

April 20, 2005

Dear brothers-in-arms,

I was born September 28, 1924, into a peasant family in the settlement of Ostravnoye, Mishynskiy District, Kurgan Region. I have a higher education, and I am a retired police colonel and a disabled veteran of the Second World War. After graduating Mishynskiy secondary school on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942, I enlisted in the Red Army. I started my service as a military student at the Valikovskiy Airschool of Mechanics (Miass, Chelyabinsk Region). Then I was transferred to the military infantry school in Tyumen.

In late January, 1943, we military students were sent to the southwestern front as part of the Red Banner Division of the National Guard #79. Upon arriving at the front, I was assigned to a 120mm mortar unit of the Guard as a loader. In June, 1943, I was transferred to a platoon as a reconnaissance scout. I took part in the liberation of Ukraine, and in particular, the cities of Slavyanagorsk, Zaporozhie, and Odessa. On June 13, 1934, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was transferred to the first Belarussian front, in the area of the cities of Kovel and Sarna. During the advance operations, I took part in liberating Poland and the cities of Lyublin, Warsaw, and Poznan.

During the Berlin operation, I took part in storming the Zeelov Heights. I was wounded three times during my war career, and every time I came back to the unit not fully recovered, because I "escaped" from hospitals. I was discharged in 1947, but in 1951, I was drafted back into the Soviet Army, and served in the Zabaikalskiy military area, in the 14<sup>th</sup> Motorized Khingang division as an assistant commander of a propaganda subdivision, and later as a superintendent of the club of tank regiment. I was discharged from the army again in 1957, and then worked as a party leader: first as a secretary of a party committee of a Soviet farm, then as a secretary of the regional committee in Mishkyn District, Kurgan Region.

In March, 1969, I was assigned to the police and worked there up to January, 1981, as a propagandist. In 1981, I was discharged as a colonel due to poor health. Presently, I am the chairman of the Veterans Council, of the Kurgan police department. I was decorated with Orders of Glory of the Third Grade, Order of World War II of the Second Grade, and with medals for Courage, for Victory Over Germany, for Liberating Warsaw, for the Siege of Berlin, and the medal of Marshall Zhukov, and for Commendable Labor, for Liberating Belarus, for Faultless Service (Grades 1, 2, and 3), and 12 Anniversary medals.

...It was at the Kyustrinsk beachhead over the Oder river. There was only 69km left to Berlin, and there was heavy war activity. The Germans were constantly bombing, making artillery strikes, just the same as our artillery and air force. There was much talk of advancing, and we were getting ready to advance, but nobody knew when. But three days before advancing, the life at the beachhead became more active. At night time, new subdivisions arrived and artillery units of different calibers were fortified. In the evening of April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945, leaflets appeared which informed us of the beginning of the Berlin operation. We knew that that would be the last dash, and we were sure that the enemy would be smashed in his lair in Berlin. Everybody was glad because the war would soon be over, and at last the long awaited peace would come.

On the night of April 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>, some powerful trucks with something hidden inside were moving through our positions to the front line. In the morning we found out that they were carrying powerful spotlights. My unit commander, Arbatsky, and I, were at the observation post. Sleep did not come. Eventually, we were filled with some anxiety because we knew that the Germans would hold their ground.

On April 16<sup>th</sup>, at 3:00AM sharp, the entire sky was lit up by flashes: the artillery strike had started. The unit commander cried "fire!" and thousands of guns, mortars, "Andryushas" and "Katyushas," spewed out all their fiery wrath onto the front line of the Fascists. Besides, we turned on those powerful spotlights, which blinded the Germans. For 20 minutes, on the front line of the enemy, there was an actual fire tornado. Everything sank into black smoke. We kept yelling "Fire! Fire!" In front of our observation post, the infantry started attacking, and they followed the fiery wave into the enemy's trenches. That marked the beginning of the advance. In spite of our overwhelming supremacy in numbers, guns, and technology, we failed to take the Zeelov Heights on the first attempt. The Germans fought back desperately, and only on our third attempt did we succeed.

We entered Berlin, its southeastern part, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, 1945, late at night. The unit camped out in the premises of some medical institution. The unit commander was called to headquarters, whereas the infantry was assigned to attack in the direction of the Empire Chancellory and the Reichstag. Our unit was supposed to support the other artillery subdivisions. The battles in Berlin were fierce: at each intersection, barricades and other obstructions had been set up. The first floors of multi-storied buildings were well equipped as pill boxes. The infantry fought in small groups of 5 to 10 men, penetrating the buildings, fast and unexpectedly. As a mortar unit, we didn't have much work. We were using 45, 76, and 85mm guns and tanks. They were transferred to a direct line of fire and they shot at any target which appeared. But sometimes, the commanders of the artillery platoons asked to "give them a light," to shoot at clusters of Germans in yards, on squares, and in buildings. We fought day and night.

On April 30<sup>th</sup>, we arrived in the center of Berlin, about a kilometer and a half from the Reichstag. 300 meters from our unit there was a well fortified bunker, from which Germans were firing heavily from large caliber sub machine guns. We decided to take that bunker. We were given the assignment of making a hole in the wall of it, through which our reconnaissance unit could penetrate and demolish the opposing enemy. We breached the wall, an attacking group rushed into the hole, took the Germans out with grenades, and the bunker was taken.

It was May the 1<sup>st</sup>. In the evening of that day, Hitler's soldiers started to surrender. They put white flags out of their windows, and surrendered in whole groups. That was the end of the Berlin operation. On May the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the commander of my reconnaissance unit, Boris Yakovlev, suggested that we should go to the Brandenburg Gate. We agreed. It was 500 meters up to the Reichstag, and without a second thought, we started towards there. We approached those who were drawing on the walls of the Reichstag. Its walls were really scratched up and illustrated, and there was no space untouched. But we found a narrow stretch and engraved our initials.

In the afternoon of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, our unit left the position and started for a new position outside of Berlin. On our way along one of the Berlin streets a shot was fired from a panzerfaust, and the shell fell straight into the regiment's kitchen. Cook Dmitriev, who had gone through the entire war from Stalingrad to Berlin, was injured with 17 pieces of shrapnel in the belly and died in our arms. That was the sad end to this war for us, which lasted 4 years.

Best regards,

Grigory Mikhailovich Fomin