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**Title: Local vets share memories with Russian brothers**  
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APPLETON -- As young men fighting for freedom during World War II, Allied soldiers like Dr. Blaine "Bud" Claypool and Boris Bogachev both likely wrote wartime letters home addressed "somewhere in Europe."

The men -- one American, one Russian -- never knew each other, although they crossed foreign soil to help protect the world against the domination of Nazi Germany.

They are now continents apart. Claypool is a retired physician from Combined Locks and Bogachev is a retired police chief from Appleton's Russian sister city of Kurgan. But the veterans recently shared their experiences through a commemorative project spearheaded by Appleton and Kurgan Rotary clubs.

"It's the opportunity to try to remember a great generation that is dying off very quickly," said Peter Kelly, an Appleton Rotarian who is involved with the Fox Cities-Kurgan Sister Cities Program, which links the two diverse communities. "I know they feel a sense of pride in being able to share their stories. They maybe feel a bit closer bond."

In time for the 60th anniversary of victory in Europe on May 8, a handful of World War II veterans from the sister communities traded wartime memories in letters and e-mails.

Claypool sent over a copy of a letter he had written to his parents on April 27, 1945.

His description of the concentration camp Buchenwald -- where he treated survivors -- was the first correspondence that his commanding officers hadn't censored for the soldiers' protection, he said.

"I was thrilled to see this letter could still be used," Claypool said. "It is something that is going to bring us together. It will bring ... a little closure. I met one or two Russian prisoners at the camp and it's coming full circle."

Bogachev, whose tour of duty sidetracked him from a career in medicine, says in his letter that American and Russian soldiers socialized at outposts and treated each other to vodka.

"And their conversations were the same," Bogachev wrote, "about home, family and children. But how did they really speak with each other? Sometimes 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."

Ivan Nichkov of Kurgan, a retired factory worker, remembers thanking God that his aircraft division was able to avoid striking American fighters with "friendly fire" as the Allies together defended an airspace obscured by low-hung clouds.

"On the first of May, 2005, I will be 80 years old," Nichkov wrote in his letter. "But the war years are unforgettable."

Kelly said the Appleton Rotarians plan to preserve the letters in a bound booklet and on the Internet.

Carl Stracka of Appleton included a memory he'd submitted to a newsletter for the U.S. Air Force's 455th Bomb Group.

"It isn't a real gory story about fighter attacks," Stracka said. "I always carried the name and address of my mother's first cousin (in Austria) in my boots in case I was shot and bailed out."

At the same time, he said, duty called him to carry out his bombing runs near the steel mill where his relative worked.

Many years later, when Stracka finally was able to accompany his mother overseas, the relative shared this story: While gardening he'd uncovered a World War II-era bomb, a dud that had gone astray.

"I hope (the Russian veterans) think about it the same way I did," Stracka said. "There were guys like me who were fighting the war to win. I had no hard feelings ... toward anyone we bombed."

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 ON THE WEB

Fox Cities-Kurgan Sister Cities program:

[www.foxcitieskurgan.org](http://www.foxcitieskurgan.org)

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*Author: Kara Patterson, Post-Crescent staff writer*

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