

April 20, 2005

Dear brothers-in arms,

I was born in Kurgan in 1924. In 1932 I went to school, and after 7 years of studying I entered Medical school (nowadays Medical College), the Paramedical Department. I graduated from it in 1942, when the Great Patriotic War (World War II) was in full swing.

At that time in medical school there were a lot of male-students (though nowadays in Medical Schools there are mostly female-students). We thought that we would treat people medically, as far as we had been instructed, because we were getting ready to serve as paramedics on the front line. But as it turned out, we should have thought again. Our profession turned not to cure people, but to kill them.

Of course, that was not what we wanted. A Russian man is peaceful by nature. Besides, we were barely more than 18. But we had no choice. At that time the slogan was: Kill a German or he will kill you!

In two days after finishing our Medical School we were drafted into the Army and sent to Uval (a small settlement) into the 32<sup>nd</sup> Ski Regiment. Here we were sorted out, and those with better education were sent to the Zlatoust Infantry and Machine-Gun School. Before, this school had been a Field Engineer School, and our group was the first of a new profession. We were trained fast, rushed, one could even say. In four months you got a "square" in the buttonhole of your collar (*a sign of rank*), come on, Vanya, straight into the battle.

Having been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant, I got to the Volkhov front in the 54<sup>th</sup> Army as a platoon leader commander of a machine-gun platoon under General Fedyuninskiy's command. I took part in broadening the "corridor" which connected the Big Land and Leningrad." I was wounded and sent hospital. After my stay in the hospital I happened to join the 57<sup>th</sup> Army and took part in the battles at the Kursk Duga (Arch). At first we were in the second echelon (that was 5-6 km from the leading edge), and then on the front line.

The battles were the hardest. Psychologically it was especially hard during bombardments when from 40 to 50 "Yunkers" (make of a German bomber) dived on your regiment. Germans sprang some "bloodcurdling" surprises to frighten us. (E.g. they drilled an empty container, it was falling from the sky with such a whistle, that I was ready to bury myself in the ground, only not to hear it.) Tons of leaflets were dropped on us. They said, "Give yourself up, Ivan, you have no choice". They said that the Germans were commanded by aces, and we were hatched in incubators and that we were losers. But then we showed those "aces" what the Russian soldier was actually made of. Though there were many such guys as myself on the front. In 1944 the guys of the year of 1926 were drafted. It was the last call-up.

Later on I took part in the forced crossing of the Dnepr River during the Yasso-Kishinev operation. We had passed through Romania, marching almost all the way down to the Carpathian Mountains. The Romanian troops left the front line and together with their banners, went out and surrendered.

Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and again Hungary - there we liberated an old part of Budapest, Buda, occupied by the Germans. I would never forget taking the palace of Frances Joseph by storm when we fought with the enemy practically face to face: the first floor was occupied by the Russians, on the second floor there were Germans and on the third there were Russians again...

It depended on who would outwit who. The Russians turned to be more resourceful. Generally speaking, we should give the Russian soldier the credit he deserves, though he would be called Ivan for his simple soul. First of all, that very Ivan was brave, and second of all, with instinctive wit.

Without this we would have failed to win.

Budapest was conquered. After Budapest there was a fast rush to Vienna. This most beautiful city was conquered without big battles. Vienna was not damaged, even from bombing. Our High Command ordered pilots not to rake the city with fire. From there we went through Zena, Shtakertz, Kren, Kemerford where we met our valorous allies - Americans.

But this meeting was preceded by one episode. Our training battalion shut down the only pass through the Austrian Alps, through which the rest of German forces could escape. There were no more roads. I was ordered by my battalion commander to get to the ambush point with all my 12 machine guns. By that time I was Senior Lieutenant, though I was not yet 20. We fortified our position in the mountains, and round the clock we repelled the attacks of the Germans at this pass. They would like to go to Italy and surrender there to Americans or Englishmen. They dreaded Russians. They thought we would take vengeance upon them, send them to Siberia, where they would die. But they had to surrender to us.

After coming back to my battalion we went for Lints. The allied commandant's office was situated in Lints. Here there were Russians, Americans and Brits. And all around you could feel, that the war was coming to an end. And, you know, there was such a special sensation: none of us wanted to die, after all so many things had already been over and so much had been suffered! By that time I had been in hospitals four times, I was wounded especially badly after crossing the Dnepr, in the area of a notorious village Borodaevka, where there were very hard battles. ... And to die at the end of the war?

In the morning of the May 9<sup>th</sup>, in 1945 we had come to a halt. I was dozing on the vehicle. Then my batman woke me up, and fanfare was playing! That signal sounded when the senior commander called officers to him, up to the company commander, and I already had a company commander. I mounted a horse and started trotting, not to bump into soldiers (a halt, you see!), to the beginning of our column. And here someone could not stand it any longer and cried out, «Victory!». Later it turned out that radio operators had failed to keep the information and let the cat out of the bag: they had been the first who knew that Germany had capitulated that night.

Unimaginable pleasure! You bet, the soldier had been heading towards that day for so many years! Such shooting arose there, as many cartridges as that had not been spent when in action! The barrels with wine appeared from the carts. The halt was set up for three hours. The soldiers were allowed to doze. But the officers got an order not to relax, because a strayed German column might appear and shoot down our soldiers. And near the town of Kemerfark, almost in its outskirts, we stopped. There our moving forward was finished.

The order came: a monthly rest. First we struck tents, then started to build a camp. We were formally on guard. The Vienna – Linz motorway separated two occupation zones: Soviet and American. One could observe a curious picture at each crossing: here there was an American outpost, and all the army officers in Jeeps (which we called “Willies”), and then there was Ivan in the trenches. And here you are, Russians and Americans came together and treated each other to vodka. And their conversations were the same - about home, family and children. But how did they really speak with each other? Some times with gestures, sometimes with mimicry, but they understood each other, you know! Americans were sick of this war too. They also wanted to go back home.

The American soldiers remained in my memory as very friendly people. The only thing I didn't like in the American army, was that white officers were hard on black soldiers. All the blacks were maintenance staff (drivers, technicians). White officers even beat them. And one more essential difference from our Army was that in our Army, a company commander was to have a saddle horse (but not for a platoon leader commander), whereas in their Army, as I have already mentioned, all the high rank officers were got to have “Willie” jeeps. Starting with the position of a company

commander they got a driver, but as for platoon leader commanders, they got no drivers--let them steer themselves!

And then there was hold a holiday for officers, to which the guests from the across-the- way military unit were invited. WE invited them according to the principle: to invite an equal rank officer, not higher, let's say, an ensign could not invite a first lieutenant. We were explained the badges of rank in the US Army. I invited "my" American guest, brought him to my subdivision, and showed him everything. It's a pity that I don't remember his name, because now I would like to meet him with pleasure and talk with him.

The buffet was served in the open air, near a mountain stream. The party was a success. Only that the Americans were very much surprised that the Russians drank so much. They said, "We drink a lot, but those Russians outdo us!" And they decided to give a reciprocal dinner. But they agreed to invite different soldiers from those who had invited the Americans because they felt that the more soldiers that would get acquainted with each other, the better. I was told about it by that person who had invited me: my equal (I don't remember his name).

The Regiment Commander ordered us in no indefinite terms not to booze it up. He suggested that we should take our batmen, just in case, to carry out their commanders from the "battlefield". But everything turned out right. We have much fun, none of the officers "excelled", and even our "propagandists" (politruk) failed to find something wrong with us. The next morning our Regiment Commander lined us up and expressed his gratitude.

That is how I finished my war. After my general release I worked in the militia (police), the Criminal Department, and I was the head of Kurgan City Police Station. I have never got an occasion to work in medicine (the profession that I studied in my youth). The war changed my plans abruptly. I have spent most of my life in uniform, but I do not regret anything. The war made a warrior from a dreamy teenager, taught me how to manage people, and though I was 18- 19 years old at that time, I had to command 40 and 50 year old people. I used this experience in my post-war life. Last year I celebrated my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Even though I am not becoming a nouveau riche, my good country provided me with everything. My pension is quite enough to have a comfortable life for myself and to assist my three daughters and their children. And next January, 2006, my wife Zoya and I, if we live long enough, will celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our marriage – a brilliant marriage.

Best regards,

Boris Aleksandrovich Bogachev,  
a platoon leader commander of a machine-gun platoon