

April 20, 2005

Dear brothers-in-arms,

I have served 7 years. I was drafted on January 1943 into the Infantry School, I was 17, the course of studies was brief, instead of one year, just half a year. The curriculum was covered, and by Stalin's order we were sent rank and file to the front line. I got into a submachine gun company, in each regiment there were two of them, one protected the banner, the command post, the other was in reserve at the Regiment Commander's disposal, where there were difficulties there were these tommy-gunners.

In the battle near Prokhorovka at the Kursk Duga I was immured by a German "Tiger" tank—it ran over me and kept going. It was good that a second before a shell had exploded nearby and I was contused and wounded in my leg. I fell face down to the bottom of the hole, and evidently, that was the reason that I had enough oxygen to survive, and my friend from the next hollow saw everything and dug me out. He bound my wound somehow and only in the evening a paramedic took me to the medical battalion, but that very "Tiger" only got 100 meters from my "grave" and it was shot to pieces by our tanks. At first, I was gravely concussed, unconscious, and spent 20 days in the medical battalion. Later, I was wounded twice by shrapnel in the leg and in the head. The latter injury was severe—it took months to recover from it in different hospitals.

During the war we knew that our allies helped us. Up to 1944, before the second front was opened, I was in infantry school and I remember that we were fed with American canned meat and ham. On the front I saw the Studebeker for the first time, strong vehicles, they draw guns and delivered freight.

After my third injury in 1944, there was an enlistment into the aircraft division and my friend Boris and myself enrolled there. I became a charge man, then gunlayer, and finally machine gun commander. We guarded the railway and motorway bridges over the Dneipr. The Germans made fly-bys every night. And American B-17's flew from England to bomb Berlin and landed at our airfield at Poltava, where they were fueled up, loaded with new bombs and flew back over Berlin. That's how we fought alongside our American allies on one and the same land. But I remember a curious incident—one time we didn't discern who was flying, as the clouds were low, and the visibility was poor. It turned out we raked these planes with fired because they flew at very high altitude, but thank God, our guns failed to get them, even though they fired at a range of 9 kilometers.

I have one military award—the medal for "Military Service," exactly for the battle at the end of 1944 when Germans unexpectedly appeared in the rear, probably retreating through the front. My friend and I were well prepared with our Shpagin submachine-guns, with two clips and two grenades, and we decided to let them come a little closer. Soon they appeared, and ran straight towards us in a line. Some of them had rifles, others with submachine guns, and the closest ones were all killed.

As for the award being the only one, it is because at Kursk-Duga and at Kharkov, our platoon fulfilled the mission, but our commanders perished and there was nobody to appoint us for awards. I was awarded with this medal at home in 1952 in our district's military office. Later for my three injuries, I was awarded with the "Order of the Great Patriotic War of the First Degree."

I returned to Kurgan in 1950 and I started my work as senior switchman on the railroad, then as the foreman of the Testing Department, then lumberjack, and finally the longest of all, for 38 years until my retirement, I worked at the "Synthesis" pharmaceutical factory.

I married my fiancée, Galina (a native of my native village of Cheshinsk, where our wedding also took place) in 1950. We had lived together for 52 years, now my Galina is no longer with me. My spouse had been ill for a long time until 3 years ago, my children and I lost her. My first daughter, Tatyana, was born in 1951, Lilia, in 1954, and they both live in Kurgan now. Lilia works in the veterinary laboratory. My granddaughter, Alla (Lilia's daughter), is a good

cook, and works at school and is finishing the Economic Faculty of Kurgan Agricultural Academy. Of my grandsons, Eugene, is an engine driver. Alexei works in the canine department of a correctional facility. Anatoli is finishing the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in high school. On the first of May, 2005, I will be 80 years old. But the war years are unforgettable.

Best regards,

Ivan Nichkov,  
Antiaircraft Gun Commander