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**STOUT
HEARTS**

(This Happened Near Rovno)



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REHEARSAL

A group of would-be partisans assembled at the Tushino Airfield early one morning in April 1942. They had come for their first test parachute jump. Among them I was the only one who had ever jumped with a parachute. Many, I noticed, were nervous. Some started lively conversations, but the uneasy looks these "jovial" chaps cast about them eloquently betrayed what they really felt.

It was not cowardice. That I knew. They had all decided to become partisans voluntarily and were aware of the dangers awaiting them in enemy-held territory. There had been many volunteers, but only fifty had been selected, fifty men who would not let their comrades down or flinch come what may. But now all of them were worried, which was natural and normal as anybody who jumps with a parachute for the first time knows.

I glanced at my watch. We still had thirty whole minutes to wait.

Alexander Lukin was sitting near me. He was to be the reconnaissance chief of our detachment. He was restive like all the others and was smoking one cigarette after another.

"Lukin," I said in a loud voice calculated to draw the attention of the others. "Don't you think you're smoking too much? It isn't very pleasant to jump from a plane, a little frightening, eh?"

Lukin realised that I had deliberately started a conversation, which clearly interested everybody.

"There's nothing to be done. Frightening or not, we have to jump," he replied.

There was an intense hush.

The men were astonished to hear their commander frankly admitting he was afraid to jump. I took advantage of the silence and began a story which I hoped would take up the remaining half hour of oppressive waiting:

"It's a new experience to you, of course. But I'm an old hand at this. Today will be my third jump. I jumped the first time long, long ago, in 1907, when nobody even heard of parachute-jumping. I lived in Byelorussia, in a big workmen's settlement called Bezhitsa. On St. Nicholas' Day, which was my father's birthday, we were expecting guests, mostly elderly people. I was eight years old and knew there was not going to be any fun for me. So while the others were busy with the preparations I pinched some tobacco from my father, took a herring, cut a piece of the birthday pie and ran to the watchman at the fire-tower, which was close by our house.

"I was good friends with old man Gavrilych, the watchman. I loved the stories he told me and frequently whiled away the time of day with him in the fire-tower, from which you could see the whole of our township.

"Gavrilych tried the fish-pie, praised it, ate the herring and by the time he began rolling a cigarette he was deep in a story about a magic carpet. We sat in the fire-tower for about two hours. Gavrilych grew tired and began to doze. Having nothing to do I decided to have a smoke. I rolled a cigarette, and put it in my mouth and walked up and down the fire-tower platform, puffing away importantly and choking all the while. I looked down and saw my father. He brandished his stick at me and made for the tower. I realised that I would not escape a thrashing for two solid reasons. The first was that he had warned me never to climb to the fire-tower again, and second reason was that he had caught me smoking.

"Feverishly I looked about me for a line of retreat. The thing that caught my eye was a big canvas umbrella. Gavrilych's wife sold sunflower seeds in the market and she usually took the umbrella with her rain or shine. I had questioned Gavrilych about this umbrella, asking him why he kept it in the fire-tower. He had replied with a crafty wink: 'This is an important thing, my lad. There may be a fire at the tower. Let's say the fire will start at the foot of the ladder. How will I get down? I'll tell you how. I'll take this umbrella and jump.'

"Gavrilych hadn't meant it seriously, but when I saw my father I was so terrified that without hesitating I grabbed the umbrella, opened it and jumped. It was an experience, I can tell you!

"I never let the umbrella out of my hand and landed on the roof of a house. I hurt myself pretty badly bruising and scratching my knees, but I had no time to think of it. I rubbed my knees and ran round the corner, from where I watched developments.

"My father had reached the top of the tower. Gavrilych went up to him, pointed to the umbrella which I had left lying on the roof, and said something.

"I then lost sight of my father. He had evidently decided to hunt for me. I took to my heels, but in the evening I returned home and got a thrashing.

"That was my first parachute jump. So you see, I have in a way pioneered parachute-jumping."

As I told the story I noticed my listeners brightening up. I looked at my watch. We had another ten minutes. I could go on with the story.

"The second time, I jumped with a real parachute from a real plane. It happened last August just after the war broke out. I had to cross into enemy territory with a detachment, and was asked if I knew how to jump. Without batting an eyelid I said that it wasn't my first time, and at once drove to the airfield. In five minutes they explained how to open a parachute, took me up into the air in a tiny

U-2, and I jumped. To tell you the truth, it gave me the creeps. Later it turned out that it had all been for nothing. We crossed the enemy lines on foot. Now I'll try my third jump. I'll be quite honest. I feel shaky again. But, on the other hand, we'll only have to jump twice and that will get us behind the German lines. The first today, the second in a few days' time, and then we'll get down to business. Well, let's get started. They're already coming for us."

My story apparently cheered the men up. They felt better. There was nothing to be ashamed of if the commander himself was worried, too.

We boarded the aircraft.

The jumps were successful but not without incident. I landed on a huge birch and my parachute got entangled in the branches. I had to wriggle out of the harness and climb down the trunk.

One of the men got stuck between two trees growing not far from the airfield. Some men ran to him, shouting: "Swing, catch hold of one of the trees and come down."

He tried to do what he was told but in vain. It was then decided to take a free parachute and hold it taut beneath him, as a jumping sheet.

"Unstrap your parachute and jump," he was told.

The ill-starred parachutist jumped and he looked like a circus performer jumping on a safety net.

A lorry took us to Moscow. It was already midday but the streets looked empty. Tverskoi Boulevard and Soviet-skaya Square, which in peace-time had always been filled with children with balls, skipping ropes and three-wheeled bicycles, were also deserted. The children and their mothers and grandmothers had been evacuated to the East, to safe areas. Many factories and offices had also been evacuated. The capital was half empty. The nazis had been driven two or three hundred kilometres away from Moscow, but enemy air raids were continuing.

Our preparations to cross the enemy lines were ending.

True, we had not spent much time on them—only about a month. We had our camp in a woods near the city and held our shooting and topography classes there. We even had some training as sappers, building rafts and crossing a near-by lake in them.

As the detachment commander I used every opportunity of talking to the men about their future life as partisans. I had more experience than the others, because I was in command of a partisan detachment in the Bryansk forests of Byelorussia from August 1941 to February 1942. I told the men of the difficulties ahead of us and I spoke coldly of the risks we would take.

"I can tell you from experience," I said to them, "that partisans are the masters behind the German lines. The people look up to them as representatives of the Red Army and of the Soviet government. That is why a partisan must be worthy of our great socialist motherland everywhere and in whatever he does."

Many of the men in our detachment were Ukrainians. That was not accidental. We were bound for Rovno Region in the Ukraine, where immense forests stretched between the towns of Sarny, Rakitnoye and Berezno. Our headquarters were to be in the Sarny forests.

But it did not prove to be easy to reach these forests. They were much too far behind the firing lines and an aircraft could fly over German-occupied territory only at night, otherwise it ran the risk of being shot down. In spring the nights are short and a plane could not make the round trip from Moscow to the Sarny forests and back under cover of darkness. Besides, the appearance of Soviet aircraft over these forests would attract the attention of the Germans and the partisan detachment would find itself in great peril. It was therefore decided to fly the detachment to the village of Mukhoyedy in the Mozyr forests on the border of Rovno Region from where it was to proceed to the Sarny forests on foot.

FORWARD

Before it was flown to the enemy rear our detachment was broken up into several groups. The first group of fourteen men were sent late in May. Young and courageous Sasha Tvorogov, who already had experience as a partisan, was put in command.

The Army unit, in which Sasha had served, was surrounded early in the war. With the other men Sasha took refuge in the Byelorussian forests and became a partisan. In October 1941 his group joined my detachment which was then operating in Byelorussia.

Sasha quickly proved himself and was appointed reconnaissance chief of the detachment and did excellent work. Later, at the beginning of 1942, he returned to Moscow together with my detachment.

He headed the list of men of the new detachment and was the first to fly to the enemy rear. His task was to land in the Mozyr forests near the village of Mukhoyedy and find a place where the other groups could be received.

Before he took off he was warned that if anything happened to him the meeting with the rest of the detachment would in any event take place as appointed—at the village of Mukhoyedy.

Two days after the take-off, Tvorogov reported by radio that there had been a mistake: instead of flying the group to the Mozyr forests the pilot had taken it to a point south of Zhitomir. That was some three hundred kilometres away from the Mozyr forests. It was a treeless locality where the group had difficulty hiding. A day later Sasha reported that his group was on its way to the village of Mukhoyedy.

Communication was suddenly interrupted during the broadcast. We waited three days but no contact was made.

What could have happened?

It was decided to send another group under Kochetkov. The men parachuted into a swamp. They got wet to the

skin and all their materiel was soaked. It was a close shave.

Kochetkov soon radioed that they were near Tolsty Les Station on the Chernigov-Ovruch Railway thirty kilometres away from the village of Mukhoyedy.

Kochetkov stopped there and reported that he was organising signals for the reception of our parachutists.

That put everybody in a good mood and we sent the third group to Tolsty Les as though we were seeing them off to a place we were sure of. Pashun, my chief-of-staff, was in command of this group. He did not have a radio operator with him—we were short of them—but two of his men knew the Mozyr forests and even Tolsty Les Station.

We informed Kochetkov that one more group was ready and that he should light fires as a signal for the plane.

The aircraft which took the latest group returned safely to Moscow and the pilot reported that the parachutists had jumped after signals had been sighted at Tolsty Les Station.

On the next day Kochetkov radioed that there had been no plane and that his signal fires had burned all night. This meant that the men had not been dropped in the right place. There was no radio operator with Pashun and we could not expect any news from him.

Tvorogov was silent. Nobody knew where Pashun was. I asked to be sent immediately. The men had to be found and the reception of the others organised.

But I was detained in Moscow and the next group was led by Sergei Stekhov, my political deputy, who had helped me to form the detachment. Mortifying but true, Stekhov's group also missed Kochetkov's signals. Stekhov informed us by radio that for three days he had been trying to get his bearings. He was sending out scouts but none returned.

My anxiety reached bursting point and at last I was given permission to take off.

I was to be accompanied by Alexander Lukin, the reconnaissance chief, Lida Sherstneva, a radio operator, and several Spaniards.

In Moscow in those days we had many Spanish comrades who had fought for a free Spain and were later forced to emigrate. When the war against the nazis broke out they asked the Soviet Government to send them to the front. Learning that partisan detachments were being formed, a large number of Spaniards insisted on joining these detachments. Eighteen Spaniards volunteered for my detachment. When they were introduced to me they declared that by fighting in the war of the Soviet Union against nazi Germany they were helping to liberate all the countries seized by the nazis.

In the evening of June 20 I was at the airfield with my group.

There were no relatives. I had said good-bye at home: it was much better that way.

Men from the detachment I had commanded previously came to see me off.

The farewells were short. The plane taxied up punctually at the appointed hour. We took our places in it, the motors roared and we were off.

Everybody was in an elevated mood. And as though we were on an excursion the men began to sing, first Russian and then Spanish songs.

We crossed the firing lines. They were not far in those days—a little to the west of Tula. Here our aircraft was instantly caught by a blinding line of searchlight beams. The Germans opened fire, but we negotiated this dangerous zone safely. After two trying hours of waiting we were ordered to prepare to jump.

I looked out of the window and clearly saw the prearranged fire signals on the ground below us. The plane circled, losing some altitude. We lined up at the side door. The major accompanying us hooked our parachute releases to a wire so that the parachutes would open by themselves.

When we were ready, Lida Sherstneva, who was standing behind me, said anxiously:

"Comrade Commander, where's your release string?"

I turned round. My release string was not hooked to the wire. I don't think I would have lost my head: all I had to do was to pull the parachute release in time, but anyway it was a good thing Lida warned me.

My heart began to throb when the order to jump was given.

I jumped first. In a matter of seconds my parachute opened.

I looked about me. We had baled out high in the air, about nine hundred metres above ground. There was a bright moon above and I could see the fires below, but they were receding into the distance: the wind was carrying me away. Parachutes dotted the air above me and to my left and right. One went past me, going down much too fast. Something must have gone wrong with it and the thought that one of the men was in danger flashed through my mind.

There was a woods below me. Following the rules, I grabbed the lines with arms crossed, and at the same moment a current of air gathered me up and I landed with a bump.

I had been carried about forty metres from the fringe of the woods.

We had arranged that I would light a fire around which the men would assemble. But I had hurt myself and was unable to stand up and gather twigs for a fire. I pulled my parachute closer and lit it. Then I crawled to some bushes about fifteen paces away from the fire, hid myself with my submachine-gun on the ready and waited. There was no telling who would be attracted by the fire—friend or foe?

Somebody moved up stealthily.

"Password?" I demanded.

"Moscow!"

"Bear!" I replied and added: "Throw your parachute into the fire and come to me."

"Very good!"

It was Lukin, and behind him there was Lida Sherstneva and then the others.

Dogs were barking ceaselessly about three or four kilometres away as though somebody was teasing them. That meant there was a village close by.

The whole group was now round me. I rose to my feet, straightening up with difficulty, and, fighting back the pain, said with all the cheerfulness I could muster:

"It's only our second jump and we've reached our destination!"

I then took out my compass and began to find our bearings. The compass, the starry sky and the railway were sufficient to show us where to go. Tolsty Les Station should be somewhere very close.

We were in the rear of the enemy, about a thousand kilometres away from Moscow and six hundred kilometres from the firing lines.

MEETING

We followed the fringe of the woods in the direction of Tolsty Les Station. Dawn was already breaking. Every step left a print on the grass, which was heavily covered with dew. I therefore ordered the men to walk in single file, two or three paces behind each other, and to step into the footprints left by the leader.

Anybody following us would have difficulty determining our number—ten or a hundred. Caution was the chief rule for a partisan.

It was almost light. There was not a sound. But I listened to every rustle, to every crack of a branch. Although there was as yet no danger I kept the men alert with pre-arranged signals to lie down and take cover.

When we had walked about five kilometres we saw two figures in the distance.

"Lie down," I ordered and called Lukin.

"You are the reconnaissance chief of our detachment, so be our chief scout as well. Find out who these people are and if they're friends ask them the way to Tolsty Les."

Lukin returned, saying that they were an old woman of about seventy and her grandson. She had clasped her hands and burst out weeping when she learnt she was speaking to partisans.

"My dears, you don't know how happy I am to see you! When will you chase out these accursed. . . . They've ruined us completely."

She said that Tolsty Les Station was only ten kilometres away but warned us not to go along the far side of the railway. The village, she said, was full of police.

Lukin gave her a bar of chocolate and some pieces of sugar.

We approached Tolsty Les Station at about nine o'clock. I ordered the men to rest. Unaccustomed to long marches they were tired and many had blisters on their feet.

I posted sentries to keep the station, the level crossing and the road under observation.

I then ordered Lida Sherstneva to unpack the transmitter and report to Moscow that we had landed in the correct place and were looking for Kochetkov's group.

At that moment the sentries from one of the posts brought three men to us. I looked at their beaming faces: they were Kochetkov's scouts.

"Lida, never mind the transmission."

We went directly to Kochetkov's camp.

The joy of this meeting is difficult to describe. It seemed as though everybody were trying to tell his news first: we about Moscow and they about their life here.

Stekhov and his group were already in Kochetkov's camp, but there was not a word about either Sasha

Tvorogov or Pashun, as though they had vanished into thin air.

Kochetkov, too, had had some trouble. When his group baled out, the parachute of one of the men, an elderly partisan named Kalashnikov, was caught between tall trees. The search for him went on for a long time. When at last he was found and saw that he was with friends he did not wait to be taken down but cut the lines with his dagger and fell to the ground. When he tried to get up he found that one of his legs was broken. He was now in the hut of a railway guard half a kilometre away from Tolsty Les Station. Our doctor, Tsessarsky, and some of the partisans were visiting him secretly every day.

Lunch was prepared for us in less than an hour. I was treated to foal liver fried with stewed pork. It was quite palatable.

We could not afford to lose any time and immediately sent scouts in different directions. We had to find out if we could stay here till the other groups arrived and whether the Germans had got wind of our camp. Towards evening I personally inspected the sentry posts to see how the camp was guarded. I walked round the camp, crossed a large glade and went deep into the forest.

The station had not been named Tolsty Les* for nothing. The trees were indeed huge. Ancient oaks, birches, pine and spruce with undergrowth between them formed thick and impassable tracts. Where I was walking there was not a single foot-path and very soon I realised that I was not going in the right direction. I turned more to the left and walked for another ten minutes, but I felt that this direction was again wrong. By this time the sun had set and I lost my bearings altogether.

"I'm in a fix, good and proper. To think that the commander of the detachment should get lost on the very first day!"

* Tolsty Les, literally huge trees.—Tr.

Frankly, I had a better opinion of myself. I was born in Byelorussia and as a boy I frequently went to the forest for mushrooms, berries and nuts. I could tell the direction by the sun, the branches and roots. Seven months as a partisan had also taught me a thing or two. And yet here I had come a cropper. My back still hurt me from the fall with the parachute, but I quickly climbed to the top of a huge oak as I had often done as a boy. I looked round. There was nothing but forest as far as the eye could see. Then I noted a wisp of smoke. It was the camp. I got the direction by my compass and climbed down.

I reached the camp in total darkness. The men were sitting round the fire. I sat down on a stump. I wanted to rest and listen to them. The conversation was about Rivas, one of our Spaniards. He was a plane mechanic and we had taken him into our detachment as a specialist. He had come with Stekhov's group.

The speaker was a young partisan:

"Well, then, we gathered round the fire and the roll was called. Rivas was missing. We went to look for him. It was dark and we could see nothing. From time to time we called out his name. We searched all night but with no result. It began to get light. The commander sent us out again to look for him. We wandered about the forest all that day. But there was not a trace of him to be found. Towards nightfall I ran into a bog in the forest. Right in the middle of it there was a thin, solitary aspen. Somebody was hiding behind it. I ducked into the bushes and looked. The man's head was hidden but you could see the rest of him. He was in our uniform. I guessed it was Rivas. I stood up and shouted: 'Rivas! Come out!' But all the answer I got was 'Take cover! Take cover!' Finally he came out, a broad grin on his face and jabbering in his own lingo and embracing me. Then he suddenly produced a live pigeon from under his shirt. It's a mystery to me where and why he got it."

The partisans laughed, gazing round at Rivas. Small and

frail, with flashing black eyes, Rivas also laughed, understanding what the talk was about.

"What did he do with the pigeon? Eat it?" somebody asked.

"Not him. He wouldn't hurt a fly! He was looking for some food for the bird. But he did not have a chance to fuss over it for long. It flew away."

Some six months later, when Rivas learnt a little Russian, he told us of the fright he had experienced when he found he was alone in the forest. He took fire-flies for the eyes of tigers. And he caught the pigeon in order to eat it if it took him long to find his comrades.

Everybody was in high spirits. There was something thrilling in the unusual situation. We were shown the "flower-bed" that the partisans had made with luminescent pieces of rotten wood. Lida, our radio operator, stuck one of these luminescent pieces in her hair, where it shone like a jewel.

"Let them have their fun," I reflected. If anybody did I knew the "romance" of the forests with its midges, dampness and smouldering campfires.

Two days later our strength was complemented by another group of parachutists.

The aircraft flew high above our fires. They burned so brightly that they lit up the aircraft and the clouds.

When the plane sighted our signals it veered out of sight and then reappeared at an altitude of about three hundred metres. Parachutists began to bale out and we could see them clearly in the fiery light reflected in the cupolas of their parachutes. The wind was carrying them away from us.

Two parachutes opened unexpectedly right over the fires at a height of not more than eighty metres. One of the parachutists landed close to a signal fire. The other fell on a log some distance away. It was medical nurse Marusya Shatalova, who hurt her leg badly. Nobody could understand why this had happened, but after we had care-

fully inspected the parachutes we found that the automatic release had not been attached to the wire in the plane. That explained why the parachutes had failed to open. They were opened by the parachutists themselves after a fall of more than two hundred metres. It was a magnificent feat.

The clearing where we received the men was really not suitable for the purpose. It was near the station with its railway tracks, cobbles and timber yard. You couldn't find a more murderous spot for a landing. We had to radio Moscow to stop sending more men for the time being.

In the meantime our scouts brought us alarming news. Rumours were spreading that twenty or thirty planes were coming every night and bringing parachutists, that a whole division was concentrating in the area. These rumours had no doubt reached the Germans and it was more than likely that they would send a large punitive force against that division. And there were only seventy of us.

BAPTISM OF FIRE

We broke camp at daybreak on June 23. It was evident that the Germans were about to send a punitive force against us. We left behind us a post of five men with orders to keep the station under observation. Our doctor Tsesarsky also remained behind to look after Kalashnikov, who was still bed-ridden in the hut of the railway guard. We could not take him with us because of the plaster cast on his leg.

I led the unit northward, to a vast stretch of forest. Before we had gone ten kilometres we saw a small house amid the trees. I sent three scouts forward.

"Ask for food and try to find out something about the Germans," I told them.

The men soon returned and informed me that a forester lived in the house. Ten small potatoes was all he gave

them, and he had refused to enter into a conversation, telling them he knew nothing.

Hardly had we covered a kilometre than our rearguard passed the word that they had detained a suspicious character. The man was riding at a gallop and reined in his horse when he saw our column.

"Where can I find your chief?" he asked, thinking we were police.

"What do you want him for?" the partisans asked imperturbably.

"Two ruffians have just been to see me. They were asking about the Germans. They're probably partisans. They've gone in that direction."

It was the forester who had given my scouts potatoes. He mistook our column for a detachment of policemen.

Questioned, he admitted that he was on his way to the district centre of Khabnoye to inform the Germans about the appearance of partisans. A reward had been promised for the capture of partisans. Speaking about himself he said that he had been sentenced for a crime by a Soviet court.

It was a simple case of a criminal turned traitor. We shot him then and there.

This incident put us on our guard more than ever. And although the men were tired I did not risk ordering a halt. At about three o'clock we each had a piece of cooked meat which we ate on the march. We had no bread.

As ill luck would have it, a pouring rain started. We got soaking wet and that added to our discomfort. One hour, then another passed. There was no sign of the rain stopping, but we pushed on, leaving dangerous places farther and farther behind us. Only by nightfall, when we were quite exhausted, did I order a halt. The rain had stopped, but it was wet in the dense forest with huge drops falling from the trees. Clouds of midges attacked us. The men were unaccustomed to long marches and fell asleep on the ground.

On the next day we found a suitable place for a temporary camp amid giant pines. There had probably been a tar-collecting enterprise somewhere in the vicinity because every tree had an "arrow" notch on it with a cup to collect the resin. We quickly pitched six tents made from parachutes to escape the midges and sleep in peace. There was a clearing near by and we decided to use it to receive parachutists. That same day we broke our force up into several units, appointed scouts, briefed them and sent them out to learn if the Germans were on our track and to find out how the people were living in the villages and if it was possible to get food.

In the morning of June 25, the camp guards brought before me some fellow who said he was a local inhabitant. He had been detained near our camp where he was stealthily spying out the location. We searched him and found an identity card that said he worked in the German police. We no longer doubted that the Germans were looking for us and that perhaps they had even got on our tracks.

An alarm was sounded that same night. One of the sentries heard a rustle in the forest but because of the darkness he could not see anything. In a whisper he ordered his companion to run to the camp and report that he had heard a noise.

The alarm was given and within a few minutes the whole detachment was in combat readiness.

But there was silence all around and nothing disturbed the peace of the forest. We searched the whole area but found nothing suspicious.

The all-clear signal was sounded an hour later, but I stayed up for the rest of the night. The alarm had revealed our weak spots: it took some of the men fifteen or twenty minutes to dress; the relief squad slept undressed although the rules demanded that they be dressed. I summoned the unit commanders and the men who had infringed upon discipline and took them to task.

In the morning Alexander Lukin went to the spot where the sentry had heard a noise in the night. He picked his way carefully, his finger on the trigger of his submachine-gun.

Something suddenly dashed out of the bushes and sped away. Quickly, without quite understanding what was happening, Lukin swung his submachine-gun. It was a wild kid-goat. Lukin heard another goat bleating. He caught them and took them back to camp with him.

"This is what caused the alarm and frightened the sentry," he said.

"The darlings!" Lida and Marusya squealed with delight. "Give them to us."

But the goat that had been hit by Lukin had to be killed. The other was given to the girls.

"Only don't sound the alarm if it starts bleating," the men joked.

Dr. Tsessarsky and the entire post from Tolsty Les Station appeared in the camp late in the evening. There had been a raid by the nazis. They had seized Kalashnikov and the railway guard.

We sent out a group of scouts to find out exactly where the Germans were and if they knew the location of our camp.

The scouts set out before dawn, when everybody was still asleep. But they did not go far. Some three hundred paces from the camp, on the far side of a small stream, they saw German troops and opened fire. The camp was on its feet in virtually two minutes. Sergei Stekhov, who shared a tent with me, rushed out of the tent first. Taking command of the relief squad he ran to the scene of the firing. I stayed behind in the camp at the tent with the radio station and staff documents.

The firing grew hotter. Obviously, a real battle was in progress at the stream.

Then the sound of firing came from the opposite side, near the camp. There was no time to be lost. I sent Ko-

chetkov with the second group of partisans and stationed additional posts round the camp.

Every cry and every shot echoed loudly in the forest. We could distinctly hear shouts of "Rus, surrender!" and the partisans' cheers that drowned these shouts.

The first of our wounded was carried in half an hour later. It was Floréjac, one of our Spaniards. A tent had been made ready by Dr. Tsessarsky and Marusya Shatalova. Floréjac was seriously wounded by an explosive bullet. Tsessarsky began to operate immediately.

Soon prisoners were brought in: two Germans and three traitors in the uniform of the German police. We interrogated them first because Tsessarsky, who could speak German, was busy operating.

The prisoners said that they had indeed been sent out after our detachment and that their advance column of a hundred and sixty men had attacked the camp from two sides. During the battle the German commander had radioed to Khabnoye for reinforcements.

The noise of the battle was dying down and the firing was receding. Our men were driving the nazis away.

Tsessarsky went on with the operation, paying not the least attention to the firing. Two more wounded partisans appeared.

The doctor swiftly cleaned and dressed the wounds, repeating all the while in a soothing voice:

"Don't worry, it will be all right. It's not dangerous."

Kostya Pastanogov returned from the scene of battle covered with blood. His arm was twisted into an unnatural position.

"We've licked the bastards," he said in a weak voice and collapsed.

Tsessarsky lifted him, put him on a waterproof cape that was spread on the ground and got busy on the arm. The bones were crushed, the skin was torn and the hand dangled on nothing but the sinews.

The engagement lasted two hours. Our men forced the

Germans to take to their heels and I had to send runners with orders for the men to return to camp.

We had passed our first test. The twenty-five partisans who fought the action held and drove back a hundred and sixty nazis. The German losses were forty killed, including seven officers. We could not count the wounded, because the enemy took them away with him. We captured submachine-guns, rifles, hand-grenades and pistols.

In this engagement we suffered a heavy loss. Brave and cheerful Tolya Kopchinsky of Moscow, who was always bubbling with life, was killed. He was a member of the Y.C.L. and the holder of a national skating record. He came to our detachment as a volunteer and quickly became a general favourite.

We dug a grave for him in a clearing in the faraway Mozyr forests. We lowered the body into the grave and silently bared our heads. "Farewell, our young friend! We shall avenge your death!" was all I said at the graveside. And I threw in the first handful of earth.

In silence the men filed past the grave, each throwing in a handful of earth.

Then the grave was filled with earth and the mound lovingly covered with turf.

We had to leave the camp at once. Our "division" would have a bad time of it if the Germans returned with reinforcements.

I gave the signal for the withdrawal.

We had three carts. These we used for our wounded. We did not follow the road but went straight through the forest. The group of men bringing up our rear covered up our tracks.

Thirty lorry-loads of German troops pursued us for four days. But in vain.

We took footpaths that they could not drive over. We marched by night, and darkness was what the nazis were scared of the most.

ON THE MARCH

We ranged enemy-held territory for more than a month with danger dogging our heels.

It is over two hundred kilometres from Tolsty Les Station to the Sarny forests. You would not notice the distance by train or by car. Neither would it be much trouble to cover it on foot if you kept to the roads and spent the nights in cosy cottages. But for partisans every kilometre is long and difficult.

We did not follow the roads, but made our way along imperceptible forest trails and along footpaths across swamps. We by-passed the villages so that even the dogs would not scent us.

We moved by night and slept by day right on the ground. We got drenched in the bogs and in the torrential rains. Midges gave us no peace, getting under the nets and stinging our faces and necks, getting into our ears, noses and eyes.

We had no bread or potatoes and went hungry for days. Our scouts were the only ones to enter the hamlets and villages and they did so with great caution so as not to give away the presence of a partisan detachment.

They learned from the local inhabitants that the nazis were hunting for us, sending their spies into the forest in the guise of shepherds or berry gatherers.

Once in a while one of our forward scouts would come across people he thought were suspicious. The whole detachment would stop and wait until a runner gave the all-clear signal.

On the way we encountered every conceivable difficulty, and the two hundred kilometres shown on the map actually proved to be five hundred kilometres and perhaps even more than that.

For the scouts the distance was twice if not four times as great. When the detachment halted, they moved forward along the route planned for the next day, looking for new

halting places, returning and then guiding the detachment across reconnoitred terrain.

Other scouts were sent to protect our flanks and prevent any surprise attack.

The wounded had the hardest time of it. The forest trails and footpaths were thick with roots and stumps. The jolt over every root, bulge or stump that could not be bypassed caused a stab of pain in the bleeding wounds. In the swamps the horses could not drag the carts that sank to their axles. We had to unharness them and drag the carts ourselves.

The men showed a very touching concern for their wounded comrades. The scouts got cream, eggs and even white bread for them.

Dr. Tsessarsky and nurse Marusya were always to be seen striding beside the carts with the wounded.

Despite the hardships nobody was in low spirits. During the halts the men sang in undertones and even the wounded joined in. The men cracked jokes, laughed and sometimes danced. But only the lucky ones danced, because when we halted many of the men would go to Tsessarsky to get a bandage for bleeding blisters.

We were in daily radio communication with Moscow and received communiqués on military operations. We made copies of these communiqués, which were first read in the detachment and then taken to the hamlets and villages by our scouts.

The peasants learned the truth about the war: the nazis claimed they had already captured Moscow and Leningrad.

Through our scouts we knew how the peasants lived. The invaders robbed and killed civilians, forced the population to do hard labour and drove young people away to slavery in Germany.

"They took my darling Anyuta," a collective-farm woman told our scouts. "When she left I told her to write but to be careful. We agreed that she would draw flowers if things were bad. I knew she would not be allowed to

write the truth. The other day I received a letter. It said that she was not complaining, but there were twelve flowers drawn on the letter. . . ."

We were heading for the area round the village of Mukhoyedy.

Our calculation was that if Sasha Tvorogov and Pashun were alive they would look for us at the rendezvous we had agreed upon.

Our scouts brought back stories circulating among the peasants about fourteen intrepid partisans. At first this news reached us as a legend about Red paratroops who had smashed a large nazi unit. Then we began to get clearer reports. Our scouts met eyewitnesses and in the end this is what we established.

After baling out from their aircraft to the south of Zhitomir, Tvorogov and his group skirted round the western side of the town and headed north towards Mukhoyedy. They stopped for a rest in a village, and at night the Germans surrounded the hut they were occupying.

"Rus, surrender!" the enemy shouted.

"Bolsheviks never surrender!" our men replied and fired from the windows.

The battle lasted through the whole of the next day. More than fifty nazis were killed, and of the fourteen partisans only five remained.

When it grew dark the Germans set fire to the house, but the partisans managed to get out and after a short skirmish to hide in the forest.

Wounded and exhausted they covered about ten kilometres during the night. When day broke they found that the Germans were still pursuing them. They reached a village and occupied a hut on the outskirts. Once again the Germans surrounded them, and the battle went on for several hours. The firing from the hut finally stopped, and when the Germans broke into it they only found the bodies of three dead partisans. The other two had escaped in some miraculous way. From the stories we heard from

the peasants and from the description of the clothes we knew that Sasha Tvorogov was among the dead.

We heard nothing more about this group. When the war ended one of the two survivors of Tvorogov's group looked me up. The other man who escaped from the hut with him was a Spaniard. They wandered about the forests for many a long day until at last they joined a partisan detachment, staying with it to the end of the war.

That brought to a close the story about the valiant men of Tvorogov's group.

At a hamlet near the village of Mukhoyedy the inhabitants reported that men dressed in overalls and forage caps had come to them and bought potatoes, milk and bread. The men said they would come again.

We decided to lay an ambush. Valentin Semyonov and several other partisans hid in the bushes near the end hut. After waiting for about six hours they saw three men coming down the road. The partisans aimed their submachine-guns, but when the three men drew nearer, Semyonov shouted: "Hey fellows, it's Shevchuk and that one's Darbek Abdraimov!" The scouts left their hiding-place in the bushes and embraced their comrades. They were partisans from Pashun's group.

Some hours later we were joined by Pashun and his men. Those who had cameras photographed the meeting. It was a memorable occasion. We had parted in Moscow only recently, but since we had last seen them the athletically built young fellows of Pashun's group had turned into bearded men.

They had been looking for us for more than a month. They had baled out of their aircraft somewhere near Khoyniki Station, about a hundred and eighty kilometres away from Tolsty Les. The pilots were misled by the fires burning there. As they found out later, these fires were lit by the local inhabitants mobilised for work on the railway. The German police saw the partisans baling out and started firing at them. It was a good thing that the wind carried

the parachutes away from the fires. In spite of that, one of the men was killed in the air. The rest landed and were brought together by a signal from Pashun.

For several days they made their way across swamps, escaping pursuit by the enemy. Then they reached the Pripyat and crossed it in boats. They got to Tolsty Les when we were already gone and from there they followed our tracks.

The whole detachment was now assembled. We were eighty-five strong!

On July 21, when we halted for a rest, Sergei Stekhov called together all members and candidate-members of the Party. It was the first Party meeting in our detachment and it was held in a glade.

Our Party organisation was small—there were only fifteen members and four candidate-members. At this first meeting we discussed important questions concerning the leading role played by Communists in the struggle against the nazis, the example that Communists had to set in battle and in life, the discipline in the detachment, and the work of the Y.C.L. organisation. That day marked the beginning of organised Party and Y.C.L. activity in our detachment.

Every day during the halts Sergei Stekhov spoke to the men about the situation on the different fronts, the life of the country, and the tasks of the Soviet people behind the German lines. He made these political talks interesting and lively and there was always a crowd around him.

Near the hamlet of Zlui we found a clearing where we could receive parachutists. I radioed the location to Moscow and the next night a plane brought another twelve men.

I was happy to see Nikolai Kuznetsov among them. I had been waiting for him for a long time. Much of my story will be about him.

OUR NUMBERS GROW

In the villages and farmsteads we came across former privates and non-coms of the Red Army. Some were living there in the guise of local inhabitants after their units had been encircled, others had escaped from German POW camps and were also hiding in the hamlets.

When they learned they were dealing with partisans all asked to be allowed to join the detachment. Every day our scouts brought in several recruits.

Near Ovruch we met a forest warden who told us there were partisans in the woods around the town. This interested us, but these partisans proved to be elusive. They were afraid of us, did not know who we were and took every precaution to keep out of sight. We finally caught up with two of them. Learning who we were they brought the others. There were twenty of them, all Red Army men who had escaped from nazi captivity.

But we could not simply include these men into our ranks. Each was questioned separately and carefully searched. Two partisans did the searching and Sergei Stekhov and I watched.

Playing cards were found in the pockets of one of the men. Stekhov took them and thanked the puzzled man:

"Thank you very much. They'll be useful to light a fire with in rainy weather."

Another had a half-litre bottle of vodka.

"Thanks for this, too. We haven't got a stock of our own and sometimes this is just the thing that's wanted," Stekhov said.

When the questioning and inspection were over, Stekhov lined up the whole group and told them our rules:

"We'll admit you to our detachment, but I want you to know that we are strict about discipline. An order from a commander must be obeyed implicitly. Anybody guilty of disobedience will be punished. Liquor is categorically prohibited. Card games are prohibited. And it is also cate-

gorically prohibited to take anything from the population. Anybody found looting will be shot. Things confiscated from the enemy are handed over to the supplies and transport platoon and distributed at the discretion of the commander. Even tobacco cannot be appropriated...."

He finished with the words:

"Some of you don't have weapons. We do not intend giving them to you on a tray. You've lost your weapons so get new weapons in battle. We shall come to grips with the enemy frequently. Have I made myself clear?"

Sitting round the campfire that evening we listened to the recruits describe their grim experiences in German camps.

I vividly remember the words of an elderly Red Army man from Siberia:

"There we sat for a day, then another and another. We did not have a bite to eat and they did not give us even a drop of water. Some of the men could not endure it and became delirious. All of a sudden we saw a German guard turn a water tap. Our men ran for the water and the son-of-a-bitch opened fire with a machine-gun."

Our contact with the Big Land did not stop for a minute. All our activities depended on it. And because of that we attached great importance to our radio communication and protected our radio operators as the apple of our eye.

When we were on the march each radio operator had a personal body-guard of two submachine-gunners, who also helped him to carry the radio equipment.

Incidentally, I'd like to mention that although this equipment was supposed to be portable, it was not light by any means. It consisted of a suitcase containing a receiver-transmitter, key and the "feed"—dry anode and cathode batteries. In addition, we had to carry spare "feed", which was made up of partially used batteries that were utilised for listening to broadcasts from Moscow.

We communicated with Moscow at a definite hour every day. If the detachment was on the move when our radio

hour came and there was no reason to call a halt, we would leave a radio operator behind with a guard of twenty men. While the detachment continued the march the radio operator would contact Moscow, finish his job, catch up with us and hand over the day's communication.

It was almost August, but we were still moving. We had already crossed the Kovel-Kiev Railway and were about forty kilometres away from our destination.

When we halted near the station and double track at Budki-Snovidovich, the local inhabitants warned our scouts that the Germans had seen us as we were crossing the railway and were planning to attack us at dawn on the next day. But we did not wait for them. As soon as this information was brought in we sent Pashun with fifty men to attack the Germans.

Pashun approached Budki-Snovidovich at night and his scouts learned that the nazis were in a train waiting on a siding.

Our lads drew as near the carriages as they could without being seen, but the alarm was given before Pashun could take stock of the situation. It was set off by a dog the Germans had. It heard a noise and began barking. One of the sentries called out a challenge and when nobody replied he fired two signal shots. Immediate action had to be taken and Pashun ordered his men to open fire. Hand-grenades rained down on the carriages filled with nazi troops. Submachine-guns and machine-guns were brought into play. Near the train a barrel of benzine, hit by an explosive bullet, burst into flame. The fire spread to the carriages and very soon there was a regular conflagration.

Towards dawn the special troops sent out to crush us were crushed themselves. Very few escaped.

The trophies captured by Pashun included rifles, hand-grenades, cartridges, and all sorts of supplies like flash-lights, and much-needed food, particularly sugar and saccharine.

One of our Spanish lads, Antonio Blanco, was killed in this action. He was twenty-two, but short as it was, his was a glorious life. In 1936, when he was only sixteen, he fought the fascists as a member of the Spanish people's militia. Then he lived in the Soviet Union. He joined our detachment as a volunteer.

Antonio Blanco died the death of a hero. He was the first to run up to a carriage and throw a hand-grenade into it.

* * *

We entered the Sarny forests two days after the battle at Budki-Snovidovichi Station.

IN CAMP

Our refuge was vast and convenient. The Sarny forests stretched for hundreds of kilometres, but they were not an unbroken massif. Woods, fields and hamlets alternated at fairly regular intervals. There was a hamlet or a village every six or eight kilometres. We had a secure hiding-place and there were people close by. That was very important.

The main assignment that we were given in Moscow was to keep the towns and railway junctions of West Ukraine under observation. We had to keep Moscow informed of the strength of the enemy, the location of war factories, stores, and staff headquarters, the movement of troops and war supplies, and any other military secret we could learn; moreover, we had to take every opportunity of striking a blow at the enemy.

We stopped in the forest near the village of Rudnya-Bobrovskaya, about a hundred and twenty kilometres away from Rovno. This was in August. The weather was warm and instead of building huts we made tents out of our waterproof capes. The men who did not have capes built cabins of branches. We found that fir branches suited the

purpose best of all. Packed tightly they kept the cabin warm, and the rain came down the needles to the ground without penetrating inside. Fir branches also made good bedding, about as good as a spring mattress, and to save ourselves from the prickly needles we covered them with leaves or moss.

In the centre of the camp, near the fire-place, there was a neat row of cape-tents for our headquarters. This was flanked on three sides by the tents of the medical corps, radio communications unit and the headquarters kitchen. A little farther off were the reconnaissance units and lastly, along the fringe of the camp, the combat units.

We built our "settlement" in one day. On the next day I was already sending out men to get in touch with the local inhabitants, to learn what they could about the Germans, to find people who could be trusted and to forage for food.

Mostly they were men who spoke Ukrainian, and of these we had quite a few. But we could not send them all out on reconnaissance. The boots of many were worn to shreds because of the long marches. We did not have supplies stores and could not very well raid the German stores on the first day.

Left behind in camp, these men glumly went about "household chores" in the tents.

One of them, Korolyov, of Ryazan Region, grumbled aloud:

"Am I a woman that I have to stay at home?"

"You go to a shop and buy yourself a pair of kid-boots," he was told.

He went to the supplies and transport platoon and asked for an axe. He then approached his commander, Sarapulov, asking:

"May I leave camp for half an hour?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"To the forest for lime bark."

"What for?"

"To make myself a pair of bast shoes."

After reflecting for a moment, Sarapulov said:

"All right, Korolyov, you may go but don't be late."

"Right!"

Korolyov returned half an hour later, sat down on a stump near his tent and set to work. He fashioned a wooden bast, cut the lime bark into strips and started making a bast shoe.

The men around him pulled his leg:

"What, making yourself a fancy pair of boots, Comrade Korolyov? If you don't look out, they'll take you for an English lord in them!"

Korolyov kept silent and doggedly went on with his work.

Sarapulov came up an hour later just as he was trying on a finished shoe.

"Here, let me take a look," he said.

He took the shoe, turned it in his hand and, without saying a word, went away with it.

He left a perplexed Korolyov sitting on the stump.

"He'll probably throw it away. And that'll be the end of it," he thought dismally.

But Sarapulov soon returned.

"Comrade Korolyov," he said, "I've just been showing your shoe at headquarters. Political commissar Stekhov wants you to make a pair for him. And his orders were that the commanders of all the platoons should each send you two apprentices."

The "apprentices" appeared within a few minutes.

"Is Korolyov around here?"

"I'm Korolyov."

"We've been sent to you to learn to make bast shoes."

There were eight men in all. Korolyov saw that not all were eager about the work and he began with "agitation".

"Don't look so gloomy, it's a good trade. Bast shoes are ancient Russian footwear. We're living through hard times. What, are we to turn marauder? It won't do to take

boots off our own peasants, and we haven't yet taken a whack at the nazis. And let me tell you that for us bast shoes are even better than boots. You have to steal up to the enemy without making a sound, and that's when bast shoes will stand you in good stead. And if it's a night raid, even the dogs won't hear you. Besides, there won't be any blisters. And now watch me and do what I do. Here, take the bast...."

In the course of that first lesson the men each made a bast shoe. They were ugly but they could be worn, and two days later many of the men were already walking about in new bast shoes. For the time being that solved the problem of footwear.

We had to face many problems and in the end invariably found a way out. Many of the men displayed talent and ability in just the things that were vital for the detachment. Rivas was one of them. He found the situation confusing at first. That ill-fated night when he was alone in the forest with just the pigeon he had caught had evidently told on his spirits.

He was appointed to a line platoon, but being frail he had difficulty keeping up with the other men. Marches wore him out so much that frequently he had to be put on a cart together with the wounded. He did not speak a word of Russian. We could not as yet use him as an aircraft mechanic and this was the first time in his life that he was doing duty as sentry. Tired and bewildered he would stand at his post and was forever whittling twigs with a penknife, thereby violating the very regulations for a sentry. One day his commander forgot to relieve him and he lost heart completely. We thought it over and suggested that he should go back to Moscow with the first plane. Rivas agreed but something nobody foresaw happened and changed everything.

In camp Rivas saw one of the men having trouble with a damaged submachine-gun. He went up and looked at the gun.

"Bad, bad! Repair?"

"Damn the thing, I can't make head or tail of it," the partisan snapped morosely.

"Hey! Try repair," Rivas said and took the gun.

The disc spring had burst. Rivas found a broken gramophone, one of the trophies from the action at the Budki-Snovidovich junction, took the spring out of it and fitted it to the submachine-gun, making it as good as new.

That was the start of a new life for him. The men began to seek him out. The scouts brought him vice clamps, mallets and files, and before long our Spaniard changed beyond recognition. He was busy all day long, sawing, drilling and cutting. With nothing but a file, he turned a rusty bolt into a first-class striker for a machine-gun. You couldn't distinguish it from one made at a factory.

Rivas cheered up, a smile appeared on his lips and he even began to gain weight. With a small suitcase filled with tools in his hand, he would come out of his tent early in the morning and begin repairing weapons. When there were many "clients" he worked late into the night by the light of the campfire. Then he made himself something that served as a lamp, which he called *mariposa* in Spanish. Because there was no kerosene he used horse or cow fat for it. Many weapons that would ordinarily have been thrown away were repaired and "returned to the ranks" by Rivas.

"That chap's a wizard," the partisans said of him.

They were right. He could repair anything.

"Rivas, there's something wrong with my watch!"

"Bad! Try repair."

"Rivas, my cigarette-lighter's busted!"

"Try repair."

When the plane came and we asked Rivas if he would fly to Moscow he looked horrified.

"No, no. I useful. Repair!" he cried, waving his arms.

That gave our detachment its gunsmith.

We had no field kitchens and, of course, no real cooks. To tell the truth, when we came we did not have any food either, and ate what the peasants voluntarily gave us.

The rule about the distribution of food was very strict. All that the scouts brought in, everything down to the last grain, was turned over to the supplies and transport platoon, which handled the distributing. No partisan had the right to use anything personally for himself.

Every unit had its own kitchen, and one kitchen served the medical corps, the headquarters staff, the radio operators and the scouts.

The cook of the headquarters kitchen was a Kazakh named Darbek Abdraimov. He introduced his own "menu", which consisted solely of a mash. This he made by boiling meat in water, then taking the meat out and mixing flour into the soup. The result was a thick, gluey mass, which we jokingly called "mash à la Kazakh". We ate it with bits of meat: there was no bread.

When we ran out of flour—which was fairly often—we cooked potatoes in the soup and crushed them.

When there was neither flour nor potatoes, we looked for wheat or rye in the fields and cooked that. The grain would be left to boil over the campfire all night, but it was never soft enough.

When finally we received a supply of flour we baked flat cakes instead of bread. Darbek did that expertly. He would put the dough on one frying-pan, cover it with another and then bury it in coals. When ready these "flat cakes à la Kazakh" were light and crisp.

The "pasture" was a great help. The forest abounded in mushrooms, strawberries, raspberries and bilberries. The gathering of berries and mushrooms was organised in the units. The men's teeth, lips and hands turned black from the bilberries. These berries were sometimes "stewed" in billy-cans over the fires, and this turned them into a kind of jam. Whenever we had captured saccharine we added

hat to the bilberry stew and had real jam for tea. Incidentally, we had no tea either. Leaves and flowers were simply lumped into boiling water.

* * *

We soon had to look for a new site for our camp. The smoke from the fires, the smell of the food and the refuse attracted crows. We were afraid that this might give us away. Besides, the water from the well proved to be bad and Dr. Tsessarsky insisted that we move somewhere else. We chose a site twenty kilometres away. Later, for various reasons, we changed camp frequently and became used to moving to new "residences".

In camp, Tsessarsky always had his hands full. He saw to the arrangement of the hospital tents, looked after the wounded, kept an eye on hygiene, had reception hours in the villages and did a hundred and one things besides.

He quickly won the respect of the partisans. Everybody had faith in him as a doctor. His bedside manner won the confidence of the wounded and the sick.

When Floréjac, who spoke no Russian, was wounded, Tsessarsky explained the nature of the wound to the patient with signs and gestures, made him believe that he would regain his strength and proved that there was still plenty of fight in him. Tsessarsky put Kostya Pastanov's arm in splints made of boards that were planed under his direction. The bone began to knit and soon Pastanogov was able to use a revolver.

"It won't be long before we'll start medical gymnastics on that arm," the doctor said, setting Kostya's mind at ease.

When people speak of a competent and experienced doctor, the picture is usually that of an elderly man with a white beard, gazing at a patient over his spectacles. This portrait could in no way be applied to Tsessarsky.

Albert Tsessarsky was twenty-one. He finished a medical institute in Moscow a month before the war broke out.

During his student days he was an intern at the Sklifasovsky Institute. When the war broke out he sent an application to the Moscow Committee of the Young Communist League, asking to be sent to the front. In July he was appointed to a unit of the Moscow garrison.

When our detachment was being formed some of Tsesarsky's friends volunteered. Albert got my telephone number from them and rang me up. We made an appointment and when he came I saw before me a tall and handsome young man with dark hair.

"Comrade Medvedev," he said, "please put me down for your partisan group and have me transferred from a rear unit."

"What can you do?"

"I am a field surgeon, and I can speak German."

"What we need is a surgeon, a general practitioner and a brave soldier rolled into one."

"It's hard to blow one's own trumpet. But you can ask Bazanov and Shmuilovsky about me. They are in your detachment."

Then and there I told Tsesarsky to write an application. With this application in my pocket I went to see the colonel-general commanding the division in which Tsesarsky served.

The colonel-general wrote: "Request granted," across the top corner of the application, and Tsesarsky jubilantly flew back to his division to complete his transfer.

We were due to fly to enemy-held territory in a few days and he did not waste a minute of this time. He assembled the medical supplies and surgical instruments that he thought he would need, attended operations, consulted with experienced surgeons, read books on medicine and still found time to train with the other men.

He was scheduled to fly with me, but when we learned that old man Kalashnikov had been injured at Tolsty Les and needed immediate medical attention, I called Tsesarsky and said:

"Can you fly today?"

It was almost evening.

"At any time," he replied.

"Be ready in two hours."

"Right."

He had got married shortly before joining us and he ran to say good-bye to his wife, but she was not at home. He left without seeing her.

Tsessarsky was indefatigable, always busy, always on the move, always hurrying somewhere.

Every day, regardless of the weather, he had all the units on parade. When the men were lined up he would order them to take their shirts off and begin his examination, putting to shame and reproving those who had dirty ears and hands and sending them to wash themselves. If he found even one louse he would have all the men deloused immediately. In warm weather they washed in the river or by the well and when it grew cold we had "baths" right at the campfire, where water was warmed.

The partisans did not grumble. What Tsessarsky said went.

The result of all this was that we had no cases of dysentery or typhus, although in the villages around us these diseases raged unchecked.

Tsessarsky regularly contributed to our newspaper, *We Shall Win*, which we began to put out while we were still on the march. It was handwritten on ordinary school drawing-books. About three pages were invariably devoted to the "medical problem", and here, too, Tsessarsky fought his war for hygiene.

"We're declaring war on epidemics," he wrote. "There is only one weapon in this war and it is cleanliness. In our ranks slovenliness amounts to treachery."

There was one issue with a drawing showing a sucking pig and a partisan drinking water from a bog. The caption, in verse, ran:

*A soldier looking like a pig
Brings every one of us disease.
Raw water, boys, is always full
Of microbes; never drink it, please.*

These lines were unsigned but I have a suspicion that they were written by Tsessarsky himself. He liked to write poetry, but in the newspaper he usually put his name only to "serious" verse.

When he would set out on one of his frequent tours of the villages the word that the doctor had come would get around swiftly and people with ailments would come in throngs.

Under the Germans the population received no medical aid, many people were ill, and famine and epidemics took a terrible toll. People suffering from all sorts of diseases came to Tsessarsky.

The children were in the most horrible plight. Malnutrition left them open to every disease. Parents came with children wrapped in dirty rags in their arms.

When Tsessarsky did not appear for any length of time the people asked the scouts to tell him they needed him, and the doctor would come at once, stopping in somebody's hut, putting on his white smock and opening his "surgery".

He often said that he was interested in art, literature and, in particular, the theatre.

"I'll join a theatre when the war is over," he always said, "I want to be an actor."

It was only in the evenings that he had any spare time, and he would begin a "concert" at the campfire where the men would be sitting. He skilfully declaimed the poetry of Pushkin, Nekrasov and Mayakovsky in a pleasant baritone.

There, behind the enemy lines, we listened to Mayakovsky's *Soviet Passport* with especial relish:

*With what satisfaction
by gendarmes in action
I'd be quartered,
crucified,
mauled,
For this hammered,
this sickled,
this red-to-distraction,
This Soviet Passport
that I hold.*

Other "actors"—singers, accordionists and dancers—appeared in our midst later, but at the beginning our men had nobody but Tsesarsky to assuage their physical pain and nostalgia.

A GHASTLY NEW ORDER

In the towns and villages of West Ukraine we saw for ourselves what we had hitherto only read about in the newspapers.

The nazis robbed the peasants, taking away their grain and livestock. Those who resisted were shot, hanged, burned alive or killed in mobile gas-chambers. Young people were taken to Germany. Those who hid themselves were hunted down with dogs, and the ones that were caught were beaten and driven to slavery or tortured to death.

And this they called a "new order".

Unendurable taxes were imposed on the peasants. Even for a watch-dog there was a tax of three hundred rubles. Famine, poverty and terrible epidemics mowed the people down. Whole districts were left without medical assistance.

That, too, was the "new order".

In every town and village the nazis forced all the Jews to register. Their property was confiscated and they themselves were sent to work in stone quarries.

The Jewish population of Rovno and the surrounding districts was exterminated at the close of August in strict conformity to a plan. The nazis took large groups of Jews out of the town, made them dig graves for themselves and then shot them. Without stopping to see who was dead and who alive they pushed them into the holes and buried them.

The vandals spared nobody, neither old folks nor babes in arms.

Only a few escaped. But that was far from salvation. On pain of death, the Germans warned the population against assisting Jews. There were announcements of rewards for traitors: a kilogram of salt for every Jew betrayed.

This was also the nazi "new order".

The population hated the nazis. They awaited their deliverance only at the hands of the Red Army, and we could feel that because when we partisans, the envoys of the people and Soviet power, went to the hamlets and villages we were received with open arms. But death was also the penalty for contact with partisans, and not only for that but also for knowing about a partisan and not betraying him. At that time the invaders never thought that the hour would come when they would have to pay for their villainy.

The film *Tribunal of the Peoples*, about the trial of the top German war criminals and about the atrocities committed by the nazis, showed me nothing I did not see in 1942 in Kastopol, Lyudvipol, Rakitnoye, Sarny and other districts and towns in West Ukraine.

The enemy lived in comfort on the blood-drenched, suffering land. The German officials brought their wives and relatives and took over the best houses in the towns and villages. Many were given whole estates. The land was tilled for them by our peasants.

The "new order" was held up by nazi bayonets, submachine-guns and gallows. But there also were traitors who supported the "new order" and helped the nazis in their black deeds.

Before the war the Germans smuggled their agents into the Soviet Union. Ukrainian nationalists enlisted by the Germans, these spies and traitors, organised gangs of kulaks and criminals, and when the war broke out they began to plunder the collective farms, and murder Communists, members of the Y.C.L. and collective-farm activists. Among the people they agitated for "the most illustrious Hitler", against Russia, against Soviet power.

After the Germans seized West Ukraine, a part of these traitors joined the nazi police, and the others remained in the gangs. The Germans armed them and sent them against the partisans.

One day as we followed a trail deep in the Sarny forests we suddenly came upon a whole encampment: the inhabitants of a big village were living in dug-outs and huts. An old man of about sixty, who had been the chairman of the collective farm in the village, told us of the collective farm's bitter portion. All the property had been carried away, many of the people killed and many taken to Germany. To save the others, he led them into the forest.

While he related all this, the old man frequently mentioned the Haidamaks.

"Who are they?" we asked.

"Don't tell me you don't know?" the old man said in surprise. "They are traitors, cut-throats. Real fiends, that's what they are. Here, look at their newspaper. They openly write how they sold their souls to Hitler."

The old man produced several issues of a newspaper called *Haidamak*. I took one of them. A phrase caught my eye:

"Nobody is barred from doing a bit of pillaging if he wants to."

These bandits were zealously toadying to the nazis, and in reward for their "faithful services" they were allowed to rob the population. Bandits were allowed to do what they pleased.

That was who supported the nazi "new order".

Brave when it came to raiding peaceful civilian inhabitants, the bandits crawled with fear at the very mention of the word "partisan".

A rumour that something like a thousand partisans had appeared in the district was spread soon after the battle at the Budki-Snovidovich junction. When we began sending our groups to scout the area the rumour acquired formidable proportions. People began to say that a whole partisan army was in the forest.

From time to time aircraft dropped us arms, ammunition and food. These aircraft were seen, of course, and the rumour of a huge partisan army gained a firm foothold throughout the district.

The Germans were alarmed. Rovno was deluged with dispatches requesting punitive troops and arms, and in expectation of this aid the traitors went into temporary hiding.

In the meantime we got busy.

The rumours that a partisan army had appeared were, I would say, not inaccurate. We numbered not a hundred or two hundred, but incomparably more. As a matter of fact all the local inhabitants were partisans. Anyone who had the least opportunity of helping us or of harming the Germans did so without hesitation. The people had a deadly hatred for the nazis and that was where our strength lay.

Had we decided to act with just the forces available to us we would never have done anything and would have quickly fallen into the clutches of the nazis. The whole thing was that the people themselves were our helpers and defenders. They were our mainstay behind the enemy lines.

We had posts of ten or fifteen partisans in the big villages. The villagers called them the Soviet commandant's offices and brought what food they could spare to these posts.

The peasants helped us in our scouting. Going about the country with chickens or baskets of vegetables they went to the district centres and the railway stations and later

told us what they saw or learned. The girls, old women and boys, who could hardly be suspected, were best at this. The local inhabitants knew the roads and the people. Their assistance was invaluable.

Life demanded that we interfere in the nazi "new order". We could not limit our activities to reconnaissance.

We began our operations in defence of our people modestly, by burning down the Alyabin Farm in Klesovo District, where the overseer was riding roughshod over the peasants. It belonged to Major Richter, head of the Gestapo in Sarny.

Our headquarters fitted out a group of twenty-five partisans with Pashun in command. The peasants themselves acted as guides and gave us all the details about the estate.

It was a night raid. The guards, who made no attempt at all at resistance, were promptly disarmed. And by day-break a train of carts came to our camp, bringing butter, cereals, sugar, honey, eggs and pedigree hogs. A herd of cows brought up the rear of the train. We gave the peasants the best of the milch cows and also shared the other products with them.

This was our first major foraging operation. But there was more to it than that.

Pashun brought in two prisoners. One was Richter's overseer, against whom the peasants had complained, and the other, a man named Nemovich, turned out to be a notorious traitor. A Ukrainian by nationality, he became a German spy before the war. After the coming of the nazis he went around the villages and small towns posing as a teacher and finding out where Soviet activists lived and betraying them. He knew many of the nazi agents sent into the Soviet Union, having gone to the same Gestapo training school as they.

It was decided to send him to Moscow. But the problem was where to keep him until the plane came. We made a

canvas sack and put the spy into it, leaving exposed only his head in a grey hat.

We began to raid German farms in earnest. In the surrounding districts we destroyed several estates and all the German creameries.

Later we made Richter squirm, destroying his second estate, seizing two of his cars, and closing in on him personally. Terrified he demanded troops from Rovno to guard his person.

Our men clashed with the "brave troops" of the nationalists during their very first sorties into the villages and hamlets of Rovno Region, and, as a rule, the bandits were routed.

Matters passed from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Valentin Semyonov, secretary of our Y.C.L. organisation, outwitted them wonderfully one day. Assuming the character of friends, Valentin and a few scouts went to the headquarters of one of the gangs, finding nine Haidamaks. There Valentin said he was a messenger from their "brothers-in-arms". In the ensuing conversation one of the bandits remarked that Valentin had a good submachine-gun.

"I got this beaut from a Red officer," Valentin boasted.

Someone said his submachine-gun was better. Valentin looked at it and said:

"Nonsense. Mine's better. Look, I'll show you."

With a single burst from his gun he killed them all on the spot and marched the two sentries to our camp.

Only nineteen and looking like a mischievous boy, Valentin was in reality a never-wearying and serious scout, strong and resourceful. He had studied at an institute of physical culture and had become a partisan by tradition, so to speak: his father was a partisan in the Ukraine during the Civil War.

He always came back with trophies.

"I've captured some bandits," he reported to me one day.

"All right, let's have the story," I said.

"They made the sign of the trident as soon as they saw us."

"What did you say?"

"Well, you know their emblem consists of three teeth and they call it the 'trident'.

"I know all that, but what has it got to do with it?"

"It's very simple. As soon as they saw us they raised their hands and that made a trident—two hands and the head in the middle."

Subsequently when any bandits surrendered the partisans said they "made the sign of the trident".

* * *

Our detachment grew rapidly. The collective farmers began sending their sons to us, giving them their blessings and fitting them out handsomely with the best clothes and footwear that had been hidden from the Germans. We had ten or fifteen men from many of the villages, and from some, like Vira and Bolshaya Selishcha and Malaya Selishcha, we had a representative from every family.

The daily communiqués from the fronts that we received by radio were distributed among the population. This inspired the people and strengthened their faith in victory.

The new partisans were trained under a programme spread over twenty days. As in real military schools, they were accustomed to camp life, trained in forest fighting tactics and taught to march and handle arms. Then they were examined by a commission, most passing the exams easily.

In the villages that were visited by the partisans, the peasants stopped paying the Germans taxes and delivering products to them. Formerly, with the help of the Haidamaks, the Germans had no difficulty collecting the taxes. Now gun-fire met the police who tried to go into the villages.

With the aid of the partisans the people resisted the ghastly "new order" that the nazis had imposed on them.

The Germans were powerless against the partisans. We

struck whenever and wherever we had the chance and avoided battle when faced by superior numbers. We had no difficulty in eluding the special troops and appeared where and when the Germans least expected us.

On this score we even had our own partisan proverbs. Here are a few:

Be on your guard: the enemy is looking for you.

If you show no fear the enemy will fear you.

Appear unexpectedly where you are least expected.

Show cunning: put the enemy off the track.

The deeper you are in the forest, the fewer Germans you will meet.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

There were strong German garrisons at the railway junction in Sarny and at Klesovo Station. These stations were kept under observation by a large group of our men led by Victor Kochetkov.

Victor contacted people who knew the inhabitants of these stations and they hunted up friends and relatives in Sarny and Klesovo who could be trusted. Kochetkov soon had an army of helpers.

In October 1942, Victor was told that a man working in the Klesovo forestry office wanted to meet him. Kochetkov agreed to the meeting.

"My name is Konstantin Dovger," an elderly man of about sixty said introducing himself.

"What do you want?" Kochetkov said, looking distrustfully at him.

"You already know all that I can tell you."

"Then what are you after?"

"What I am after? I'll tell you. I am a Soviet citizen and when I learned that there were partisans here I decided to join you."

"I imagine we can get along without you," Kochetkov snapped.

He did not know why, but he thought this man was a Gestapo agent.

Dovger saw what was in Kochetkov's mind and the colour drained from his face.

"You don't trust me? You think I'll betray you? I have a big family here—my wife, mother and three daughters. They'll answer for me if I do anything against you."

The tone in which these words were said was so sincere and, at the same time, so resolute that Kochetkov did not know what to think.

"But you're getting on in years and you'll have a hard time keeping up with the partisans," he said.

"I know it won't be easy for me to carry a gun and shoot because I have never been a military man, but there are other things I can do."

Konstantin Dovger finished a forestry institute before the Revolution and was appointed senior forester of the Klesovo Forestry Administration in Rovno. He settled down for good in Rovno Region and together with the people went through the ordeals that fell to the lot of West Ukraine. In 1920, this part of the Soviet Republic was torn away by the capitalists by force of arms. In 1939, nineteen years later, West Ukraine rejoined the Soviet Union and its people became part of the fraternal family of Soviet peoples. But when the war broke out this land was overrun by the nazi hordes.

As senior forester, Dovger knew exactly where the Soviet partisans had their camp. He quickly got in touch with us, but we felt we could not give him an assignment without first putting him to the test. The opportunity for this soon came and we saw that he was a true patriot.

Among other foresters he was summoned by the commander of the special troops sent against us.

"There are no partisans in my section of the forest," he said in answer to questions, "but I believe you'll find them in square 20."

With our approval he indicated the places we had already evacuated and the Germans combed the swamp-ridden forests to no purpose. All they found were tottering huts and the ash from our campfires.

Shortly after this Dovger carried out his first assignment from Kochetkov. Among other interesting things he brought back valuable information about Rovno. This concerned the location of the Reichskommissariat, the Gestapo, and the palace occupied by Erich Koch, Reichskommissar of the Ukraine and slayer of the Ukrainian people.

We sent Dovger to Kovel, Sarny, Rakitnoye and Rovno. Clever and shrewd, he found out things few people had access to.

It was not always possible to get in touch with him personally and for that reason he introduced his elder daughter Valya to Kochetkov. Valya was seventeen but with her small and frail body and big dark eyes she looked much younger. She was a ledger clerk at the mill in the village of Vira. At first she acted as a messenger between her father and Kochetkov, but soon began to carry out assignments on her own. She began visiting Klesovo and Sarny where from her friends she got information that interested us.

In the village of Vira, Klesovo District, the Germans had a machine works where they repaired steam engines, tractors and lorries. There was also a power station. A railway branch line ran from Klesovo to the works.

Valya informed Kochetkov that the Germans were planning to take all the equipment somewhere to the West. To prevent them from doing that, Kochetkov proposed that we blow up the works and the railway bridge at Klesovo Station.

From the local inhabitants Kochetkov obtained details about the arrangements at the works and about the strength of the guard, and sent twenty men to blow it up. Our sappers—Malikov, Fadeyev and a Spaniard named Gros—went with them.

They reached their destination at night and broke up into three groups. One with Gros went to the works, the second with Malikov to the power station and the third with Kochetkov and Fadeyev to the engine depot. They removed the guards noiselessly and planted mines.

When the preparations were completed the mines were set off at a signal from Kochetkov. There were deafening explosions. The depot, works and power station were enveloped in flames. It seemed that everything went well, but when the partisans collected at their rendezvous Kochetkov said dejectedly:

"We've mucked it up. Only two of the engines were in the depot, and the third with fifty carriages is still on the branch line. Are we going to leave it there, comrades?"

"Blow it up."

"Blow it up you say? But how are we going to do it when we only have one mine left, and it's for the bridge."

Gros came forward with the solution. He thought of a way to destroy the bridge, the engine and the carriages with that one mine.

Here is how it was done. Malikov, Fadeyev and some of the partisans went to lay the mine under the bridge. The others went to the engine. There, one of the men, Nechiporuk, who had been an engine-driver's mate, started a fire in the furnace of the locomotive. By the time the mine was laid the train was ready to start. Nechiporuk set it moving with the throttle opened wide and jumped off. Gathering speed, the engine reached the bridge just as the mine went off, and it plunged into the river below, dragging about twenty carriages after it.

This operation alarmed the Germans. A special commission arrived a few days later and its estimate was that the losses ran into several million marks.

"It warms my heart," Kochetkov said in camp. "And Gros was magnificent. It was a real brain wave he had."

The partisans liked Kochetkov, but among themselves

they made fun of him. The reason for this was that Victor could never talk quietly. His booming voice was the subject of many a joke.

Our men usually went out at night and moved as soundlessly as possible, not touching even a twig for fear of making a noise.

"Stop talking. March silently," Kochetkov would say if he heard anybody whispering, but his own voice would set the dogs in the surrounding hamlets barking.

One night Kochetkov led a group of fifteen men on a scouting mission. When they came to a river they had to ford, Kochetkov ordered them to undress.

The partisans took their clothes off and waded into the water, shivering in the moonlight. Reaching the opposite bank they started to dress.

"As you were!" Kochetkov commanded. "We'll move on like this. There's no sense dressing when there's a tributary of this river just a little way off."

The men pushed on naked. They walked for one kilometre, then another, but still there was no tributary. It was cold and the midges swarmed all over the men.

"Where's the tributary?" they asked.

"Shut up!" was all the answer they got.

They went farther, walking for about five kilometres until Kochetkov realised that his map had misled him.

"Halt, you may dress," he ordered in a matter-of-fact tone.

We joked at Kochetkov's expense for a long time after that. Stories about his "naked march" raised howls of laughter. But our jokes never bothered him. He laughed with the rest as though somebody else were meant.

* * *

At the close of 1942 Dovger suggested that we get in touch with a certain Fidarov.

"You'll find him useful," he said. "He was an engineer on the Kovel Railway and was station-master at Sarny

just before the war broke out. He has many friends in Sarny and in Kovel. He is a Party member and I should imagine he'll be reliable as an underground worker."

"Where is he now?"

"He had many trying experiences when the Germans came, and he went into hiding. Then he got a job as dispatcher at a mill near Sarny."

Konstantin Dovger had a genius for choosing the right people for us. We knew that anybody recommended by him was tried and true.

Kochetkov contacted Fidarov and within six weeks the latter organised a strong observation and wrecking group of workers, engine-drivers, track-walkers and office employees at the Sarny railway junction.

He kept us regularly informed about the traffic on the Kovel-Korosten and Sarny-Rovno lines, giving us the number of trains, the destination and kind of troops, and the quantity and kind of freight and equipment. These reports were immediately passed on to the High Command.

Fidarov's group soon turned to active wrecking, blowing up trains and bridges. Kochetkov kept in touch with him through Dovger and Valya.

"PAUL SIEBERT"

Three carts were moving along the Rovno-Kastopol road and although the horses looked sleek and well-fed the pace of the carts was leisurely.

In the first was a German officer. Sitting erect, he looked about him with a gaze that was at once arrogant, indifferent and disdainful. Beside him was a man in khaki uniform, a white arm-band and a trident badge on his forage cap. This was the uniform of the traitors who took service with the nazis.

The other two carts were filled with police. They wore a mixed assortment of clothes: some were in army slacks

and a simple rural jacket, others in a tunic and a cap, still others in a Red Army field shirt with the tabs torn off. These clothes were obviously stolen. But on the sleeve of each there was a white arm-band with the German word "Schutzpolizei". The Ukrainian peasants called these arm-bands "cautions". A very apt name it was for it also meant that one had to watch one's step when a man wearing such an arm-band was around.

In contrast to the imperturbable German officer and policeman, evidently the chief, in the first cart, the men in the other two carts were bawling songs and smoking home-grown tobacco.

The picture of bandits with a nazi officer leading them to smash up a village for disobedience was usual for those times.

The road ran straight through open country, with fields and meadows on either side and a woods some distance away. There was quite a bit of traffic on the road. German lorries and passenger cars sped past the carts, and the latter moved slowly hugging the ditch along the edge of the road.

Every time a car overtook the carts or came speeding in the opposite direction, the officer straightened his back into a rigid line. Swearing angrily at the bawling fraternity behind him, he saluted in the nazi manner with his right arm stretched out and cried "Heil Hitler!" It was plain that it nauseated him to be riding in a cart with riff-raff of an "inferior race" when his brother-officers were sweeping past in comfortable cars.

The carts had been on the road for three hours, striking terror into the hearts of the inhabitants of the roadside hamlets. Sighting them in the distance the people hid in the huts, apprehensively peeping out of the windows.

A big and handsome limousine came into view in front of the carts. Here the road stretched across fields. The

officer in the cart stood up, looking round attentively. There was nothing to be seen either in front or behind the car. Turning to the carts behind him, he raised his arm. The songs and the shouting died down instantly. Everybody looked up.

The car came closer. The man beside the officer jumped off the cart and quickly went forward, and as the car came abreast of him he calmly threw an anti-tank grenade at it. The blast enveloped the shiny Opel-Admiral and it turned over into the roadside ditch.

The men in the other carts jumped down and with guns on the ready ran to the overturned car near which the German officer was already standing.

"Good work, Prikhodko," he said in excellent Russian to the man who had thrown the grenade. "You had it calculated exactly. The car's overturned and I think the passengers are alive. Get them out."

When two frightened nazis, a little worse for wear, were dragged out of the car, the officer spoke to them in German:

"Gentlemen, please don't worry. I am Lieutenant Paul Siebert. Who have I the honour of addressing?"

"I am Major Count Hahn, head of a division at the Reichskommissariat," one of the Germans, a stout, elderly man with reddish hair, replied, smoothing his uniform. "And this," he pointed to the other man, "is Imperial Counsellor for Communications Reiss, who has just come from Berlin."

"I'm very pleased to meet you," the officer said. "Your car's had an accident. I can offer you a lift in my cart."

"What's the meaning of all this?" the count demanded, growing indignant. "I can't understand it."

Hahn was about to ask more questions, but the officer nodded to his men. The nazis were seized, tied and laid on the floor of one of the carts.

At the next turning the carts went off the road and soon reached one of our posts. There the German officer

changed into a pair of overalls and regained his true identity. He was Nikolai Kuznetsov.

It was the same Kuznetsov who came down to us by parachute near the hamlet of Zlui and whom I had been so anxiously awaiting.

He hailed from the Urals. His serious, stern face and especially his steel-blue eyes reflected a remarkable intelligence.

Tall, well-built, courageous and strong he soon became our best scout.

He spoke German fluently, having learned it in his boyhood from German colonists in a village near his own. He not only learned to speak the language but also got to know the manners and customs of the Germans. He continued his study of the German language in school and then at an institute. In civilian life Nikolai was an engineer.

We quickly realised that he was a born linguist. He did not know a word of Ukrainian, but when he joined us in the Ukraine and began visiting the hamlets he rapidly learned the language, sang Ukrainian songs and the peasants thought he was a Ukrainian.

When we penetrated places inhabited by Poles, Nikolai learned to speak Polish. As though that were not enough he could speak broken Russian, Ukrainian or Polish as a German who knows a little Russian, or as a Russian who knows a little Polish. In this respect he was a superb actor.

When we met in Moscow he told us that he would like to try to pass off as a German. We agreed to this but made it a condition that he should first get to know the nazi army regulations and study some German province so as to be able to give out that he was born there.

He decided he would pose as a Prussian. He read a large number of books about East Prussia, her economy, scenery and people. His picture of the city of Königsberg was so vivid that it seemed he was really born and bred there.

We began giving him prisoners not only for interrogation but also to enable him to learn the regulations obtaining in the nazi army.

The prisoners that we brought back did not satisfy him.

"They're blockheads, clock-work dummeis!" he said. "All they can do is shuffle their feet. There's nothing to talk to them about when 'Heil Hitler' is all they understand."

"Do you expect us to get you a professor?" I said.

"All right. I'll get what I want myself. Just give me permission."

"You have it."

And Nikolai planned the operation I have just described. The whole plan was really extraordinary. In military textbooks the directions for an ambush are that troops hide in a definite place, wait for the appearance of the enemy and then attack him. But what if you're given an open road with nothing around except fields? Where are you to lie in ambush in those conditions? Nikolai decided on what he called a "mobile ambush" in carts.

So as not to arouse suspicion he donned the uniform of a German officer and had the other men dress as policemen.

Not for nothing did Kuznetsov take a fancy to the handsome Opel-Admiral. The bag in the car indeed proved to be interesting, the prisoners really had a lot to tell us.

In the camp Kuznetsov appeared before the prisoners in the uniform of a German lieutenant. In keeping with German Army etiquette he clicked his heels.

"Sit down," Major Hahn said gloomily to the gallant lieutenant, indicating a log. In the tent there was nothing else to sit on.

"How do you feel?" Nikolai asked blandly.

But the others were in no mood for pleasantries.

"Tell me where we are and what all this means."

"You are in a Russian partisan camp."

"Why are you, a German officer, here in the camp of our enemies?"

"I came to the conclusion that Hitler is leading Germany to her doom and that he will lose the war and so I voluntarily went over to the Russians. I advise you to be frank, too."

The Germans gave in quickly and Kuznetsov had many long conversations with them. They were competent judges and Nikolai was able to test his knowledge of German on them. Providentially, Count Hahn proved to be Kuznetsov's "fellow townsman" from Königsberg.

When we searched Reiss we found a map of the earth and motor roads and railways of the whole of occupied Ukraine. The map contained detailed descriptions. While studying the map and descriptions Kuznetsov came across a very important secret of the Germans. The descriptions indicated the route of an armoured cable linking Berlin with Hitler's Eastern headquarters, near Vinnitsa.

He wanted details and asked Hahn:

"When was this cable laid?"

"About a month ago."

"Who built it?"

"Russians. Prisoners of war."

"But it was a risk letting the Russians know the location of Hitler's headquarters."

"We secured ourselves against all risk."

"You mean you killed them?"

Hahn and Reiss were silent.

"How many prisoners did you have on that job?"

"Twelve thousand."

"And all twelve thousand were. . ."

"But that's the work of the Gestapo," Hahn pleaded.

From the prisoners Kuznetsov got all the information he wanted. At the same time he saw that they had no doubts whatever that he was a German.

We hanged Hahn and Reiss. It was only what they deserved.

We felt that the time had come when we could send Kuznetsov into Rovno. But there was one thing that worried me and it was that in his sleep Nikolai sometimes spoke in Russian. That could give him away.

There was no other recourse than to tell him about it and to advise him to speak as little Russian as possible.

"If you feel you must talk, go to Tsessarsky and talk to him . . . in German. And try to think in German."

Kuznetsov yearned to start what he called real work. Though he hardly ever spoke about it because he was by nature restrained and even somewhat reserved, he had an implacable hatred for the nazis. But this man had a big and kind heart.

Once Nikolai and I were strolling in the vicinity of the camp. It was a cold day in autumn and the first snow had fallen.

We noticed a sudden movement in the bushes. We went up and saw a boy of about seven. But his appearance! It was terrible just to look at him.

His shirt and pants were in shreds which showed his emaciated body: ribs with a blue skin drawn taut over them, thin legs. His hair was so thick with lice that it seemed to be moving. He had a festering wound on one of his legs.

The boy gazed up at us with lacklustre, almost lifeless eyes and shrank a little.

I glanced at Nikolai. He was deathly pale. Without a word he took off his woollen jersey, covered the boy, tenderly took him up in his arms and walked quickly to the camp.

The boy, as we later learned, was called Pinya. By some miracle he remained alive during a nazi butchery of Jews.

Pinya was put in our hospital and Nikolai, whenever he returned from a mission, always had some sweetmeat for him.

"You'll get well," Nikolai said to him, "and we'll send you to Moscow."

THE SILVER BROADSWORD

Near our camp, adjoining the village of Voronovka, there was a meadow that we found we could use as a landing field. It was a big meadow and it had a stretch of even ground long enough for a plane handled by a skilful pilot to land.

We were promised ammunition from Moscow and wanted to send to Moscow the important documents we had secured and also our wounded. We gave Moscow the position of the landing field and were informed that a plane would be sent.

Kochetkov was our airfield expert. He marked off the places for the signal fires strictly in accordance to rules. One fire showed where the landing strip ended and the others were shaped into the letter T, showing the direction and location of the landing strip. For a distance of three to five kilometres all the roads leading to the airfield were guarded by sentry posts.

We waited for two nights in vain. The aircraft appeared on the third night but there was a setback in store for us. A thick mist rising from a stream began to move in the direction of the landing strip about an hour before the plane was due. It spread over the ground, covering the entire meadow. We did not know what to do or how to warn the pilot of the danger because we had not arranged for any signals against such a contingency.

"Victor," I said to Kochetkov, "put more wood on the fires, perhaps they will disperse the fog."

The fires burned brightly, but the blanket of fog clung to the ground.

Before we could think of anything else to do we heard the roar of motors.

"Air!" bellowed Kochetkov. "More wood!"

That was when his booming voice stood us in good stead.

Hardly visible through the fog, the plane appeared over the landing strip, flew along it and then disappeared.

"He's gone back. He saw that he couldn't land," I said.

But suddenly voices cried out:

"He's coming back!"

"He's decided to land after all," somebody behind me said.

The roar of the engines grew more distinct. We did not see the plane but by the sound of the engines we realised that it was already over the landing strip. In the next instant there was a blinding flash of light and a deafening crash.

The pilot had not seen the letter T and landed in the wrong place. We all rushed towards the plane.

We found it with its nose in the ground a few paces away from the stream on the edge of the meadow. The pilots, navigator and radio operator were already hopping out of it with pistols in their hands. They put their pistols away when they saw who we were and sat down helplessly on the ground beside the wrecked plane. The commander had blood on his forehead.

"Are you wounded?" I asked.

"It's only a scratch. But this chap," the captain pointed to the plane, "is a goner."

Rivas and the crew looked over the plane and confirmed that they could do nothing: the chassis was damaged and there were holes in the wings and tanks. The plane was beyond repair: it needed spare parts.

Reluctant though we were to do it we adopted the only possible decision, which was to burn the plane. We could not leave it as a trophy for the enemy.

The partisans quickly unloaded the plane, took all the machine-guns and everything else that could be unscrewed or torn off. Then they piled straw under the wings and the gasoline tanks, poured paraffin over it and set it alight.

Flames enveloped the plane, the tanks exploded and clouds of smoke rose to the sky. We watched and silently said farewell to it as to a live envoy from the motherland. To some extent both we and the pilots felt we were

to blame. But we could not pinpoint the blame. Damn the fog.

This happened during the days of the great Battle of Stalingrad. At a time when the whole country was straining every nerve in the struggle against the nazis the motherland did not forget us, a detachment of Soviet partisans fighting in the faraway Sarny forests.

The next morning we held a meeting of the partisans of our detachment. We swore that to avenge the plane we had burned we would destroy ten enemy planes and send all the valuables we would capture from the enemy to Moscow so that new planes could be built. Though we were behind the enemy lines we subscribed to the patriotic undertaking of the workers and peasants and the Soviet intelligentsia who were giving their savings to buy war machines for our Army.

Once again we started a search for a reliable landing field. During this search we met people who showed us a suitable place and helped the detachment in many ways.

Shortly before the destruction of the plane, somebody attacked a German cart train with dairy products about twenty kilometres away from our camp. They killed all the guards, took the products and distributed them among the peasants. When I heard of this I thought it was the work of some of our scouts. I questioned them but they knew nothing. Several days later we learned that a German truck with the district gendarmerie chief, two German soldiers and five captive collective farmers was stopped on the motor road. The Germans were shot and the farmers sent home. Our partisans got the story from the freed farmers.

"Can you describe the men?" the partisans asked.

"They looked like you, but we can't say exactly. We were too frightened to remember anything."

I ordered all scouts to question the people and find out who these other partisans were. A fortnight went by but we learned nothing.

While looking for a new landing field, one of our scout groups headed by Napoleon Sargsyan, a jolly young Armenian, saw a village they did not know. Stopping his men on the fringe of a forest about three hundred paces away from the village, Sargsyan said:

"Wait for me here. I'll go in alone."

He quickly "camouflaged" himself by turning his forage cap round so that the star was at the back of his head, and gave his submachine-gun to one of the men.

Reaching the first cottage he saw a man and noticed him making a sign to somebody at a window. Another man came out of the house. Sargsyan decided that this was a trap and quickly retreated. The strangers followed him. The scouts on the fringe of the forest saw all this and hid themselves. They were about to open fire to cover Sargsyan, who was unarmed, when they heard one of the pursuers call out in an amicable voice:

"Hey, fellow! Stop. We want to talk to you."

Sargsyan joined his men, grabbed his submachine-gun and turned round to face the enemy.

"Halt or we'll shoot!" he shouted.

But the strangers paid no attention. One of them, a stocky chap with blue eyes, came up to Sargsyan and said:

"You'd do better if you turned your forage cap round. I only calmed down when I saw the star. Since there's a star on the forage cap it means you're friends."

"So what?" Sargsyan said jauntily.

"You're friends, that's what. My name is Nikolai Struciński. Tell your commander that I want to see him. I have a small group here and we're partisans, too."

The conversation became friendly. They arranged where to meet and in token of friendship Struciński gave Sargsyan a captured silver broadsword, the kind that were usually worn by German district commandants.

On his return to camp Sargsyan told me about this meeting but said nothing about how he left his submachine-gun

with his men and then ran. Neither did he say a word about the gift.

The next issue of *We Shall Win*, our newspaper, came out on the day after my conversation with Sargsyan. It carried a cartoon of Sargsyan, his forage cap worn backwards, walking importantly with his hands in his pockets, and behind him a partisan standing with a submachine-gun in his hands and a look of consternation on his face.

Sargsyan was not in camp and I could not have it out with him. I had sent him for Nikolai Struciński.

He soon came back.

"Did you bring him?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Did you see this picture?" I showed him the cartoon.

The lad turned pale.

"Is it true?"

"Yes."

"How could you allow yourself to do it? How could you give your weapon to somebody else?"

"I'm sorry, Comrade Commander."

"I don't want it ever to happen again. Come."

We went to the men Sargsyan brought.

There were nine of them and they were waiting at the end tent of the camp. They were armed with CB self-loading rifles, German carbines and pistols. The handles of German hand-grenades, looking like potato-mashers, were sticking out of their pockets. And on the ground was a machine-gun.

"Who's in charge?" I asked, looking at an elderly man with a moustache. I thought he was in command but I was mistaken. A very young man came forward.

"Nikolai Struciński," he said, introducing himself.

"I'm listening."

"We want to join your detachment."

"Who are 'we'?"

"We're practically all one family. This is my father," he indicated the elderly man with the moustache. "These

are my younger brothers—Jerzy, Rostislav and Vladimir. These two are collective farmers from our village, and these men escaped from the Rovno concentration camp. That's the lot."

While I listened I scrutinised the Strucińskis, father and sons. Before me was an age ladder—a father and four sons. The difference in the ages of the sons was not big, perhaps a year or eighteen months. They were strong and healthy lads and were very much alike. Struciński senior had regular features, blue eyes and a thickset body. All his sons had the same features.

Nikolai Struciński told me that eleven men had recently left their group aiming to cross the front and join the Red Army.

He spoke slowly, quietly, carefully choosing his words. His father looked steadily at him, repeating his words with soundless movements of his lips.

"So you had a whole partisan unit and you were the commander?"

"We're no partisans. It's the Germans who called us that."

"What did you do to earn the name?"

"There was nothing much we could do. We're too few."

"Who told you about us?"

"That's very simple. Everybody is talking about you. We have been looking for you for a long time and have even been where your plane burned up."

And he told me that near the village of Lenchin there was a big, flat pasture where a plane could land easily.

I talked the thing over with Stekhov, my political deputy, and Lukin, our reconnaissance chief, and we decided to admit the entire Struciński group into our detachment.

Some days later I saw Sargsyan with the silver broadsword and asked him:

"Where did you get it?"

"Comrade Commander, it's a present."

"Who from?"

"That Struciński chap gave it to me."

That gave me an idea. I summoned Nikolai Struciński.

"Comrade Struciński," I asked him, "where did you get the silver broadsword?"

"Oh, that. We were rescuing some captive collective farmers and the district gendarmerie chief himself was in the truck. Well, we took the broadsword from him."

"So it was you? That solves the mystery. And you were the men who captured the cart train?"

"Yes."

And he went on to tell me the story of the Struciński family, a family of Soviet partisans, and a remarkable story it was, too.

FAMILY OF PARTISANS

Vladimir Struciński had been a stone-mason in Lyudvipol District almost all his life. He and his wife Marfa raised nine children. Life became easier for the family when West Ukraine was reunited with Soviet Ukraine. Vladimir got the job of assistant forester.

On the very eve of the war his elder sons were already working: Nikolai was a driver in Rovno, Jerzy, a turner's apprentice at the shipbuilding yard in Kerch, and Rostislav and Vladimir helped their father run the household. The other children were still too small.

The war broke out and the Germans seized West Ukraine. During the very first days of the occupation the Germans arrested two of Vladimir's sons, Nikolai and Rostislav, and wanted to send them to Germany, but they escaped from the camp and hid in a forest. They were soon joined by Jerzy, who managed to make his way back home.

Coming upon a battered German tank Jerzy took the machine-gun off it and adapted it for hand firing. This was at first the three brothers' only weapon. Nikolai opened the score by killing a German gendarme and taking away his weapon.

That marked the beginning of the three brothers' career as partisans. Their father joined them, coming under the captaincy of his own son.

The partisan group began to grow. Local inhabitants and Red Army men who had escaped from German captivity and were wandering about the forests joined it singly.

In the villages the people began to talk of the partisan brothers. Acting on information from a traitor, the nazis broke into the Strucińskis' home where Marfa and four of the younger children were. They beat her with their feet and with the butts of their rifles, beat her children in front of her and demanded to know the whereabouts of her husband and sons. They got nothing out of her. Then they tied her hands behind her back and warned her that she would be hanged if she did not tell them.

But they did not hang her. They decided to leave her as a bait for the sons.

Vladimir got through to the house at night and softly knocked on the window. Marfa opened the door: she had been expecting that signal because her younger son Volodya had been to his father and told him everything.

"Listen, Ma," Vladimir said. "Pack quickly. Take the children and come with me. I'll take you to a man we can trust, and Volodya will go to the forest with me."

Volodya was sixteen.

Marfa hurriedly packed some clothes, woke up the children and the family left the house.

Under cover of the short summer night the Strucińskis left their native village unnoticed. A few days later the Germans took what they left behind and set fire to the house.

The Struciński family were a great find for us. They were at home in the Sarny forests, had relatives and friends in many villages and towns and, what was very important because that interested us most of all, knew the town of Rovno like a book.

It was no accident that Nikolai Struciński became the commander of his small detachment. Courage, daring and a cool head were happily combined in him. The men quickly nicknamed him Placid.

We did not at first pay much attention to Jerzy Struciński, who was a year younger than Nikolai. Stocky, with blue eyes and fair hair like the elder Strucińskis, he was shorter than the rest and, I would say, even more inexcitable and reticent than Nikolai. His gait was a slow waddle.

"He's a bumpkin," Lukin once said.

I thought so, too. But we soon changed our minds about Jerzy. After fighting in a few actions he earned the reputation of a man who knew no fear.

"Jerzy uses his machine-gun as though it were a miner's pneumatic pick," Jerzy's unit commander, Kolya Fadeyev, told me.

Jerzy was a crack shot and there was no silencer on his machine-gun. That, added together, caused terrible panic among the enemy. Then we found that Jerzy was master of all kinds of weapons and it somehow came about that he began to teach others to shoot and to disassemble and clean submachine-guns, machine-guns and rifles. Before long he began to take part in all the more difficult operations. He returned from battle as unassumingly as he went into it, and would silently sit and listen to what others had to say.

There was nothing to upbraid Jerzy for and as for praising him we tried to do it in a restrained way. The men spoke admiringly about him but if anybody said a word of praise in his presence it not only embarrassed him but also made him suffer: he would flush to the roots of his hair, not a muscle would move in his face, but the colour would rise and then gradually fade leaving him pale.

Nineteen-year-old Rostislav Struciński was a zealous and disciplined soldier and imitated his brothers in everything.

Volodya Struciński was nearly seventeen. We at first wanted to send him to the supplies and transport platoon because he was hard of hearing, but he protested, saying that he wanted to fight. Persuasion did not help, and we had to put a weapon in his hands. The men of the fighting unit he was sent to tried to keep him in camp, afraid that during battle he would not hear commands. But nothing came of that either. He was so eager for action that in the end he took part in almost all the engagements.

Volodya loved arms, spending all his spare time taking his carbine to pieces, cleaning it and again assembling it. And he also loved to listen to war stories. His eyes would virtually climb out of their sockets from the strain of listening.

Vladimir, the father of the Struciński family, was fifty-five but he was in vigorous health. The streaks of grey could hardly be seen because his hair was light. We appointed him deputy commander of the supplies and transport platoon. As a purveyor he was unparalleled. He knew Ukrainian and Polish and could speak to the peasants in a language they knew. Wherever old Struciński appeared they willingly gave us potatoes, vegetables, flour, cereals and other products.

He was also an asset to us in our combat procurements, that is to say, when we attacked German storehouses and cart trains. He was a good rifle shot and kept a level head in battle.

The old man's only trouble was that he was much too soft-hearted. As "caterer" he was in charge of the alcohol that we "obtained" from a German wine distillery. The alcohol was rationed out only under special circumstances, chiefly for the hospital. But if anybody wanted a drink he would go to Struciński and say:

"I think I've got a fever. About fifty grammes might help."

Or:

"I've caught a cold; perhaps it's a touch of 'flu.'"

And the old man could not refuse the "medicine".

We reproved and even punished the men who went and asked for alcohol, and spoke to Struciński about it, but his embarrassed excuse invariably was:

"I hope you'll forgive me, Comrade Commander. I can't help feeling for a man when he's ill."

"We have a doctor to look after anybody who's ill."

"Yes, you're right," Struciński would say penitently.

But the same thing would happen all over again in a day or two. We had no other alternative but to take the spirits away from Struciński's supervision.

One day Nikolai Struciński asked our scouts to look in at the hamlet where Marfa and the children were hiding from the Germans and to see how she was getting along.

When they returned, one of them came to me and said:

"Comrade Commander, here's a letter for you. The youngster that gave it to me said I should hand it to you personally."

He gave me a piece of grey paper on which was written in pencil:

"To the commander of the partisan detachment from Vasily Struciński application I want to join the partisan detachment when I come I thank the commander very much. Good-bye Vasily Struciński October 26, 1942. My brothers are partisans and I also want to be a partisan."

Vasya could be excused the mistakes in his note. He was only ten and had had only a year of schooling when the war broke out. Before I could think of a reply I found Nikolai Struciński before me.

"This is an application from your kid brother," I said to him.

Nikolai smiled.

"He's been giving us no peace for a long time. He wants to be a partisan. But I have a request, Comrade Commander. The boys are telling me that it's dangerous for my family to live there. The Germans, so it seems, have got on their track. I want your permission to bring them here.

I gave him permission and in a few days Marfa Strucińska came to the camp with three children and her niece Jadzia. Vasya, the lad who wrote the application, was also with her.

All the Strucińskis, young and old, found their place in the detachment.

Marfa, who was past fifty, could not sit idle for a single minute. Too shy to come to me herself she sent her old man to ask for something to do. I was reluctant to assign her to anything because she had enough cares with the children. So Marfa began to sew for her family and for others and to wash clothes for the partisans. She worked without a let up for whole days and nights. I finally decided that it would be easier for her if she cooked for one of the platoons. She gladly undertook the job but went on with her sewing and washing.

Vasya, in spite of his bellicosity, was sent to the supplies and transport platoon to look after the horses. He sulked, feeling offended, but later he took such a liking for my stallion Diversant and the other horses that he resigned himself to his duties. In addition, he was his father's unofficial aide, running about the camp with messages.

Eleven-year-old Slava also helped his father, and Struciński's niece Jadzia became a cook in one of the units.

Struciński's daughter, fifteen-year-old Katya, was appointed to the medical corps, where she at once became a favourite with the sick and wounded. Unlike her brothers she was unusually quick and active. She never could sit still, running every minute to the wounded and asking:

"Is there anything you want? Anything I can do for you?"

And she would be off on an errand at top speed, her golden tresses waving in all directions.

She came to me one day. It would be more correct to say that she blew into my hut. Breathless and excited, her sly blue eyes flashing, she said quickly:

"Comrade Commander, the wounded are dissatisfied with the food. It makes no difference if they have their meals from the headquarters kitchen. They don't know how to cook there and there's never any variety. The men are suffering from different diseases and want something special. They must have a separate kitchen."

"A separate kitchen?" I smiled. "Where are we to get a 'special' cook? Who'll cook for them?"

"I could. Why not?"

"Well, all right."

We organised a separate kitchen for the medical corps and Katya was made chief cook. We gave her two assistants—staid, bearded partisans. The girl could not, of course, order them around and so did everything herself. She would drag a huge leg of a boar to her kitchen, chop it up with an axe, roast it and still find time for a sick man. And our wounded devoured the Ukrainian borsches, pork chops and curd dumplings, smacking their lips and praising Katya.

SMALL KOLYA

One of our men, Kazakov, strayed from his group, which was sent on a scouting mission to Klesovo Station. Because of inexperience and his inability to find his bearings, he roamed the forests all day without finding the road back to camp. No matter what direction he took he returned to the same spot in an hour or two.

He spent the night alone in the forest, unable even to light a fire. He went on with his search all the next day as well, and towards nightfall he heard the lowing of cows. Cautiously avoiding windfallen branches, he stole in the direction of the sound.

He soon reached a glade where cows and oxen were grazing. A boy cowherd was sitting on the stump of a tree, hitting a stick with a penknife.

Looking about him to make sure that no one else was there, Kazakov went to the boy.

"Hello, youngster!"

The thin, fair-haired little cowherd leaped to his feet with fright and stared at Kazakov, his eyes rolling.

"What are you scared of? You live around here?"

"Yes," the boy replied, then seeing a rifle on Kazakov's shoulder and a pistol and hand-grenades in his belt, he brightened up and asked: "And you, uncle, are you a partisan?"

"A smart boy, eh!"

"I know you're a partisan," the small cowherd said in an assured tone of voice.

"Have you seen any partisans?"

"No, but I heard tell there's many of them near Rudnya-Bobrovskaya."

"How do I get to Rudnya-Bobrovskaya? It's where I have to go."

"I know the way. If you like I can show you."

"Yes. What's your name?"

"Kolya."

Then and there Kolya told Kazakov everything about himself. He lived in Klesovo. His father was tortured to death by the nazis, and his mother and elder brother had been driven away to Germany. Kolya had been going to school, but the school had been closed and he had become a cowherd to earn his keep at least.

"Listen, Kolya," Kazakov interrupted him: "I haven't had anything to eat for almost two days. Take the cows to the village and bring me some food."

Kolya cracked his whip, gave a whistle and drove his "goods" as he called the herd. He returned to Kazakov late in the evening, bringing a mug of milk, some flat-cakes and a piece of fat.

"Here, uncle, eat it. My mistress gave this to me for my supper."

Kazakov fell upon the food ravenously, and while he ate Kolya quickly asked him:

"Uncle, may I go to the partisans with you?"

"The commander won't like it, Kolya. You're too small."

"I'm twelve already."

"Too small, my lad."

"In that case, uncle, let's organise a detachment of our own. The forests are full of people hiding from the Germans."

Kazakov smiled.

"What if the Germans catch and kill us? What then?"

"But we won't let them catch us."

When it was quite dark, Kolya took Kazakov to a farm and there in a hayloft the partisan, who had not closed his eyes for two nights, fell sound asleep. Near the shed Kolya paced up and down, a self-appointed sentry, and at daybreak roused the partisan and went off with him.

In the morning the peasants drove out their cows but the small cowherd did not appear. They looked for him all over the hamlet but he was nowhere to be seen.

"Where could he have got to?" the people wondered.

In the meantime Kolya and Kazakov were already far from the hamlet on the road to Rudnya-Bobrovskaya.

"So you don't want to take me with you, uncle? Well, I won't leave you all the same. I'll go with you and that's the end of it."

They stopped near a village called Karpilovka. Kazakov hid himself behind some bushes and Kolya went to the village to get some food.

He returned in an hour with some bread and fat.

"I heard," he said, "that the Karpilovka forestry station is full of policemen. They sleep like logs at night and have no guards. What do you say, uncle, if we attack them?"

It is hard to imagine how they came to an agreement, but the fact remains that Kazakov yielded to Kolya's persuasions. "It'll be great if I bring back some trophies and prisoners," he reflected.

Kazakov gave the boy a hand-grenade and a pistol, and at night they stole up to the forestry station. There was a cart near the house, and the horse, left in harness, was lazily chewing hay. Kazakov and the boy entered the hut where the policemen were snoring, some sprawled over the table and the others on the floor.

"Hands up!" Kolya cried, his hand-grenade held above his head.

Kazakov kept his rifle in readiness.

The policemen leapt to their feet and with heads still full of sleep submissively raised their arms.

"Go out into the street. Put your weapons in the cart," Kazakov ordered.

Without a word the policemen drew on their boots and obediently carried their rifles out of the hut.

Kazakov stood in the doorway and Kolya, with hand-grenade and pistol, went to the cart.

Funny and strange as it may sound, but a partisan and a boy disarmed a large group of policemen. And there was a funny ending to this episode.

When all the weapons were in the cart, Kazakov and the boy ordered the policemen to line up and led them out of the village in the direction of our camp, which was at least forty kilometres away. In the evening they had to stop at a hamlet for a rest, and at night the policemen escaped taking all their weapons with them. It is amazing that they left our heroes unharmed.

Kolya stuck to Kazakov and came to the camp with him. The men received him very kindly and we did not have the heart to send him away.

I saw Kolya the day after his arrival. He was sitting with some partisans—a small, fair-haired, thin boy.

"What's your name?" I asked him.

"Kolya," he replied, standing at attention like the others.

"Do you want to live with us?"

"Yes."

"What will you do here?"

"Anything you tell me."

"All right," I said gravely, "you'll be a cowherd."

"No, I won't. I've already been a cowherd. I want to fight the Germans."

"All right, you can stay. The only trouble is we have so many Nikolais. Nikolai Prikhodko, Nikolai Struciński, Nikolai Gnedyuk, Nikolai Kuznetsov. We seem to be getting all the Nikolais. We'll have to call you Small Kolya. You don't mind?"

At first Kolya was in the supplies and transport platoon, helping to look after the horses, peeling potatoes in the kitchen and carrying firewood. He did everything eagerly and quickly, but what interested him most was when he would get a rifle.

He trained with the other newcomers and passed the drill exams with flying colours. In appearance he was always neat and tidy (we naturally gave him some new clothes), and his replies when he was addressed by his commanders were usually precise and short as required by army regulations. I sometimes wanted simply to chat with him, to show him my affection—he was, after all, only a boy—but he never gave me the chance: he replied as a soldier.

After we had come to know the boy, we decided to make a scout and messenger out of him, and Alexander Lukin took him under his wing.

HOLIDAY

In the evening of November 6, 1942 the partisans gathered in the centre of the camp around a cart with a loudspeaker that we had obtained specially for this day.

Lida Sherstneva bustled round the receiver, worrying that the aerial was too short.

Vanya Stokov, who was in charge, was worried as much as Lida but calmed her, saying:

"It's all right, Lida. The aerial's almost a kilometre long."

Everybody had been talking about the aerial for the past few days.

Suddenly the loudspeaker began to wheeze and we heard indistinguishable sounds. Vanya screwed something tighter and we breathed with relief. A concert was being broadcast from Moscow. Not counting our official radio communication, this was the first broadcast that we heard from Moscow in five months.

Lida Sherstneva and Vanya Strokov beamed.

But it was not the concert that we wanted to hear. We waited and hoped to hear the broadcast of the meeting marking the anniversary of the October Revolution.

Four partisans with paper and pencils sharpened to needle-point sat at a deal table near the cart, ready to take down everything: if one missed a word the others would be sure to fill the gap.

At about six o'clock the voice of the announcer told us what the whole country was waiting for, what we, partisans gathered round a radio receiver in a drizzling rain in the dense Sarny forests, were awaiting on tenterhooks: the meeting to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Great October Revolution would be broadcast from Moscow.

Silence descended on the forest. The men tried to suppress even their breathing.

Though we were a thousand kilometres away from the capital, we learned about everything that was happening in the country and about the situation on the fronts of the Patriotic War.

Repulsed at Moscow, the nazis had marshalled their reserves during the summer, broken through the front in a south-westerly direction and were now in the region of Voronezh, Stalingrad, Novorossiisk, Pyatigorsk and Mozdok.

But like all other Soviet people we did not doubt for a moment that our Army would smash the enemy in open battle and chase him back.

It is a tradition with Soviet people to mark anniversaries with success in labour and in battle.

We decided to mark November 7 in our own partisan way so that the nazis would remember it.

Long before the anniversary we planned to derail two enemy trains. On the eve of November 7, right after the broadcast of the anniversary report, two groups, one commanded by Shashkov and the other by Malikov, set out to carry out the assignment.

Shashkov returned at noon on November 7 and reported:

"Comrade Commander, the assignment to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Great October Revolution has been fulfilled. An enemy train heading east with troops and supplies has been blown up."

Malikov returned in the evening of the same day. He, too, reported that as a present for the anniversary of the Great October Revolution an enemy train carrying supplies to the front had been derailed.

We held a sports meet in the forest on the day of the anniversary. Five platoons displayed their military prowess in a glade about a kilometre away from the camp. The events were hand-grenade throwing for distance and at a target, tree-climbing and obstacle races.

There was a lot of fun, with more excitement among the "fans" than among the competitors. There had been a lot of argument as to who would win. Old man Struciński, Lukin and Kochetkov showed the greatest zeal as spectators.

Vladimir Struciński hopped about shouting: "Blast you!" or "There, the damn fool missed!" Lukin ran back and forth encouraging the losers, while Kochetkov laughed so loudly that anybody standing near him ran the danger of going deaf.

The excitement reached its climax during the tug-o'-war.

"Put more weight into it!" cried the supporters of one side.

"Where are you going to get your weight from?" came the response.

Weakening, one side relaxed their hold of the rope and the winners fell flat on their backs. A burst of laughter shook the forest.

The celebrations ended with a concert by our amateur actors. It began with a chorus singing *Farewell, Beloved Town*, a song that everybody knew. The singing was led by several voices, and the entire chorus caught up the refrain. This was followed by *Katyusha*. When that song ended, Vladimir Struciński suddenly rose to his feet and conducting with both hands started *The Dnieper Broad Is Roaring and Groaning*. With smiles of approval on their faces, everybody joined in.

Then the dancers took over, giving exciting performances of the hopak, lezghinka and other dances. One number followed another in quick succession. One of them was a recitation by twenty-year-old Macheret, who studied at the Department of Literature before the war. He took his place at the fire and announced:

"I shall recite for you Nikolai Tikhonov's poem *The Twenty-Eight Guardsmen*."

Nikolai Kuznetsov came forward when the concert was almost over. He was in high spirits. Without announcing what he would recite he began:

"The Grass-snake climbed high up into the mountains and lay down in a damp cave, coiling up into a knot and gazing out into the sea. . . .

"Suddenly into the cave where the Grass-snake lay, a Hawk fell from the heavens, its breast pierced, its feathers in blood. . . ."

Kuznetsov recited simply and quietly. But every word he spoke reached the very bottom of the men's hearts. You could feel that he was reciting something he loved and held dear.

I glanced at the men. In their eyes there was a light I had never seen before, and grave and solemn expressions on their faces.

Without raising his voice, but clipping his words more than ever, Kuznetsov reached the last lines:

"Never mind that you have died.... But in the song of brave and stout hearts you shall always be a living example, a proud call to freedom, to light!

"To the madness of the brave we sing our song!..."

Nikolai Kuznetsov's recitation of Maxim Gorky's *Song of the Hawk* made a very strong impression on us.

We received a plane from Moscow soon after the anniversary, on November 11. The landing field that Nikolai Struciński had shown us near the village of Lenchin did indeed prove to be a good one. Besides, we had virtually combed every blade of grass and smoothed out every bump, and also pulled down a watch-tower that stood about four kilometres away. The peasants were pleased that we did that because the tower was rotting and they were afraid of an accident.

The day before we were to receive the plane, a large group of nazis arrived in trucks in the village of Mikhailin, which was about nine kilometres away from our landing field. We sent men to lie in ambush along the road with strict orders not to let the Germans through.

Our instructions from Moscow were to fire red and green rockets every half hour so that the location could be seen from a distance of forty or fifty kilometres. That increased the danger of an attack by the Germans. But everything ended happily.

We heard the engines at one o'clock in the morning. Turpentine was poured on the fires and they burned brightly.

The plane landed safely, and the partisans were not the only ones who rejoiced. There was no end to the delight of the villagers when the plane flew past their roofs and landed smoothly on the field, its headlamps throwing a dazzling light.

It stayed on the ground for only forty minutes, bringing us mail and gifts, and taking away our wounded, including Floréjac and Pastanogov, who were still a long way from recovery, documents, letters to relatives, the boy Pinya, who was found by Kuznetsov and me, and the crew of the plane that had crashed. The valuables that we had taken from the enemy were also sent to Moscow. These were our contribution towards the building of an aircraft to replace the one that we had to burn.

The plane took off, described two circles over the glade and with a friendly dip of its wings, flew away.

BETTER THAN GENUINE

The town of Rovno lay buried in verdure in the very heart of West Ukraine. There was nothing remarkable about the town: the houses were small, one-storied affairs with a few two- and three-storied buildings only along the main thoroughfare. And yet it was made the seat of the occupied part of the Ukraine by the Germans.

Rovno was of special interest to us, for in it at that time was the Reichskommissariat for the Ukraine with Eric Koch, Hitler's deputy and Gauleiter of East Prussia, at its head. The Gestapo, the military police headquarters at the headquarters of General von Ilgen, commander of the special troops in the Ukraine, were also quartered there. Although Kiev was in Nazi hands, Rovno remained the centre. The reasoning of the Germans was probably that they were much safer in Rovno than if they were close to the front.

The town virtually teemed with German officers, officials and their families who had come with an eye to making a quick fortune.

With all things considered, there was a great deal of information that could be very useful for the Soviet High Command to be picked up in Rovno, information on the movement and regrouping of troops at the front, on the

building of new defence lines, on measures of an economic character and on what was taking place in Germany herself. We decided to get a foothold in this town, planning our approach carefully and calculating every step.

It was decided that at the beginning we would send into Rovno only men who knew the town and had relatives or friends there. Our first choice was Nikolai Prikhodko. He was born in Zdolbunovo, Rovno Region, and was manager of the railway storehouses before the war. He had been among the last to evacuate from the town, when all the valuables from the storehouses were loaded on a lorry and there was already street fighting in the town.

Nikolai Prikhodko was twenty-one. He was of a gigantic stature, well made, with a handsome face and kind, hazel eyes. He reminded me of the heroes of Russian epics. He had the strength of a Hercules and was capable of great endurance. He was absolutely fearless and was always to be found where danger was the greatest.

When our detachment was on its way to the Sarny forests, he went into a village ahead of the scouts. There was a big crowd in the middle of the street. The women were weeping and wailing. He went to them and asked:

"What's happening here?"

"They're taking our lads and girls to Germany," he was told.

Girls and boys with bundles on their backs were standing in the middle of the crowd guarded by six policemen.

Pushing his way through the crowd, Prikhodko stopped in front of the policemen.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Police," one of them replied, not suspecting, of course, who he was talking to. Prikhodko was in semi-civvies.

"Why are you taking these youngsters?" he thundered.

"It's an order and we're carrying it out. Here, who the hell are you?" the senior policeman said, growing angry.

"Give me a second and I'll introduce myself!"

Saying this Prikhodko grabbed two of the policemen by the scruff of their necks and banged their heads together with all his strength. They bounced away from each other like rubber balls and stretched out on the ground.

"Lay down your guns," he ordered the others, training his submachine-gun at them.

When, with all the regulation precautions, our scouts entered the village they saw Nikolai Prikhodko deep in conversation with the peasants. Six rifles lay at his feet and the policemen, disarmed and bound were sitting on the ground some distance away.

Our scouts had to cover three times the distance of anybody else, but Prikhodko walked more than any scout. The reason for this was that he was always around when something urgent had to be done.

Once, it happened during our march, we heard firing in the distance. I sent Prikhodko to find out what it was all about.

A minute after he was gone, Tsessarsky appeared.

"Comrade Commander," he said, "Prikhodko cannot be sent anywhere. His feet are in blisters and he can't wear boots."

"I didn't know. He wore boots when I called him and I noticed nothing."

When Prikhodko returned, I asked him:

"What's the matter with your feet?"

"Nothing much, a trifling blister."

He was lying. He had pulled on his boots with difficulty in order to answer my summons, and had gone out on the reconnaissance barefoot.

As I have already said, we decided that Nikolai Prikhodko would be the first to go to Rovno. To the question of whether he would go, he replied categorically:

"Naturally, and there's nothing more to be said about it. You can depend on me."

We were in no doubt about that.

But our problem was how Prikhodko should be dressed. The clothes that he wore and slept in round fires were worn to shreds. He needed city clothes for Rovno to attract as little attention as possible.

We had no captured clothes and so we began to search for clothes among the partisans to find something suitable for Nikolai. Four men were found with more or less presentable clothes.

Picture to yourself four men sitting at a fire in their underwear and not understanding why their clothes had been taken (Prikhodko's departure for Rovno was kept a strict secret). In the meantime Nikolai tried on the clothes in a tent. Not one of the suits fitted him.

"You can't call them men, they're pygmies," he grumbled.

The sleeves of the jackets, which came down only to his elbows exposed his brawny arms and enormous fists. The pants looked as if they had been taken from a younger brother, coming down only to the knees. And while he tried on a suit it burst along its seams.

The suits were returned to their owners with thanks. Somehow or other we managed to fit Nikolai out. The civilian jacket and trousers that we finally selected for him were at least a size too small for him. But we could not get a pair of shoes to fit him—he wore size 11. We had to send him off in high boots, with the trousers worn over them.

Nikolai went to Rovno with a permit certifying that the "bearer, Gritsenko, is a resident of the village of Lenchin."

Our camp was about a hundred and twenty kilometres away from Rovno, which made the round trip two hundred and forty kilometres. Prikhodko set out on foot and we expected him back in camp in six or seven days.

He did not let the grass grow under his feet, returning on time.

It was a great relief to me when I saw him. Our first sortie into Rovno had been successful. That was an event in itself.

Prikhodko first looked up his aunt, who lived in a village close to Rovno. She told him that one of his brothers was living in the town and Nikolai asked her to go and fetch him. This took only a few hours. He entered the town in company with his brother.

A lot of what he saw in Rovno surprised him. The names of the streets had been changed, and these were in German: "Deutschstrasse", "Friedrichstrasse". The buildings that had formerly been clubs, cinemas and dining-rooms, now had signs over them, reading: "Only Germans allowed". The best buildings had been taken over by German offices, and the apartments by Germans. German was spoken in the streets.

Nikolai visited the family of a friend and arranged with these staunch people that their home would be used by partisans. That was our first secret address in Rovno.

Nikolai also went to Zdobunovo Station, situated some thirty kilometres away from Rovno, where he found friends and arranged for another meeting.

When Prikhodko finished his report, I asked him:

"Did you have to show your permit anywhere?"

"Yes, three times. There was no trouble."

That, too, was a triumph, but for the time being I did not tell Prikhodko what that triumph consisted of.

We began sending other men to Rovno. Their task was reduced simply to lining up secret addresses and to establishing what German offices were in the town and what buildings they occupied.

One of these men was Polikarp Voznyuk. He had joined us in the Sarny forests, where with a small group of collective farmers he had been harassing the enemy. Voznyuk was followed into Rovno by Bondarchuk, another local inhabitant who had been in Struciński's detachment.

Without waiting for these men to return, we sent Nikolai Struciński. The papers that we gave him bore the seal of the Kastopol Municipal Council and certified that he was a teacher sent to Rovno for textbooks. We dressed Nikolai in an excellent suit of clothes and he was so attractive in them that we could not help admiring him.

Stekhov, Lukin and I saw Nikolai out of the camp. We stopped on the fringe of the forest, chose a tree and arranged that in the event we moved the camp to a new site a note would be left for Nikolai in a hollow in the tree. Then we shook hands and he went off.

We could not help thinking of the film *Gorky's Childhood* in which a boy goes out "into the world". Nikolai walked across a meadow overgrown with tall grass and we stood watching until he disappeared from view.

Voznyuk returned from Rovno two days after Struciński's departure. He had come across a friend who was working in a German commission store. The friend told Voznyuk that a Gestapo agent came to the store every day. Voznyuk lay in wait for the agent, killed him near the store with two shots from his pistol and ran away. As he was crossing a street, he came level with a car with two German officers. He threw a hand-grenade into the car, quickly turned into a courtyard, jumped over the wall into another street and hid.

He finished his story with a broad grin on his face, expecting praise. But Lukin gave him a reproachful look and said slowly:

"Who told you to do it? Your job was to go about the streets quietly and carefully and to find out where the Gestapo and the Reichskommissariat were and to return just as quietly. But you made a noise," he continued, raising his voice. "Now there'll be round-ups and every person will be closely checked. What did you do it for? Our men are now in danger because of a lousy agent. Some hero, I must say."

Voznyuk was dismissed from scouting duty and the men, upon hearing of his "heroism", gibed: "So it's a noise we're making, eh brother?" And they nicknamed him Noisy.

Bondarchuk returned a few days later. He managed to get a secret address but had had a hard time. He had worked in Rovno before the war and in the streets he met many friends who wanted to know what he was doing now.

Then, at last, Nikolai Struciński also returned. He gave a comprehensive report of all he had learned: what German offices were in the town, where they were housed, where his friends were working, where his relatives lived, and where we could establish secret addresses. He brought back specimens of documents that were being issued by the nazis.

"What about your own papers? Were they in order?" I asked.

"Yes. The Germans asked for them but I don't think they'll ever see the difference. They're better than the real thing."

Now I'll tell the story of these papers.

One day Nikolai Struciński told me that when he was a boy he liked to carve on wood with a knife. I suggested that he try to copy a German seal. He found a pair of compasses, sharpened a penknife, tore the rubber heel off his boot and made a seal which we could not distinguish from a genuine one. After that we got him to copy other German seals.

He worked slowly at first, taking two or three days to make a seal. It was in autumn, when the days were overcast, and the delicate work that he did required a bright light. But later he became so practised a hand at it that with no other tools than a pair of compasses and a penknife he would make the most intricate of seals in an hour or two. We began supplying him with rubber because he had used up the heels of his own and Jerzy and Rostislav's boots and was already eyeing the boots of our headquarters staff.

We came upon typewriters with Ukrainian and German characters at a German farm. They were turned over to Tsessarsky, who typed all the documents we wanted on them. And Lukin forged the signatures.

Tsessarsky did the typing, Lukin supplied the signature and the seal came from Struciński, and nobody could tell that the papers were not issued by the Germans.

In this way we provided papers for Prikhodko, Struciński and many of our other men. We issued papers from town and district councils, private firms and even from the Gestapo.

And it was really true that they were better than genuine papers.

There was an interesting incident with them. A partisan detachment, which was operating near by, asked us for a permit which one of their scouts could use for a visit to Lutsk. We gave them an identity card but did not say where we got it from. With this card their man went to Lutsk and returned safely. Then it was used by another scout. They had to send a third man but the "card" was no longer valid. So they prolonged it and forged the signature themselves. The commander of the detachment told Lukin and me about it himself when he came to our camp.

"One of my men forged the signature so well that you'd never say it wasn't genuine."

Lukin feigned indignation, jumping to his feet and shouting:

"That's a criminal offence. How did you dare forge papers? I'll take you to court. You forged my signature!"

The commander was taken aback but in the next moment we all burst out laughing.

We turned out so many papers that in the end the nazis began to smell a rat and frequently changed the pattern of their papers. But our intelligence service worked smoothly and we always had the new patterns in our camp at least two weeks before new papers were issued. These patterns

were brought to us directly from the print-shop by underground workers and we issued new papers simultaneously with the Germans.

FRIENDS PASSED BY

Nikolai Kuznetsov had long and exhaustive conversations with all the men who came back from Rovno. He asked Prikhodko, Struciński, Bondarchuk and Voznyuk hundreds of questions.

But I was still doubtful if the time had come for him to go to Rovno.

"I won't start a row, I'm not Noisy," he urged. "I'll just take a walk about the town, look around and return. We'll decide how to act after that."

I finally gave in, but made it a condition that he would not go alone but with old man Struciński, who would introduce him to his relatives.

We prepared Nikolai carefully. With Stekhov and Lukin we discussed every detail of his dress. We got him an excellent pair of boots and had a captured German officer's uniform made to fit him, pinning and unpinning German tabs and medals until we were satisfied. All this was done in absolute secrecy because we could not be sure that there was no enemy agent in the detachment. Difficult as it was to keep things secret in the camp we made it a rule that no partisan should know what did not concern him personally.

In camp Kuznetsov wore his usual clothes, and only the men who went on a mission with him ever saw him in German uniform.

The preparations lasted for three days. It was impossible to tell when Kuznetsov and Struciński found the time to sleep. They were busy with their preparations during the day-time and spoke with concentration deep into the night, walking up and down in some secluded spot or sitting on tree stumps.

They went to Rovno in a cart, Struciński as the carter and Kuznetsov as a German officer belonging to a commissary unit in the rear. That, at least, was what their papers said.

They stopped at a hamlet situated about eighteen kilometres away from Rovno, where they looked up one of Struciński's relatives, Waclaw Zigadlo.

"You can use my house," Zigadlo said after he was told what was required, "but be careful, otherwise it'll mean curtains for you, me and my family."

Zigadlo had ten children. The coming of the Germans had deprived him of the very helpful large-family allowance from the Soviet authorities.

Struciński made another stop when they had almost reached the town.

He had another relative who lived very close to the town. Struciński and Kuznetsov left their cart at the house of this relative and proceeded on foot.

In Rovno Kuznetsov kept to one side of the street and Struciński to the other.

"There I was," Struciński later related, "shaking from head to toe and thinking that I would be picked up at any moment. I turned my face whenever I saw a German or, especially, one of those traitors in the German police. I had the feeling that everybody was looking at me with suspicion, because in Rovno many people know me. But Nikolai was strolling on the other side of the street as though he owned the place. He read the signboards and stopped at the shop windows as coolly as you please. Every time a German passed by he raised his arm with a loud 'Heil Hitler'. He led me about the town for about four hours. I was already signing to him, wiping my nose with a handkerchief as we had arranged, but he paid no attention. A brave man."

That was Nikolai's first sortie into Rovno. It naturally could not enter the heads of any of the people who saw him in the streets that this "German officer" was really

Russian partisan and that Gestapo agents would shortly be hunting for him.

In Rovno itself Struciński introduced Kuznetsov to one more relative, Kazimierz Dambrowski, who ran a small saddle-maker's workshop; he repaired saddles and harnesses. Dambrowski agreed to help the partisans and gave Kuznetsov and Struciński his solemn word. He kept his word and was of great assistance to us.

Kuznetsov and Struciński left Rovno long before the curfew hour, which was at six o'clock, got into their cart and made their way back to camp.

Kuznetsov was very pleased with this first sortie. His appearance in Rovno had not given rise to any suspicion and that meant he had trained properly.

His only grievance was that not everything was well with his disguise. He wore a summer uniform at a time when the German officers were already wearing greatcoats and autumn raincoats. He was in a forage cap. These caps were only worn by officers of line regiments; most of the officers in Rovno were in peak-caps.

When Kuznetsov went into Rovno for the second time he was in a brand-new uniform, which was made for him by a celebrated Warsaw tailor by the name of Schneider.

We now had all sorts of people in our camp. Boot-makers (the epic of the bast shoes was a thing of the past), bakers, sausage-makers and this tailor from Warsaw, who was a Jew. Schneider lived in Warsaw before the war. When the city was captured by the Germans they forced all the Jews into a ghetto. But Schneider was taken into the household of a general, who gave him a tiny room in the attic of his house and had him make uniforms not only for himself but also for other officers. The German put the payment for the tailoring into his own pocket. But the day came when an end came to this. The general told the tailor that he was sending him to the ghetto. There was only one way out of the ghetto and it was through the ring squad. That night the tailor escaped and after many

trying experiences finally found his way to our detachment. Kuznetsov's was the first German uniform that he made lovingly, suspecting what it was wanted for.

Nikolai began to go to Rovno quite frequently, usually with Nikolai Struciński or Nikolai Prikhodko. They stayed the night either at Kazimierz Dąmbrowski's or at the house of Prikhodko's brother.

Kuznetsov made the acquaintance of German officers in restaurants and in shops. With some he only exchanged a few words, with others he had long conversations. In those days all talk revolved around Stalingrad. The reports from Stalingrad worried the Germans. The legendary city, which the Germans had over and over again claimed to have taken, was fighting heroically and there were alarming rumours that the German army at Stalingrad was being encircled.

We continued sending other men to Rovno, but they did not, as a rule, know who their fellows were or when they were sent out. They were warned not to show surprise if they met any of our partisans in Rovno and to pass them by without making any sign of recognition.

On one occasion we sent Nikolai Kuznetsov to Rovno in comfort, in a fine britzka drawn by a pair of blooded dapple-greys. I ordered Vladimir Struciński to give these horses to Kuznetsov, feeling that rich trappings would minimize the danger of anybody stopping him. But as this time Kuznetsov was going to spend a few days in Rovno I told him to get rid of the horses as soon as he entered the town.

"What, get rid of horses like these!" Vladimir Struciński cried. "Here let me harness those little chestnuts."

He begged, entreated, almost wept, but I had made up my mind. Kuznetsov set out on thoroughbred trotters. Gnedyuk went with him as driver with orders to stay in Rovno and to keep his eyes open.

Three days later Mazhura and Bushnin, our resident scouts, suddenly came riding into the camp in Kuznetsov's

britzka drawn by the same horses: these men lived in Rovno practically all the time and reported to the camp only when summoned or when there was some emergency.

I was seriously alarmed. Mazhura and Bushnin had never seen Kuznetsov and they had no idea that one of us was going to Rovno in a German uniform. Then how could they have met? Who gave them the horses and the carriage? Had there been a slip-up? Had Nikolai been arrested?

When I ran up to them Vladimir Struciński was already fondly stroking the horses.

"What happened?" I asked Mazhura apprehensively. "Where did you get these horses?"

"It's a long story," he grinned. "We pinched them from the Germans."

"How?"

Unhurriedly Mazhura took me aside and with the same infuriating grin began his story.

"We were at our secret address preparing to return to camp when looking out of the window we saw a German officer ride up on these horses. He climbed down from the britzka and went somewhere. The driver took the bridles off, put sacks of feed round the horses' heads, looked about him and also made off. Well, the boys and I thought it was a pity to go back to camp on foot when we could ride. So we took the horses. We let them rest for the night at the hamlet near Rovno where we always stop, and this morning we rolled into camp. Lovely brutes these horses are, don't you think so, Comrade Commander?"

"Yes, they're magnificent, remarkable animals," I said with a sigh of relief.

QUICK JUSTICE

We organised a post in the hamlet where Zigadlo, old man Struciński's relative, lived. It was a convenient base because it was located midway between the camp and Rovno. It was about a hundred and twenty kilometres

from Rovno to the camp. A messenger took forty-eight hours to cover that distance. After we had set up our post, a messenger from Rovno went only as far as the hamlet, from where the message would be brought to camp by another man on fresh, well-groomed horses.

Late in December 1942 we found it necessary to recall all our men from Rovno and from the midway post. There were about twenty of them, including Kuznetsov, Nikolai and Jerzy Struciński, Prikhodko, Gnedyuk, Shevchuk and Small Kolya, who was at the midway post. He was now one of our regular scouts.

I reckoned that the men would be in camp by dawn. But the morning and then the whole day passed without a word from them. We had an anxious time of it at headquarters, worrying that something might have happened to them, that they had been ambushed.

Each supposition was gloomier than the one before it.

"We'll wait till morning," I said, "and if they don't show up by then we'll send a large force along the route they should have taken."

At three in the morning the officer of the day suddenly came to me.

"Comrade Commander," he reported, "Kuznetsov is in camp."

"What about the others?" the words escaped my lips.

It was a pointless question. Like all the other partisans he did not know who we were summoning and where the men were coming from. He did not understand my question and was very puzzled when the people sitting round the fire with me rose to their feet. Nikolai came up before he could reply.

"Comrade Commander, the scouts have arrived."

"But where are they?"

"Behind the outpost guarding prisoners."

"What prisoners?"

"We routed a detachment of military police."

I ordered the officer of the day to receive the prisoners and, calming down, said to Kuznetsov:

"All right, now tell us what happened."

"I really don't know where to begin," he said, "it's so out of the common run. Acting on orders from you, all the scouts assembled at Zigadlo's and were preparing to set out for the camp. But in Rovno I was informed at the last moment that the Lyudvipol Gebietskommissar was going home on furlough. Carts filled with loot were due to leave Lyudvipol in a few hours with a military police escort, and were to be followed in two hours by the Gebietskommissar himself. He was planning to take the train at Kastopol with all his 'trophies'.

"You know, of course, that the Lyudvipol Gebietskommissar was on our lists. I did not want to miss such an opportunity. It was too late to inform you and ask for your permission; it was no use sending a messenger. I talked it over with the men. You can imagine how Prikhodko and Struciński reacted. Even Small Kolya said we should hurry.

"We lay in ambush on the Lyudvipol-Kastopol motor road. The place we chose was not very suitable because all the cover we had were some bare bushes. We took up positions behind these bushes and waited. Gros laid a mine on the road, covered the fuse with earth and brought the end to the bush where Prikhodko was sitting.

"We waited for three long hours but saw neither the carts nor the Gebietskommissar. We were shivering with cold and were already on the point of giving the whole thing up and going back to camp when we saw clouds of black smoke rising about three kilometres from where we were waiting.

"Tongues of flame became visible and we heard bursts of machine-gun and submachine-gun fire. An hour after this a train of about twenty carts moved in our direction from the burning village.

"Picture the scene to yourself. Four Gestapo men were in the front cart that was pulled by a pair of horses. We

could see their black greatcoats and the nazi emblems on their caps and sleeves. The rear was brought up by a gang of Haidamaks. That told its own tale. They had been burning a village.

"We had to attack. There could be no other decision. Besides, we could not rely on not being seen and any tardiness on our part would mean playing into their hands.

"I signed to Prikhodko. As soon as the first cart approached the mine, he jerked the fuse. The blast finished off the cart and the four Gestapo men in it. We opened fire and attacked.

"Some of them escaped. Nikolai Prikhodko and Shevchuk grabbed the rifles discarded by the military police and started picking them off. But if anybody distinguished himself it was Jerzy. He simply mowed the policemen down with his machine-gun. Their casualty figures ran high. We took twelve prisoners, searched the killed and took their papers. Then the boys gathered the trophies—rifles, submachine-guns and hand-grenades—and, well, here we are.

"But wait, that is not the whole story.

"On the way I questioned the prisoners and this is what I found out. The Gebietskommissar somehow learned that he would be attacked. He postponed his departure and sent out a punitive group, who lay in ambush near the village of Ozertsi. We were in ambush about three kilometres away from them. They waited for us and we waited for the Gebietskommissar. They began to feel the cold and lit some fires.

"In the village of Ozertsi the peasants felt that something was wrong and began to steal away into the forest.

"The senior Gestapo man decided that they were going to the forest to warn the partisans. He snapped an order and the police began catching the frightened villagers and burning the houses.

"Nothing helped, neither the prayers of the adults nor the tears of the children. In something like an hour the frenzied murderers caught all the villagers within sight

and killed and threw them into the burning houses. The prisoners admitted all this. You can ask them.

"When it was all over the police, their minds at ease, set out for Lyudvipol to report to the Gebietskommissar and ran into our ambush."

There was complete silence when Kuznetsov finished his story. Nobody spoke. I was silent, too. I admit that at first I was tempted to take Kuznetsov, Prikhodko and Struciński to task for having acted wilfully, but now I just couldn't do it.

"Quick justice, that was," somebody said.

Kuznetsov realised that this meant the operation was approved.

Giving me what looked like a badge, he said.

"Comrade Commander, take a look at this. It's my personal trophy."

What he placed in my hand was a small tag made of a white metal and suspended from a thin but strong chain. On one side it had the words "State Political Police" in German and below them: "No. 4885". The nazi eagle and swastika were stamped on the reverse side.

"This tag," Kuznetsov explained, "belonged to the senior Gestapo man who is now lying on the motor road. I have an idea that it may come in useful. The Germans do not question the authority of anyone who produces one of these Gestapo tags."

Several days later we learned that out of the three hundred and thirty houses in the village of Ozertsi, the police had set fire to three hundred and twelve. Four hundred people were shot. To be more exact, they shot only the adults. The children were clubbed to death and thrown into the fire.

Partisans had never been to this village and its inhabitants had no connections with them whatever.

That was how the Germans dealt with the peaceful inhabitants of the village of Ozertsi.

GARLAND

During one of his meetings with Dovger and Fidarov Victor Kochetkov learned that in the town of Sarny the Germans had had a big house vacated and were hurriedly furnishing it.

The commandant, the town council and the police were looking high and low for furniture: mirror wardrobes nickel-plated beds, armchairs. They commandeered everything that took their fancy and brought it to this house "Our Stalingrad heroes will rest here," they told the curious.

Fidarov investigated and learned that the Germans were really furnishing a rest home for field officers of the rank of captain and higher and that the first train-load was expected in Sarny within a few days.

A worthy reception had to be arranged for these "heroes".

A large partisan force of forty-two men commanded by Stekhov took up positions along the railway in the evening

Snow began to fall while they waited, but the snowflakes melted as soon as they touched the ground. A strong piercing wind rose at midnight. The partisans lay on the ground all night, shivering with the damp and the cold German Army track-walkers passed along the tracks with lanterns but they missed our mines.

The night was drawing to its close but there was still no sign of the train.

It was disappointing to withdraw without fulfilling the assignment, and yet there was no alternative but to retire when day broke. The nazis had cleared both sides of the railway of trees and shrubs for a distance of three hundred metres and if carried out in the day-time this operation could cost us the lives of many men.

Suddenly the observers stationed on either side of the ambush gave the warning that a train was coming from the east. By the rumble of the carriage wheels it was

obvious that the train was empty. Another empty train went by half an hour later. It had several cars loaded with ballast coupled in front of the engine. Stekhov knew that the two empty trains would soon be followed by the one they were waiting for.

Presently they heard it coming. The observers signalled that passenger carriages with the windows camouflaged in blue could be seen behind the locomotive.

Stekhov alerted the men. Malikov, the demolition man, drew the mine fuses taut. When the locomotive passed the entire line of our ambush and reached Malikov, he jerked one of the fuses. A mine exploded, the locomotive came to a stop with a shudder, and the carriages piled up one on top of the other before the eyes of the partisans. Then there was silence, and two or three minutes later the nazis began jumping out of the carriages. Quite possibly they thought that there had been an accidental explosion and that now they were safe. But in the next moment a mine was exploded in the tail of the train, and it was followed by two more blasts in the middle. And then the firing started.

The heavy machine-gun that we had taken off the wrecked plane and set up on a two-wheeled cart made specially for it opened up first. After it riddled the engine's boiler, it traced a straight line across the carriages. Its fire was supported by fire from submachine-guns.

The firing lasted for about forty minutes. One officer, his face distorted with horror, jumped out of a carriage and began to laugh hysterically. Fear had unhinged his mind.

The sun was shining brightly when our men withdrew to the forest. The report on the results of this action was brought two days later by Kochetkov.

It was the train our men had waited for. It was coming from Stalingrad and was taking officers—airmen and tankmen—to Sarny for a rest. The Germans arrived at the scene of the ambush an hour after the withdrawal of the

partisans, cordoning off the whole district. The killed and wounded were taken to Sarny, Klesovo and Rakitnoye in cars and motor-trolleys. We could not establish the exact number of the killed, but forty-seven corpses were brought to Sarny alone. Several corpses were sent to Germany from Klesovo and Rakitnoye. They had evidently been important personages.

That happened on November 26, 1942.

From the communiqués of the Soviet Information Bureau we knew that on November 23 the Soviet troops had broken through the nazi defences near Stalingrad and had surrounded the Sixth and Fourth German armies. We were doubly happy for having made our small contribution to the great battle. German officers who had escaped from the Stalingrad cauldron had fallen into a trap set by partisans.

In this action we had no casualties at all. The only mishap was suffered by a man named Yermolin. A bullet carried away the heel of one of his boots. But with him that was inevitable. It was amazing what a charmed life he had. In every engagement, even if only one shot was fired, the bullet would find its way to him—not into him but into some article of his clothing: his greatcoat, cap, or, as had happened now, his heel. He had to take out his needle and repair his clothing after every skirmish. He was wounded only once—in the finger.

The success of this operation was not accidental. It was directed by Sergei Stekhov, my political deputy, who was really a military genius. He carefully prepared every operation, planning every detail. Our men considered it a privilege to go into battle with him.

It is not easy to win the admiration of partisans, but Stekhov was admired and respected by everyone. The qualities of a fearless commander and Bolshevik and of a good comrade were combined in him. Short of stature and very active, he was always neatly dressed, with his Mauser and map case strapped tightly. A civilian in peace-

time, he looked as though he were on parade. In the life we were leading this smartness was a necessary example for the partisans.

Sergei was always with the men and he could usually be found in some unit, smoking a pipe, which for him, a non-smoker, served as protection from midges, talking, listening or giving some advice.

* * *

Christmas was approaching. The nazis began their preparations for the holiday with an orgy of looting. Valya Dovger brought us the report that the enemy had fallen upon the village of Viry and seized the peasants' remaining food. They had taken all the flour from the mill.

We were determined to protect the peasants. On the road near the village of Viry our men saw a "Christmas Eve" procession consisting of a German officer in SS uniform and white gloves strutting in front of a group of soldiers. He was actually goose-stepping. The soldiers had their rifles on the ready (they were not forgetting the partisans!). Behind them were four pairs of oxen harnessed to a waggon filled with squealing pigs, cackling hens and quacking geese. Such was their "foraging" for the holiday table.

When the nazis approached, Stekhov opened up from his submachine-gun. The officer threw up his hands and dropped to the ground. The other partisans opened fire in the next instant and dispatched the enemy within a few minutes. Only two of the Germans took shelter in a ditch and returned the fire.

While our men were busy with them, nazi reinforcements arrived from Klesovo in trucks. An order was issued and the Germans began to advance on the partisans in open formation. But Stekhov had anticipated this. He had stationed several men about three hundred metres away from the ambush in the direction of Klesovo in the event

there would be reinforcements. And before the Germans could get started, this group opened fire. The engagement did not last more than twenty minutes. All the loot was returned to the peasants.

The local authorities were helpless against us. A German officer, the commandant of a small town called Mokvin, wrote to Berlin:

"My darling wife Gertrude,

"The situation here is very serious. There are partisans everywhere. We dare not go outside our houses. I have never had a Christmas like this. I tremble for my life and every night I go to bed with the thought that the partisans might come for me. I have a body-guard of military police, but what is a handful of policemen against partisans who are helped by the entire population.

"I have sent you a parcel but I do not know if you have received it. I am sending you two hundred marks and I am not sure that you will get them either. Let me know as soon as you do."

The commandant had good reason for his doubts.

The parcel, the two hundred marks and the unfinished letter were bagged by the partisans. And Gertrude's husband himself fell into their hands on New Year's eve.

We celebrated the New Year with a party in our own partisan style. It had to be a fighting party that showed no mercy to the enemy so that the New Year parties in every Soviet family would always be happy and gay. The New Year issue of our newspaper carried the following announcement:

"Everyone wishing to come to the New Year party must bring his own decorations for the New Year tree. We accept: 1. Luminous garlands of burning nazi trains. 2. Captured submachine-guns for our sound effects. 3. Fritzes of any size. 4. Everyone can display his own initiative. All presents must be turned in on or before December 31."

A garland made of a burning train was presented for the "New Year tree" by a group of demolition men headed by Malikov.

The enemy began to show increasing interest in the Sarny forests, where we had established ourselves. We therefore planned to divert their attention by blowing up a train on the Kovel-Rovno line, which ran on the western side of Rovno.

Malikov, an engineer by profession, and twelve men took some big mines and went to the spot we had selected. When they reached the railway they waited until night fell and under cover of the darkness crept up to the hut of the pointsman.

The pointsman, an old man, readily told them that trains ran frequently on that line and that those bound for the front carried troops and supplies and that west-bound trains were filled with wounded, with men suffering from frost-bite, and with loot. Realising what our men intended to do, the old man said:

"I'm not worried about what might happen to me, but what about the other people? They will be shot."

It turned out that the Germans had mobilised peasants from the surrounding villages to guard the railway and had warned them that they would be shot if there was any wrecking. They had their posts at intervals of about fifty paces.

"We'll speak to them ourselves," Malikov said.

The talk with the peasants was cordial from the very beginning. They made no attempt to dissuade our men, and only looked for a way to safeguard themselves.

"Tie us up," an elderly woman suggested, "and go about your business. Gag us and knock us about a bit so that some bruises show."

"That's something we can't do."

"All right, if you won't then we will," the woman said.

It was a funny sight indeed. While our men laid the mines, the "guards" pommelled each other. The partisans

then trussed them up and laid them round a fire. A train with arms, ammunition and other supplies soon came into sight. It was blown up in classical style, the engine turning over and sixty carriages crashing and bursting into flames.

That was our New Year present to the country.

OUR "CAPITAL"

Frosts of twenty degrees below zero set in in January. Our chooms, as we called our huts, were not adapted for the winter. We frequently moved to new sites and that made it impossible for us to build warm huts, and we had to rest content with chooms made of thin poles covered with fir branches and earth. For doors we used waterproof capes. A hole was left in the middle of the choom to let out the smoke. A fire burned inside the choom and the men slept round it, with their feet to the fire and their heads against the wall. The feet were kept warm by the fire, but it was very cold where their heads lay. We had cases of men waking up and wanting to rise but finding their hair frozen to the ground. The men slept fitfully, getting up and stamping their feet to warm themselves and then lying down again and shivering. There was one more trouble. By the laws of physics, the smoke should have gone out of the choom through the hole in the roof, but in our chooms the smoke did not rise but spread along the floor, stinging the men's eyes. Evidently there was something wrong in the way we built our huts.

In short, we were plagued by so many things that we finally decided to billet the detachment in the village of Rudnya-Bobrovskaya for the period of the frost. We knew we would be safe in that village. We had one of our posts there, and the men of the post had organised a defence force from among the young people in the village.

The detachment moved to Rudnya-Bobrovskaya on January 19.

We were received as welcome guests. A large crowd of villagers met the detachment near the village and marched into it with us. The children ran in front and with sticks slung over their shoulders as rifles marched beside Stekhov and me.

The entire population of the village were waiting for us in the village square. The portraits of the leaders of the Party and the Government were hung on the Village Soviet. The people waited and believed in the return of the Soviet Army and preserved these portraits.

An old peasant was standing beside a table covered with red cloth. In his hands he had a tray with bread and salt on it.

When our column approached and halted, the peasant came forward towards us.

"We welcome you with bread and salt," he said. "The doors of our houses are open and we beg you to feel yourself at home. We shall feed and warm you. We know and respect your detachment. You treat us well and will not let the Germans and bandits hurt us. And if now we shall have to fight the sworn enemy we shall fight together."

Finishing his speech the peasant gave the bread and salt to Stekhov, who took the tray and made a short and simple speech in reply.

I dismissed the men and they promptly mixed with the peasants. From the heart-to-heart talks that began on all sides one had the impression that they were old, long-time friends.

We called the village of Rudnya-Bobrovskaya our capital. We had our headquarters there and around us we had posts in the big villages in Sarny, Rakitnoye, Bereznyany and Lyudvipol districts. As a matter of fact, we were the representatives of the Soviet authorities in the whole area.

We controlled all the dairies working for the nazis and they could get nothing from them. We "straddled" the Mikhailin sawmill, placing our commandant there, and the

timber was given only to the peasants who needed it. We raided German estates on the western bank of the Sluch and the Goryn. The estates on our side of these rivers had all been destroyed earlier. We became the masters of many districts.

Important information which we at once relayed to Moscow flowed into our "capital" from Rovno, from the district centres, from railway stations and other places.

An operational post commanded by Frolov was organised fifty kilometres to the south of Rudnya-Bobrovskaya. Armed detachments composed of local inhabitants were formed at that post and they were sent out on combat assignments together with our groups.

Our "capital" was strongly guarded by outposts stationed around the village. These outposts were reinforced with local young people, who also patrolled the streets. This was very important because they could immediately pick out a stranger.

We fixed up a landing field right beside the village, and Moscow, like a fond mother, sent us presents almost every night. Huge parachutes opened in the air and great packages containing outfits, warm clothing, food and cigarettes landed near our fires.

The population took heart when we came. Through us they were kept abreast of the situation at the front.

In Stalingrad the Germans were surrounded by an iron ring of our troops. The final destruction of an army of three hundred thousand men was now only a matter of time. In January the troops of the Leningrad front broke the blockade around Leningrad. In the North Caucasus the offensive mounted by the Soviet Army was developing rapidly.

We had good relations with the local population. Every partisan used all his spare time to help around the house he lived in.

In our detachment we strictly forbade the men not only to procure but also to accept alcoholic drinks even when

treated to them. Sometimes it would happen that when a partisan returned from an assignment the mistress of the house would produce some food and home-made vodka for him.

"That's for you," she would say. "You're probably cold."

"Thanks for the food, but you can take the vodka away. I don't drink."

"What's the matter? It'll do you good."

"No, I won't drink, it's against the rules."

This rule was broken only once and the consequences were very grave.

A partisan by the name of Kosulnikov was frequently stationed for long spells at Zigadlo's post. He joined our detachment with a group of men who had escaped German captivity. Malikov, who was in command of the post, reported that Kosulnikov was systematically breaking our rules and getting drunk on moonshine every day. More, he had begun to steal food and items of clothing from the other men in order to exchange them for vodka. Then we learned that he had become intimate with a suspicious family and had let out that he was a partisan.

Not only the partisans who visited the hamlet but also Zigadlo's family were exposed to mortal danger by this scoundrel. Headquarters decided to recall all our men from the post and from Rovno immediately and to arrest Kosulnikov.

The whole detachment lined up in the same square where the villagers had welcomed us with bread and salt after an old Russian custom. The whole population of Rudnya-Bobrovskaya, men, women and children, also gathered in the square. When Kosulnikov was led into the square, I made a short speech.

"This man," I said, "had already betrayed his country once before. He broke his oath of allegiance when he surrendered to the enemy. And now, when he was given the opportunity of redeeming himself, he broke our rules,

disgraced the partisans and stooped to treachery. His act was detrimental to our struggle and was helpful to the nazis. The Command of the detachment has passed the sentence of death on Kosulnikov."

And Kosulnikov was shot.

* * *

A large number of partisans was concentrated in our area early in 1943. Two battalions arrived from the detachment commanded by Hero of the Soviet Union General Saburov. A detachment commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Prokopyuk was stationed near by, in Voronovka. In addition, there were several reconnaissance and wrecking groups.

This convergence of partisans worried the Germans. Nikolai Kuznetsov reported from Rovno that Erich Koch, Hitler's vicegerent in the Ukraine, had ordered the Sarny forests to be "cleared" of partisans. The chief of the Rovno police, a man named Pietz, mustered two thousand SS men in Rovno, reinforced them with nationalist gangs of bandits and garrisoned the district centres around us.

We took counter measures. Through the local inhabitants we spread rumours that we were intending to attack the district centres ourselves. These rumours reached the nazis and instead of taking the offensive they looked to their defences. The doors of the houses in which they were billeted were reinforced with thick sheets of iron. Iron shutters with machine-gun ports were fitted over the windows. The houses were surrounded with barbed wire and trenches with communication passages. And while, by our cunning, they were so engaged, we went on with our work.

At the close of January we learned from Kuznetsov, who was in Rovno, that the nazis were preparing a big punitive expedition. Troops had been called out from Zhitomir and Kiev. The plan was to advance from several directions.

With the help of the population we placed wooden obstructions on all the roads round the villages where we had posts, and also around Rudnya-Bobrovskaya.

The Germans moved towards Rudnya-Bobrovskaya from four directions, but we did not stay behind to wait for them. We could of course have inflicted heavy losses on them, but the risk was too great and, besides, it would have endangered the inhabitants of the village.

We quitted Rudnya-Bobrovskaya, and a large part of the villagers left with us. They brought their belongings and livestock into the forest and set up their own civilian camp.

The ring around Rudnya-Bobrovskaya was tightened and soon closed. But we were no longer there. The Germans followed in our tracks in an effort to surround us in other villages and hamlets, but we slipped through these traps. A game of hide and seek began. The Germans stumbled upon wooden obstructions and subjected them to a hurricane fire, believing that we were entrenched behind them, and when they went past these obstructions they ran into mines. By the firing and the blasts we knew exactly where the Germans were, but they moved like men who had been blindfolded.

The two battalions from Saburov's detachment and Propyuk's detachment retired to the huge forests in the north, but we continued circling about the villages, going on with the "game" not for the fun of it, of course. We had work to do. We had our people throughout this area and posts in the villages. Messengers sent by Kuznetsov kept coming from Rovno. Naturally we could not give up this smoothly running organisation.

Our messengers and scouts sometimes encountered the Germans and withdrew after a short skirmish. But we did have one major engagement.

Once there were no messengers from Frolov's operational post for three whole days. Believing him in danger we sent a force of sixty-five men to his assistance. On the

way they ran into the Germans and opened fire, but at the height of the battle the nazis suddenly stopped firing and hastily retreated. Our men were surprised but did not pursue them. We discovered the reason for this only on the next day. They were not a column of punitive troops, but the commander of the punitive expedition, a German general with a hundred troops acting as his bodyguards. The general and his aide were killed almost as soon as the firing started. That disheartened the Germans and they turned tail and hastily carried away the corpse of their commander.

Having had its fill of tilting against obstructions in the forest, the punitive expedition moved away in the direction of Zhitomir. At the beginning of February we again settled down in the forest, in one of our old camps near the village of Rudnya-Bobrovskaya. At that time our radio brought us happy tidings: crack German armies had been destroyed at Stalingrad.

A rumour soon reached us that the Germans had declared three days of mourning during which no kind of entertainment was permitted. The men had to wear a black band on the left sleeve and the women had to put on dark clothes, but since the reason for this was not given rumour had it that Hitler was dead.

"Thank God, the tyrant's dropped off," the peasants said.

It was not until Kuznetsov returned from Rovno that we found out that the occasion for this mourning was the defeat of the three hundred thousand strong nazi army at Stalingrad.

Nikolai had other interesting news. Transport traffic through Rovno and Zdolbunovo had recently grown heavier. The railways and motor roads were packed with troops. Reichskommissar of the Ukraine Erich Koch ordered "extraordinary measures" in respect to districts that did not pay taxes in cash or in kind. Determined measures were also ordered against the partisans.

EXPLOIT

Our scouts avoided Waclaw Zigadlo's post. We were afraid Kosulnikov's talkativeness had put the Germans on our track and Zigadlo was told that none of our men would use his house for some time.

But we could not dispense with a post between Rovno and the camp, and therefore it was decided to establish a secret post in another hamlet close to a forest massif where shelter could be sought in case of danger.

The new post was situated about thirty kilometres away from Rovno. It was manned by twenty-five picked men and with them there were several pairs of horses with carriages. A carpeted sled was kept specially for Kuznetsov for his trips to Rovno.

When Kuznetsov was in Rovno he kept in touch with the post through Nikolai Prikhodko. He travelled to the post by cart, bicycle or on foot, and another man took the messages on to camp and brought back messages from me. Prikhodko would take these messages to Kuznetsov in Rovno. Sometimes he had to make the journey twice a day, but he always got through safely. His appearance did not arouse any suspicion. Enemy outposts checked his papers several times and found them in order.

But we knew the kind of chap Nikolai Prikhodko was. It was not in his nature to pass a nazi or a policeman dispassionately, and although he usually kept quiet about his adventures we got to know about some of them.

One day as he was riding out of Rovno in a cart he noticed two policemen who he thought were shadowing him. Instead of whipping up the horses and making off he deliberately slowed his horses down to a walk. The policemen were behind him.

Presently the bridge across the Goryn came into view and about half a kilometre away from the bridge Prikhodko pulled up and began tightening the horses' belly bands although there was nothing wrong with the harness.

"Want a lift?" he offered when the policemen came abreast of him.

The men climbed into the cart, placing their rifles beside them.

"You boys in the police?" Prikhodko asked.

"Yes."

"Where are you going?"

"We're rounding up people to send to Germany. There's a village near by that needs a push. They don't want to go with a good grace," one of the men explained.

"Irresponsible people," Prikhodko said sympathetically. By this time the cart was already on the bridge.

"You're right, they're stupid. Take yourself," the policeman went on, "you're big and strong. Why stick around here? If I were you I'd volunteer. You'll get rich and come back a gentleman. Are you married?"

The cart reached the middle of the bridge.

The policeman did not get an answer to his question.

"Hands up, you skunks," Prikhodko ordered, levelling his pistol at his two passengers.

Dumb with fright they submissively put their hands up.

"Get off the cart, you cheap bastards," Prikhodko commanded.

The policemen, their hands in the air, backed away and got off the cart.

"Now get into the water, reptiles," came the next order.

It was late in the autumn. The river was swollen, the water flowing just beneath the planking of the bridge.

"Jump, I tell you, or I'll shoot," Prikhodko pressed.

With the pistol pointing at them the policemen had no alternative but to jump into the river.

In the water they clutched at each other until both went down to the bottom.

Their rifles remained in the cart. It was against our rules to conceal trophies and Prikhodko had to tell the story himself.

We spent a long time at headquarters explaining to him that he should not do these things, that he had no right to run such risks. The messages he was delivering from Rovno and which we were relaying to Moscow were more precious than policemen.

"I understand everything, Comrade Commander, but when there's an opportunity I can't help myself," he pleaded, but gave his word that it would never happen again. "I'd rather die than let you down," he added.

"There's no need to die. What you want to do is to be more careful."

Prikhodko kept his word. After that he carried many messages to and from Rovno. The communication service operated smoothly.

On February 21, I gave the messenger from the post a packet for Kuznetsov.

"You are carrying an important packet," I told him. "If it falls into the hands of the enemy we will lose some of our best men. Pass that on to Prikhodko."

The packet was handed to Prikhodko in the morning of February 22 and he went off to Rovno with it.

Kuznetsov waited for Prikhodko all day, and he did not appear on the following morning either. By midday rumours began to circulate in the town. Some people said that near the village of Veliky Zhiten a Ukrainian killed many Germans and was killed himself. Another story had it that a partisan from the forest fought Germans all night and killed a large number of them. All the stories claimed that one man fought the battle.

Kuznetsov at once realised that this man was Prikhodko. The time and the place showed that it could have been no other. Besides, nobody but our giant Prikhodko could have taken on a horde of Germans single-handed.

Kuznetsov knew Prikhodko well. They became friends in Moscow, came to the detachment together and had fought side by side. Kuznetsov did not doubt for a minute that Prikhodko would ever betray his comrades even if

he were captured and tortured by the enemy. But the question was: had he, if he was killed, destroyed the packet intended for Kuznetsov?

Taking every precaution, Kuznetsov sent Kazimierz Dąmbrowski to Veliky Zhiten, where the latter had relatives.

Dąmbrowski questioned eyewitnesses and brought us the details of Nikolai Prikhodko's death.

As usual, Prikhodko rode in a cart. At the village of Veliky Zhiten he was stopped by a picket of about twenty German military police and traitors.

He reined in his horses and produced his papers, which stated that he was a local inhabitant. These papers had been checked many times and did not seem to arouse suspicion this time as well. But the nazis decided to search the cart.

Prikhodko could not let them do that. As always, beneath the hay he had a submachine-gun and some anti-tank grenades.

"What's there to see?" he said in an effort to make them change their minds.

"That's none of your business," was the reply.

He quickly pulled his submachine-gun out of the hay and let the police have a long burst. Several were killed on the spot, the remainder ran behind the houses and opened fire from there.

Returning the fire, he sprang into the cart and whipped up the horses, and it was then that he was hit. Badly wounded in the chest he continued driving in the direction of Rovno.

On the outskirts of the village his advance was blocked by a lorry with German soldiers. Feeling that something was wrong they opened fire with machine-guns and submachine-guns. Prikhodko was hit again but there was no thought of surrender in his mind. Scrambling down from the cart and taking shelter in a roadside ditch he went on firing.

The unequal battle lasted a long time.

Three bullets hit Prikhodko. Bleeding and feeling his strength ebbing, he tied the secret packet to a hand-grenade and hurled it at the enemy with fast-weakening arm.

When the surviving nazis surrounded Nikolai, he was already dead. But he did not die from a German bullet. A shot into his temple was the last shot fired by our Hercules.

* * *

It would be superfluous to describe how the news of Nikolai Prikhodko's death was received at our camp. He had always been a favourite and his courage had become legend.

The Soviet Government highly appraised the exploit of our comrade. He was posthumously decorated with the lofty title of Hero of the Soviet Union, and the scout unit in which he served was named after him.

AT ZDOLBUNOVO STATION

The news of Nikolai Prikhodko's death came as a shock not only to the partisans of our detachment. In the wrecking group at Zdolbunovo Station there were men who had been Nikolai's childhood playmates. He was born at this station and had lived there before the war. His death was a heavy loss to the people of Zdolbunovo.

During his first visit to Rovno, Nikolai had stopped at Zdolbunovo Station where he met some old friends—Dmitry Krasnogolovets and the two Shmereg brothers. These men readily agreed to help us. Later, our scouts Chevchuk and Gnedyuk became frequent visitors at the station.

A reconnaissance and wrecking group headed by Dmitry Krasnogolovets was organised in Zdolbunovo at the close of December 1942, before Prikhodko was killed.

Zdolbunovo was an important railway junction on the route between Germany and the Eastern Front.

Troop trains ran via Zdolbunovo from Czechoslovakia, Germany and Poland and back from the front. Traffic was very heavy on both tracks of the line.

One can appreciate the importance of reconnaissance and wrecking activity at this station and we took every step to keep Krasnogolovets' group under cover. By March or April 1943 it had nearly twenty members and embraced the key sectors of the railway junction.

The Zdolbunovo group included workers of the station and depot, pointsmen, train guards, drivers and dispatchers.

The group had special messengers through whom they maintained contact with our detachment. One of them was a school-master by the name of Ivanov, who took a job as an unskilled worker at the station when the Germans came. He came to our camp regularly, using his identity card and the pass that enabled him to ride on the railway without hindrance.

The teacher carried out his modest but very important work with unusual staunchness. Let me relate one instance. One frosty day in winter I noticed that Ivanov, who had just arrived in the camp, was huddled up with cold at one of the fires. I went up to him and saw that he wore nothing beneath his jacket. Quiet and unassuming he did not stint his health where the fulfilment of an assignment was concerned. Naturally, we saw to it that our Zdolbunovo messenger was given adequate clothes.

The information supplied to us by the Zdolbunovo organisation was of the utmost importance. It fully covered the work of the railway junction: the destination and starting-point of the trains and what they carried. If it was troops we were given their number, the arm of the service and sometimes the names of the units; if it was materiel we knew what sort of materiel it was and also its quantity.

The reports from Zdolbunovo gave us timely warning that the German High Command, worried by the situation at the front, was building fortifications in the region of

Belaya Tserkov and Vinnitsa, where Hitler had his headquarters. German troops began to arrive in these areas from around Leningrad.

About fifty carriages of cement, prefabricated machine-gun port hoods and weapons bound for Belaya Tserkov passed through Zdolbunovo daily.

These reports were radioed to Moscow regularly every five days.

Besides scouting, the Zdolbunovo organisation engaged in wrecking activities. This they began first on a small scale: tracks were loosened and carriage and engine brake hoses cut. Later, with the TNT that we sent them, they learned to make mines. Taking pieces of TNT they put an explosive into them, then painted them over with glue or tar and rolled them in coal dust giving them the appearance of a lump of coal. They threw these "lumps" into the tenders of locomotives. When the lumps got into a furnace they blew the engine boiler into pieces.

Through Ivanov we sent fifty delayed-action magnetic mines to Zdolbunovo. These portable mines clung to any piece of iron. A clock-work mechanism set to explode the mines was placed into them together with an explosive.

These magnetic mines were used with telling effect. A train with a time mine beneath its boiler would go up three or four hundred kilometres to the east of Zdolbunovo. Try and trace it from there!

Then they hit upon the idea of placing magnetic mines under fuel cisterns. Whole trains were destroyed in that way.

The Zdolbunovo group inflicted tremendous losses on the Germans. It was simply impossible to keep a count of these losses. We could not very well ask the Germans to keep a record of all the big and small accidents caused by our brave underground workers at the railway junction.

In the course of three months they held up seventy locomotives at the Zdolbunovo engine depot under various pretexts: while repairing some of them they damaged

others. This in itself was a major wrecking operation. But the most noteworthy achievement of the Zdolbunovo group was the destruction of a big double-track railway bridge spanning the Goryn on the Zdolbunovo-Kiev line. Troop trains bound for or returning from the front passed across this bridge every ten or fifteen minutes. Although there were four lines leading into Zdolbunovo from the West, the only road east from the station ran across this strongly guarded bridge. Sentries were posted at the approaches on either side, and at the corners there were machine-gun nests. Every inch of the open ground around the bridge was kept under observation. The barracks of the guard stood near the bridge.

We knew that attempts to destroy this bridge had been made by partisan groups, but all these attempts had failed and the cost in men had been high. In spite of that our headquarters were determined to blow it up.

The details of the plan were worked out by Nikolai Gnedyuk, one of our scouts who had established himself in Zdolbunovo.

After a long search, a brakeman, a Pole by nationality, was found who had charge of the brakes on a troop train. His job was to put the brakes on when his train went downhill and to release them when it went uphill. He was trusted by the Germans and had papers stating that he was a Volksdeutsch, a person of German origin.

A big suitcase mine with a V-1 grenade explosive was prepared for the bridge.

When all was in readiness the brakeman took our suitcase with him. He pulled the cotter pin from the mine just as his train reached the foot of the bridge and when it was in the middle he pushed the suitcase on the track for east-bound trains. A few seconds later there was an explosion and the central girder collapsed, pulling carriages after it.

Our scouts observed the operation from a hiding-place about a kilometre away from the bridge.

It took the Germans about three weeks to repair the Goryn bridge.

The operation was carried out very ably: it was not traced by the Germans to any of the members of the Zdobunovo organisation.

* * *

Our radio operators found work piling up on them as our activity increased. Formerly we used to contact Moscow only once a day and one radio operator could handle all the messages. But now there were so many reports from Rovno, Sarny, Zdobunovo and other places that two and sometimes three operators had to get down to the transmitters at one and the same time.

Only one transmitter could be operated in the camp. To avoid interference the other transmitters had to be taken to a distance of at least five kilometres away.

Our radio operators formed a small but close-knit group. They had their own rules: to stand by day and night in turns; to be ready at any moment to pack the transmitter, take it over the shoulder and withdraw; to safeguard the secret codes; to train every day with the key and practise receiving messages by ear.

During one of our busiest days, when the radio operators were transmitting information received from the Zdobunovo group, Kuznetsov sounded the warning from Rovno that the nazis had sent three cars fitted with direction finders to the region of the Sarny forests and that punitive expeditions had been dispatched to Berezhno, Sarny and Rakitnoye.

With these direction finders the Germans could pinpoint the location of our radio stations and, consequently, our detachment. The objective of these direction finders and punitive expeditions was obviously to locate our radio stations and surround and destroy our detachment.

We quickly had confirmation of Kuznetsov's communication. On the day after we received his warning, our scout

reported that a closely guarded car arrived in the village of Mikhalin. It left the village every day at daybreak and nobody was allowed to come closer to it than two kilometres. In addition, groups of Germans were seen in the forest with radio apparatuses and ear-phones.

It was a nasty situation. We could not break contact with Moscow, but if we continued our work the location of our camp would be disclosed.

The radio operators solved the problem themselves.

"Comrade Commander," Lida Sherstneva said to me, "we have thought it over and here's what we have decided. Tonight we can each choose a place say twenty or twenty-five kilometres away from the camp, send off the messages and come back. Tomorrow we'll work somewhere else. The nazis will never find us."

The plan was a good one.

For several days in succession the operators, each with a group of partisans, moved from one place to another in different parts of the forest and not only kept to the timetable fixed by Moscow but also named new days and hours for transmission and reception.

These "nomad" transmitters saved us. The German direction finders found they were on a wild goose chase, pinpointing our radio stations now in one now in another, diametrically opposite, place. The troops would surround and fire at abandoned sites.

We put an end to this chase ourselves, by ambushing the nazi direction finders. We did not capture the installations, but the scare we gave the nazis was enough to make them stop their search.

MARFA STRUCIŃSKA

I was very surprised when Marfa Strucińska came to headquarters. She had always passed on her requests through her husband, Vladimir Struciński.

A fire was burning in the headquarters choom, and the

logs that served us as chairs were scattered around the fire.

"Take a seat," I said, indicating a log.

She sat down gravely.

"I want just a little of your time," she said. "I want to ask you to send me to Lutsk."

We were selecting people with the object of sending a group to the area around Lutsk. The situation in Lutsk interested us and we wanted to know what German offices and headquarters were in the town and how big the garrison was. Moreover, in the event our detachment had to move, we needed information about the forests in that area.

The task was a difficult one. We were about two hundred kilometres away from Lutsk and it took not less than five days for a journey in just one direction. But the difficulty was not only in the time and in the distance. The area teemed with German troops.

We hand-picked the people for this group, giving preference to those who knew the town. Jadzia, Struciński's niece, and Rostislav Struciński were among the first to volunteer. Marfa had evidently got her information from them.

"I don't think you should go to Lutsk. You're not strong enough," I said. "Besides, you're doing very useful work here."

"I wouldn't say that. Anybody can cook and wash. And please don't worry about my strength. I'm strong and can be of more use than a young person. I have relatives and friends in Lutsk and through them I can find out anything and get in touch with anybody."

"What about the children? What about Vasya and Slava?"

"Katya will look after them."

"It's a dangerous mission."

"God is merciful. And then, who'll suspect that I'm a partisan?"

I looked at Marfa, at her good, kind face, with a feeling

of great respect, and thought: "How strong and noble this Soviet woman is!"

"All right," I said, "I'll talk it over with the comrades."

Fearing a refusal, she sent her husband to me. But I could not make up my mind.

A few days later Tsessarsky told me that Marfa was down with a bad cold. That gave me my excuse and I told Frolov, who was appointed commander of the group, to let Marfa know that she was not going.

No sooner did Frolov return than Marfa came running with tears in her eyes.

"It's only a light cold. I'll be well tomorrow," she said and started pleading so earnestly that in the end I gave in.

Sixty-five of our partisans set out for Lutsk in mid-February.

Vladimir Struciński and the children saw Marfa off, going a long distance from the camp with her.

In the course of the next two weeks I received the information that the group had safely reached the Lutsk area and was successfully developing its activities. It was encamped in a forest some twenty-five kilometres away from Lutsk and was sending scouts into the town.

At this time the Gestapo began an energetic drive against partisans. Troops appeared in all districts and the police were being heavily armed.

I was worried that all the roads would be closed and ordered Frolov and his group to return to the camp without delay. Frolov came back but the news he brought was not comforting.

His group was ambushed on the fringe of a forest near a ford across the Sluch River. The engagement lasted only a few minutes. The nazis had not counted on meeting with resistance and quickly retreated, leaving their killed and wounded in the forest. But six of Frolov's men were also killed.

I was very upset when Frolov told me that Marfa,

Jadzia, Rostislav and five other partisans had remained behind near Lutsk.

Marfa and Jadzia had gone to the town twice, contacted people who could help us and introduced them to Frolov. One of them, an engineer working at the railway station in Lutsk, gave Frolov some valuable information, in particular that the Germans had unloaded several carriages of chemical shells and aerial bombs and were planning to test them on partisans and on the civilian population. This engineer promised to get a detailed plan of the town showing all the German headquarters and offices as well as the depots with ammunition and chemical shells. It was arranged that Marfa would go to Lutsk for this plan in a few days, but my order for the return of the group was received before she could see the engineer.

Nothing in the world could make her leave without the plan.

"How can I leave when we've started such a big thing. The plan will probably be sent to Moscow. Leave Jadzia and Rostislav with me and I'll return with them."

She had her way. Frolov could do nothing. He detailed Jadzia and six men, Rostislav among them, to escort her back to camp after she had completed her mission.

When Frolov finished his report I went to see old man Struciński. He had already been informed and was sitting in his hut with a downcast and gloomy look on his face.

"How are things?" I asked.

"As well as can be," he replied in a constrained voice. Then, after a silence, he added: "What's there to say, I miss my old woman."

"She'll be all right. Rostislav's there and he won't let anybody hurt his mother."

"That's true, but he may get hurt himself. Oh well, it's war and there's nothing we can do about it."

Jadzia, Rostislav and two partisans returned to camp a few days later.

Old man Struciński saw them before anybody else. He

listened to Jadzia and Rostislav in silence, and without saying a word disappeared into his hut.

Jadzia came to me at once. She took a packet from a secret pocket.

"Aunt Marfa told me to give this to you," she said. Then she burst into tears and told me what happened.

She and Marfa went to Lutsk, got the packet from the engineer, and returned to the forest where the partisans were waiting for them. Marfa sewed the map into the collar of her coat, and the whole group started out on the return journey.

They travelled by night, resting by day in hamlets and villages. In a hamlet called Vyrok, some forty policemen surrounded the hut they were resting in.

Rostislav and the other men told his mother and Jadzia to run to the forest across the courtyard, and then darted out of the hut.

Marfa quickly ripped her collar open and got the packet.

"Take this, Jadzia," she said. "You'll get away—you're young. Give it to the commander."

The engagement was fought near the hut. Six partisans could not stand up against forty policemen. Three of our men were killed, and Rostislav and the other two men began to retreat towards the forest, sure that Marfa and Jadzia were already in hiding.

"Rostislav did not see the policemen break into the hut," Jadzia wept. "They wounded Auntie and seized me by my arms. I did not see anything else. I broke loose, grabbed a pistol and firing at them jumped out of a window and ran away. I met Rostik and the other two boys only on the next day. Rostik did not know his mother had been captured by the Germans."

"What happened after that?"

"We wandered about this forest near Vyrok. In the evening we saw a woman coming in our direction. When she approached we questioned her. She said that Auntie was horribly beaten, but that they did not get anything

out of her. Then the Gestapo men took her out of the village and shot her. The peasants took her body at night and buried it in the forest. This woman took us to a fresh grave. She had helped to bury Auntie and had come to the forest believing she would meet us. She said she knew we were somewhere around."

This was war. We had seen death many times, and had buried many of our comrades. We avenged them mercilessly. It seemed that we had grown used to the cruelties of war. But all of us were shaken by Marfa's death. The news spread about the camp with the speed of lightning and it was unusually still when I made my way to Vladimir's hut.

It was impossible to speak to him: spasms were choking him. I quickly walked away, feeling that I was somehow to blame.

As I now recalled Marfa's death, I looked up an issue of our partisan newspaper which had an obituary written by partisans who knew her well. Here it is:

"The comrades who returned from the most recent operation brought back the sad news of Marfa Strucińska's death at the hands of the nazi monsters.

"We came to know her well during the months she was in our detachment. The mother of a family of partisans, a family of heroes, she was a heroine herself, a courageous partisan.

"In the detachment she was a mother to everybody. Tireless and competent, she worked day and night. Marfa Strucińska volunteered for an important operative assignment. On the way back her life was cut short by a nazi bullet.

"The heart of a wonderful woman has ceased to beat. But her death will be avenged.

"There are many who will do that. The nazis will pay with their dirty blood for the life of Marfa Strucińska, which was precious to us.

"The Motherland will not forget her."

Nikolai and Jerzy Strucińskis were not in camp when we learned of the death of their mother. They were in Rovno, and that made it all the harder for Vladimir Struciński. We sent him off on a mission thinking it would help to mitigate his grief. He went, returned and came to me to report that the assignment had been fulfilled. I was stunned by the change in him: he had aged and his cheeks had grown pinched in those last few days.

"Sit down, Vladimir," I offered.

He sank heavily on to a tree stump. I poured a glass of wine for him, but he waved it away.

"I can't," he said.

The silence seemed never to end and I could not disturb this mute confession; the old man did not want to be consoled. Then, at last, he spoke, giving utterance to a thought that had been torturing him for a long time.

"If only Nikolai ... or Jerzy, he's also dependable—has been with her. But what's lost can't be helped. This is war. ..."

"What's the news from Jerzy? When will Nikolai return?" he now began to ask frequently when his sons were away.

After Marfa's death Vasya and Slava were looked after by our girl-partisans, but they could not take her place. Besides, we lived a life of danger, and for that reason we sent the two boys to Moscow by aircraft in April. Katya went with them with strict injunctions from her father to take care of her brothers.

* * *

On March 8, International Women's Day, I sent close on a hundred men under Bazanov, a skilled commander to the village of Bogushi. Our information was that an enemy battalion was quartered there. Men from this battalion had attacked Frolov.

A line of fortifications, built when Poland was ruled by squires, ran along the western bank of the Sluch River.

near this village. Some of the trenches and pillboxes were still intact, but the water-level in the river had risen and all the pillboxes were flooded.

Bazanov ably reconnoitred the area and masterfully took stock of his forces. He attacked Bogushi at daybreak. Taken by surprise in their sleep, the nazis rushed about the village like frightened beasts, the bullets of our men cutting them down. Many ran to the trenches and pillboxes, but that did not save them. Hit by our bullets they were drowned in the flooded trenches and in the river.

Bazanov returned to camp with a large quantity of arms and ammunition.

That was our revenge for the slaying of our comrades, for the death of Marfa Strucińska.

TWO OPERATIONS

The Germans watched all the river crossings on the road from our camp to Rovno. To get in touch with Rovno we now had to send not one or two runners but a group of twenty or thirty partisans. Skirmishes became the rule. The Germans and the traitors serving them suffered heavy losses in these skirmishes, and our casualty figures also began to rise.

In order to allow the work in Rovno to proceed undisturbed, I decided to move a part of the detachment to the Tsuman forests, lying to the west of the town. These forests had been reconnoitred by the men who went to Lutsk with Frolov.

I picked a hundred and fifteen men, leaving Sergei Stekhov in command of the old camp.

In addition to the scouts who had already been to Rovno, I took with me all the men who knew the town. Alexander Lukin also went with me. He had only just returned from Moscow where he had reported on the situation behind the enemy lines. He came down from the plane by parachute. The same aircraft brought us letters

from friends and relatives, magazines and newspapers, submachine-guns, ammunition and food.

At the conference I convened at headquarters, Lukin gave us the latest instructions from the High Command on the work of our detachment and on the key objectives assigned to us.

With Lukin there were four new-comers for the detachment. One of them, Grisha Shmuilovsky, was an old friend of Tsessarsky's and Macheret's. He was a student of the Moscow Institute of Literature and had for a long time been begging to be allowed to join our detachment.

"What about the institute?" I asked him.

"The institute? I'll finish it after victory."

The second man was Max Seleskiridi, a student of the theatrical school at the Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow. He wanted to be a comedian, but in our detachment he became a demolition expert. Looking at Max I frequently wondered how he could be a comedian for I never saw a smile on his face.

The two others were radio operators. One of them, Marina Kikh, attracted our attention. She was born in Lvov Region, in a village called Novoselki-Kardinaiskiye.

She joined the underground organisation of the Communist Youth League of West Ukraine in 1932 and four years later she became a member of the Communist Party of West Ukraine. She was arrested by the Polish gendarmes in 1936 and then again in 1937 for her revolutionary activity. After West Ukraine was liberated, she was elected to the People's Assembly. She went to Moscow with a delegation from the People's Assembly to attend an Extraordinary Session of the Supreme Soviet and then to Kiev to convey to the Soviet Government that Lvov Region wanted to become a part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and that the population requested Soviet citizenship.

When the war broke out, Marina attended courses for radio operators and was sent to our detachment.

I was pleased with the recruits and included them in the group that was to go to the Tsuman forests.

For us this move was a difficult military operation. We fought our first engagement with the nazis at the village of Karachun near a level-crossing on the Rovno-Sarny Railway. The Germans had evidently learned of our movements, and they ambushed us there. After a short exchange of fire, I decided to withdraw to a forest and find out the numerical strength of the force opposing us. A train-load of troops arrived at the very moment that we began our withdrawal. They must have been called out by telephone.

We had to cross the railway at all cost, and I decided to be the first to attack.

Hardly had the troops alighted and the train pulled out when the air was rent by our cheers and we charged. The Germans did not expect such a swift onslaught. We killed about twenty nazis and took five prisoners.

Interrogated by Kuznetsov they said that a large SS force had been sent to the Rudnya-Bobrovskaya area from Rovno and Kastopol. This was confirmed by the local inhabitants.

"At least two hundred lorries filled with German troops went in that direction," the peasants said. "And they had artillery."

I tried to warn Stekhov by radio but we could not get through to him. So I sent him a radiogram via Moscow although I realised that this was already a belated warning.

In the engagement at the level-crossing we lost one man, and two others were wounded. One was our engineer and demolition expert Malikov: an explosive bullet had shattered two fingers of his right hand. Tsessarsky immediately amputated the fingers and dressed the wound.

The other was the Spaniard Gros, our resourceful sapper, who was always so full of ideas of how to trick the Germans. It was he who had master-minded the destruction of a railway bridge and a whole train with a single mine. In the detachment, just as in the battles in his home-

land, he was distinguished for his bravery. Very few operations were undertaken on the railways without his participation.

Gros was seriously wounded. An explosive bullet had penetrated a shoulder-blade and partially shattered it.

"He won't return to the line soon," Tsessarsky reported to me. "The wound itself is not dangerous but it will take a long time to heal."

We fought another battle in the evening of the next day. Our vanguard which was advancing along a straight high road was suddenly stopped by machine-gun and rifle fire. The enemy was encamped in a forest about a hundred paces away from the road and he had an outpost right beside the road.

This time the bandits resisted stubbornly. We fought for two and a half hours, forcing our way with difficulty but in the end we compelled them to put their hands up. The killed remained lying on the road, and the survivor surrendered.

Besides weapons, we captured about twenty pigs. This was most welcome. We had been on the march for five days and had not had a hot meal. Everybody was delighted when we found an army field kitchen among the trophies. A delicious dinner, so long awaited by the men, was served at last.

Nikolai Fadeyev, a unit commander, was wounded in this battle. A bullet had splintered the bone of one of his legs just below the knee.

When we reached our destination it was found that Fadeyev's wound was affected with gangrene.

"He must be operated on," Dr. Tsessarsky reported to me, "otherwise he'll die."

Like the old one, our new camp was in a dense forest. We had not built any huts, and a surgical operation requires closed premises, plenty of light and real surgical instruments. Nothing of this was as yet available. Tses

sarsky had left all his surgical instruments in the old camp, taking only medicines and instruments for first aid.

"What do you suggest?" I asked him.

"With your permission I'll amputate with an ordinary saw."

"Good Lord! But can it be done?"

"The risk is very great, but I'll take every precaution. Only an operation can save him."

While the preparations were being made for the operation I felt nervous as hundreds of thoughts raced through my mind. The life of a young man was at stake. Nikolai Fadeyev was only twenty-one.

Our surgeon, on the other hand, was calm or at least that was the impression I got. He summoned my driver Pyotr and holding an ordinary saw in his hand said to him:

"Here, Pyotr, I want you to file off these teeth. I must have smaller teeth on this saw."

And he explained in detail the kind of teeth he wanted.

The saw was ready in about two hours and Tsessarsky disinfected it, wiping it with alcohol, holding it over a flame and then wiping it with alcohol again. In the meantime the medical personnel completed all the other preparations, building something in the nature of a hut of fir branches without a roof so that there would be enough light. They boiled the instruments and got out the bandages.

Fadeyev asked to see me about twenty minutes before the operation. The lad, strong and merry only a few days before, lay on the grass, emaciated, with an ashen face.

"Comrade Commander," he said, "if everything turns out well will you give me a recommendation for candidate-membership in the Party?"

I was deeply moved by his request.

"Of course. You're a brick, lad. And don't worry about the operation. Our doctor is a magician."

He knew nothing about the kind of saw that was going

to be used or about our anxiety. But he realised that it was risky to operate in such conditions.

Leaving Tsessarsky and his assistant in the "operating room", all of us drew away.

In a few moments we heard ... loud oaths. Swearing was strictly prohibited in our detachment. The men themselves considered that foul language was unworthy of a Soviet partisan. But under the chloroform Nikolai let himself go.

"Here's a man unburdening his heart and there'll be no punishment for him," Lukin, who was standing beside me said to cover his agitation.

The operation took more than an hour.

It was a good thing Tsessarsky had a plentiful supply of chloroform, because it evaporated quickly in the operating air.

When he came to me after the operation he was pale and looked played out, and there were beads of sweat on his face.

"The danger is still there," he said, "but I'm hoping for the best."

His hopes were justified. Fadeyev's temperature dropped on the very next day and after that everything progressed as in the best of hospitals.

A few days later Nikolai again asked to see me.

"Comrade Commander," he said, "is it true that I swore during the operation? Or are the fellows joking?"

I smiled.

"So it's true. Please forgive me."

"It's all right, my boy. I'll have to accept your apology this time."

"Thank you, Comrade Commander. There's something else I want to ask you. What will I do now without a leg? I don't want to be sent to the rear."

"Don't hurry, we'll think of something. You'll yet be more useful than many others."

"Thank you again, Comrade Commander."

When Fadeyev recovered we appointed him head of the group training demolition men and put him in charge of all the demolition gear. He fulfilled his duties excellently. And I, of course, gave him a recommendation for membership in the Party.

Nikolai Fadeyev's case was not unique. The partisans associated the Party with their best and loftiest feelings. The importance and role of the communist organisation in our detachments was enormous. Of the men and officers who had been flown in from Moscow only fifteen were members of the Party. There were also very few Party members among the people who joined us locally. Small as it was, our Party organisation enjoyed tremendous prestige in the detachment, the reason for this being that Party members set an example in battle and in everyday life. "A worthy Bolshevik," the partisans said of the Communists.

A life of battles and marches, of anxiety and unending hardship was the best test of a man's Bolshevik qualities. Small wonder, therefore, that from the very beginning of our activities behind the enemy lines many partisans applied for membership in the Party. We could not in our conditions draw up the documents as required by the Party Rules. We did not have application forms and we did not give anybody written recommendations. Everything was done orally, first at a meeting of the Party bureau and then at a meeting of members. The Secretary kept notes so that later, when he returned to Moscow, he could officially register the new members and establish their membership from the day they were accepted by our Party meeting.

We only accepted men who showed they were real Bolsheviks. Dr. Tsessarsky, Valentin Semyonov, who was Secretary of the Komsomol organisation, and Darbek Abdraimov were among the first to be accepted. The Party organisation in our detachment was steadily augmented with the best men we had.

HELPERS

The change to the new base in the Tsuman forests diverted our attention from Rovno for a while. But we began to catch up on lost time as soon as we settled down. The scouts found the shortest and safest routes to the town, and early in April we sent out not only those who had been there before but also ten other men who knew the town. Nikolai Struciński did not go to Rovno. He, Jerzy and Jadzia were sent to Lutsk with the task of organising a group of scouts from among the people with whom Marfa had put us in contact.

Our new camp was much more conveniently sited than the old one. It halved the distance to Rovno, and the road to the town was better. Formerly our scouts had to cross two rivers, but here there was only a narrow stream, a tributary of the Goryn.

We again set up a post halfway to Rovno. Unlike the other posts, it was not located in a hamlet but right in a forest about half a kilometre away from the Rovno-Lutsk motor road, and we called it our forest post.

April is a good month in West Ukraine. There is no snow at all. Green grass appears, and the buds on the trees are ready to burst into leaf. But the nights are still cold and wet, especially in the forest. It was therefore no picnic in a forest post in April. At night the men shivered with cold because they had to sleep on the wet ground. There was no way to get warm. They could not light a fire as that would give them away.

In addition to the forest post we had what we called "forest letter-boxes". Every scout departing for Rovno was shown a "letter-box" somewhere in the vicinity of the post. This was a tree with a hollow, the stump of a tree or a rock. In these places the scout hid his report and found messages from the camp.

The "letter-boxes" were our central communications hubs and their location was kept a close secret. Our most

experienced and careful scouts were detailed to maintain contact with the post, to stand by at the post itself, and to make the rounds of the "letter-boxes". These men were headed by Valentin Semyonov.

Small Kolya was by now doing the work of an adult. He was Nikolai Kuznetsov's runner.

When Marina Kikh joined us, Kolya grew deeply attached to her. She too seemed to take a liking to the boy and undertook to look after him, washing and darning his clothes, spending much of her time with him and telling him about Moscow, the Metro and school.

When Small Kolya became Kuznetsov's runner, Marina made two suits for him. The first consisted of a peasant's shirt and home-spun pants, to which Korolyov, our bast-shoe expert, added a pair of small bast shoes. The other was a suit for town wear: a shirt with a turn-down collar, short pants and shoes to match.

Kolya changed his clothes in a forest near Rovno. If he was bound for Rovno, he would put on his town suit, hiding his village suit. When he went to the forest post, he put on the bast shoes and long pants.

Valentin Semyonov anxiously waited for Kolya when he left the post for Rovno for the first time. The boy returned safely with a packet from Kuznetsov.

"Now tell me all about it," Semyonov said to him. "Were you stopped anywhere?"

"Yes. But I told them what you taught me: that my father and mother were dead and that I was living by begging. Only one fine day...."

"When was that?" Semyonov asked with a smile.

It was Kolya's favourite expression. When he described anything, whether it happened a long time before or only yesterday, he always prefaced his story with "One fine day".

"Yesterday morning, when I left you. Three policemen stopped me in a village and wanted to know where I was going. I started to cry, saying that my mother was in hos-

pital and that I was on my way to see her. They let me go. And although I cried I really wasn't scared a bit."

Kuznetsov soon had another helper in Rovno—Valya Dovger.

We lost Valya's father, Konstantin Dovger, early in March. He and another local inhabitant by the name of Petrovsky, were making their way to Sarny on an assignment from us when they were seized by nationalists. The bandits beat them savagely, demanding information about partisans.

Failing to get anything out of them, the traitors tied the hands of our comrades with barbed wire and took them to the river, which was ice-bound. They forced Dovger and Petrovsky to a hole in the ice and were about to push them in when Petrovsky shouted that he would rather die from a bullet and started running. The bandits fired after him, but the night was dark and he got away.

Reaching our camp he told us how Konstantin Dovger was killed.

After a long search we found the tortured body of our comrade and buried him with partisan honours.

Valya joined the detachment after her father's funeral, saying that she and her mother would take his place.

I introduced Valya to Kuznetsov. After his first talk with her he told me that she could help him if she lived in Rovno. We acted on his recommendations. Valya went to Rovno and in April she found a job and managed to register as a permanent resident of the town. This was not easy because at that time the Gestapo were handling all residence registrations. One of her girl-friends introduced her to a Gestapo man named Leo Metko, who was private interpreter for the Police Commissioner of the Ukraine. Metko swallowed Valya's story that her father had collaborated with the Germans and had been killed for this by Soviet partisans. He even got her a document certifying the truth of this story. With his assistance she got her registration and also a job as shop-assistant.

vaiya rented a comfortable room with a separate entrance and took her mother and younger sisters to live with her.

After she had settled down she introduced Metko to her "fiancé", a German officer named Paul Siebert. Under this guise Nikolai Kuznetsov began to make new acquaintances. Through Metko he met other men from the Reichskommissariat and the Gestapo.

Senior Lieutenant Siebert became very popular. Gay, witty and generous, he did not stint German marks to treat his friends; we seized these marks by the truck-load from the Germans. These friends believed that Paul was the son of an East Prussian landowner and planned to visit his big and rich estate after the war.

Kuznetsov also became acquainted with a local resident, a Pole by the name of Jan Kamiński. Kamiński was a member of a Polish underground organisation and thirsted for action. Without hesitation he agreed to help Kuznetsov and reinforced his word with a signed oath.

We began to receive reports from Kuznetsov almost every day. These told us of different German undertakings in the Ukraine and of the plans of the German Command. Nikolai gave us the names and addresses of Soviet people who were eager to fight the nazis. He also got the names and descriptions of the secret agents the Gestapo was sending to the Soviet rear for subversive and terrorist activity.

In a restaurant Paul Siebert made the acquaintance of a German Army corporal named Schmidt, who trained dogs for Koch's body-guard. He had flaming red hair and freckles, and was flattered by the attention given him by the dashing officer.

"I'm very, very happy," he said, shaking hands with Kuznetsov.

"I am also very happy to know you. I love dogs and I want to know more about how they are trained. We keep

dogs at my father's estate. When you have the time, come and see me."

Kuznetsov gave him his "official" address.

Schmidt did not keep him waiting, appearing on the appointed day with a German police dog that he was training for Koch.

"It's the eighth. I've already trained seven dogs for the Gauleiter, but this one is the best of the lot. It can pick out a non-Aryan at once, and recognise a partisan a mile away. I selected it from the SS kennels."

"You don't say! What a clever dog," Kuznetsov said, admiring the dog and throwing it a piece of sausage.

"The dog's phenomenal," Schmidt chattered delightedly, gazing at the animal which was licking its chops, wagging its tail and looking at Kuznetsov in the hope of getting more sausage.

Schmidt quickly fell under Siebert's influence. Siebert lent him money, paid for him at the restaurant, lent a ready ear to his grievances and sympathised with him.

"Some people are making more out of this war than they'll ever spend in a lifetime," Schmidt whimpered. "But I could never succeed and will return home with empty hands."

"My good fellow," the lieutenant comforted him, "after the war I'll see to it that my father makes you his steward. You'll be well off. I'll write my father about you."

For his part Siebert let Schmidt feel that he had his full confidence. He introduced him to his "fiancée"—Valya Dovger.

"She's a good girl," Siebert said confidentially, "but she's been dogged by bad luck. The Russian partisans killed her father and the documents showing her German antecedents fell into the hands of those thieves. Now she'll never be able to prove her origin."

"I'm sorry to hear it. But wait, I have a friend who I think can help Fräulein Valentina."

"I would be very grateful to you if you could do that,

Schmidt," Kuznetsov said with genuine delight. "And if money is needed, I don't mind. Just name the sum." And he gave Schmidt five hundred marks.

Several days later Valya received a document stating she was a Volksdeutsch and was given the appropriate ration cards.

Everything seemed to run smoothly when suddenly Valya was summoned to the police and told that she would have to go to Germany. We would never have let her go and would have recalled her to the detachment, but that would have upset our plans. The alternative was to obtain a permanent residential permit through official channels. This was undertaken by Schmidt.

"It is a question that only the Reichskommissar Herr Koch can decide," Schmidt explained. "He is in Berlin at present but will be in Rovno in May. Fräulein Valentina, write an application and I'll give it to Captain Babach, the Reichskommissar's aide. He'll inform the Gauleiter."

The application was written and Schmidt took it away with him, getting a thousand marks from Kuznetsov for "expenses".

"Until this matter is settled nobody will bother you, Fräulein," Schmidt promised the worried Valya.

When he left, Nikolai breathed with relief.

"I think everything will be all right," he said. "There's another thing that has to be settled. Is Small Kolya here?"

"Yes. He's probably out in the courtyard."

"Call him."

Kolya was waiting near the house for Schmidt to leave.

"Did you have any trouble getting through?" Kuznetsov asked, embracing him.

"No," Kolya replied.

"Have something to eat and take a rest because you'll have to run back to the post."

Kolya was a sturdy and active boy, but the runs to the post tired him. It was twenty-five kilometres from Rovno

to the post, and a round journey of fifty kilometres in a single day was no joke.

While Kolya slept Kuznetsov wrote a message for me. An hour later Valya roused Kolya. He was dog-tired but feeling the responsibility he rose to his feet at once and smoothed out his clothes.

"Keep a sharp look-out. I'm giving you an important document. Tell the men at the post to send it to the commander at once. You'll wait for the reply and bring it to me as quickly as you can."

Kolya took the packet, hid it in his secret pocket and departed.

"Bless his heart," Valya said, following him out with her eyes, "he's only a child. At his age he ought to be playing at home."

"Yes, Kolya is small, but look at the important work he's doing," Nikolai replied meditatively.

This time the boy met with trouble on the way to the post. When he was about five kilometres away from Rovno he suddenly heard somebody cry "Halt!" He looked round and saw two German soldiers. They had not been visible from the road and had probably lain in ambush. Kolya instantly knew what to do. He ran to the forest with all his strength. The Germans started firing, bullets whistled in the air, but the boy ran on until he was well in the forest.

Kuznetsov's packet was delivered to the post and from there to me.

SHAM AND REAL MASTERS

The message brought by Small Kolya was very interesting. Kuznetsov reported that preparations were under way in Rovno to celebrate Hitler's birthday. A parade was planned in honour of the Führer on April 20. "I want your permission to 'command' this parade," Kuznetsov wrote.

Similar reports came from our other men in Rovno somewhat later.

"We are waiting for your permission to take revenge on the nazi ringleaders in the square," Shevchuk wrote.

I sent out identical replies.

"I categorically forbid what you ask. Any action on your part may disrupt all the work we have been doing. The time will come when we'll settle all accounts with the hangmen. I permit you to be in the crowd. In the event people, other than you, start anything, support them with fire."

The preparations for Hitler's birthday were characteristic. SS men and military police went about the villages taking food from the peasants and anything else they could carry. The loot was delivered to special offices of the Packettauktion. The "procurement" operation was directed by General Knut, Koch's deputy.

At the Packettauktion offices this loot was sorted out into "parcels from the Führer" weighing from ten to fifteen kilogrammes each. Beautifully packed, they were sent to Germans in Rovno itself, to the front and to Germany.

Our partisans and the people of Rovno, in particular, knew what the price of these "parcels from the Führer" was. They knew how they were obtained and how much blood and tears they had cost our people.

In mid-April I summoned Stekhov with a hundred men from the old camp. He told me of the German "parcel" procurements in Sarny District.

The reports we had of punitive expeditions while we were en route to our new camp had been correct. On March 30, troops came down on the villages and hamlets of our partisan area like a swarm of locusts. Their principal objective was Rudnya-Bobrovskaya. But Stekhov marched the detachment away before the Germans could find it. More than half of the inhabitants followed the partisans into the forest. A reign of terror overtook those who stayed behind. The nazis raided the villages, seizing the livestock and other property and then setting the houses on fire. The old folk, children and the sick were shot and the

young people were taken to assembly points for transportation to Germany.

The same thing went on in the areas where we were now operating. The roads were filled with people being driven to slavery and cart-trains of loot.

The parade was held as scheduled on April 20. The central square in Rovno was cordoned off. All units of the German garrison—special troops, units of the regular army guarding headquarters, units of the SS and military police, and police units—were lined up in the square.

The “guests of honour”—officials from the Reichskommissariat, and army and civil dignitaries—were gathered on the stands. Among the guests was Lieutenant Paul Siebert, with a young lady on his arm.

Over the stands was a huge portrait of Hitler. The lobster eyes, dandified moustache, and forelock over a narrow forehead were at variance with his Napoleonic pose.

At the appointed hour, high-ranking representatives of the authorities and Army rode up in comfortable cars. Erich Koch's first deputy, Paul Dargel, took his place on the stands. Tall and thin, and full of his own importance, he looked neither to the left nor right. Behind him was Knut, Koch's second deputy and head of the Packettauktion. He seemed to have no neck at all: his head sat on a mass of fat. Panting and puffing, he climbed to his place. Then came Dr. Funk, Chief Judge of the Ukraine, General von Ilgen, commander of the special, that is to say, punitive troops, and some other personages.

Despite the cordon several of our men, including Gnedjuk and Shevchuk managed to slip into the square. Each was armed with a pair of pistols and two or three anti-tank grenades.

Dargel made a speech. He spoke of Hitler's “services” and of the “invincible German Army”, pointing out that “here, behind the firing lines the German authorities must organise the supply of everything needed by the Army”.

In the square of a Ukrainian town, Dargel brazenly declared:

"Let the defeated starve to death. That does not in the least bother the German nation. Germany has her own ideas and aims. And we shall achieve these aims whatever the cost. Drive pity from your hearts! For the strong pity is a disgrace! I call upon you to be merciless!"

Our partisans listened to Dargel in silence. They itched to destroy this nazi reptile but they had to obey orders and they gave the nazis the opportunity of holding their parade.

As Kuznetsov left the square, he said to his girl loudly in German:

"What charming little feet you have. When a German officer sees beauty he appreciates it. Allow me to see you home."

The girl turned admiring eyes to the gallant officer.

But when they were out of the crowd, Valya said in an undertone:

"The commander was wrong to hold us back. It was a nauseating spectacle!"

"You're wrong, Valya. We can't afford to endanger all we have done. But don't worry. They'll never get out of here alive. They're not the masters here." With a quick look at the other side of the street, he added: "See that man in a shabby coat and cap walking on the left side of the road. He's one of the real masters of this town."

We had long known that Rovno had its own underground organisation. It was not difficult to understand that the fires at the factories and the killing of German officers was the work of this organisation. But for a long time all our efforts to get in touch with it came to nothing. Finally, a flimsy thread of information and hints led our intelligence to Terenty Novak, a Bolshevik and the director of the local felt mill. He proved to be the head of the underground organisation in Rovno.

Novak came to our camp soon after the parade and we arranged that we would co-ordinate our activities.

This organisation had been very active in Rovno, but I shall describe, and briefly at that, only what was done by our detachment jointly with Novak's men.

We began by regularly supplying the organisation with Soviet Information Bureau communiqués. They made duplicates of these communiqués and distributed them among the population. From time to time we sent Novak copies of *Pravda*, *Krasnaya Zvezda* and other newspapers that were parachuted to us.

Kuznetsov, Shevchuk, Gnedyuk, Nikolai Struciński or any other of our scouts could not carry on agitation or distribute leaflets in the town. But Novak's organisation could and with the materials supplied by us they started extensive political agitation among the population.

Novak's wrecking units carried out two major operations with our help.

A chock-cutting mill, run by a German named Tannholtz was working at full capacity in Rovno, supplying wood chocks for the gas-generator lorries used by the German Army. This was the only mill of its kind in occupied Ukraine. It was burned to the ground.

The second operation was an explosion on the platform of the Rovno Railway Station. The nazis had unloaded several cars of 32-pint bottles of nitric acid. Two delayed-action mines that were received from us were left among the bottles by Novak's men. After the first blast the acid from the smashed bottles flowed along the wooden planking of the station and it caught fire, spreading to the wicker-work baskets holding other bottles. The Germans rushed to extinguish the fire, but the second mine went off and the bottles began to explode. The splashing acid and the splinters prevented anybody from coming near the seat of the fire. Within a few minutes the whole platform was a raging inferno. There was no possibility of fighting the blaze and for several hours the German police and the

troops that were called out could do nothing but watch the flames.

Novak's organisation helped our detachment in many ways. We were especially grateful to them for drugs, bandages and surgical instruments. There were Russian doctors—prisoners of war or doctors who had not managed to evacuate in time—at all the hospitals in Rovno. Through them the underground organisation supplied us the drugs and instruments asked for by Tsessarsky.

When the doctors learned of our partisan detachment they asked to be allowed to join. We were very short of medical personnel. Engagements with the Germans and nationalists became more frequent and our casualty figures began to grow. The underground organisation arranged for the doctors and surgeon's assistants to come to us. Few came empty-handed, most of them bringing along whole cart-loads of medical supplies that they took from the hospitals.

We soon had thirteen doctors and nearly twenty surgeon's assistants. A dentist also joined us, bringing a whole dental surgery complete with a foot-pedal drill.

Quite a big hospital, with Tsessarsky as the chief surgeon, took shape in our camp. It had surgical and therapeutic departments and a dental surgery.

RECEIVED BY KOCH

One morning in May Corporal Schmidt called on Valya and told her that Reichskommissar of the Ukraine Erich Koch would receive her at four o'clock that afternoon.

"His adjutant said you should come with Senior Lieutenant Siebert. The Gauleiter probably wants to be sure that a German officer is interceding for you."

As soon as Schmidt departed, Valya ran to Nikolai.

"What are we going to do now? What if it's a trap?"

"It's too late to retreat, I'll go, of course. I never ex-

pected I would also be summoned, otherwise I would have asked for instructions from the commander."

"But can't we do it without permission?" Valya said with a meaningful look.

"I'll take my decision on the spot," Nikolai replied.

A carriage drove along Rovno's main thoroughfare, named Friedrichstrasse by the Germans. In it were Valya Dovger, Paul Siebert and Schmidt. An Alsatian, the one that could "feel a partisan a mile away", lay at Schmidt's feet. The time was nearly four o'clock.

Nikolai was dressed in a new parade uniform with all his decorations on his breast: a nazi party membership badge, ribbons showing that he was wounded twice, and two Iron Crosses. His boots shone. A pistol in a holster hung on his left side. In his pocket he had another pistol with the safety catch released. Valya wore a dark dress with a crêpe band on her sleeve. We had supplied her with a police certificate stating that her father was killed by partisans.

The driver, the reins taut in his hands, sat on the coach-box. It was Gnediyuk. In his pocket he had a pistol and under his seat several anti-tank grenades.

The houses on either side of the street were turned into German offices and residences for German officials. The Reichskommissariat stood at the end of the street. Near it, in a blind alley behind a high wall with barbed wire was the palatial mansion occupied by Koch himself.

The carriage drew up at the mansion.

SS men armed with submachine-guns walked back and forth along the wall.

Schmidt quickly got out of the carriage and went to the guard house.

"Are the passes for Senior Lieutenant Paul Siebert and Fräulein Valentina Dovger ready?" he asked the man on duty through a window.

"Yes," came the reply.

The man on duty knew Schmidt personally and handed

the passes for Kuznetsov and Valya without asking for their papers.

The SS man at the gates saluted and let them in.

Koch's mansion stood in a huge garden. The sun-lit oaks, lindens and maples cast shadows on the asphalted walk. Lilac bushes filled the air with a sweet fragrance. Gardeners were busy at the flower-beds and the fruit-trees.

In addition to the mansion there were several small houses for the guards and the servants. Kuznetsov made a mental note of these and many other details.

"You go to the adjutant. I have to hand in this dog," Schmidt said.

He showed Kuznetsov and Valya where to go.

"Will you shoot?" Valya asked, breathless with excitement.

"If I'm sure I can kill him," Kuznetsov replied.

The adjutant met them courteously and took them to the second floor, where Koch had his reception-room.

"Please take a seat. The Gauleiter is in a good mood today," he said with a smile. "I'll tell him you are here."

Babach disappeared behind a heavy door.

There were some officers in the waiting-room. Two were generals in full uniform. Before Valya and Kuznetsov had time to look around the adjutant returned.

"You may go in," he said to Valya. "You will have to wait, Lieutenant."

Valya's head began to whirl. Would she give herself away? Would they call Kuznetsov? Would he fire at Koch? At the door she turned and looked at Nikolai. He was sitting in an armchair and speaking nonchalantly in an undertone with some captain.

The adjutant opened the door of the study, let Valya in, closed the door and remained in the waiting-room.

Valya stepped into the room and before she could look round a huge Alsatian bounded up to her. She shuddered with fright.

"Back!" somebody said loudly in German.

The dog turned away. The same voice said to Valya:
"Sit down."

Valya turned frightened eyes to the speaker. Sitting at a desk was a big, corpulent man with a Hitler moustache and long reddish eyelashes. Valya guessed it was Koch.

Koch's desk stood at an angle in a corner of the study and perpendicular to it was a long table. She was offered a seat at this table. Two guards were seated on either side between her and Koch, and there was another guard at the window. The Alsatian lay at Koch's feet.

"Good lord, how the man's guarded!" Valya thought and at the same time heard Koch's voice again.

"Why don't you want to go to Germany?" he asked, his eyes not on Valya but on the application before him. "You have German blood and could be very useful to the Fatherland. To beat the Bolsheviks, everybody must do his bit."

Koch raised his eyes and during the rest of the interview stared fixedly at her.

"My mother is seriously ill and my sisters are small," Valya began to explain, fighting down her nervousness. "After my father's death I had to go to work to support the family. Please allow me to stay in Rovno. I know German, Russian and Ukrainian and can be of use to Germany here as well."

"Where did you meet Herr Siebert?"

"Accidentally, in a train. After that he came to see us frequently, whenever he was on furlough. We are engaged," Valya added, trying to sound embarrassed.

Koch kept Valya in his study for a few minutes. He wanted to know if she knew any other German officers. When Valya named not only officers from the Reichskommissariat but also from the Gestapo, Koch seemed satisfied.

"Good, you may go," he said, and in a rasping voice asked the guards to call Senior Lieutenant Siebert.

Valya had no opportunity of exchanging a single word with Kuznetsov. They looked at each other: fright and

questions in Valya's eyes and encouragement in Kuznetsov's.

"Heil Hitler!" Paul Siebert said, crossing the threshold and throwing out his hand.

"Heil!" the man at the desk replied.

The Alsatian growled but not a muscle moved in Siebert's face.

With a gesture Koch indicated the chair that Valya had vacated.

"Where were you decorated with the crosses?" Koch asked.

"The first in France and the second on the Eastern Front, Herr Gauleiter," Kuznetsov replied.

"What are you doing now?"

"After recovering from my wound I was given an appointment in the supply arm of my section of the front."

"Which is it?"

"The Kursk Front."

Siebert put his hand into his breast pocket to draw out his papers, which he wanted to show Koch. But this innocent movement alerted the SS men. The dog was instantly at Kuznetsov's feet.

"It's all right. I presume you have already shown your papers to my adjutant."

"Yes, of course."

"Where were you born?"

"In East Prussia. On my father's estate, about forty kilometres away from Königsberg."

"Ah, we come from the same place."

"Yes, Herr Gauleiter."

"What's the mood in the Army?"

"The men are full of determination."

"Tell me, have the recent events frightened many?"

"You mean Stalingrad? No, they have only fortified our spirits."

"Yes, that's true. You may return to your unit. Bear

in mind that the Führer is preparing a surprise for the Russians in your Kursk sector," Koch said meaningfully.

"I do not doubt it, Herr Gauleiter."

After a moment's silence Koch said:

"I'm surprised that a German officer, a man of Aryan blood and born in Prussia should be interested in a Polish girl."

As he spoke disgust was written on his face.

"Herr Gauleiter, the Fräulein has German blood. I saw her father's papers myself. He was brutally killed by bandits," Siebert said.

"If every German officer begins interceding for a woman from our subject peoples there'll be nobody left to work in our industry. You must know, of course, that we have put everything we have into this fight and that we are short of manpower. You are a member of the National-Socialist Party and you must not tie yourself up with Volksdeutsch. We only need these people as a temporary mainstay in the conquered countries."

Accepting Paul Siebert as a pure Aryan and convinced of his devotion to the Führer, Koch no longer hesitated to lecture him.

"Properly speaking, we need neither Russians, Ukrainians nor Poles. We want fertile land. From now on there will always be Germans here." His voice rose. "We have to render the local population harmless."

Throughout this forty-minute interview Kuznetsov felt the cocked pistol in the right pocket of his trousers. He watched for an opportunity to pull it out and empty the whole magazine into the repulsive face of his "compatriot". Carried away by his own eloquence the man spoke of ways to annihilate the Polish and Ukrainian peoples.

But the guards did not take their eyes away from Kuznetsov, watching every move he made. The Alsatian, too, kept its eyes on him. The dog had evidently been trained to watch callers.

"It won't give me a chance to raise my hand," Kuznetsov reflected. "I won't be able to fire a single shot."

Pleased with his programme speech, Koch again questioned Kuznetsov:

"What are you planning to do after the war?"

"I wish to remain in Russia."

"You like this country?"

"My duty is to help make this country what the Führer wants to see it like."

"Your reply is worthy of a German officer. Good, I'll let your girl stay here. There are times when we must show charity to the conquered. But don't let it ever enter your head to marry her," Koch said, writing something across Valya's application.

All this time, which seemed interminable, Valya sat in the waiting-room, watching the heavy door. "He'll fire now.... Now.... Now....," she thought, but she had to speak of something totally different. The German officer sitting beside her pestered her with small talk.

"Yes, of course, I have pretty girl-friends," Valya replied as in a fever. "I can introduce you...."

Kuznetsov emerged from Koch's study with a smile on his face. He had Valya's application in his hand.

"What did the Gauleiter write?" Babach asked in a sonorous voice. He took the application from Kuznetsov and read aloud: "'Permission to stay in Rovno granted. Find work in the Reichskommissariat.' My congratulations, Fräulein, and to you, too, Lieutenant."

The officers in the waiting-room congratulated Siebert and Valya and shook hands with them, while Babach, as a mark of special favour, gave Siebert a few packs of expensive cigarettes.

Valya took Siebert by the arm and they left.

When they were back in her room, she asked Kuznetsov:

"Couldn't you make up your mind?"

"It would have been madness. Three guards and, you probably didn't notice it, there was another guard behind

the curtains. And that damned dog at your feet. They would have seized me before I could move. I only hope Koch doesn't leave Rovno. His fate is sealed, but he will be destroyed without risk to the detachment, to you or to me. I have been screened. To think that an East Prussian like Koch never dreamed he was talking to a Soviet partisan who has never been to Germany in his life. All in all, this meeting has been useful. Koch told me that Hitler is planning an offensive in the Kursk sector, and we mustn't forget that Koch has only just come back from Berlin. The news therefore is fresh. We must report it quickly."

"AGENTS" AND "PROFITEERS"

A police agent by the name of Marchuk noticed a profiteer going frequently to a commission store and buying up all sorts of things. One day Marchuk saw the profiteer buy various surgical instruments and an excellent suit of clothes that was obviously not his size. He did not even try it on. Marchuk told a fellow police agent about the profiteer and they decided to detain the man and extort a bribe from him, or if he proved to be obstinate to take him to the police station.

The agents waited for their opportunity in the commission store and casually started a conversation. The profiteer was a little confused, but as the conversation was general he finally warmed up to it.

The conversation was finished in a small restaurant where, on Marchuk's suggestion, they went to cement their acquaintanceship with a bottle of wine.

In the restaurant the agents ordered expensive wine and an abundance of refreshments with the clear hint that the profiteer would foot the bill. The latter raised no objections.

In the middle of the feast Marchuk turned to the profiteer, saying:

"A profiteer's got to be smart, but you, friend, never even noticed how you got into our hands."

He showed his new friend his police card and hinted that if the latter would share his profits he would be let off. But the profiteer went on eating without reacting to the threat. When he finished his meal he calmly stood up and in a commanding tone of voice said:

"Pay the bill!"

"What did you say? Who are you?"

Silently the profiteer produced a card and put it to the noses of the dumbfounded agents. It said that the "bearer", Władysław Jankiewicz, was employed by the Rovno branch of the Gestapo.

At the table the situation changed radically. The agents not only paid the bill but were also profuse in their apologies: police agents went in mortal fear of Gestapo men.

Leaving the restaurant, they called a cab and took Jankiewicz home.

Jankiewicz did not prove to be rancorous. He even promised to call on Marchuk at his home.

This story was related to me by our partisan Mikhail Shevchuk when he left Rovno "on business" and arrived back in camp. He was the Gestapo man Jankiewicz.

Born in West Ukraine, Mikhail was an old-time underground worker. In squire-ruled Poland he was gaoled for evolutionary activity. The Red Army released him in 1939. He was over forty when he joined our partisan detachment.

In Rovno Shevchuk quickly adapted himself to the situation. Following the example of many Germans, he wore dark glasses, went about with a flower in his buttonhole and engaged in petty profiteering. The profiteering was for outward appearances. Most of the things he bought were sent to the detachment. The Gestapo card was issued by S.

After the incident in the restaurant, a rumour began to float about that Jankiewicz was a Gestapo agent. The

care-taker at the house he lived in began to tell him about "suspicious characters", and in the meantime Shevchuk came to an arrangement on the use of several reliable addresses, where the tenants, people we could trust, did intelligence work for us.

We had another "profiteer" operating in Rovno. He was tall and handsome Nikolai Gnedyuk; the Ukrainian girls called him "Adorable Eyes". He lived in Rovno under the name of Baciński, a Pole.

Gnedyuk did some profiteering as a screen, buying at cheap prices and selling at a small profit and sometimes even at a loss. As in Shevchuk's case, police agents began to bother him but he came to terms with them with a bribe.

Like Shevchuk, Nikolai Gnedyuk organised an underground group and had several secret addresses.

Nikolai Struciński, too, returned to Rovno from Lutsk, where he had established a number of intelligence groups and set things going. Before leaving he had prudently furnished himself with papers stating that he was a reporter of the *Ukrainian Voice*, a newspaper that was run by the Germans in Lutsk.

Struciński concentrated on the Rovno Gestapo and the Gebietskommissariat. He found helpers among the employees of these establishments. His brother Jerzy, who lived in Rovno under the name of Grzegorz Wasilewicz, was his lieutenant.

Step by step we enmeshed the nazi agencies in Rovno with our own intelligence network.

Our Rovno scouts seldom left the town. To secure themselves against discovery they worked separately and each had his own messenger through whom he kept in touch with the post and the camp: Kuznetsov through Small Kolya, Gnedyuk through the runners from the Zdolbunovo group, Shevchuk through Mazhura, Struciński through Jerzy and Jadzia.

Secrecy demanded that the scouts avoid each other, but

they communicated when anybody needed help or when some operation had to be co-ordinated.

Our men often did not know who was in Rovno from the detachment. The "greenhorns" did not know the "veterans" and the "veterans" did not know the "greenhorns". That led to many amusing incidents.

Nikolai Gnedyuk frequented the home of a girl named Lidya, who was helping us. Leo Metko, whom we have already mentioned, introduced Senior Lieutenant Siebert to her. Siebert began to call on Lidya, hoping to make her one of his assistants.

One day he appeared at Lidya's when Nikolai Gnedyuk was there and she had to hide the partisan from the "German officer".

"Listen," she said to Gnedyuk a few days later, "we must do for this confounded Paul. What does he want here? I hate the sight of him. He dresses up like a peacock. Doesn't speak a word of Russian and it sickens me to hear how he murders Polish."

"I'm not sure that it's worth our while," Gnedyuk replied having no idea who the girl was talking about.

"Yes, it is," she insisted. "He's an important nazi."

The next time Siebert came, Lidya gave Gnedyuk the opportunity of taking a look at him. Gnedyuk, who was in another room, put his eye to the keyhole and was amazed when he found that the "German officer" was Kuznetsov. Lidya had to be let into the secret and the "German officer", "this confounded Paul", became one of her best friends.

Take another case.

Two of our men returned from Rovno one day and after making their reports said that they had stumbled upon a Ukrainian who worked at the Gestapo and was making things dangerous for them.

"How?" Lukin asked.

"By visiting Hanna, who lives at our secret address."

"Can you describe him? What do you know about him?"

"He's an old devil. Goes around in glasses and comes to our address. Even the care-taker knows he's from the Gestapo. It's time we fixed him."

"Hold on!" Lukin said. "Is he a profiteer?"

"No question about that."

In short, it turned out that the man was Mikhail Shevchuk.

Shevchuk "married" Hanna some time later, inviting many people, including Marchuk the police agent, to the "wedding". He was now an established resident of Rovno, a married man.

But things did not always run smoothly.

We had a scout named Karapetyan, who was sent to Rovno on a few missions. In the town he usually stopped at the house of the wife of a Red Army lieutenant. She had two children.

One evening Karapetyan appeared at the house in a drunken state. Two strangers were there. But Karapetyan was tipsy and he threw caution to the winds.

"Do you know who I am?" he boasted. "You probably can't guess. Well, I'm dangerous to the Germans."

The mistress of the house made warning signs behind the backs of the strangers, but there was no stopping Karapetyan.

"I know what I'm doing," he went on, "so shut up. What was I saying.... O yes.... Nobody can get at me with bare hands. Did you see this?" He showed his revolver and hand-grenades. "Scared you, did I? I won't touch you. But those I'm after...."

Having listened carefully to this bluster the strangers hastened away.

This incident had an unhappy ending.

When Karapetyan returned to camp he did not say a word about what had happened. But Nikolai Struciński, who used the same secret address, reported that the mistress of the house and her children had been arrested by the Gestapo.

Karapetyan was questioned at headquarters and admitted everything. His crime could not be forgiven and he was sentenced to death.

Several days later the Gestapo arrested Jerzy Struciński. He was tracked when he went to the secret address that was disclosed by Karapetyan.

Jerzy was seized on the road to the forest post. He tore away from his captors but in the ensuing gun battle he was wounded and retaken.

We knew Jerzy would not betray anybody. But we were afraid the Gestapo had got on to the trail of our other men and decided to recall them. Kuznetsov, Shevchuk, Gnedjuk and Nikolai Struciński left Rovno for Zdolbunovo, where they waited for the affair to blow over.

Subsequently it turned out that this precaution had not been necessary: the Gestapo had learned nothing of our activities in Rovno.

MEETING KOVPAK

Back in February 1943, when our whole detachment was encamped in the Sarny forests, we frequently received reports from our scouts in Rovno, Sarny, Klesovo and Rakitnoye and also from the local inhabitants that a large partisan formation was operating somewhere to the north of us.

"Kovpak's there with an army of a hundred thousand partisans," the local inhabitants said.

"The military police and the special troops are very uneasy about a large partisan detachment commanded by Kovpak. The Germans are terrified. They are saying that Kovpak appears suddenly and destroys German garrisons, bridges and trains. They're afraid he might come to Rovno," Kuznetsov wrote to me from Rovno.

At that time we knew nothing about this formation and did not know who Kovpak was.

Valentin Semyonov soon reported to me that Kovpak's

partisans had appeared in Knyaz-Selo and were being billeted in the surrounding villages.

"Did you see them?"

"I did not see Kovpak himself but his representative are on their way here."

True enough, in an hour I was already talking to Kovpak's representative. I saw before me a thickset man of medium height with a bushy beard. He dismounted from his horse and introduced himself:

"My name is Vershigora. I am head of intelligence of Kovpak's detachment."

He had three rectangles on the tabs of his tunic, which showed he had the rank of lieutenant-colonel. On the left side of his breast was a shiny Order of the Red Banner.

Vershigora answered our questions sparingly, but wanted details about the dislocation of German garrison: the number of troops in Rovno and the region, and the villages controlled by partisans.

"Sidor Kovpak and Semyon Rudnev are holding a party to mark the anniversary of the Red Army. They asked me to invite you to Knyaz-Selo for the celebrations," Vershigora said.

Accompanied by Pashun and a small group of partisans I set out for Knyaz-Selo at dawn on February 23.

During my days as a partisan behind the German line I had met many partisan detachments, scouts and individual partisans, and there had always been something deeply moving about these meetings. "We are not alone here. There are many of us. We are everywhere," I would reflect. But the meeting with Kovpak and his men gave me a lasting memory.

As we passed through the villages of Lenchin and Rucnya-Lenchinskaya, where Kovpak's units were stationed, I forgot that I was in the enemy rear. Men armed with submachine-guns walked about the streets. They had bright red ribbons and Red Army stars on their caps. Many had been decorated and the new Orders and medals.

shone on their tunics. There were machine-guns and even field pieces at some of the cottages. The partisans sang and gaily shouted greetings to each other.

I had pictured Kovpak as a huge man with a fog-horn of a voice. You can imagine how surprised I was when I saw a thin and quiet-spoken man of about sixty. The Gold Star and Order of Lenin gleamed on his breast.

"How are you, Comrade Medvedev," he said. "I have heard a lot about you in the Bryansk forests and here in the Ukraine. You're doing good work."

He showered me with questions: Had I been in these parts long? How were we carrying on our work? How long we planned to remain near Rovno? I gave detailed replies.

"And we intend staying here until the Red Army comes."

A tall and handsome man with Orders on his tunic entered the room. He had a tired look on his face.

"This is my commissar, Semyon Rudnev," Kovpak said, introducing us.

Rudnev joined in our conversation.

"Is it true that you have men in Rovno?" he asked.

I replied in the affirmative, and Rudnev looked very interested. He asked me how we had achieved this, what papers our men were using, how we contacted the local Bolshevik underground organisation, who Novak was, and how we co-ordinated our operations.

"We ought to start the same thing," Rudnev said to Kovpak.

Kovpak asked me to furnish his intelligence chief with suitable papers and added:

"We have men we can send to the town but I don't have a German."

"I don't understand," Rudnev said.

"One of their partisans masquerades as a German in Rovno."

"You don't say! Can I see him?"

"Unfortunately, not. At the moment he is in Rovno," I replied.

"But can your 'German' find out the results of our work in Rovno Region?"

I promised to send Kuznetsov the necessary instructions.

Evening was drawing near. Tables were laid in three rooms and the places round them were soon taken by staff officers and battalion and company commanders, seventy men in all.

The first toast was to the Party and it was proposed by Sidor Kovpak. Semyon Rudnev spoke after him. One had to see to appreciate the love and sincere devotion with which the men listened to the commander and the commissar.

Then I was given the floor.

I spoke of our detachment and of the commotion that the appearance of Kovpak and his men was causing among the nazis; special troops began to enter villages and hamlets warily, asking if there was any sign of Kovpak. I told them that in Rovno the German "overlords" and their wives were in mortal fear that Kovpak would attack the town.

The party ended with dances to the accompaniment of an accordion.

We left at dawn.

Three days later, when Kovpak's men were leaving for their famous Carpathian raid, we sent Commissar Rudnev all the information he had requested.

Four months passed. In that time we had moved farther west, beyond the Sluch and the Goryn, and established ourselves in the Tsuman forests.

One hot day in June a runner sent by an outpost near a highway two kilometres away from the camp appeared in my tent.

"Comrade Commander," he said in a disturbed voice, "a column of German troops is moving on the highway from the direction of the village of Zhuravichi. Their van-

guard are mounted and are followed by infantry in carts and by artillery."

Two men ran in breathlessly before I could take any action. The first was from one of our sentry posts and the other was a partisan who was grazing our cattle in a glade near the camp. They said that they had seen the German cavalry with their own eyes.

There could be no doubt any longer: the nazis were closing in on us from three directions.

I ordered Stekhov to take the reserve platoon and organise an advanced command post. I remained behind in the camp in command of the other platoons and kept in touch with the outposts.

Hardly had Sergei and his men run two hundred paces than a long burst of machine-gun fire broke the forest stillness. Then followed sustained fire from submachine-guns and rifles.

I thought my men were firing and wasting ammunition, which was not plentiful. I sent a messenger with orders that the fire should be aimed and ammunition expended sparingly.

The runner instantly disappeared behind the trees.

In the next moment I received a report from our outpost that the Germans were deploying their artillery.

I immediately sent Bazanov and thirty-five submachine-gunners with orders to seize the guns.

The firing grew heavier and cheers could be heard.

I wondered if Stekhov had attacked without first warning me. But the messenger I had sent returned and reported:

"Your orders have been passed on. Comrade Stekhov says that the nazis are doing the firing and that our men are hardly firing at all. He is surprised that Russian cheers are heard continuously from the side of the enemy."

"Tell Stekhov not to attack. He has enemy artillery on his right flank. Bazanov has been sent there. Let him get in touch with Bazanov."

The situation was still unclear. Why were the enemy

cheering in Russian? Had the Germans sent traitors ahead of them? Neither I nor Lukin, who was with me, could understand a thing.

Then, at last, the situation cleared up.

The reserve platoon that went with Stekhov was commanded by Boris Krutikov. Adapting themselves to the terrain and taking cover behind the trees and stumps, our men drew close to the enemy. Suddenly Krutikov distinctly heard a woman's voice shouting his name from the side of the enemy.

"What are you doing, Boris, firing at your own people?"

He looked closely and very nearly dropped to the ground with stupefaction. The "enemy" was a class-mate he had shared a desk with in a school in Kiev. They rushed into each other's embrace.

Near by events unfolded quickly.

Reaching the highway where the enemy were deploying their artillery for battle, Bazanov commanded in a loud voice:

"Battalion! First company to the right, third company to the left, second company follow me!"

His purpose was to sow panic among the enemy.

A stranger ran up to him.

"But our battalion is already in position," he said.

"What battalion are you talking about?"

"Kovpak's second battalion."

The firing ceased. The men began to fraternise. Kovpak's men "advanced" against us.

I went to see Kovpak together with Sergei Stekhov. Our first meeting in February had been very warm and friendly but this time it was really "hot" as we jokingly described it.

Kovpak was now heading for the Carpathians. His men were heavily armed and well clothed and booted. The reason for their unexpected appearance in our new territory was that they were moving rapidly, covering more than fifty kilometres on the day our outposts sighted them.

Neither our intelligence nor the local inhabitants were able to give us timely warning of their approach. They were taken for Germans because almost all their cavalry wore captured German uniforms.

Kovpak's men rested for a few days near our camp and every day either Kovpak or Rudnev visited us or we went to see them.

"Show us your 'German'," Kovpak said to me one day, remembering our conversation about Kuznetsov.

Kovpak and Rudnev came to us on the next day and I introduced our "German" to them. Kuznetsov had just returned from Rovno.

"This is the real thing," Kovpak said in Ukrainian, listening as Kuznetsov spoke of his work in a nazi nest.

The sight of sausages on the table laid for the guests astonished Kovpak.

"Where did they come from?"

"We made them ourselves," I told him.

By that time we had organised something in the nature of a sausage factory, but not because we wanted luxuries. Our scouts had to leave the detachment for periods of a week or a fortnight. Moreover, we constantly had men on duty at the forest posts. They had to eat, but they were under orders not to go for food to the villages. There was nothing they could take with them except bread. Cooked meat perished quickly, and the men were half-starved. Sausages were the answer to the problem. We found that in our detachment we had sausage-makers any factory could be proud of. I told Kovpak all this.

We had been sitting at the table and talking for about two hours when a group of Kovpak's men approached.

"Comrade Commander," one of them said, addressing Kovpak. "May we speak to Colonel Medvedev?"

"Yes."

"Comrade Colonel, we have come to you with the request to teach us to make sausages."

Kovpak had dispatched a note to his commissary chief to send some men to learn to make sausages.

Before Kovpak's formation left us we worked out a code and call-signals and arranged a time-table for communication by radio so that we could pass each other information that could be of service to both detachments.

VOLODYA

In a small, quiet street in Rovno there was a tiny watch-maker's workshop. The sign, "We repair clocks and watches of all kinds", was bigger than the little window it hung over. The watch-maker, a man named Diky, worked at this window. The workshop was one of our secret addresses and was used by Mikhail Shevchuk and three other partisans.

One day Diky noticed a boy of eleven or twelve passing by several times and peering into the window.

Shevchuk appeared on the next day, handing his watch through the window. He whispered something, took his watch back and departed. Looking up, Diky again saw the same boy on the opposite side of the street.

"This looks fishy," the watch-maker reflected.

An hour, then another went by. The boy suddenly appeared at the window, put his head through it and asked:

"Uncle, can you tell me how to find the partisans?"

"Is anything wrong with your head? What are you talking about?"

A look of fear entered the boy's big dark eyes, but he stood his ground.

"I somehow thought you knew," he said. "Perhaps you know somebody who knows the partisans?"

"Know, know. . . . How should I know!"

"Oh, all right," the boy said and shuffled away.

But something about the boy attracted Diky. He went out of his workshop and called out:

"Come in," the watch-maker said to him.

The boy entered the workshop.

"Now tell me what you want the partisans for," the watch-maker said.

"I can't tell you. The only person I can tell it to is the commander of the partisan detachment, Colonel Medvedev."

"I see. All right, wait."

Diky was expecting one of our men, Liseikin, with a message from Shevchuk. Liseikin presently appeared at the window with the message.

"I have a boy here," the watch-maker said to him. "Take him with you and see what he wants."

In reply to Liseikin's questions, the boy explained that he was sent to Medvedev's detachment by the Lenin partisan detachment which was operating around Vinnitsa.

"That's all I can tell you," the boy said resolutely.

"What's your name?"

"Volodya."

Liseikin took Volodya along with him. Diky had given him orders from Shevchuk to go to a certain address where a car was waiting to take him to camp.

For some time now Kuznetsov and Shevchuk had stopped going about on foot. The arrangements that Nikolai Struciński had made were such that he could get a car from the Gebietskommissariat garage in Rovno at any time he, Kuznetsov or Shevchuk wanted one. There had even been a few cases when the Gebietskommissar himself waited for a car never dreaming that his chauffeur was driving partisans around.

What I am now going to relate happened at the close of August. I ordered Kuznetsov and all our other men in Rovno to report at the camp for briefing.

An ordinary 30-hundredweight lorry drove up to the place that had been agreed upon beforehand. The driver

was a man named Zubenko. He was employed at the Gebietskommissariat and had managed to get himself sent to Lutsk with a half truck-load of nazi newspapers and pamphlets, and was given the necessary pass for the trip.

Liseikin came to the rendezvous with Volodya.

Kuznetsov, who was standing near the lorry, asked in surprise:

"Who's the lad?"

"He's looking for Medvedev's detachment. Says he's been sent from another detachment."

"Take him into the lorry. We'll look into this later."

But Volodya broke loose from Liseikin and started to run.

Liseikin caught him in two bounds.

"Where d'you think you're going, you little devil?"

"Let me go. I know nothing about partisans."

"You little bastard! So the police sent you?"

"You're police yourselves," Volodya said with a sob, looking sullenly at Kuznetsov.

"I'll be damned!" Liseikin laughed. "Did he scare you?"

He had not thought of the impression Kuznetsov's German uniform might make on the boy.

Bending, he said something into Volodya's ear and the boy obediently climbed into the lorry.

Six of our men were sitting in the lorry, their weapons lying beneath a pile of nazi newspapers. Kuznetsov sat in the cabin beside the driver.

At the post on the road leading out of Rovno there was a huge sign with the words:

"Exit for Convoys Only," written in German.

Cars were let through only in convoys to minimise the danger of an attack by partisans.

At the post Kuznetsov explained that he had urgent business and could not wait for a convoy. The lorry was allowed to pass, but the real obstacle lay ahead.

On a post about ten kilometres out of Rovno there was a sign which said the road was closed for repairs and that

all traffic should turn into another road. This meant going back for a distance of about ten kilometres. Kuznetsov decided to move on.

They soon came within sight of a bridge and Kuznetsov saw that there were Germans around it. When the lorry drove up, an officer saluted and said to Kuznetsov:

"You see, the bridge has been burned. Besides, Herr Senior Lieutenant, cars are allowed here only in convoy. You risk running into a partisan ambush."

"What's this about partisans?" Kuznetsov said, raising his voice. "Does it mean we have to stay at home if partisans are about? There's a war on! I am on urgent business."

"You have to speak to the regimental commander," the officer said, wavering. "Here he is himself."

Kuznetsov stepped down from the lorry and went towards the major.

"Heil Hitler!"

"Sieg heil!"

In the lorry the men released the catches of their pistols. Volodya, who had only just assured himself that he was safe, shrank into a corner.

Before two minutes had passed the men in the lorry heard the sapper regimental commander give an order and the soldiers, who had been repairing the bridge, threw down their axes and spades and went towards the lorry.

"The fireworks are starting," the scouts thought.

In the meantime, Kuznetsov calmly came up to the lorry.

"It's all right, boys. The sappers are going to drag our lorry to the other side," he whispered.

"Do we have to get off?" Liseikin asked.

"No."

About fifty of the German sappers pulled the lorry across the ditches and through the mud, bypassing the ruined bridge. Our men encouraged them with cries. This lasted for about a quarter of an hour, and when the lorry was finally on dry ground on the other side, Zubenko started the engine and the lorry moved off without further incident.

They reached camp late in the evening. Hearing about Volodya, I ordered the boy to be put to bed, deciding to talk to him in the morning, but he came to me himself.

"Are you Colonel Medvedev?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I have a secret message for you."

"What is it?"

"I can only tell it to you privately."

With me were Stekhov, Lukin, Kuznetsov and Tsessarsky.

"That's the situation, comrades," I said, smiling. "We don't trust you with our secrets. Come along, Volodya."

In my hut the boy took off his cap, ripped the lining open and gave me an envelope. I opened the envelope and took the letter out. It was type-written.

"The bearer, Volodya Samorukha, son of the Secretary of the Party organisation in the Lenin partisan detachment, has been sent to find the detachment commanded by Dmitry Medvedev. . . ."

The commander of the Lenin partisan detachment requested me to inform Moscow that such a detachment existed but that it did not have a radio transmitter and was therefore unable to contact Moscow itself. The commander gave his location and fixed the days and signals for an aircraft from Moscow with a radio transmitter and other equipment. The letter ended with the further request that Volodya be sent to Moscow.

I looked at the boy. He was tearing the lining of his pants and getting another letter.

"What, one more?" I asked.

"It's a duplicate in case I lost the first. I sewed it up in my pants."

He gave me the second envelope.

"Now tell me how you got here."

Volodya related his adventures. He walked about five hundred kilometres in fifteen days, sleeping in the forest, in fields, or in a shed if he could find one. He ate what

he begged on the way. When people asked where he was from, he said that his parents were dead and that he was going to his aunt. He gave a different address each time. In Proskurovo District he said the aunt lived in Shepetovka, and in Shepetovka District that she lived in Rovno.

He wandered about Rovno for some time before he came across the watch-maker's.

"What made you think the watch-maker knew where to find us?"

"I don't know. I just thought he knew. If he proved to be a low-down skunk I would have run away."

"You've simply had a run of good luck, Volodya."

The boy remained with us. For a long time there was no opportunity of sending him to Moscow and, besides, he did not want to go.

The partisans came to like the boy. He was always cheerful, smiling and clean, as though he were being scrubbed every day.

Small Kolya now had a comrade of his own age. The two boys were "veteran" partisans, but Kolya's adventures were more thrilling.

"I've made the run from the post to Rovno fifteen times. You get the creeps sometimes. I remember one fine day there were policemen everywhere. I kept saying 'Good morning' as I passed them, but I missed one of them and he pulled out his pistol and shouted:

"'Come back, stand against the wall.'

"I began to cry, saying:

"'Uncle, please don't kill me!'

"But all the while I was thinking that the letter and money for Nikolai Kuznetsov that were sewn into my pants would be lost.

"But he yelled:

"'Where are you going?'

"'Home,' I replied. 'I went to see my mother in hospital.'

"He believed the story and let me go.

"One fine day I met Genya Bogan at one of our secret

addresses in Rovno. He's only ten. I asked him if he wanted to be my aide, and he said he did. We began going on missions together. When Kuznetsov sent me to one of our people I'd take him along—it was more fun and safer. Once he went to the post with me. One fine day we went to a shop to buy something. I gave the shop-assistant a twenty-mark note and asked for the change, but he said:

“‘How did you come by this money? I'll call a policeman.’

“We left the money and ran away. That scared Genya and he hasn't been anywhere with me since.”

Volodya liked to listen to Small Kolya, who told him the story about a ball. None of us in the detachment knew that story.

Kuznetsov and Valya were the only ones who knew, but they had promised the boy to keep it a secret. Here is how Small Kolya related the story himself:

“Nikolai Kuznetsov would leave me now in one house now in another so that I would not be conspicuous. One fine day he sent me to a woman. I went and asked: ‘Have you any soap for sale?’ That was our password. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘come in.’ On the next day I went outside with her son. I walked about the street waiting for somebody to come for me. Suddenly I saw a ball. It was a good black ball, the kind we play rounders with. Just as I was about to pick it up that boy of hers put it in his pocket. I told him to give it to me but he refused. Well, we fought. I took the ball from him, but he cried and ran to his mother. I got a scolding from Kuznetsov. He took the ball from me and gave it to that boy. I was sorry to lose the ball, but I kept quiet and only asked that nobody should be told about it. You must promise me, Volodya, not to tell anybody either. They'll put me to shame, saying that a partisan fought over a ball.”

It was sad to listen to these true children's stories of our small helpers. They should have been going to school,

splashing about in a river in summer and skating in winter. The war had cut short their happy childhood and flung them into a grim partisan struggle. There was not a man in our detachment who was not profoundly grateful to our gallant boys for their devoted service to the people.

ESCAPE

Try as we would we could not for a long time trace the whereabouts of Jerzy Struciński, who had been captured by the nazis. Nothing or rather anything but the truth was told to old Vladimir Struciński.

"You understand, of course, that we have to keep our work secret. I can't tell you where Jerzy is or what he is doing. But I assure you he will come back."

And with his mind made easy the old man would leave me.

But Nikolai Struciński knew and he took it keenly to heart.

He made many attempts to learn what had happened to his brother and finally got on to the right trail.

Back in the summer he had met a girl named Larisa who was an office-cleaner at the Gestapo. She was a thin girl whom nobody noticed.

Larisa eagerly undertook a dangerous intelligence mission. She went out of her way to please her masters, working conscientiously, carefully cleaning the offices and willingly doing odd jobs. And with the same thoroughness that she did her work she smuggled secret documents from the Gestapo to us: topographical maps, search and arrest warrants and search protocol forms. Once she brought Nikolai Struciński a Gestapo seal, which she took from the desk of one of the officers. In this she went too far. Nikolai had made such a seal for us long ago, and we used it frequently for the papers that we supplied to our scouts. The theft of the seal could lead to a hue and cry. Larisa

had to hurry to the office and unnoticeably put the seal back in its place.

When Larisa cleaned the offices, she collected used carbon-paper and brought it to Nikolai who with the help of a mirror read what was written on it. Among other information this yielded lists of hostages, the names of people sentenced to be shot, and instructions on how to conceal the bodies of people who had been executed.

On one of these carbons Nikolai read the names of people held by the Gestapo, and among them was the name of Wasilewicz, Grzegorz. It was Jerzy.

That told us that Jerzy was alive and that he had given his alias.

Larisa knew some of the guards at the Gestapo jail and through her Nikolai made their acquaintance. The approach was simple—money. All sorts of “favours” were done for a bribe. The guards confirmed that Grzegorz Wasilewicz was in the jail and for another bribe they allowed him parcels. Nikolai sent Jerzy shoes, clothes and food.

Soon Nikolai had detailed information. Jerzy's wound had begun to heal, but it had opened again as a result of the beatings he got during interrogation. Then it was learned that Jerzy was being interrogated almost daily: he was suspected of being a Soviet partisan. The danger that he would be shot or die from torture during the interrogations hung over him.

In the detachment we had another relative of the Strucińskis. He was Petro Mamonets, an ex-corporal of the Polish Army and the brother of Jadzia. Nikolai Struciński arrived in the camp in September and asked to be allowed to take Mamonets with him.

“We'll try to free Jerzy,” he said.

In Rovno Nikolai had little difficulty in getting Mamonets a job as a prison guard. Mamonets proved to be a very zealous “policeman”. He did his best to make his superiors take note of him, vehemently cursed the partisans and, what was most important, gained the favour of his

superiors by providing them with butter, fat and our, partisan-made, sausages. He was soon promoted to the position of senior guard and had the opportunity of seeing Jerzy.

"You'll hardly recognise him," he said to Nikolai. "It's terrible to see what they did to the lad. There's nothing but a bag of bones left. . . ."

Jerzy began to receive parcels quite often but they could not keep up the strength of a man who was being beaten mercilessly almost every day.

Mamonets struck up a friendship with the chief warder and offered him a "profitable deal". He said there was big money to be made by leasing prisoners to a private building firm.

"Give me, say, twenty prisoners and three or four guards. I'll make them work and we'll divide the profits."

The warder at first declined the offer, but food and money, which Mamonets said was an advance from the firm, made him more pliable.

At the close of October Mamonets learned that Jerzy had been sentenced to be shot. Jerzy himself did not as yet know his sentence. It was impossible to wait any longer.

On November 3, Mamonets took a group of prisoners to work. For a special bribe Jerzy was included among them. As the prisoners were led out of their cells Mamonets whispered a few words to him.

When the prisoners were about two blocks away from the jail Jerzy suddenly felt "dizzy".

Mamonets was in command of the guards and ordered them to keep the prisoners moving.

"I'll deal with this swine myself," he said, dragging the "unconscious" Jerzy into a courtyard.

The guards were sure that he would finish him off there.

But as soon as Mamonets pulled Jerzy into the courtyard, the latter jumped to his feet and together they climbed over the wall into an adjoining lane, where a car with Nikolai Struciński and Kuznetsov was waiting for them. It had been there for the second day.

The joy over Jerzy's rescue knew no bounds. For old man Struciński it was a joy mingled with pain, for only now did he learn of the danger his son had been in. It was not a ruddy, smiling Jerzy that he saw but a gaunt man in the last stages of exhaustion, who answered all questions dully.

Jerzy was given the best of care we could offer in the camp. His youth took its own and he soon returned to intelligence work.

RETRIBUTION

The names of Erich Koch, Paul Dargel and Hermann Knut were well-known in West Ukraine during the occupation. With their henchmen these ringleaders of the nazi gang plundered and destroyed everything living on Ukrainian soil. The very mention of their names was enough to make people tremble with hate. These names were associated with prisons and gallows, ditches in which people were buried alive, looting and murder, and the death of thousands upon thousands of innocent people.

Reichskommissar of the Ukraine and Gauleiter of East Prussia, Erich Koch came to Rovno for only a few days at a time. His permanent seat was in Königsberg, where he had his own factories and mills. Paul Dargel, who was Koch's deputy and handled "political affairs", was in Rovno almost uninterruptedly, going to Kiev, Nikolayev, Dniepropetrovsk or some other town for short spells to direct the "activity" of the pack of nazi wolves. Dargel also guided the network of nationalist gangs.

Nikolai Kuznetsov had for a long time been preparing to pay the nazi ringleaders in the Ukraine in their own coin. At the beginning of September we discussed his plan of action in detail in the course of several days.

Before he took his leave he gave me a sealed envelope. "I'm leaving this with you in case anything happens. I

want you to keep it," he said, shaking hands and quickly walking away.

I looked at the envelope. It had only six words written on it: "To be opened after my death."

By this time Valya Dovger was working at the Reichskommissariat. Her assignment was to study Dargel's timetable: when he came to work and when he went home. Valya did her work thoroughly. She gave Kuznetsov all the information he needed down to the route Dargel usually took. She said that Dargel left the Reichskommissariat every day punctually at 2.30 p.m., and that with him there was always an adjutant with a red leather brief-case. Kuznetsov had seen Dargel only once, at the parade, when the latter had made a speech, and now he relied on his memory.

Events unfolded on September 20. A brand-new Opel-Kapitän, the Gebietskommissar's private car, was placed at Nikolai's disposal by a driver from the Gebietskommissariat, a prisoner of war named Kalinin.

Nikolai Struciński in the uniform of a German soldier took the driver's place, and the passenger was Kuznetsov as Senior Lieutenant Paul Siebert.

Dargel lived in a mansion in one of the central thoroughfares that the nazis had renamed into the Schloßstrasse.

Nobody but the highest-ranking German officials lived in that street. It was out of bounds to Ukrainians and Poles, and only Germans were allowed to appear in it.

When everything was ready Kuznetsov and Struciński drove along the route usually taken by Dargel. They chose a time when Dargel was in the habit of walking home from the Reichskommissariat. They had only a few minutes in which to act.

They could not risk waiting with the car in the street. A military policeman was constantly on duty at Dargel's mansion; and there were others along the Schloßstrasse. Moreover, a military police sergeant-major and a Gestapo

agent in plain clothes always appeared two minutes before Dargel came out of the Reichskommissariat and escorted him home.

Kuznetsov and Struciński decided to wait in a lane from where they had a view of the entrance of the Reichskommissariat. The general emerged from the Reichskommissariat exactly at 2.30 p.m., and with him was his adjutant, a major with a red brief-case under his arm.

"It's them," Kuznetsov said. "Step on it, Nikolai."

The car rapidly overtook the nazis. Kuznetsov stepped out of the car with a pistol in his hand and went up to Dargel and his adjutant from behind. Hearing footsteps the nazis turned round. Kuznetsov fired three shots at point-blank range at the general and then at his adjutant, and when they fell to the ground he fired a shot at each of them again.

Then he jumped into the car and Struciński drove off at a furious pace. They disappeared in a trice. All this happened in the course of only two minutes.

When the shots were fired the people in the street scattered in all directions. Windows were slammed shut. And before anybody could do anything there was no trace of the car.

Kuznetsov was in camp when two days later two of our scouts, Kulikov and Galuzo, brought fresh German and Ukrainian newspapers from Rovno. Nikolai eagerly seized the newspapers and was dumbfounded by what he read. The man he had killed was not Dargel but Dr. Hans Gehl, Imperial Counsellor for Finance, and his adjutant Winter. Gehl had come to Rovno only a short while before to pump taxes out of the population.

"You made a hash of it this time, Nikolai," I said to Kuznetsov.

"It was a delusion, a trick of the eyesight. I distinctly remembered Dargel's face. Then there was this adjutant with the red brief-case. What can it all mean?" he said, unable to get over his surprise.

We subsequently learned that Gehl and Dargel closely resembled each other. Kuznetsov had seen Dargel only once and could not be blamed for making a mistake. But it was a mistake that could be remedied.

Kuznetsov and Struciński returned to Rovno ten days after killing Gehl. This time Kuznetsov wore the insignia of a captain because the Germans were hunting a man in the uniform of a lieutenant.

The Opel, which had been painted black, had a new licence plate. At the same place and time, at exactly half past two in the afternoon, Kuznetsov threw an anti-tank grenade at Dargel and his adjutant. Both men dropped to the ground. A small splinter wounded Kuznetsov in the left arm but that did not prevent him from quickly getting into the car.

This time danger loomed large. A German patrol car was stationed near by. Struciński had to drive past this car. The Gestapo rushed to their car but the driver could not start the engine; he was probably scared out of his wits. When the engine was finally started the black Opel was far away.

The nazis gave chase. On the outskirts of the town Kuznetsov could already see the Gestapo car.

"Turn off the road," he shouted to Struciński, noticing a black Opel in front.

Struciński turned into a lane, then into another. There was no pursuit.

The Gestapo car continued following a black Opel but not the one our men were in.

They caught the "criminals" on the highway outside the town, overtaking the Opel and firing at it. A bullet ripped open one of the tyres and the Opel spun round at full speed and turned over into a ditch. A German major, half-dead with fright, was dragged out of the car. He was beaten up and taken to the Gestapo.

Kuznetsov and Struciński safely returned to the forest post, reaching the camp from there.

But Dargel was not dead. The grenade had hit the curb. This had reversed the direction of the splinters and the blast. Dargel had been dazed and badly wounded. He was immediately taken to Berlin, and his political career ended.

An order removing the chiefs of the Rovno Gestapo and military police and many of the top officials came from Berlin shortly afterwards.

The hubbub that was raised over these acts of retribution gladdened Soviet people, as it showed that here, too, behind the enemy lines, scores were being settled with the nazi invaders.

The nazis appointed to the vacated posts were likewise powerless to help the occupants.

In the meantime, preparations were again started at the forest post. A Mercedes, newly spirited away from the Reichskommissariat garage, was repainted, and Kuznetsov and Struciński drove off to Rovno in it before the paint was dry.

"One fine day they'll notice the fresh paint and you'll be caught," Small Kolya said.

"We'll drive fast and that'll dry the paint," Struciński replied.

The two men approached Rovno in the shiny car. They were stopped at an outpost.

"Halt! Your papers!"

Kuznetsov showed his papers and his permit for the car. They were allowed to proceed, but were again stopped at the next block.

"Halt! Your papers!"

"But our papers have just been examined," Kuznetsov said indignantly.

"You must excuse us," a military policeman said confidently, "but today papers are being examined all over the town. We're looking for bandits dressed in German uniforms." Glancing at Kuznetsov's papers, he added: "You may drive on."

"Nikolai," Kuznetsov said to Struciński, "turn into a side-street. This way we'll only land in trouble."

At the end of the block, Struciński turned into a side-street, stopping the Mercedes at the corner. Kuznetsov got out of the car.

"Keep an eye on the street," he said to Struciński, "and I'll help the Germans."

Before many minutes passed he was stopping cars and examining the papers of the passengers, waving aside all complaints with the explanation that this was part of a dragnet spread for bandits dressed in German uniforms.

In one of the cars the passengers were Gestapo agents. When Kuznetsov ordered the car to a stop, one of them displayed his Gestapo card and said: "It's all right, Captain, we're after the same bandit." As the car drove off the man smiled ironically as if to say that the captain did not know who he was stopping.

Kuznetsov examined papers for two solid hours until Struciński told him that the posts in the other streets had been withdrawn. They sat in their car and calmly drove off.

At the parade, that was held to mark Hitler's birthday, Kuznetsov and Valya had seen an uncommonly fat man on the stands. He was General Knut, Deputy Reichskommissar of the Ukraine for General Affairs and head of the robber Packettauktion organisation.

Robbery was Knut's profession; the property of the Packettauktion organisation consisted solely of loot. Knut selected the best of this loot for himself and was said to be fabulously rich. He grew so fat that he could hardly walk. He was the image of a huge pig.

The Packettauktion offices were in the Legionsstrasse near the railway station. Kuznetsov, Struciński and Jan Kamiński stopped their car in this street, a short distance away from the office. They did not have to wait. With German punctuality Knut left the office at 6 p.m. sharp.

Kamiński raised himself when Knut's car came abreast of them and hurled an anti-tank grenade into it. The front

of the car was blown off and what remained of the car crashed into a wall. Kuznetsov and Struciński sprayed it with bullets from submachine-guns after which our men drowe away.

Gehl had been given a grand funeral with wreaths and orations. The newspapers had been filled with obituaries and eulogies. The attempt to assassinate Dargel had also been widely publicised. But not a word was said or written about Knut. It seemed that there had never been a man of that name and that nothing had happened.

Knut was killed, but the Germans decided to keep silent about it. Indeed: they were the "masters", they had established a "new order", they were "invincible", and yet the partisans were killing their leaders in broad daylight in the streets of Rovno, capital of occupied Ukraine. Besides, the culprits were elusive. It was better to say nothing. The situation was bad enough: you could not go out into the streets not only at night but during the day as well.

IN A NEW CAMP

The autumn rains and the cold nights plagued the partisans, especially those who had no warm clothing. The sheepskin coats that were dropped to us by parachute last winter had been worn to shreds. Their only use now was as bedding. The new men had no warm clothing at all.

We had to think of building a winter camp.

The site for this camp was chosen in a forest between the villages of Berestyany and Lopaten near a narrow-gauge railway. Tall pines gave us cover from the air and the thick underbrush screened the camp from the side of the railway and a motor road running parallel to it.

The scale of the construction was not small. We had to have large barracks to house four companies, the headquarters staff, the scouts, the medical corps, the radio operators and the supplies platoon. In addition we needed bath-houses and other auxiliary buildings.

We were now experienced camp builders. We got down to the actual building only after we had planned the site and drawn up the time-table.

No tree was cut for timber within a radius of two kilometres round the camp. Pits four and a half feet deep were dug for each structure so that only the sloping roofs were seen above ground.

The premises for the medical corps and for the radio operators were built first. The radio operators moved into their quarters in three days. For a stove they used a metal petrol barrel, and the bunks were placed on either side of the stove, and a table near the window. The aerial led in to the table, which was used for the transmitters.

Our medical corps had a hospital for twenty beds; each of the wounded had his own trestle-bed with a mattress filled with fresh hay. At the entrance was a small room for the surgeon on duty and the nurses, a surgery for "out-patients" and a dental surgery. It was cosy and there was plenty of light. To prevent the clay from flaking off, the ceiling was covered with parachute silk. The medical corps' second premises housed the operating theatre, for which a special table was designed under the guidance of Dr. Tsessarsky.

Headquarters had a real house of seven rooms. The house had belonged to the German elder of one of the villages and we transported it lock, stock and barrel.

Around headquarters were the premises of the camp commandant's platoon, the scouts, the medical corps and the radio operators. The buildings of the infantry companies and the supplies and transport platoon with its sausage-making factory, smoke houses, stores and bakery grew up or rather grew into the ground about two hundred paces away.

The quarters for the companies were so big and comfortable that they were no longer called chooms but barracks. They had not only real brick stoves and real windows but

also floor-boards, while in B company the floor was made of fence boards laid in the form of parquet.

A house-warming party with a concert and dancing was thrown after each of the premises was completed.

* * *

The "surprise" which last May Koch told Paul Siebert Hitler was planning near Kursk ended in a complete failure. The nazis lost an army of a hundred and twenty thousand men and retreated. At the close of September the Red Army advanced right up to the Dnieper.

Once self-assured and smug, the Germans lost their faith in victory.

"I believe that now I am their most cheerful and confident officer," Kuznetsov said with a laugh.

No longer hoping to retain the fertile lands of the Ukraine, the Germans sought to wring as much food as possible from this territory but they were not very successful.

Numerous partisan detachments were organising resistance, destroying German food stores, blowing up trains and bridges, and annihilating German foraging parties.

The Germans were especially hard pressed in localities where partisan detachments were based. The population in a huge territory extending from the Sarny-Kovel railway in the north to the Rovno-Lutsk line in the south and from the Goryn River in the east almost to Lutsk in the west did not give the occupants either grain or livestock. Several partisan detachments were operating in this area: Prokopyuk's detachment, a battalion from Fyodorov's formation commanded by Balitsky, detachments commanded by Karasyov and Magomet and our detachment.

Hushing up the real situation at the front and keeping up the myth that the Red Army would soon be defeated, the Germans demanded taxes from the population in cash and in kind.

But, as a Russian proverb says, an old bird is not caught with chaff. The partisans and the peasants resisted the

Germans more than ever before. Extraordinary punitive measures were taken. Aircraft were used in an effort to break the resistance of the partisans and the population. Almost every day whole squadrons bombed peaceful villages and the forests where the partisans had their bases.

The struggle that we started against the occupants in the Sarny forests was continued here, in our new region. We burned down German farms and wrecked trains and railways. With our coming one more region was wrested from the Germans, and small wonder that they began to show us increased "attention". Troops appeared now in one village now in another. The armed traitors likewise did not miss the opportunity to toady to their masters.

Ivan Sokolov, my logistics chief, who was a fine comrade and a brave partisan, was killed in a skirmish with the nazis and their hirelings. Grisha Shmuilovsky, our poet and choir leader, who taught our partisans the latest songs, was also killed.

Grisha flew in from Moscow later than the others and was eager to make up for lost time. It was his dream to perform an exploit and he always volunteered when something important had to be done. In a conversation with his comrades, he once said:

"If I must die, I want to die advancing, with my face turned to the west."

With the face turned to the west! How vividly and well these words expressed the aspiration of the Soviet man to advance, to drive the occupants out of his country.

Many partisans were wounded in the engagements and skirmishes. Sergei Stekhov was hit in the hand by an explosive bullet.

Hardly a day now passed without a skirmish. Many more men were needed in the detachment. Where formerly five or ten men used to go we now sent one or two whole companies. When one or two scouts set out for Rovno, Lutsk or Zdolbunovo they had to be escorted by a large number of partisans. Besides, our detachment had been

split up. We had two hundred men in the Sarny forests; seventy men were near Kovel on a special assignment; and about twenty of our best men were constantly stationed at each of the midway posts near Rovno and Lutsk.

We had not been anxious to increase the strength of our detachment, only admitting people who could help us in our intelligence work. Had our task been generally to augment our numbers we could have mustered a whole army. A huge number of people wanted to join partisan detachments, but our aim was to keep the detachment flexible for our intelligence work.

The situation was now different. More men were wanted.

Our scouts and Novak's organisation in Rovno began to recruit reliable people for our detachment, returning with ten or twenty men after each visit to Rovno.

Two traitors, Naumenko and Chernenko, filtered in with the recruits. They stayed with us for about a month and then disappeared. Much later we learned that Naumenko was a secret Gestapo agent and that he had been sent to get first-hand information on our strength and armaments.

A few days after Naumenko's disappearance, Kuznetsov, Struciński and Shevchuk reported that Rovno had suddenly turned into a hornet's nest. Gestapo sleuths and agents lurked in the streets, scrutinising the faces of almost all passers-by, examining residential permits and raiding houses.

Struciński wrote that Naumenko had been seen riding about the town in a car with Gestapo agents.

Naumenko did not know any of our secret addresses in Rovno, but he nevertheless put the Gestapo on the track of one of them. Two of our men, Kulikov and Galuzo, always stopped with a woman who lived alone in a small two-storied house at the corner of the main thoroughfare and a side-street. Before the war Kulikov was a village schoolmaster and Galuzo an agronomist. They joined our detachment early in 1943, and were frequently sent to Rovno.

Galuzo bore a resemblance to Kuznetsov and the Gestapo were evidently positive that he was Kuznetsov. For the time nobody suspected Paul Siebert.

One night the Germans surrounded the house. The mistress of the house was the first to notice them and roused our men. Galuzo looked out of the window:

"You must leave at once," he said to the woman. "Lie your way out or hide. We'll stay here."

The woman went away.

"Rus, partisan, come out!" a German voice cried out.

Kulikov and Galuzo hurriedly barricaded the door and windows with furniture.

The Germans tried to break into the house, but the partisans started firing from the windows. A battle flared up. Rifles, submachine-guns and machine-guns were used against the little house. But that did not help, and the sharp-shooting of the partisans began to have a telling effect. The Germans called out reinforcements.

A lorry with a heavy machine-gun drew up, but a hand-grenade thrown from one of the windows landed in it, destroying it together with the machine-gun. More reinforcements had to be called.

This battle between two Soviet patriots and at least a hundred nazi special troops in the heart of Rovno went on for more than six hours. Kulikov and Galuzo were taken only after they had run out of cartridges and hand-grenades, but they were not taken alive. Wounded and bleeding, they saw that their position was desperate and they shot themselves.

But Naumenko's treachery did not end there.

ROUT OF MASTER KILLERS

On November 6, 1943, our radio operators stayed glued to their ear-phones from early morning. Vanya Strokov sweated over the loudspeaker with partisans crowding round him in the hope of hearing a broadcast from Moscow.

He finally got the waveband in the evening. The announcer was reading an Order of the Day on the recapture of Kiev by our troops. This was tremendous news for the whole country. We danced with joy when we heard that the capital of the Ukraine had been retaken. We were in the Ukraine, but the territory we were in was still held by the enemy. The hour of victory and of the liberation of all Ukrainian territory was drawing near.

Just as a year before, the partisans heard a broadcast of the meeting of the Moscow City Soviet marking the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution.

The year that passed between the twenty-fifth and the twenty-sixth anniversary witnessed a turning-point in the war. The offensive mounted by the Red Army in that year brought Germany to the verge of catastrophe.

In the morning of November 7, the detachment formed into a square in the forest and the anniversary Order of the Day, received by our radio operators during the night, was read. The forest shook with cheers.

Guests began arriving at midday. They were the commanders of neighbouring detachments: Balitsky, Karasyov, Prokopyuk and Magomet. Each came with a small escort.

"You have a wonderful camp here. It could be turned into a holiday home after the war," they said looking over our lay-out plans and touring the premises.

There was a sumptuous dinner and it was followed by a concert.

The stage consisted of a raised platform with fires burning at the corners. These lighting effects were remarkable.

It was a surprise to everyone when Valentin Semyonov and Bazanov appeared on the stage. They showed an acrobatic number, going through their turns like real circus performers. The light and shadow from the fires played about them like spotlights.

Among the new men from Rovno there were actors from the Rovno theatres. One of them gave a good impersonation of Charlie Chaplin, and hardly did he leave the stage than Rivas appeared with the same number. He looked like Charlie Chaplin and although there was no particular art about his performance the effect was the same as if it had been a professional actor.

Stekhov came up to me at about eleven in the evening, when our guests had already departed and the concert was still continuing. I was sitting in the front row of the stalls. Logs served us as seats.

Bending over to me, he said:

"Can I see you for a minute?"

I followed him.

"A runner has just come in from Berestyany," he said with anxiety in his voice. "A large punitive expedition with mortars and artillery has arrived there. An hour ago I received a report that a train has brought troops to Kivertsy Station as well. They plan to attack us tomorrow and are looking for guides."

This news did not take us unawares. About two weeks before the anniversary we had been informed by Kuznetsov that special troops were planning to invade our forests with the intention of attacking our detachment. Kuznetsov wrote:

"It has reached me that Koch came to Rovno recently by aircraft. He summoned General von Ilgen, commander of the special troops in the Ukraine, and ordered urgent steps to be taken to destroy the partisan detachment commanded by Colonel Medvedev. General Ilgen told his friends that he had ordered out an expeditionary force under the command of General Pipper, who is known as the Master Killer. Ilgen plans to take personal command of the troops to be sent against the partisans in order to 'talk to them in their camp'.

"For my part I shall do my best to give General Ilgen the opportunity of talking to you in our camp."

Kuznetsov appended a plan of action to his letter. It was discussed and approved.

The business with Naumenko made us think that the Germans knew the exact location of our camp. After a short conference, Stekhov and I decided to give battle.

I waited for the next number to finish and then climbed to the stage.

"Comrades," I said to the men, "we have information that we shall be attacked by special troops tomorrow morning. We shall not retreat but shall remain true to our principle of first smashing the enemy and then withdrawing."

The men cheered.

I raised my hand for silence.

"The concert will go on!"

Some men began to sing *Into Battle for the Motherland*, and the song was caught up by the others.

The concert continued for another whole hour.

The men went to sleep in full preparedness for next day's battle. Additional posts were stationed round the camp and scouts, on foot and on horseback, were sent in the direction of Berestyany.

Valentin Semyonov rode in at dawn from somewhere around Berestyany.

"A large column of nazis is moving towards our camp from the village," he reported breathlessly.

Machine-gun fire was heard in the distance almost at the same time. The firing came from the direction of Balitsky's camp, which was situated some ten kilometres away from us. I sent mounted messengers to learn what was happening, to see if assistance was wanted and to inform Balitsky that we were ready for the Germans.

In the detachment we had about seven hundred and fifty men divided into four infantry companies and two platoons—a scout platoon and the camp commandant's platoon.

The first company, commanded by Bazanov, advanced against the enemy moving from Berestyany. I sent the second company, commanded by Semyonov, to outflank the enemy with orders to find their artillery, mortars and command post and to strike at them from the rear.

When the second company marched out, our outposts reported that a second column of Germans was advancing against us from another direction. I sent a part of the fourth company to block the road taken by that column, and the rest of this company was deployed to guard our right flank. The third company manned the outposts round the camp.

All our forces were thus deployed, and the reserve consisted of a group of scouts and the commandant's platoon.

The battle started at about ten o'clock in the morning. The nazis opened up furiously against the second company with machine-guns and submachine-guns. They advanced in close formation under cover of their mortars and artillery. The fire from our machine-guns and submachine-guns stopped them and forced them to take cover for only a short while. Then a command was heard and the enemy rose and attacked again.

Letting the Germans approach to within range of our submachine-gunners, our men counter-attacked, cheering lustily.

The enemy's second column also advanced, closing with part of our fourth company.

The wounded began to walk or be carried into camp.

We were aware that we could not fight a drawn-out battle: we did not have the ammunition for that. I therefore sent runners to Balitsky and Karasyov to ask them to send small groups to attack the enemy in the rear. I felt this would distract some of the enemy forces.

The German batteries began to find the range of the camp, but the shells burst two hundred paces away from the camp proper.

The first company let me know that they were running out of cartridges and that they had spent all the ammunition for their heavy machine-gun. We sent them reinforcements from the commandant's platoon. But soon another message was brought. It said that they had practically no ammunition left and could not hold out much longer if help was not sent.

"We're picking off the Germans like flies, but they keep coming for more," the runner said. "They want to scare us with a psychological attack."

Semyonov's company was gone for four hours, but there was still no sign of it. Where were they? What were they doing?

We began to reinforce the first company with all the men we could spare from the other units, but this was only temporary assistance.

It looked as though we were losing the battle.

The runners sent to Balitsky and Karasyov returned. Balitsky said he could give us no help because his detachment was deployed in expectation of an attack, but Karasyov wrote that he was sending a whole battalion to fall upon the enemy's flank.

The nazis increased their pressure from both directions and the firing was now close to the camp. Our last reserves joined in the battle. They consisted of the camp commandant Burlatenko and fifteen lightly wounded men who had just had their wounds dressed.

Mines were already exploding in the camp itself, felling enormous pines. The Germans were coming ever closer.

We had been fighting for seven hours. There was still no sign of either Karasyov's partisans or of Semyonov's company.

A little after five o'clock in the afternoon I ordered the horses to be harnessed to the carts and the seriously wounded and the headquarters documents to be put into the carts. Of the wounded only fourteen men were able to bear arms. Tsessarsky and the other doctors were to

cover the seriously wounded and the cart train. With the remainder of the commandant's platoon I went to the central sector to order a rearguard action to protect the cart trains and the wounded.

I knew that if we did not hold out till darkness fell we would be trapped: the Germans were all around us.

Suddenly we distinctly heard Russian cheers from the direction of the German artillery.

Before the cheering died down the firing ceased as though by a wave of a magic wand. In five minutes the enemy mortars opened up again, but this time the fire was directed at the Germans.

At once there was confusion and panic among the enemy. They began to throw down their guns and run. Our men gave chase.

What miracle was this?

There was, naturally, no miracle. The issue was decided by Semyonov's company. It went deep into the rear of the Germans. Without haste Semyonov reconnoitred the enemy positions, located the artillery and mortar batteries, learned that they consisted of three field guns, three battalion mortars and one ten-barrelled mortar, and found that the command post was in a tent two hundred paces away from the batteries.

Semyonov divided his company into two groups, and both groups attacked simultaneously. One of the groups swooped down on the German field guns and mortars and turned them against the nazis, and the other group captured the command post and the radio station through which the battle was being directed. Nineteen staff officers and the Master Killer, General Pipper, commander of the punitive expedition, were killed. This decided the day.

Karasyov's battalion arrived in time to join in the end of the battle, ramming the flanks of the enemy.

The men returned to the camp only towards eleven o'clock in the night. They had been pursuing scattered groups of Germans. About a hundred and fifty enemy

troops shut themselves up in Berestyany, but now there was no point in going for them.

I was sure that the Germans would bring in fresh forces in the morning and would begin bombing the camp from the air. During the night we learned that another German column was moving in our direction from Kivertsy Station. We decided to leave the camp before dawn.

Our casualties were twelve killed and thirty-two wounded. The dead were buried and the wounded given over to the care of the doctors, and preparations were started to break camp.

I sent runners to Balitsky and Karasyov to inform them that we were leaving the camp and that they could take a part of our trophies.

The bag of trophies was enormous. We captured the whole of the German baggage train, which consisted of a hundred and twenty carts loaded with arms, ammunition, shells, mines and clothing. We seized three field guns and three mortars, submachine-guns, rifles and a large quantity of mines, shells and cartridges.

From the staff documents that fell into our hands we learned that we had engaged a punitive expedition under General Pipper and three SS battalions with a total strength of two and a half thousand men.

Judging by the documents, General Pipper had been a commander of special troops from the very outset of the war. He and his SS battalions had been in all the countries occupied by the nazis, and he had been on a rampage in the Ukraine for about five months.

The square of forest where we had our camp was marked in red pencil on General Pipper's staff map. This, of course, was Naumenko's work, but he had not given the camp's exact position and that accounted for the inaccurate artillery and mortar fire.

At two o'clock in the morning the partisans had their first meal in twenty-four hours, and at three o'clock we were already on our way. We were sorry to leave our

warm quarters and to freeze in the cold again and to soak in the rain, but there was nothing we could do about it.

Our plan was to withdraw temporarily to the northern borders of Rovno Region in order to knock the detachment into shape again and to try to send our wounded to Moscow by plane. We left a small group under Cherny in the Tsuman forests. Their task was to manoeuvre and hide from the punitive troops and to receive the men coming from Rovno.

On the day after our departure nazi aircraft began bombing and strafing the now deserted square of forest. After considerable artillery preparation the nazis approached the camp unopposed. They left the camp loaded with "trophies"—the Germans killed by us there. Many corpses had been left lying on the ground. We had destroyed at least six hundred troops.

The body of General Pipper was flown to Berlin. The nazi press sobbed violently, writing that he had been one of the props of the occupation authorities, but he was not called the Master Killer any longer.

TO BE CONTINUED

There was always a sentry in Melnichnaya Street at the gates of the mansion occupied by General Ilgen, commander of special troops in the Ukraine. "One fine day" a boy in short pants and playing a mouth-organ hung around this mansion. The boy walked past the sentry several times.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" the sentry demanded in Ukrainian.

"Who me? Nothing."

"Beat it. This house belongs to a general, see! You'll be in trouble if I catch you here again."

The boy took to his heels, but he stopped at the next corner, from where he continued to keep the house under observation.

Soon Valya, carrying a brief-case, went to the mansion.

"Hello," she said to the sentry. "Is the general in?"

"No."

"Is anybody at home at all?" she said with a glance at the house.

"Only the batman."

"I'll go in and wait for the general. I have an urgent packet from the Reichskommissariat for him."

Valya had brought many messages and the sentries knew her.

She was let into the house by the batman who had entered the general's service only a few days before.

Valya knew this, but she said with an expression of surprise:

"I'm from the Reichskommissariat. Where's the old batman?"

"He was sent to Berlin."

"What for?"

"He went with trophies. Come into the house, Fräulein, you can wait here."

"No, I don't think I'll wait. There's another urgent packet that I must deliver. I'll come in on my way back. Are you expecting the general soon?"

"He ought to be in soon."

On her way out Valya told the sentry that she would shortly be back. She saw the boy at the corner of the street.

"Run quickly and say that everything's in order. Tell them they can come."

Small Kolya sped to the house where Kuznetsov, Struciński, Kamiński and Gnedyuk were impatiently waiting for him.

In a few minutes they were outside Ilgen's mansion. Kuznetsov, wearing the uniform of a captain, was the first to step out of the car.

The sentry saluted.

"The general is not at home," he said, believing he was addressing a German officer.

"I know," Kuznetsov said curtly in German and went into the house followed by Struciński.

The batman was dozing in the hall.

"I'm a Soviet partisan," Kuznetsov said, clipping his words, "and if you value your life you'll do what you're told. If you don't you'll only have yourself to thank."

The batman was unable to believe his ears: the German officer a partisan! Trembling, his teeth chattering with fright, he mumbled:

"I have always been on your side. We were mobilised against our will. . . ."

"All right, but watch your step," Kuznetsov said.

Dispirited and still unable to believe that the German officer was a partisan, the batman stood stock still.

"What's your name?" Kuznetsov demanded.

"Kuzko."

"Sit down and write what I tell you," Kuznetsov ordered.

While Nikolai dictated, Kuzko wrote:

"Thanks for the meals. I'm going over to the partisans and am taking the general with me. Kuzko."

The note was put in a prominent place on the writing desk in the general's study.

"And now, while our host isn't at home, let's get down to business," Kuznetsov said to Struciński.

The two men made a thorough search, taking documents and weapons, which they tied in a bundle.

When the search was over Struciński stayed behind with the batman and Kuznetsov returned to the sentry. Gnedyuk was standing near the man and as Kuznetsov came up he heard Gnedyuk saying:

"What sort of a chap are you? You were Gritz and now you've become a Fritz."

"Go away while your head's still on your shoulders," the sentry replied uncertainly, without spirit. "I'm no Fritz."

"Then help the partisans."

"Have you two come to an agreement?" Kuznetsov asked, coming up from behind the men.

The sentry turned round sharply.

"What, the captain, too?" he said, his eyes bulging.

"Yes. Come with me," Kuznetsov ordered.

"Mr. Officer, I'm not supposed to go into the house of a general."

"Whether you're supposed to or not makes no difference. Here, give me your rifle," Kuznetsov said disarming the sentry.

The latter trailed along into the house behind Kuznetsov.

Nikolai Gnedyuk took the place of the sentry.

Kamiński stepped out of the car and paced up and down near the mansion.

All this took place in the dusk, when the streets were still light and people were passing by.

Five minutes later Struciński came out of the house dressed in the sentry's uniform, with a rifle in his hand, and took up his station at the gates. Gnedyuk went into the house.

Everything was now ready, but Ilgen did not come. Twenty, thirty, then forty minutes passed, but there was no Ilgen.

The sentry, who was sitting in the hall, suddenly recollected with fright.

"There may be trouble," he said to Kuznetsov. "The relief is due soon. Let me take over the post. Since I've decided to help, I'll help."

"Is he telling the truth?" Kuznetsov asked the batman.

"Yes," the man replied.

Gnedyuk called Struciński. Clothes were changed again and the sentry with Kamiński watching him took over the post and Struciński sat in the car.

Before long Ilgen drove up. He stepped briskly out of his car, sent it away and went into the house.

"He looks as strong as an ox and they'll have a hard time with him. I think I'd better go in," Struciński said to Kamiński when he saw the general.

As soon as the batman closed the door behind the general Kuznetsov pointed his pistol at him and said, punctuating every word:

"General, you are under arrest. I am a Soviet partisan. If you behave properly no harm will come to you."

"Traitor!" Ilgen bellowed, dropping his hand to his holster.

But Kuznetsov and Struciński, who had come up, seized him by his arms:

"I have told you clearly who we are. You were looking for partisans. You see them before you."

"Help!" Ilgen yelled.

He was pushed down to the floor, tied and gagged and dragged out. When he was being pushed into the car the handkerchief dropped out of his mouth and he began to yell again. The sentry ran up.

"The relief is coming!" he shouted to Kuznetsov.

Nikolai smoothed his tunic and saying "Shut his mouth" went towards the men who were approaching. They were not the relief but four German officers. Kuznetsov displayed the Gestapo badge he had once taken as his "personal trophy" and said:

"We have caught a partisan dressed in German uniform. He was going to assassinate the general. Show me your papers."

The officers produced their papers. The badge forced them to obey. Nikolai wrote their names down in his notebook and said:

"You three may go, but you, Herr Granau," he turned to the fourth man, "will have to come to the Gestapo with me."

Granau's documents stated that he was Reichskommissar Erich Koch's private driver. "He'll have something useful to tell us," Kuznetsov reflected.

When Granau went up to the car with Kuznetsov, the latter signed to Kamiński and Gnedyuk and they pushed the officer into the car and disarmed him.

The small Opel, designed for five people, now carried seven.

That night and especially in the morning there was considerable commotion in the town. A general had disappeared. The Gestapo looked high and low for partisans. The streets were patrolled and military police made a house-to-house search.

While the Germans, their tongues hanging, were looking for the "criminals", the sentry and the batman were at our midway post telling our men how at first they had been frightened and then had helped to tie up Ilgen, and Kuznetsov, lolling in an armchair, was waiting to be received by Funk, Koch's deputy and chief judge in the Ukraine.

Alfred Funk bore the rank of SS Oberführer. Before his appointment to the Ukraine he was chief judge in German-occupied Czechoslovakia, where he dealt ruthlessly with Czech patriots. He continued his gory career in the Ukraine. By his orders prisoners were shot in the jails and thousands of innocent people executed in the concentration camps.

Following the assassination of Gehl and Knut and the attempt made on Dargel, Funk ordered the execution of all the prisoners in the Rovno jail. When we learned of this order we passed the death sentence on the hangman. The preparations for the execution were laid by Kuznetsov, Struciński, Kamiński and the barber who shaved Funk every morning.

Kuznetsov knew that Funk would arrive in fifteen minutes. There was only the secretary in the waiting-room and Nikolai began a conversation about the weather with her. As he talked he kept looking out of the window. Jan Kamiński was strolling in the street below, watching the barber's window.

It had been arranged with the barber that the curtain would be drawn when Funk had had his shave and went to his office. The signal to show that Funk was leaving the barbershop was to be given by Kamiński by taking off his cap and scratching his head.

"I'll wait for you at six o'clock at the corner of Friedrichstrasse and Deutschstrasse. We can go and dance somewhere. Will you come?" Kuznetsov asked the secretary. "Yes, I'll come," she said.

At that moment Kuznetsov saw Kamiński's signal.

"Do you think you can get me a glass of tea?" he asked the secretary. "It's terribly hot today."

"Yes, of course, Captain. I won't be a minute."

When she returned there was nobody in the waiting-room. She shrugged her shoulders in surprise and sat down at her desk. Funk walked in and with a "Good morning" to the secretary went into his office.

A minute later two shots rang out in the office. The frightened secretary jumped to her feet. The captain she had been speaking to a few minutes before came out of the office and walked to the landing without a glance at her.

The offices of the chief judge were full of people. The shots brought everybody to their feet, but nobody suspected Kuznetsov and he went out into the street. Two cars full of Gestapo men and military police had just drawn up at the entrance. The Gestapo men stepped out of the cars and gazed with surprise at the second floor windows from where the sound of firing had come.

Kuznetsov stopped near them and also gazed up at the windows, feigning astonishment. When cries of "Murder, help!" were heard and everybody rushed into the building, Kuznetsov went round the corner, turned into a courtyard, climbed over one fence, then another, and reached his car. Struciński was at the wheel.

Kamiński, who had remained at his post in the street, watched the Gestapo men and military police cordon off the building, climb to the roof and garret in their search

for a partisan, then finally lead about twenty people, some German officers among them, out of the building and take them to the Gestapo.

In the meantime Kuznetsov and Struciński were already on a highway far beyond the outskirts of the town.

This event occurred while we were on our way northward after the battle with the troops of the "Master Killer".

RESPIRE

Our withdrawal was not of the easiest. During the six months we had lived in the Tsuman forests our numbers had increased considerably and we had accumulated a large supply train. We had barrels of salted meat and fat, boxes of sausages, and many sacks of wheat which we had taken in ourselves from the fields of Polish peasants put to death by the nazis. A whole cart was loaded with the equipment from Rivas' workshop, which now had a huge number of tools of every description. In addition there was the equipment of our tailors and boot-makers, and much else. Our train consisted of fifty carts, each drawn by a pair of horses, and after we defeated the punitive expedition of the "Master Killer" we had teams pulling captured field guns, mortars, shells, mines and other ammunition and trophies.

The rains had made the roads almost impassable. We had a difficult time of it, and it was torture for the wounded.

Finding our camp deserted, the Germans gave chase. A blind man could have followed our trail because in addition to our detachment, the same route was taken by Prokopyuk and Karasyov's detachments, Balitsky's battalion and Magomet's group. All these units left the old hunting grounds and it was impossible for them to cover up their tracks.

But the Germans were unable to overtake us. There were two reasons for that. The first was that they had not acted promptly, and the second that they wasted a

great deal of time combing the forests when our tracks took them there. They advanced in skirmish line, fearing a sudden encounter.

After we had covered a hundred and fifty kilometres and were within five kilometres of our destination, the village of Tselkovichi-Velki, we saw an enormous ball of fire rising slowly in the east.

"Is the sun always playing tricks like that here?" I asked an elderly peasant who was standing on the road.

"It's a sign that we'll have a snow-storm today," he replied.

"A snow-storm?" Lukin said incredulously. "Why, there's not a cloud in the sky, and not a breath of wind."

But the peasant proved to be right.

As it rose above the horizon, the sun grew smaller, its colour turning into a pale opaque, and clouds slowly filled the sky.

Great fluffy snow-flakes began to fall before we had finished billeting our men. The dazzling whiteness of this first snow was beautiful to see. Then a strong wind began to blow. The snow came down ever faster and in ten minutes visibility was reduced to three paces.

The storm raged for about two hours, covering the ground with a thick blanket of snow.

We knew that the snow would not keep for more than a day because the earth was as yet not cold enough, but everybody was happy to see it. It covered our tracks for that day at least and, besides, when it thawed the German lorries would be helpless in the mud.

* * *

Prokopyuk's detachment was quartered in Tselkovichi-Velki together with us. Karasyov's detachment occupied the village of Mlinok, which stood on the Styr about two kilometres away. Belitsky's battalion returned to its old camp in a forest twenty kilometres to the north of Tselkovichi-Velki.

We found we had another neighbour in addition to the units that came from the Tsuman forests. It was the formation commanded by Fyodorov, who was better known as Fyodorov of Chernigov. His men were encamped in a forest thirty-five kilometres to the west of Tselkovichi-Velki.

We planned to stay here for not more than ten or twelve days. Our aim was to return as soon as the Germans grew tired of wandering about the deserted Tsuman forests. We had to develop the work that we had started.

The mobile group that we had left in the Tsuman forests could not replace us and, besides, we found that we could not contact them by radio.

The Red Army was advancing. In the hope of holding one line of defences and then another the nazi High Command kept regrouping its troops, transferring them from one sector of the front to another. Our task was to detect these movements and to send timely reports to Moscow.

Late in October we received orders to harass the occupants with the purpose of sowing panic among them, and making it impossible for them to prepare their fortifications or to evacuate with their loot. This order was immediately passed on to Kuznetsov, Struciński, Shevchuk, Novak and our other men in Rovno and to Krasnogolovets in Zdolbunovo.

Furthermore, while we were on our way to Tselkovichi-Velki we sent several combat groups to Rovno with wrecking and intelligence assignments.

In the vicinity of Tselkovichi-Velki we found a piece of ground that could be used as a landing field and radioed the location to Moscow. But no aircraft came. In reply to my inquiries as to the reason, I received the instructions that our detachment and the Karasyov and Prokopyuk detachments should send their wounded to the partisan formation commanded by Fyodorov of Chernigov.

We had always shown special concern for our wounded and sick. Concern for the wounded was a law that was

held sacred by the partisans. We now had to transfer our wounded to another detachment. We had heard many good things about that detachment but we nevertheless decided to see for ourselves what conditions our comrades would be living in. With an escort of twenty men, Karasyov, Prokopyuk and I rode to pay Fyodorov of Chernigov a visit.

We were given a very cordial welcome and I shall always remember the day that we spent with Fyodorov and his men.

Alexei Fyodorov told us of his march from Chernigov Region via the Bryansk forests, where I had commanded a partisan detachment in 1941-42.

"The people remember you, Comrade Medvedev," he said. "We saw the graves of your gallant partisans. You chose lovely places for them. I was deeply impressed by the grave of your chief-of-staff Staroverov in a woods near the village of Batayevo. My boys touched up all the graves and placed wreaths on them. And as for Staroverov, they avenged him by routing a big police detachment in Batayevo."

There was an excellent hospital in the detachment and I asked Fyodorov if he would take our wounded.

"Gladly," he said. "We have good doctors. And as soon as we organise a landing field we'll send them to Moscow."

To our wounded comrades I said:

"You will be taken to the hospital of the partisan formation commanded by Hero of the Soviet Union Major-General Fyodorov. You will have the same good care that you have had here. It is a strong, fighting formation just as it should be under the command of a deputy to the Supreme Soviet. We are transferring you with an easy heart. My only request to you is that you do not mar the prestige of our detachment and that you be disciplined and worthy of the name of Soviet partisan in everything you do."

Alexei Fyodorov came to see us a few days later but we met in a troubled atmosphere. Nazi planes flew over

TSELKOVICH-VELKI several times while we were having our dinner. Failing to discover anything they ruthlessly bombed a village fifteen or twenty kilometres away from us. The bombing lasted all day. Huge clouds of black smoke rose over the village and at night there was a crimson glow that lit up the clouds.

To save the hospitable people of Tselkovichi-Velki from the danger of an air raid, we moved into a forest, where we built ourselves a temporary camp.

* * *

Legends were being circulated about Kuznetsov and Struciński. Many stories were told about them in the different partisan detachments. Men were sent now from one detachment and now from another to invite them for a visit. But they could not go calling because even in our own detachment we did everything in our power to keep their identities a secret, fearing that their descriptions might fall into the hands of the Gestapo. I did, however, let them pay a visit to Karasyov: both Victor Karasyov and his commissar Mikhail Filonenko had won our liking. Upon learning that Kuznetsov hailed from the Urals and was, one could say, almost a fellow-townsmen, they invited him to a bath-house built in the Siberian style.

"I hadn't had such pleasure for a long time," Kuznetsov told me when he returned. "I've never seen a bath-house like it even in my native district. It's so hot on the upper bunk from the steam that it takes your breath away and it's cold on the floor. It's a steam bath to remember."

"Have you forgotten our own bath-house? The one that collapsed?" somebody asked.

Amid laughter we recalled a steam bath that Kuznetsov took one day. We had built a bath-house in the shape of an ordinary hut with a big hole in the roof to let out the smoke. Big vats were hung over the fire to heat water. A deep well was dug in the floor to provide a supply of water. You could not enjoy your bath very much because

the heat from the fire was so terrific that it was impossible to stand near it, but if you took a few steps away you found yourself in a piercing frost.

The bath-house suddenly collapsed while Kuznetsov was washing. He was covered with soap and fell into the well. Helped to climb out of the cold water, he emerged smeared with mud from head to toe. Some of the men brought him warm water from their huts in billy-cans. He'd pour the contents of one billy-can over himself and then wait in the frost until somebody brought him another. His steam bath was such that it was a wonder he did not freeze to death.

* * *

The officer of the day reported to me that visitors were coming. About ten men, mounted on horses, slowly rode into the camp.

One of them, a thickset man, dismounted and came up to me.

"My name is Begma," he said, introducing himself.

Before the war Vasily Begma was the secretary of the Rovno Regional Party Committee. During the war he continued his duties as a member of the underground Party committee, chief-of-staff of the partisan movement in Rovno Region and commander of a partisan detachment. I had never met him but had heard a lot about him and was hoping that we would meet.

He came to our camp from the north-eastern part of the region, which was quite a long distance away from us. After we finished the business that he had come for and sat down to dinner Begma told me that some partisan dressed as a German officer was making the hair of the Germans in Rovno stand on end: he was killing nazi ring-leaders in the streets in broad daylight and had kidnapped a German general.

Begma never dreamed that the man he was talking about was having dinner at the same table with him. Lukin

wanted to interrupt the speaker but I signed to him to keep quiet. As for Kuznetsov, he listened attentively.

"That man is doing a big job, and we can't hold a candle to him," Begma said in conclusion.

At this point I introduced our legendary partisan to him.

* * *

We stayed in the camp near Tselkovichi-Velki much longer than we had planned. The aircraft with the ammunition and radio batteries that we were expecting from Moscow did not arrive and our orders were to stay where we were.

"Let me go to Berestyany," Lukin said to me. "The men are itching for action and want to go to Rovno."

I raised no objections and Lukin set out for the Tsuman forests at the head of an infantry company and a group of scouts.

Three days later we received a radiogram from him via Moscow. He reported that shortly after crossing the railway he had unexpectedly encountered an enemy gang and thrashed it soundly.

A week after that permission was received to move the whole detachment to the area round Rovno. The movement was accomplished safely without a single shot being fired.

During a halt in a small village situated in a great pine forest, Lidya Sherstneva brought me a radiogram from Moscow. In it the High Command congratulated us on our achievements and informed us that by a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., Orders and medals of the Soviet Union had been awarded to men of our detachment. Kuznetsov, Nikolai Struciński, Stekhov, Kamiński and I were decorated with the Order of Lenin; Shevchuk and Jerzy Struciński with the Order of the Red Banner; and Gnedyuk with the Order of the Red Star. Tsessarsky and Valentin Semyonov received the Order of the Patriotic War First Class. All our radio operators were decorated with Orders. More than two hundred men re-

ceived partisan medals. Small Kolya, too, was decorated, receiving the Partisan Medal First Class.

The news spread quickly. The men congratulated each other.

"You deserved this award more than anybody else," I said to Kuznetsov, shaking his hand.

"This honour only makes my duty to my country greater," he replied.

SEND-OFF

The Red Army was moving westward with giant strides. Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk and a number of other regions in the Ukraine had already been liberated. A part of Rovno Region was retaken. Our Air Force was bombing German military targets in Sarny, Rovno and Lutsk and also attacking the retreating enemy columns.

Rovno was gripped by panic. Offices began to evacuate to Lvov. The Germans hastily packed their loot into suitcases and dragged them to the railway station.

"The nazi buzzard has flown," Kuznetsov wrote to me from Rovno, hinting at Erich Koch. "The events at the front and the terror sown in the town by our people have really put the fear of God into this bird of prey. He had a Christmas party on December 22 instead of on the 25th to enable him to get away sooner.

"I can't forgive myself for being late to that party. It looks as though he'll never come back, and I was all set to put him out of the way.

"A Gestapo man by the name of von Ortel danced attendance on some of our people here in my absence. Lidya received some information from him but I cannot say if it's trustworthy. Von Ortel said that in Germany they have invented a flying bomb, something like an aircraft, that will fly at a high speed within a radius of up to four hundred kilometres and will have great destructive power.

"I wanted to speak to him personally and, if there was

a chance, to give you that opportunity, but he suddenly disappeared."

This information about missiles, which the nazis began to use some eight months later, was immediately relayed to Moscow.

Kuznetsov also reported that headquarters staffs were moving from east to west and that the Germans had mined some of the big buildings in Rovno.

An enormous number of Gestapo men and military police collected in the town from the territory liberated by the Red Army. The reign of terror grew to unheard-of proportions. In Belaya Street, where prisoners were usually shot, there was continuous firing every night, from sundown to sun-up. People were shot indiscriminately. Covered lorries were on the go all night carrying corpses out of the town.

The nazis arrested Kazimierz Dąmbrowski.

"The Gestapo have evidently learned something about us," Lukin told me, reporting this arrest.

His surmise was soon confirmed.

Terenty Novak was sitting in his office at the felt mill, when three Gestapo men suddenly broke in. In his desk Novak had several anti-tank grenades, and a revolver lay snugly in his pocket.

"Where can we find the director of the mill?" one of them asked Novak in broken Russian.

"You mean Novak?"

"Yes. Where is he?"

"On the second floor. I can take you to him."

"Never mind. You stay here. We'll find him ourselves."

When they trooped out of his office, Novak put the grenades in his brief-case, released the safety catch on his revolver and hurried out. He thought of going home but saw two cut-throats in plain clothes near the house.

The next day the Gestapo arrested his father. His wife and child had been taken to our camp a month before and then placed in the care of Alexei Fyodorov.

Nikolai Struciński was in mortal danger. He was traced

in spite of the care he took to keep his identity secret. The roar of a lorry engine and then loud knocking on the door was heard fifteen minutes after he entered one of his secret addresses.

"The Gestapo!" the master of the house managed to warn Struciński and took him to another room.

Two Gestapo men smashed the lock and burst into the house.

"Where is he?" they shouted, waving their pistols.

"Who?"

"Stop pretending!" one of the men said, raising his arm to hit the man with his pistol.

But before he could swing his arm Struciński appeared in the doorway, his pistol spitting death. The Gestapo men dropped dead. Taking their weapons, Struciński and his host ran to the stairs.

From the second-floor landing they saw a lorry filled with military police.

"Heil!" Struciński shouted and fired several shots into the lorry.

The police began jumping out of the lorry, knocking each other down. Struciński and his host took advantage of the confusion and escaped.

Difficult as the situation was, our men did not for a moment think of leaving. They felt themselves in duty bound to give the occupants a send-off they would remember.

The nazis had once thought their army was invincible and that conquered territory would be theirs for good. Now they had to flee, and as quickly as they could. The railway station was packed with Germans and traitors fleeing from the advancing Red Army. The entire square in front of the station swarmed with terrified "conquerors".

Fabulous sums of money were offered for a car, but cars were very difficult to find. Struciński and Novak had men in many of the garages who held up lorries and passenger cars in every possible way. The drivers did all they could,

putting sand into the petrol and the engines, laying mines at the approaches to the garages, tearing the wiring in the cars, carrying away starter-keys or simply burning the cars. The Germans raved but they were helpless. Cars did not leave the garages, and the few that did broke down on the way.

The railway remained the only road out of Rovno. Military police sealed off the Rovno railway station and tried to put things in order there. First-class carriages were reserved for senior officers and generals. In the waiting-halls the "Fräulein" and "Frauen" of these high-placed robbers waited with great suitcases.

The smaller fry travelled by second and third class, but they too had great suitcases. Nobody could enter the station without a special pass. Shevchuk and another scout named Budnik made up their minds to get into the station with just one small but heavy suitcase. Shevchuk appeared at the entrance.

"Show your pass," a military policeman said, stopping him.

"I think I've lost it," Shevchuk said, looking in his pockets.

"Stand aside. You won't go in without a pass."

Budnik was standing some distance away and watching.

"We'll only get caught," Shevchuk said, going up to him.

"Let's try some other approach. See how many officers are rushing to the station on foot?"

"Yes," Budnik replied. "What of it?"

"Nothing. Come."

Towards evening Shevchuk rode to the station in a phaeton. Budnik held the reins. In the street throngs of Germans, men and women, with looted property were walking to the station overtaking each other. The phaeton moved without haste. Shevchuk scrutinised the people, trying to find someone to share the phaeton with him. Finally his gaze was arrested by a lieutenant-colonel sweating under the weight of his suitcases. The German

officer put the suitcases on the ground. Pulling a handkerchief out of his pocket, he took his cap off and mopped the sweat off his face and bald head. Shevchuk stopped the phaeton.

"Mr. Officer," he said with the most innocent of smiles, "can I give you a lift?"

"You go station. Thank you," the lieutenant-colonel said joyfully.

"Here you, give a hand!" Shevchuk shouted to the "driver".

The "driver" jumped down and quickly put the officer's suitcases in the phaeton. Then he obligingly helped the German to a seat, returned to his own seat and shouted at his horse. The phaeton rolled towards the railway station.

"I'm very grateful to you," the officer mumbled, breathing easily and again wiping the sweat off his head.

The phaeton stopped at the station gates, and Shevchuk and Budnik took the officer's suitcases and their own before the man could collect himself.

"It's all right, Mr. Officer, we'll help you," they said and went to the gates.

The German ran after them.

"Show your pass," a military policeman said, stopping them.

"Let them through, they're with me," the lieutenant-colonel said.

They were in the station! Shevchuk and Budnik entered the first-class waiting-room, which was filled with Germans. Somehow they found space for the lieutenant-colonel's suitcases. A short distance away Shevchuk put down his own suitcase among a pile of luggage.

"Good-bye, Mr. Officer. Happy journey."

"Thank you."

"Don't mention it. And thank you ... for everything," Chevchuk said with a grin.

"Forgetting" their small suitcase, our men walked out of the station, sat in their phaeton and drove away. In three

or four hours they were in a house from where they had a good view of the railway station.

The "forgotten" suitcase contained a thirty-kilogramme delayed-action tolite mine.

It went off at two o'clock in the morning. A wall of the waiting-room was blown away and the ceiling caved in, crashing down on the heads of nearly a hundred German officers and their "Fräulein", "Frauen" and suitcases.

But that was not all. A troop train was approaching the station at the moment the mine exploded. It jerked to a stop and the troops jumped out of the carriages and scattered, thinking the station was being bombed by Soviet aircraft. Meanwhile, the military police and Gestapo stationed round the station thought these troops were Soviet partisans and opened fire. Reinforcements were called and thrown against the "partisans". The Germans shot at each other for about twenty-five minutes and naturally there were casualties on both "sides".

In the morning all the talk in Rovno was about the explosion. The Germans were utterly confused. And suddenly another explosion shook the centre of the town at midday. The German Ortskommandantur was blown up. It was the second explosion in twenty-four hours.

At the Ortskommandantur there was a semi-basement where the personal effects of the prisoners were stored. One of the porters employed at the Ortskommandantur was a man named Kozlov, who belonged to an underground organisation. He was introduced to Shevchuk, from whom he got a delayed-action mine. This he planted in the basement. The mine went off without a hitch.

While the Gestapo were turning the town upside down in their hunt for the wreckers responsible for these explosions, we planned further moves together with Novak's group and went forward with our intelligence activities.

The Germans were aware that they would have to leave the town and they mined the bridges, roads and big buildings. Our men kept a close watch and reported where the

mines were placed. In our turn we passed these reports on to our Command. At the airfields our people kept a count of all incoming and outgoing aircraft, learned where the nazis had their ammunition and bomb dumps, and spied out the roads taken by the retreating troops.

Our combat scouts gave the occupants no peace.

Seeing that there was no time for careful planning, Shevchuk went about Rovno with an anti-tank grenade on which Rivas had put a "defensive jacket" made of thick nails notched in several places and held tightly together with wire. When such a grenade exploded at least a hundred splinters flew in all directions.

Passing by a restaurant Shevchuk saw that it was crowded with officers. He acted on the spur of the moment, hurling his grenade into a window and killing seventeen of the officers.

Two of our last actions in Rovno struck the Germans dumb with fear.

One of these was the blowing-up of the Casino Restaurant, which occupied the ground floor of Rovno's best hotel at 49 Deutschstrasse. Three Ukrainian girls, Liza, Galina and Irina, were maids at this restaurant. They were connected with Novak's group and with one of our scouts. Terenty Novak gave the girls two six- or seven-kilogramme delayed-action mines. In the morning of January 5, the girls took these mines into the restaurant in pails full of floor rags. They tied one of the mines to a table in the room for generals and the other to a table in the room for other senior officers. Then they cleaned the restaurant as usual, after which they went to a pre-arranged address from where they were taken to our camp.

The mines went off during the dinner hour, when all the tables were occupied, the mine in the room for generals exploding first. The ceiling and the walls collapsed, blocking the exit. The second mine exploded ten minutes later.

The officers in the upper-floor rooms began jumping out of the windows in panic, breaking arms, legs and heads.

While the dead were being pulled out of the ruins, the military police cordoned off all the surrounding streets and lanes. We subsequently learned that seven people, including three generals, were killed in the first room and nearly seventy in the second.

The explosions in the restaurant occurred at three o'clock in the afternoon, and at eight o'clock on the same day a train was blown up on the railway passing through Rovno.

Novak's group placed a thirty-kilogramme mine on the tracks of this railway. The cable running from the mine was joined to the switch at the felt mill. Members of Novak's group stood by at the switch day and night waiting for the special train carrying high-ranking officials. The Germans found the mine, but it was too late to do anything as the passenger train was approaching at full speed. The troops digging trenches along the railway signalled, but the driver either did not understand their signals or was unable to apply the brakes in time.

Novak himself was at the switch when the train approached. He turned the current on and the engine stopped dead, the carriages piling on top of one another and killing and maiming nazi officers and troops bound for the front.

That was our send-off for the unwelcome guests.

THE LAST MARCH

At the close of December we received permission to move to the vicinity of the city of Lvov. The Red Army was advancing swiftly. Zhitomir, Belaya Tserkov, Rakitnoye, Klesovo and Sarny were liberated. In our camp we could clearly hear artillery fire, especially at night and before dawn. It was music to the ears of the partisans.

We had to move quickly, otherwise we would find ourselves "surrounded" by the Red Army at a time when our job was to follow up the send-off we were giving the occupants. Our men returned to camp from Rovno, Zdolbunovo and all our posts early in January. Only a small number

were ordered to stay behind until the arrival of the **Red Army**. Novak and some of the members of his organisation also arrived in the camp. The strength of our detachment was brought up to nearly a thousand two hundred men.

Valya Dovger remained in Rovno. As an employee of the Reichskommissariat she had to evacuate with the Germans to Lvov. Kuznetsov was very worried for her sake. In Rovno he had felt that his "good friends" were beginning to distrust him.

"If they have really begun to suspect me then, naturally, Valya is in danger. She's very dear to me. We have gone through a lot together," he said.

His anxiety was not unfounded: in the night before they retreated to Lvov the Gestapo arrested Valya.

Our departure for Lvov was delayed. We did not have the necessary topographical maps and were short of batteries for our transmitters and of ammunition for Soviet-made weapons.

So as not to waste time we sent a mobile group to the region around Lvov. Its assignment was to select a site for our camp and to make arrangements for secret addresses in Lvov itself. This group consisted of twenty men. One of them, Pastukhov, was a public services engineer in Lvov before the war. His task was to obtain a detailed map of the underground passages in the city.

Marina Kikh was very eager to go to Lvov.

"I know the city like the palm of my hand," she said. "I worked there and have relatives and friends. Why don't you want to send me with the group?"

"You'll have to wait," I told her. "You'll come with the detachment and will have the opportunity of doing very useful work. At the moment I want you to write letters of introduction to your friends who you think can help our men."

Marina wrote letters to her sister and some friends and gave them to Krutikov, who was given command of the group. The group left on January 5, and although they

had a radio operator with them we never heard of them again.

Kuznetsov's enforced idleness hung heavy on his hands.

"Look what's happening," he said to me. "The Red Army is moving so fast that the Germans will soon begin to pull out of Lvov as well. I could do a thing or two there before they get out. Besides, Valya is probably waiting for me. Let me go alone."

"I think you're right," I said. "You needn't wait until the whole detachment is ready."

This time we "borrowed" a car for Kuznetsov from the Gebietskommissar of Lutsk. We could not give it a new coat of paint because we had neither the paint nor the time. But to prevent anybody from recognising it, the body was scarred and the disks were taken off the wheels. This whole "operation" was carried out by Belov, who took the car from the Gebietskommissariat garage on instructions from Struciński.

Kuznetsov planned to drive to Lvov with Belov and Jan Kamiński. He carried his old papers made out in the name of Lieutenant Paul Siebert. To this we added a travel certificate for Lvov and another for Cracow. Jan Kamiński posed as a big profiteer fleeing from the Red Army.

While these preparations were under way, the detachment started moving in the direction of Lvov. Kuznetsov was still with us. The detachment made slow progress and Kuznetsov's car could not proceed under its own power. It would have gone too far ahead of our column even if it were kept in low gear. Furthermore, the roar of the engine could attract the attention of the Germans. We solved the problem by harnessing a pair of horses to it. Belov sat in the driver's seat. I sat beside him, and Kuznetsov and Kamiński were in the back. Behind the closed doors of the car we worked out the plan of action in Lvov.

Ahead of us was the Rovno-Lutsk Railway. It proved to be no easy task to cross it. Minimising the number of outposts, the Germans had blocked almost all the level-

crossings, fenced them off with barbed-wire barricades and mined the approaches. Fortifications were built round the level-crossings that were left open. Our mounted scouts made attempts to cross the line at several points but everywhere they were stopped by machine-gun fire. We had a big detachment and required a lot of time to cross the railway, but there was no sense in engaging nazi units which could call out reinforcements and even an armoured train.

While we looked for a loop-hole in the German line we ambushed enemy infantry and motorised columns retreating along the highways.

Kuznetsov decided he would not wait any longer. I did not object because I could not say when we would cross the railway.

The moment of Kuznetsov's departure arrived.

"Well, good-bye," he said to me.

I embraced him and we kissed three times after the Russian custom. Then he took his leave of Lukin, Stekhov, Struciński and other men. Everybody wanted to embrace him and say something pleasant.

Kuznetsov did not drive directly to a level-crossing. He felt that he was hunted, and proceeded warily. He stopped his car in a woods near a highway about two kilometres away from a level-crossing, and the men who escorted him to this woods helped to camouflage the car. He waited until dawn and when day was just beginning to break he joined a retreating column of German cars, crossing the railway with it. That happened on January 17, 1944.

We were confident that we would meet Kuznetsov in Lvov in a week or two, but things turned out differently. Four days after Kuznetsov's departure we learned from a messenger from Lutsk that Kuznetsov, Kamiński and Belov had stayed in the town for two days before going on to Lvov. Nobody could explain the delay. A Gestapo major and two military policemen stopped the car at a level-crossing on the outskirts of the town and demanded that

Kuznetsov and his companions show their papers. Kuznetsov evidently felt that something had gone wrong. While they were looking at his papers he whipped out his pistol and shot the Germans. Our men smashed the barrier and drove off at top speed. This was all the news I had of Kuznetsov for a long time.

We decided to cross the railway at all cost on January 19, selecting a section of the line between two level-crossings where the ditches were shallow.

Our advance guard consisted of two large groups, one of which was sent to the left and the other to the right of the section of the line we had chosen. In the event an armoured train was called out these groups had orders to blow it up and keep the enemy engaged until informed that the whole detachment had crossed the line.

The detachment took an hour and a half, perhaps more, to cross the railway. There was no hindrance, and not a shot was fired.

On the next day, January 20, we clashed with the enemy. Strong ambushes were laid for us all along our two-hundred-kilometre route.

We moved at night, running into ambushes every now and then, and in the day-time we rested in the intervals between skirmishes. We made it a rule that while one unit fought, another cooked food and rested. Vladimir Struciński was indispensable here, on the march, as well. As deputy commander of the supplies and transport platoon, he kept the men supplied with food and looked after the wounded in spite of the constant danger.

We had to fight our way into almost every village.

The villages where enemy sentries or armed groups were noticed were shelled with artillery and mortars before we entered them: these were standing orders. That helped. After a dozen or so salvoes, half a squadron of cavalry would charge, and the detachment would march into a cleared village.

Sometimes we would enter a village and not find a single

person, cow or chicken, even the furniture would be gone from the cottages. At first this mystified us and we thought that the Germans had taken the people and their chattel to Germany.

The mystery was solved by Nikolai Struciński, Shevchuk, Valentin Semyonov and Novak.

In the store-room of one of the cottages they found a hole carefully covered with an empty barrel. They moved the barrel aside and Semyonov went down with a flashlight. A shot suddenly rang out and Semyonov scrambled out. Our men shouted: "Come out voluntarily," but there was no reply.

During one of our skirmishes with the Germans we captured several smoke bombs. We took them with us but were not sure that we would find a use for them. We remembered these smoke bombs now and one of them was thrown into the hole. Within a few minutes a voice was heard shouting: "We surrender!" And the soot-covered ugly face of a bandit appeared. One more man climbed out after him. From them we learned what had happened to the villagers and their property.

The Gestapo had ordered all peasants on pain of death to dig cellars in their houses and hide their grain, livestock and all other property in them, and also to hide themselves in these cellars in the event the Bolsheviks approached. We verified this information. Many of the houses had cellars and in them there were beds, grain, personal effects, cows, horses, pigs and poultry. When the villagers saw who we were they joyfully left these cellars.

When we crossed the strongly defended border of Galicia the resistance put up by the Germans grew stiffer. And we found the going itself very hard because of the terrain. We had reached the foot-hills of the Carpathians, and it was up hill and down dale all the way. The artillery and carts with shells and wounded had to be dragged by the men. One day it snowed and the next it would thaw, making the roads sticky with mud. There were riv-

ers to be crossed and we forded them and built bridges under enemy fire.

But one way or another we were already within sixty kilometres of Lvov.

A TREACHEROUS SILENCE

We were approaching the village of Nivitsa. Our scouts reported that no German outposts were to be seen there. This surprised me because up till now we had met with resistance from the Germans.

We rode into the village and found that it was indeed quiet. We billeted the men in the houses, and the headquarters staff stopped in a cottage at the very edge of the village. I went into the house and introduced myself to the host, an elderly peasant, and his wife. I noticed a radio loudspeaker hanging on the wall.

"Does it work?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "In our village the church and the school are also open."

"Are there any Germans around?"

"Not now."

"How have you been living?"

"We get along."

"Do the Germans come often?"

"Now and then."

"Often?"

"They come in groups of three or four for timber, which they get in the forest near by."

I instructed Lukin to send scouts about the village to get more information. The scouts returned an hour later and reported that everything was quiet. I summoned Yermolin, who commanded the first company.

"This stillness bothers me," I said to him. "I want you to station additional posts."

The men were tired and they all went to sleep. But I felt restless. I had been ill for more than a month and

the past few days I had lain covered with a quilt in a hut without getting up. I had messengers near me all the time. I was still weak and that was probably why I could not fall asleep. Near morning, when it was still dark, I decided to get up and check the posts myself. I pulled on my greatcoat with difficulty, put on my cap, slipped a pistol in my pocket and, holding on to the wall for support, stepped over the men sleeping on the floor and went outside. The sentry near the door saluted.

There was a wicket in the wattle fence. I went through it and found myself in a vegetable field. There, against the background of the grey sky, I saw the silhouettes of men. At first I thought it was the commander of the first company posting sentries as he had been instructed to do, but in the next moment I realised that I was wrong. I saw that the men were moving in a chain and not in a group. I lay flat on the ground so that I could see their silhouettes more clearly. There was no doubt about it. It was a chain with definite interval between the men and this interval was widening as they drew nearer.

A minute later they were almost on top of me. I had miscalculated the distance because of the darkness. Were they enemies? I rose to my feet and shouted:

"Who goes there?"

"Who are you?" came the reply.

"The commander, the colonel."

"Come here!"

This "Come here!" to a commander meant only one thing. They were bandits. I pulled out my pistol but before I could fire they aimed two bursts of submachine-gun fire at me. I heard an order given in German. I pulled my trigger twice and somebody fell to the ground.

Our men quickly engaged the enemy. That was good but was caught "between two fires". I was five paces away from the enemy and twenty paces away from my men. Both sides were firing. The bullets whistled past me, and one knocked off my cap. I fell prone on the ground. I

reflected that if I started crawling to my men the nazis would see that I was alive and begin shooting at me. And my men would also shoot if they saw somebody crawling towards them. I was in a fix, and I knew it.

Suddenly I felt somebody tugging me by my leg. I turned and saw it was a man in a German helmet. He wanted my fur boots. He probably thought I was dead. I shot him.

The firing continued. An explosive bullet tore the tab on the collar of my greatcoat.

"Cease fire!" I shouted at the top of my voice.

But it was not easy to make oneself heard above machine-gun fire. I was not heard.

"Cease fire! It is I, Medvedev!" I shouted again.

I was heard! The order "Cease fire ... cease fire ... the colonel's out there," was passed along our lines.

I crawled to my men in a hail of enemy bullets. At the wattle fence strong arms were stretched out to help me, but I did not need help: during those moments of extreme tension I felt a surge of strength come over me and took over the command.

Shevchuk, Struciński, Novak, Gnedyuk and a group of men from the commandant's platoon charged into the enemy chain, firing at point-blank range. Small Kolya, taking shelter behind the wattle, was firing at the rapidly retreating enemy with short bursts.

The house in which Tsessarsky and the medical personnel were billeted stood at the edge of an open field to the right of headquarters. Several bandits managed to force their way into the house early in the battle. Before Tsessarsky could fire with his Mauser two hand-grenades exploded in the room. Tsessarsky was seriously wounded. Two other doctors and two nurses were also wounded. Hearing one of the men give an order, Tsessarsky shouted:

"Boys, we're surrounded. Run to the forest!"

The bandits thought this was an order from one of their number and took to their heels.

Forty minutes later silence descended on the village

once again. There was still some firing about two kilometres away where our men were pursuing the enemy, who left thirty dead on the battle-field.

There were twelve bullet holes in my greatcoat and two in my cap, but I was not even scratched.

"It's your second birthday today," Nikolai Struciński said to me as he counted the holes in my greatcoat and cap.

Hardly able to drag my feet I went to the medical corps. Tsessarsky and the other wounded doctors had already been bandaged. Our dentist was swathed in bandages from head to foot; he had been caught in a shower of grenade splinters.

"Comrade Commander," Sukhenko said, coming up to me, "Darbek Abdraimov is asking to see you."

"Where is he?"

"In the next house. He's been badly wounded."

I went to the house Sukhenko indicated.

"You're alive? And not wounded?" Darbek said when he saw me.

"Yes, alive and not wounded."

"I'm glad."

He smiled, stretching out his hand and weakly pressing mine. He had been the first to hear my shout when I was trapped in the cross-fire. He had rushed towards me but had been hit by a machine-gun bullet.

"How do you feel?" I asked.

"Very bad, Comrade Commander."

"I'm sure you'll get well, Darbek, and that we'll have another taste of your mash à la Kazakh."

He did not reply, only smiled.

A few hours later he was dead.

We expected a fresh attack and started preparing for it. I toured the village in a cart and gave all the necessary orders. The host and hostess had disappeared from the cottage occupied by the headquarters staff.

"It's certainly been a quiet village," I said.

Lukin now knew everything. We had stopped at the house of a puppet elder. He had informed the nazis of our arrival.

The enemy soon attacked with armoured cars, tankettes, large-calibre machine-guns, artillery and mortars.

The houses along the edge of the village caught fire at the very beginning of the shelling. The nazis came from the direction we were bound for, from the west, but they hesitated to break into the village.

Our supply of ammunition was limited and when twilight began to set in we decided to withdraw. We planned the withdrawal cannily: our main body of men quitted the village leaving one company behind to hold the enemy back. Then this company withdrew and a platoon carried on the battle. Finally the platoon slipped out, leaving the Germans to continue their aimless fire.

During the first halt after the battle Lidya Sherstneva brought me a radiogram. It was an order from the Command to recross into the rear of the Red Army at the nearest point from us. We calculated that this nearest point was approximately the place where we had crossed the Rovno-Lutsk railway. The detachment turned back and proceeded over terrain that we were now familiar with.

In the morning of February 5, at a distance of about three hundred paces from the Rovno-Lutsk railway we met Red Army cavalry units. The firing lines had not yet been brought up to this area and these were advance mobile units of our Army who had penetrated into the enemy rear to cut off the German retreat. They were straddling the highway along which a large column of motorised troops were expected to retreat. Running into these units of the Red Army, the Germans turned off the highway in the direction of the village where our detachment was resting. The bursting shells and mines set the village ablaze. We withdrew into a forest where we took up positions and returned the fire.

The Germans quickly turned away, leaving their baggage train behind.

This was our last battle. We lost eight men. In the evening of February 5 we crossed the railway and found ourselves in liberated territory.

At the close of February an ambulance plane took me to Moscow. Small Kolya and the wounded, including Albert Tsessarsky, went with me. Sergei Stekhov remained behind in command of the detachment.

KUZNETSOV'S LETTER

I was in a hospital in Moscow. After long months of struggle and danger I found myself in an atmosphere of peace and quiet. The air was not punctuated by the sound of firing. The only people I saw were the doctors and nurses who came into my ward from time to time. I was not accustomed to this and somehow felt dispirited. My only consolation was that I had fresh newspapers to read every day and the opportunity of listening to the radio without worrying about batteries. For whole days I mentally relived our life behind the enemy lines and strangely enough the things that seemed insignificant during the struggle now acquired importance.

We had passed on a great deal of valuable information to our Command about the work of railways, the movement of enemy headquarters, troops and materiel, the activities of the occupation authorities, and the situation in occupied territory. In the battles and skirmishes with the enemy we had destroyed nearly twelve thousand officers and men. Compared with that figure our own losses were small: a hundred and ten killed and two hundred and thirty wounded. In our area we had stirred the population to active resistance against the nazis, blown up troops trains and railway bridges, destroyed nazi farms, factories and stores, destroyed or damaged the enemy's motor transport facilities, and killed leaders of the occupation forces.

I frequently thought of Nikolai Kuznetsov. Where was he now? What was he doing? Had he met Valya?

One day I had some news about him.

I was lying in bed and listening to the news broadcast with ear-phones. At ten minutes to midnight I suddenly heard:

"Stockholm. According to the newspaper *Aftonbladet*, the deputy governor of Galicia, Dr. Bauer and a high-ranking official named Schneider were shot in broad daylight in a street in Lvov by an unidentified person in German uniform. The slayer escaped."

I sat up in my bed and wanted to rise, but pain forced me back to my pillows. I stretched out my hand and rang the bell.

This was all unnecessary: I should not have called anyone.

A nurse entered.

"Please bring me a headache pill," I said.

She went out.

There was nobody here who would be interested to hear my news.

So Kuznetsov had "escaped". It was he, I was sure of it, because that was what we had planned when we sat in a car drawn by a pair of horses. But I only learned the details of Kuznetsov's activities in Lvov six months later.

Krutikov, Drozdov and Pastukhov, three of the members of a mobile group I had sent to Lvov, turned up. In the detachment we thought they had perished, but that was not so.

The group was ambushed on the border of Galicia. Seven of the twenty men were killed and the commander, Krutikov, wounded. The radio operator was among the killed and that was the reason we had lost contact with this group. During a skirmish Drozdov and another partisan named Pristupa were cut off from the others. The rest somehow reached their destination.

Pastukhov and Kobelyatsky, who knew the town, recon-

noitred the railway station and investigated the underground passages. On July 20, 1944, when the Red Army approached Lvov, they left the town by these underground passages and gave the intelligence corps of 38th Army the plan of the town showing the line of fortifications, the mine-fields, the position of the mortar and artillery batteries, the deployment of the troops, and the buildings that had been mined. The two men then guided a large group of Red Army troops along the underground passages to the centre of the town, bypassing the mine fields. This group attacked the nazis from the rear. Pastukhov and Kobelyatsky fought in this action.

Drozdov and Pristupa, the men who had been cut off from Krutikov's group, organised a partisan detachment locally. Kuznetsov was seen by Pastukhov and Drozdov the former saw him in Lvov, and the latter in a forest. Here is what they related.

Kuznetsov learned that Bauer, the deputy governor of Galicia, would hold a conference of senior German officers in a theatre. He managed to get into the theatre while the conference was being held and take a good look at Bauer, who was sitting on the stage. Then he went out and waited near the theatre. Bauer emerged from the theatre with his secretary, sat in a car and drove off. Kuznetsov, who had a car waiting, followed him, finding out where he lived.

On the next day his car "broke down" as he was driving past Bauer's house in Ivan Franko Street. Belov got out of the car and began tinkering at the engine. Kuznetsov, too, stepped out and upbraided the driver loudly in German.

"There's always something wrong with the car. You don't look after it, you're a loafer. And now I'll be late because of you."

While he gave vent to his indignation he kept an eye on the opposite side of the street where an expensive car was parked near a handsome mansion.

Punctually at 10 a.m. two men came out of the house and went to the car. The driver quickly stepped out and opened the door for them. Kuznetsov came up just as they were entering the car.

"Are you Dr. Bauer?" he asked one of them.

"Yes, I am Bauer."

"Then you're the man I want!" Kuznetsov said, shooting Bauer and his secretary. He ran back to his car while Kamiński and Belov fired at the sentry.

Kuznetsov probably had the Dargel case in mind when he decided to ask Bauer his name in order to make sure there was no mistake.

The car sped out of Lvov, but at the village of Kurovtsy about twenty kilometres away from the town it was stopped by military police. A Gestapo major carefully looked through Kuznetsov's papers and scrutinised the other passengers. He was evidently not satisfied and demanded additional proofs of Kuznetsov's identity. Kuznetsov realised that he was sailing too near the wind and fired with a submachine-gun through the open window of the car. The major and four military policemen were killed.

Our men saw pursuers on the highway behind them. Belov pressed the accelerator and the speedometer showed they were doing 120 kilometres. Then suddenly they found they had run out of petrol. Kuznetsov, Kamiński and Belov leaped out of the car and ran to a forest. It was the Ganovichi forest. They wandered in it for three days before finding Drozdov's detachment. But Drozdov did not have a transmitter and Kuznetsov, still in his German uniform, and his companions decided to make an attempt to cross the enemy lines and contact a Red Army unit.

Although a long time had passed since Kuznetsov's departure this was all Pastukhov and Drozdov knew about him.

The last information that we received about him was found in the papers of the Lvov Gestapo. Among the documents that were seized at the Gestapo there was a copy of an urgent telegram addressed to Berlin. It stated:

"Three Soviet parachutists were captured by military police in a forest on March 2, 1944. They carried forged German papers, maps, German, Ukrainian and Polish newspapers, among which was a copy of the *Gazeta Lwowska* with an obituary for Dr. Bauer and Dr. Schneider, and also a report written by one of these agents about his work. This agent (the German documents give his name as Paul Siebert) has been recognised. He is a Soviet partisan—a spy and wrecker, who was active for a long time in Rovno with impunity. Among other crimes he murdered Dr Funk and kidnapped General Ilgen. In Lvov Siebert planned to shoot the Governor Dr. Wächter. He was not able to carry out this plan and instead of the governor he murdered the Deputy Governor Dr. Bauer and his private secretary Dr. Schneider. Both these German officials were shot near their residence. In Siebert's report this murder is described in the minutest detail.

"In Lvov Siebert shot several other people besides Bauer and Schneider. One of them was military police Major Kanter, for whom we had been looking for a long time.

"The details given in the report of the time and place of these murders, of the wounding of victims, of the arms that were seized, and so on, seem to be correct. A communication has been received from the Pritzmann field group that Paul Siebert and his two accomplices have been shot."

Thus died Nikolai Kuznetsov, our comrade-in-arms, who with unprecedented daring destroyed representatives of the German occupation authorities and sowed confusion among the brutal enemies of our country.

When we learned of his death, some comrades and I unsealed his letter. This was what we read:

To be opened after my death. Kuznetsov.

July 24, 1943. It will be eleven months tomorrow since I crossed into the rear of the enemy. At 00.05 hours on August 25, 1942, I came down by parachute mercilessly to avenge the blood and tears of our mothers and broth-

ers who are groaning under the yoke of the German occupants.

For eleven months I studied the enemy. I used the uniform of a German officer to penetrate into the lair of the satrap, the German tyrant in the Ukraine, Erich Koch.

I am now going over to action.

I am young and I love life. But if I shall have to sacrifice my life for my country, which I love as my own mother, I shall not hesitate. Let the nazis know what a Russian patriot and Bolshevik is capable of doing. Let them know that our people cannot be conquered just as the sun cannot be dimmed.

It matters not if I die because in the memory of my people patriots are immortal.

"Never mind that you have died, but in the song of brave and stout hearts you shall always be a living example, a proud call to freedom, to light. . . ."

This is from my favourite work by Gorky. I hope our young people will read it more frequently.

Yours,
Kuznetsov.

* * *

On November 5, 1944, by a decree of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., Nikolai Kuznetsov was posthumously decorated with the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

EPILOGUE

"Had it really been us?" Lukin exclaimed when he, Frolov and Tsessarsky were visiting me recently in Moscow and recalling our life as partisans.

Yes, indeed, had it really been us, the men in civilian clothes now sitting in a cosy apartment, men who were now wholly absorbed in peaceful work? Had we really been the people who had fought countless battles and had been engaged in hazardous operations? Had we really been

the sick and wounded who had jolted in carts along muddy, uneven roads without even dreaming of a clean bed or boiled drinking water? How strong and cheerful we had been!

It was now all a thing of the past.

The partisans who had fought with me were now scattered all over the Soviet Union. Some had returned to their factories or mills, others to collective farms, and still others had gone to study at institutes or technical schools. Most of the men remained in the localities where they had lived before the war and where our detachment had been active. All of them were now engaged in peaceful work and were contributing their knowledge, energy and experience to the gigantic programme of construction that was started after the war.

I frequently receive letters from my former comrades-in-arms, and when any of them come to Moscow on business they make a point of paying me a visit. That keeps me in touch with many of them.

Valya came to see me in Moscow in 1946. She had had some bitter experiences. At a time when we were already in liberated territory, she was being horribly tortured by the Gestapo. The hangmen wanted to know the whereabouts of Paul Siebert, the secret addresses, and the names of her comrades. Valya told them nothing. She was locked up in basements where Soviet people, murdered by the Germans, lay bathed in blood; she was taken out to be shot. It was dreadful to die at nineteen. But Valya bore all the torments and kept silent. Hoping to break her resistance, the Gestapo transferred her to Lvov and from there to West Germany.

V-Day found Valya in a concentration camp in Germany: from there she returned home.

Terenty Novak, Boris Krutikov, Valentin Semyonov and tens of other comrades went to study.

Marina Kikh, too, returned to her native Lvov, where she continued her education.

"We want you to share our joy," former partisans wrote to me from Lvov. "Our Marina is now a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukraine."

After the war Small Kolya went to school and then became a car mechanic. He is no longer small: he is taller than his commander. He wears his Partisan Medal First Class with pride.

Volodya, Kolya's war-time chum, now lives with his father and is finishing school.

In May 1946, the Central Board of the Union of Polish Patriots in the U.S.S.R. forwarded a letter to me from a woman named Grinshpan. She asked for "news of her son, who escaped death and, according to rumours, had been picked up by Colonel Medvedev's partisan detachment and sent to Moscow by plane."

We did not have to look far for Pinya. We knew he was in an orphanage near Moscow and sent the address to his mother. She was reunited with her son who she had believed dead.

Albert Tsessarsky has changed his profession: he is now an actor. He had dreamed of the stage in the days he was with our partisan detachment.

Nikolai Fadeyev, whose leg Tsessarsky amputated, manages a roller mill in Moldavia. He paid me a visit in the winter of 1946.

"We are in a bad way, Comrade Commander," he said. "My mill is idle most of the time. We've had a crop failure because of the drought."

"How's the artificial leg? Not having trouble with it?"

"No. I forget it isn't my own."

In September 1947, I received a letter from him: "We have more work at the mill than we can handle," he wrote. "The harvest this year has been excellent."

I recently visited Rovno, Lvov and other spots where our detachment operated during the war. With the Struński brothers, Shevchuk and Gnedyuk I toured many of the places we had been active in and everywhere we met

former comrades-in-arms. It was then that we hit upon the idea of holding a rally of the former partisans of our detachment. The rally was held in the Shevchenko Park, near the common grave of Kulikov, Galuzo and other intrepid partisans.

* * *

In one of her letters to me Valya recalled words that Nikolai Kuznetsov once uttered:

"I can imagine how everything in our country will be in flower in five or ten years after victory. What a wonderful life it will be. If anything happens to me I want you to know that I was the happiest man on earth because I fought to make this life possible."

I reread these words, which were written in Valya's hand.

"He was right," I said to myself. "The partisan struggle that we had waged and the grim trials that had fallen to our lot had been a great privilege."

"Had it really been us?" I reflected.

Yes, it had been us, ordinary Soviet people. The danger that had hung over our country in those days and the calls of the Party had multiplied our strength tenfold. If anybody ever again attacks us, thousands and millions of ordinary Soviet people will once again rise to the defence of their country and sacrifice their all for their Motherland.

1948

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In February 1942 the Germans shot seventeen prisoners of war—sailors of the Dnieper flotilla. They were ordinary men and they shared the fate of thousands of fighting men like them.

The author is a citizen of Kiev and a participant of the Great Patriotic War. He calls his startling book a tale of courage.

Pp. 196. Size 11×17 cm.

Y. PILYAR. IT ALL REALLY HAPPENED

In 1941 seventeen-year-old Yuri Pilyar volunteered for the front. In July 1942 he was heavily wounded and taken prisoner. Up till 1945 he was imprisoned in nazi concentration camps; for over two years he was a prisoner in Mauthausen camp. Pilyar was not only an observer of events but directly participated in them.

This book was written because somebody had to write it. It is the last will of those who perished. It is written not as a book of reminiscences but as a stern reminder and warning to the living.

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S. SMIRNOV. HEROES OF BREST FORTRESS

An old Russian fortress stands a mile from Brest, on the western border of the U.S.S.R. The defenders of the fortress were among the first to bear the brunt of the nazi offensive in the early hours of June 22, 1941. The Soviet garrison would not flinch before the overwhelming enemy. They fought courageously for every inch of their native land, destroying the enemy. And the nazi

troops were compelled to move on to the east, leaving the resisting fortress in the rear.

In one of their documents the Germans were forced to admit that "the Russians in Brest Litovsk fought with exceptional stubbornness and determination, they displayed superb infantry training and a splendid will to resist".

Sergei Smirnov's book is devoted to the feat of the heroes of the Brest Fortress. The author spent several years tirelessly looking up the Brest Fortress heroes and studying material about them.

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