecks and sending it to the front. German tanks and cannons aren't used at the front — the Red Army's command gives its soldiers better, Soviet-made equipment.

Everywhere along the roads, you can see German motor vehicles that had been brought to the southern Soviet front from Africa. You don't need to check the driver's logbook to confirm the routes they took — these vehicles still bear the zebra stripes and desert paint from Africa. Although the Germans are quick at camouflaging and changing their appearance, the Red Army moves so fast that they didn't have time to adapt...

At the Potash railway station, death has frozen everything in place, from the "Panther" tanks to the last motorcycle, belonging to the "Adolf Hitler" armored division and attached units of the 16th Division. But the grimace of death is still visible.

The division had disembarked at the station and was preparing for battle. The Red Army, with lightning speed, cut off all their escape routes. Boris Nikolaevich Kampov, from Marshal Konev's headquarters, pointed to the forests from where the Soviet firestorm had descended upon the steel beasts.

The division's commander tried to form a battle line. He set up a circular defence and sent out tank patrols, which the Red Army crushed in the fields and at the forest's edge. And so, in that circle, in that chaos and confusion, death caught up with the division. Tanks were buried deep in the now-dry mud, their long cannons pointed in all directions. There are dozens of them — "Panthers," "Tigers" and massive motorized artillery pieces. They are burned out, riddled with holes, and as you look at them, frozen mid-motion, mid-leap, you cannot help but feel that they were just alive and powerful moments ago.

It is here that one truly understands what the Red Army has done for the peoples of Europe, crushing the German army, so heavily armed. Who else could have broken such a monster, who could have melted so much steel and silenced so many deadly mouths? Who else could have destroyed millions of criminals, firmly united by plunder and murder, and armed with the latest technology against the unarmed masses across Europe? And Europe remained silent, gave Hitler its labour, opened its mines and factories for him. Nowhere, like in the USSR, do you see — when looking at French tanks and heavy artillery, Romanian oil and Dutch cheese — how the Red Army had to break the material force of all of Europe, organized by Hitler.

As we continued on toward the front, we drove past a captured German depot. For three kilometres along the road, on both sides, every 50 metres or so, in wooden sheds

the size of small barns, lay stacked every type of German ammunition. It felt as though we were driving down the street of a town. But that is just one street — further into the forest, along the entire length of the forest road, there were more rows of sheds. It was a whole town of German ammunition. With their innate meticulousness, the Germans had numbered the houses and streets so that, as General Bragin joked, "It is not hard to find your way around this neighbourhood if the Red Army needs anything."

That is what things look like after the battle. And that is, more or less, what a typical, quite common, report from the Soviet Information Bureau looks like.

IN A VILLAGE WITH SOVIET PILOTS

We find ourselves in a Ukrainian village, near a guards aviation unit. In the Soviet Union, one is immediately engulfed by a sense of something extraordinary — epic and heroic. There is a feeling that you are lifted and strengthened by the energy and unity of a great people and great deeds. But nowhere, as with the pilots, does one feel the courage and bravery more intensely.

The history of this unit is an epic in itself, full of the most incredible feats and experiences, defying the belief that in war, only technology is decisive, and that it plays the leading role. "It is the human element that matters," say everyone in the Red Army, and they truly

prove it. We saw countless images of precise strikes, showing clearly that such accuracy can only be achieved by people who are passionately dedicated to their work, transferring their thoughts and feelings into the machines they operate. For instance, three planes with pilot-snipers were enough to destroy the bridge near Iași, whereas theoretically, according to probability calculations, 102 planes would be needed to guarantee a hit.

The Hero of the Soviet Union, Colonel Gavrilov, young, handsome and fit, was given the task near Velikiye Luki to dive-bomb enemy batteries twice. His plane was set on fire by enemy fire even before the first dive, but he continued flying and, with the plane ablaze, completed both dives.

The burning plane, smoking and spitting out bombs and machine-gun fire at the Germans, was moments away from exploding. Gavrilov stubbornly remained in the cockpit and managed to land between the lines. He saw soldiers from both sides running toward him, and just as he stepped out of the plane, someone struck him on the back of the head. Later, when he regained consciousness in Russian dugouts, they told him there had been a fierce battle around the plane, with fists and rifle butts. The Russians were stronger and rescued him. "The mission was accomplished," Gavrilov says in the end.

What do these words mean in the Red Army?

They are a vow and a sacred trust. To accomplish the assigned task is the thought of

everyone, from soldier to marshal. To complete it precisely and fully — that is what the Red Army soldiers are taught, and that is what they have mastered.

Everywhere in the Red Army, order and discipline prevail. Some aspects of discipline may seem too strict or incomprehensible to some (for example, a younger soldier must stand up at the table when speaking to a superior, or he must ask permission to pass in front of him, etc.). But after spending just a day or two in the Red Army, feeling the high political consciousness, the dedication to completing the mission, the loyalty to the commander's orders, one quickly realizes that none of this is formal or unnecessary, but rather essential, inevitable — I would even say natural — because it is part of the work toward victory.

The Red Army is one big family, where everyone respects and loves each other, and all mercilessly fight against carelessness, laziness, indifference and disorder that hinder this community from winning and living.

Nowhere is this more evident than among the aviators, selected from thousands for their courage, boldness, discipline and loyalty. Yet, the pilots are not conceited. Major General Polbin, tall, robust, sinewy and strong, rightly says, "The infantry is the most important; the foot soldiers are the best. This spring, aviation had little work due to the mud, but the infantry carried everything in their hands — guns, fuel and ammunition — and drove the Germans out of the Ukraine."

The Ukrainian mud is thick and black

like tar. Nothing but tanks and infantry could break through it. Supplies and manoeuvres were impossible. Evacuating the wounded was extremely difficult. The entire land turned into a black, sticky paste. The Germans relied on the power of the mud, but the Red Army proved stronger than both the mud and the Germans. Soldiers fought waist-deep in the mud for three days straight without stopping. The Red Army soldiers cut down forests and paved kilometres of roads with the logs, dragging cannons by hand and carrying ammunition and fuel on their backs. The Germans couldn't handle it, neither in spirit nor in organization. Their supply lines were cut, and in their retreat, they abandoned everything — from tanks to boots. The pilots saw all of this and helped as much as they could. The fearless Soviet falcons, from their high blue skies, witnessed the titanic efforts of the infantry and were filled with admiration: "We only assist the infantry," says Polbin, "they're the ones who track, catch, chase and destroy the enemy."

In the dining room, located in a schoolroom, there was cleanliness and order. Soviet people, wherever they are, live with culture and neatness. It is pleasant to sit, after a hard day, after a battle, at a clean table. On the table were white tablecloths and flowers — spring lilacs and jasmines, their gentle fragrance wafting warmly to the battle-hardened Soviet soldiers.

In the village, we spoke at length with the peasants, especially with one peasant woman,

Evgeniya Kogut. She is an ordinary, simple Ukrainian peasant, and the conversation with her is significant only in that it provides a picture of what an average, non-party woman thinks about the collective farm, about Soviet power and what she knows about politics.

Evgeniya Kogut's husband went to war, and she hasn't had any news from him. They lived well together and got along. But the war shattered their happiness. Still, she doesn't mourn — she works hard, fights through and waits. Perhaps one day, now that the village is free, a letter will come.

She has no children or a husband to help her. And she speaks of the collective farm in a sober manner, like a responsible head of household, yet tenderly, like a mother. She says, "Our collective farm is already working as it should."

She recounts how, before the collective farm, she lived well. It was just her and her husband, with a prosperous home.

"But it is better in the collective farm. You don't work like an animal. You're not afraid of drought, hail or anything. Whether the harvest is good or bad, you feel that all of the Ukraine, all of Russia, is standing behind you. In the collective farm, you live without worry or hardship."

On the small plot that doesn't belong to the collective farm, she grows enough that many of our own peasants would be satisfied to have that much land. Each peasant has been left enough land and given enough opportunities for personal life that they can easily achieve

anything they want for their household. The collective farm is about advanced agricultural technology and the planned organization of work on vast, shared lands. But how much someone works, how many "labour days" they accumulate, with what love and skill they work — that is how much they'll earn. Evgeniya Kogut puts it nicely: "The hardest part was getting used to showing up for work on time, by the clock."

Under the Germans, the collective farm was truly destroyed. People had no will to work; they worked as slaves for the Germans. Everything was deteriorating — the technology, the organization of labour, the quality of crops and livestock. The peasants were thrown back not just to the time before the collective farm, but far beyond, to the slave plantations of antiquity. The return of the Red Army revived everything. The people threw themselves into work, determined to rebuild their shattered lives.

The collective farm system has united the peasants and the proletariat, uniting their lives and their fate. It has given the USSR that unbreakable inner strength and opened limitless possibilities for future development. Collectivization is the most epochal event in Russia since the October Revolution. It cemented the revolution, turning the ideas of October into a living reality.

Evgeniya Kogut's village was liberated just fifteen days ago. But it is being rebuilt with a natural vitality. "We've begun to live again," Evgeniya says.

A lieutenant came to the village after three years at war to find his wife and children. But the Germans had killed them. I didn't see tears in his eyes. They were as hard as steel. He sat with the peasants, asking them about the collective farm, giving them advice. "I'll come back to you again," he said, "after we destroy the Germans. There's no life for us as long as the Germans exist."

The peasant women quietly wipe their tears with their scarves as they look at him. The aviators gathered around him remain somber and silent. Then, an elderly woman says, "As long as you're alive, everything will be alright... As long as we have you, our falcons, everything will heal."

AT THE FRONT

We didn't see much of the front, if by the front one means the thin line where the Russians and Germans face each other. Everything is so well hidden and camouflaged that you practically have to step on a trench, cannon or tank to notice anything.

Lieutenant General Korotayev took us four kilometres from the Germans. The outskirts of Iasi, with its church tower, could be clearly seen on the bright day, just behind a hill. There we found Major General Martirosyan, a handsome and solid Armenian. He only needed to take a few steps from his dugout to reach a periscope, through which he could see every point of his section of the front. He had direct communication with all the com-

manders, and it only took him five minutes for about a hundred Soviet cannons, positioned left, right and behind us, hidden in the bushes, to unleash fire on the edge of a forest. In that thunderous roar, the air above our heads began to hum with countless different sounds. It felt as if, flying through the air, countless invisible houses were collapsing.

"Katyusha is playing," Korotayev smiled.

"Katyusha," as the soldiers affectionately call the guards' mortar, a secret powerful weapon of the Red Army, didn't play for long. It was just one chord. And in an area of about a hundred square metres, dozens of flames flared up, black smoke billowed, and furious, powerful explosions echoed.

As we were leaving, General Martirosyan, shaking our hands, said:

"Please, in my name and in the name of... (here he mentioned his unit)... greet your leadership and the brave fighters of the National Liberation Army, and tell them that we all know they are our brothers in everything, and we dream of the day when we will embrace them."

Martirosyan wasn't much of a speaker, but the power of his words came from the fact that he spoke from the heart, with an open, almost child-like smile on his face.

That was the front, directly. It was considered inactive. At night, on the Prut, a winding, muddy river sneaking through the willows, we listened as the Germans pounded Russian positions with about 150 cannons, and the Russians answered with twice as

many. Sometimes in the morning, we would hear the sound of "Katyusha" again, heard from as far as six or seven kilometres away.

But the front isn't just a thin line of trenches. The front is the deep space, often fifty or more kilometres wide, where all the reserves, warehouses, vehicles, anti-aircraft artillery, aviation, medical units and so on are stationed. Streams of material and personnel flowed along the communications to and from the front. Ordinary Russian girls, with freckled, round faces, were regulating traffic at every crossroads. Along the roads, every fifty metres or so, small trenches were dug as shelters from air raids. A traffic jam in modern warfare is a disaster. One broken-down truck can stop hundreds of others. And the road must be cleared in an hour or two to allow, for example, a motorized division to pass. We know this kind of delay from our own war, when a load falls off a horse on a mountain trail. But on a communication line in modern warfare, this takes on gigantic proportions. They push the broken truck off the road, and everything moves on quickly. The Russians call such a traffic jam a *propka*. A *propka* is especially dangerous on narrow pontoon bridges, so traffic must be carefully regulated. On the bridges over the Dniester and Prut, we didn't see any *propkas*.

During the day, it is safe to travel toward the front. German aviation doesn't dare to cross the frontline deeply. This shows that the Russians have gained air superiority. At night, however, it was dangerous to travel with

lights on because German planes would sneak over the roads.

The settlements around which battles had been fought were flattened to the ground. The Germans destroyed everything they could reach. But in western Ukraine and Bessarabia, they didn't manage to burn down all the villages. The Red Army was faster than the hands of the arsonists.

THE STRENGTH OF THE RED ARMY

The strength of the Red Army lies in the nobility of the causes it fights for.

Major Kampov, a cheerful and straightforward man with a slightly crosseyed look and a simple, good-natured smile, loves to sing a Red Army song about a cigarette. The song was born somewhere along the Don River, during difficult trials. It tells of how the Red Army will return to the West and how Odessa and other cities will welcome it with open arms. The war will pass, but a deep memory of it and of comrades will remain in their souls:

"Somewhere, sometime
We'll remember the infantry
And our own company...
We'll remember comrades and friends,
The fires and flames
And how you gave me a light.
Let's light up, comrade, just one more..."

Today, in the Red Army, the most belov-

ed songs are those that express intimate, close and warm feelings: about a blue scarf waving from the shore to a soldier heading to battle for his homeland; about the quiet light in the window at night, in the house of a beloved girl; about the dear eyes of a woman leaning over a cradle, separated from the soldier by the night and the steppe — a night that will pass, the steppe that he will cross, crushing the Germans and returning to a happy life.

Major Kampov is an expert at explaining military operations, telling stories and humming songs.

He told me a story about a Soviet girl, a story so horrifying that the Germans deserve to have their seed cursed for nine generations because of it. And a story that so fully expresses the nobility of the Red Army soldiers, proving they deserve to have their steps kissed by every generation to come.

It happened in the winter of 1942, in Velikiye Luki. The unbearable Russian frost reigned, and fierce fighting raged day and night in the city. From the German-held section, civilians escaped every night to the Soviet-controlled part.

At the Red Army's position was the famous Soviet writer Fadeyev.

One night, Major Kampov and the writer Fadeyev encountered a heavily wounded Soviet tanker carrying something in his bloody coat. They immediately brought him into a dugout. The writer and the officer opened the coat — it contained a seven-year-old girl, wrapped in rags. The dying tanker,

while they gave the girl tea and dry bread, told them he had found her between the lines, next to a dead woman and a boy, likely her mother and younger brother.

Everyone competed to comfort the unfortunate girl. But she left a strange impression. Her facial features were smart and delicate, distinctly Russian, but she only knew a few rude German words, pronounced with a Russian accent. Otherwise, she made incomprehensible sounds, in which the cadence of the Russian language could be heard. She couldn't say anything about herself or her family. She seemed like an undeveloped child. What especially shocked everyone was that when they offered her chocolate, she recoiled in horror, her face filled with disgust and she huddled into a corner. The girl was sent to a doctor for an examination.

Nothing was written about this. But I must write it, however difficult it is to even think about, so that this story won't be forgotten — because it seems to me it proves, more than anything else I've heard or seen, the vile nature of the German army. The Germans had raped the girl from behind and infected her. She had suffered a severe nervous breakdown, forgetting everything — her language, her mother, her brother, her home and her friends.

Now, the poor girl lives with a well-known Soviet family in Moscow. She is a bright child, slowly regaining the joy of childhood. Major Kampov always visits her when he comes to Moscow, writes to her new parents and asks about her. He speaks of her with such tender-

ness, as if she were his own child. In the end, he said:

"I'm so sorry I can't show you her photo — I left it at headquarters."

The soldier Aksyonenko, a collective farmer from the Oryol region, explains the goals of the Red Army in Romania.

"In Romania... we don't need Romania. We don't want anything from them. We just want them not to plot anything against us."

Indeed, in the part of Romania liberated by the Red Army, the peasants breathed a sigh of relief. German-Romanian propaganda had frightened the population so much that the Red Army found the villages empty. Soviet commanders posted guards everywhere to prevent looting or fires. The people soon began to return, not only from the forests and groves within Soviet-controlled territory but even from the other side. They were given the right to choose their local government and live freely. Everywhere we went, our vehicles were greeted cheerfully. Some peasants even greeted us with the fascist salute, which didn't bother the Soviet officers at all; they simply explained patiently and quickly that it was a leftover habit and that the people hadn't yet unlearned it.

I asked the soldier Aksyonenko what kind of government he would recommend for us, the Yugoslavs. It was a difficult question for him, and he thought long and hard before answering:

"I don't know... I'd say... a government that would be a friend of the Soviet Union..."

Another soldier, Churikov, briefly explained why he was fighting:

"I'm defending Soviet power. I won't trade it for any other. In Soviet power, only the most honest and intelligent people can lead, and their only concern is the people."

The strength of the Red Army lies in its rejection of rigid tactics and its embrace of initiative and talent.

Lieutenant General Korotayev, a large, strong man with a rough face and a shaved head, is well-versed in literature and music and is passionate about art — he never misses an exhibition. He is the embodiment of the new, bold and well-rounded Soviet officer. No one explained to us better than he did what initiative means, what abandoning rigid formulas in war means.

"We learned a lot from crossing the Dnieper. After the Dnieper, rivers were no longer serious obstacles for us. And, interestingly, the crossing of the Dnieper was something completely new, something that defied all the rules we had learned, something that happened outside all the known principles."

The Red Army had reached the Dnieper, but they didn't have the necessary pontoon materials. The mud made rapid delivery impossible, yet they had to secure the other bank before the Germans could regroup. When the order came to start crossing immediately, commanders, soldiers and junior officers responded with such initiative that their efforts surpassed everything previously known in the history of warfare.

Using fishing boats, wine and gasoline barrels, and wooden beams from houses, the Red Army soldiers crossed the wide, fast river and established a foothold on the other bank.

Captain Karaulov, wounded seven times, became a Hero of the Soviet Union because of the Dnieper. He is a young man, dark-haired and noticeably frail.

"After receiving the order," he says, "we crossed on rafts made from local materials, captured a village, repelled German attacks and destroyed six tanks. We held the position until the pontoon bridges arrived and we received the order for further advance. And — that's it."

In one operation after Uman, General Korotayev foresaw that the Germans, with smaller forces, could threaten the flank of one unit. It would take too long to send troops there. He sent six tanks instead. But there was a river in front of them. "Try to cross it," he ordered the tank crews. They tried: two tanks got stuck in the water, but four made it across and surprised a column of a German battalion.

What more is there to say? In every battle, the Red Army demonstrates countless examples that reveal the extent to which it has mastered the art of war and how initiative is endlessly encouraged.

The strength of the Red Army lies in the heroism of its soldiers and commanders — modest, ordinary people who can talk beautifully about everything except their own exploits. At one meeting with Red Army soldiers and officers, a conversation began about

the toughest moments each had experienced in the war. No one could really say. These are people who don't recognize difficult moments. Only Colonel Korolenko, a handsome, strong man with dark hair, shared his most difficult moment — when half of his unit was at risk of being completely destroyed.

Sergeant Kuznetsov, born in 1925, became a Hero of the Soviet Union. He tells it like this:

"I'm a signalman. I established communication across the Dnieper, but the line was cut. The commander said: 'Kuznetsov, the line must be re-established at all costs.' I completed the mission. That's why I was made a Hero."

"But, Kuznetsov," others interjected, "you forgot to mention that the enemy was bombarding the area with heavy fire and that you were severely wounded in the head while working..."

And a major, a Ukrainian, told me, pointing to the soldiers marching by:

"With them, it is not hard to become a hero."

That was his only explanation of how he earned the title. And indeed, Heroes of the Soviet Union, when telling how they achieved it, don't speak of themselves — they speak of their commanders, their units or their comrades.

The strength of the Red Army lies in how deeply it understands the enemy.

The Marshal of the Soviet Union I.S. Konev received us in a simple and friendly manner in a village in Bessarabia. He is a worker,

having served as a divisional commissar in Siberia during the revolution. After that, he remained in the army, studied diligently and completed every military school. He is a tall, calm man in his fifties, with a somewhat cold appearance, thin lips, and a hard face with prominent cheekbones and jawline. Once, during a battle, when a piece of a mortar shell pierced his boot, he simply said, "It ruined my boot," bandaged the wound and continued observing the battle through his binoculars.

Konev asked us to convey his greetings to our leadership and gifted a dagger and binoculars to it with which Konev had fought through the entire war, observing countless battles. "But, excuse me," he said, "the binoculars are a bit chipped from long use; one part broke off, but it can be repaired somewhere, and then you can give it to your leaders."

He is the type of the new great Soviet commanders who have grasped the essence of modern warfare and the complex problem of coordinating different branches of the military. Major Kampov told us that Konev despises cowards. As an illustration of how far command and coordination of forces have been perfected, Kampov recounted an incident he witnessed himself: Konev was at the most sensitive point of the front, observing a battle. He called for planes to strike a hill held by the Germans, but while the planes were in the air, the Germans moved and took back the positions the Russians had held. Then the German air force appeared and began bomb-

ing their newly won positions, thinking the Russians were still there. Konev ordered the Soviet planes to bomb the same spot where the Germans were attacking, and the Red Army soldiers regrouped, reclaimed their positions and drove the Germans back. Modern command is very complex: when and where, and in what numbers, to send tanks and planes, where to concentrate artillery fire, when to send cavalry or motorized infantry, where to deploy reconnaissance battalions and so on. You need both knowledge and talent for it, just as one needs talent to become a poet or an inventor. And to win a battle, one must know and study the enemy.

What does the slogan mean that we have heard so often, and that sounded so abstract to us? How is it realized in the fire of battle?

Marshal Konev says that he always talks to German prisoners. He asks them: how did Soviet artillery affect them, how did "Katyushas" perform, were they surprised by this or that Russian manoeuvre, at what moment of the battle did the air force hit them and so on. "Know your enemy, otherwise you cannot defeat him — know him in every way, his mental and material strength," Konev says.

The Red Army soldiers have come to know the enemy so well that each one, in his sector, knows what the Germans can do, where the Romanians or Hungarians will go. Artillery Major Yurchenko, a freckled young man, describing how he destroys "Tigers" and "Panthers," recounted one event: "I knew the Germans would come from behind the forest, they

like to encircle, so I turned my guns there. When they appeared, everything was ready, and the 'Tigers' began to burn."

The weaknesses and rigidity of German strategy and tactics became fully apparent when the Red Army thoroughly understood the German military art. When Soviet commanders, enriched by modern military theory, began solving battle problems based on real experience, it became clear that not only was German military science outdated, but all previously known military science was obsolete, and that something new had to be introduced, something previously unknown. The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union has given this new approach, and it has become the possession of millions of soldiers, ingrained in their consciousness, transformed into a material force that crushes everything in its path to dust and ashes.

The strength of the Red Army lies in the powerful modern equipment with which its rear is richly supplied. Just as the Red Army develops its skills, engineers, technicians and workers improve the weaponry. We saw in the USSR weapons far superior to the enemy's, yet they were still being replaced by even better ones.

The initiative for such development of the Red Army, for victories, for heroism and drive, for troop movements and the improvement of technology, comes from Stalin. Every Red Army soldier, from the marshal to the private, feels his firm hand and his care for everything. In the most critical hour of the homeland, the

Red Army found in Stalin a true commander, and Stalin showed both the commanders and the soldiers how they would defeat the enemy, pointed out their weaknesses, gave them the means and led them to victory.

Marshal Konev, speaking of Soviet marshals, said this about Stalin:

"He is, in every sense, a genius, capable of understanding the essence of everything, including modern warfare. In everything, the initiative comes from him. And it is the good fortune of our army and our state that, in such a time, such a man stands at its head."

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