Brief recollections of World War II–by the son of a Soviet military leader and Left Oppositionist murdered by Stalin: Part 1

Yuri Primakov
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This is part one of a two-part series. Read part two here.

These recollections about the Nazi-Soviet war of 1941–45 were written by Yuri Primakov, who experienced the war as a teenager, and is now 94 years old. Yuri Primakov was born in 1927 and lives in Moscow. He was born into a revolutionary family. His mother, Maria Dovzhik, fought in the civil war but left the Bolshevik Party in 1922. His father, Vitaly Primakov, joined the Bolshevik in 1914. At age 19 he became a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee, which, under the leadership of Leon Trotsky, organized the seizure of power in October 1917. He later became a leading commander in the Red Army during the civil war and a member of the Left Opposition. In 1937, Vitaly Primakov, along with virtually the entire leadership of the Red Army, was arrested and executed. The mass murder of Red Army leaders was part of the Great Terror, in which almost a million people were killed in 1937–1938, among them virtually the entire leadership of the Bolshevik Party of 1917 and the Soviet Left Opposition. Often, the family members of revolutionaries too were either killed or sent into camps. The Great Terror disarmed the Soviet and international working class in the face of the Nazi war threat.

The decapitation of the Red Army convinced Hitler and the Wehrmacht leadership that no serious resistance could be expected from the USSR. They were mistaken. Despite the crimes of Stalinism, the Soviet people rose up to defend the conquests of the October revolution against the fascist counterrevolution, but at a tremendous cost. At least 27 million Soviet citizens were killed in the war, among them an estimated 2 million Jews, 3 million Soviet POWs, and millions of civilians.

The fact that Yuri Primakov survived the war was, in large measure, the product of chance: due to poor vision he could not join the army and instead worked at an army hospital. Among his generation, almost all men, many just boys, were drafted or fought with the partisans; the vast majority of them fell.

His recollections of the war are a unique document. They illustrate the horrific crimes of Nazism, but also the enormous disorientation, confusion, and senseless death caused by the Stalinist bureaucracy. We have made some slight edits, for the sake of historical clarity, and added endnotes. Comments by the editor are in brackets. Part one recounts the first year and a half of the war, beginning in the summer of 1941 and going through 1942. During that time the Red Army suffered major losses and the Wehrmacht advanced into Soviet Russia, towards the Volga River. Large parts of the Soviet population, as well as major factories, were evacuated from the western USSR and moved to the Urals, Siberia and Central Asia. It was the largest mass evacuation in human history.

1941

In 1941 I went for a vacation to Chernigov [also Chernihiv, a city in northern Ukraine] to see my grandfather and grandmother, my mother's parents. My grandmother's name was Mera Zelikovna, my grandfather's name was Aron Markovich. Grandfather worked as an accountant and grandmother was a housewife. Grandpa was a native to Chernigov, grandmother was from the village of Baturin. My mother's family name was Dovzhik. By then, my father's mother, Varvara Nikolaevna Primakov, was already in a [Soviet] camp. The father of Vitaly Markovich Primakov, Mark Grigorievich, had died from the beatings of the Petliura gang in 1920.[1]

In 1941, I had finished the seventh grade in school. I was 14 years old.

On June 22, my comrades and I went swimming in the river Desna. We were swimming with rafts. Then the air-raid siren began to howl.

– A drill, again, said Igor,—how much howling can they do?

– Let's swim a bit more and then we'll go home, Osya decided.

The boys were three years older than me and I agreed with them. Moreover, since 1940 there had been training drills from time to time in Moscow as well. By the time that we had already come out of the water and decided to go home, the siren again began to howl. Taking our time, we went up the bank—one of the most beautiful spots in town. All citizens loved to go for walks there. Cannons from the times of the Crimean War [of 1853–56] were placed on the bank, there was the house of the clerk Lizogub, which the inhabitants of Chernigov usually referred to as the house of Mazeppa, as well as old churches, in which Prince Igor had held a prayer service before the campaign against the Polovtsians [a Turkic nomadic people who invaded Kievan Rus' in 1185]. Chernigov was one of the oldest towns of Kievan Rus'. In the 19th century, it had gone into total decline and become just an average provincial town where unruly students were sent from St. Petersburg after the events of 1905 [the Russian revolution of 1905].

The siren was howling the whole time and that was unusual. As we walked up the embankment and passed by a woman who was grazing a cow on the grassy slope of the bank, Osya asked:

– What's going on with the sirens? Why are they howling all the time? Are they broken or what?

– It's war, boys. The Germans have attacked. And they bombed Kiev.

We hurried back home. When we were crossing the Red Square—the main square in the town before the war—past the new Shchors movie theater, we heard V.M. Molotov,[2] the Commissar of Foreign Affairs, through the loudspeakers. He was stammering more than usual, and this alarmed us. It meant the war was real. Red Army soldiers with helmets and rifles were standing at several places in the corners of the square. They had bags with gas masks hanging over their shoulders. We ran home. And were promptly scolded by our parents. No one knew what was going on in the country. We had a brand new SI-235 receiver in our

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bedroom at home. We twisted and twisted the knobs as much as we could but nothing apart from songs and marches was being transmitted.

The next day, the announcer on the radio said that heavy fighting was taking place on the Western border, and that in addition to Germany, the USSR was also attacked by Finland and Romania. There were battles along the entire Western border. Our troops were inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy and counterattacking them. Stalin was silent and that was the most amazing thing. After all, it was he who had all the power in the country and who had signed a peace treaty with Hitler.[3] After this treaty [from August 23, 1939] our German teacher explained to us, "*Der Deutsche Führer ist Adolf Hitler und unser Führer ist Genosse Stalin*" ["The German Führer is Adolf Hitler and our Führer is comrade Stalin"]. Everything was very simple. The Anglo-French imperialists wanted to draw us into a war, but the wise comrade Stalin had made an agreement with Hitler, and everything turned out well. The working people of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Bessarabia completely voluntarily wanted to join the Soviet Union, and we couldn't refuse them.[4] We sent our troops there upon their request and thereby defended them from war. Why our friend Hitler would be a threat to them was incomprehensible. Newspapers and journals printed articles about the victories of the brave and skilled German army, and announcements by comrade Voroshilov, the commissar of defense, that the war would be fought only on enemy territory and that only little blood would be spilled. Everyone was singing a new favorite song from the movie *If War Comes Tomorrow*: "And on the enemy's land we will defeat the enemy with little blood, with a mighty blow."

Now, after June 22, it was precisely this song which was constantly played on the radio together with songs from the civil war. Later, the more solemn and somber song *Vstavai strana ogromnaya* was played ["Arise, great country," arguably the most popular WWII song in the USSR. Also known as "Sacred War"]. In the songs, everything sounded fine, but it was impossible to understand what was going on at the front. Fighting was still going on in the area of Lviv and Brest, the enemy suffered heavy losses, but our troops did not go on the offensive. An order was broadcast on the radio to hand over all radios and all weapons to the police within three days—small caliber rifles and hunting rifles. Grandfather gave away our new receiver, Igor's father gave away their old double-barreled rifle, and the neighbor gave away his small-bore rifle. Why, no one understood. Perhaps the war was now already ending and it would not come to partisan warfare on our territory? Movie theaters began showing anti-fascist movies (*The Oppenheim Family*, *Professor Mamlock*) which had disappeared from the movie screens right after the signing of the pact with Hitler. In the movies, the fascists persecuted only the Jews and good Germans were upset about this, and the German people did not approve of this outrage at all. Everyone was anxious, but most were confident that the war would not reach Chernigov.

Then, finally, on July 3, Stalin spoke on the radio. For the first and last time he called the inhabitants of this country brothers and sisters and his friends. He said that the attack was treacherous and sudden, that the treaty with Hitler had been necessary, but that our cause was just and victory would be ours.

We continued to go swimming and were sure that by the fall the war would be over. We would go back to school, and everything would be as it was. But disturbing rumors were floating around the city. Some said that the Germans were dropping their landing troops everywhere, everyone was dressed like we were and spoke without an accent. Vigilance was in order. In the city, people had begun already in early July to darken their windows and there were paper curtains on the windows. No one knew where the front was. There was still food at the market and bread in the stores.

Suddenly, one day, when we went swimming as usual in the Desna River, on our way back near the Palace of Pioneers (the former synagogue), we saw a small truck (1.5 t GAZ). There were rows of round holes on the wooden boards. They were drilled like a ruler. There were several people in the truck. Most of them were old, bearded Jews with briefcases or small suitcases. A few Ukrainian guys and girls.

– Where are you coming from, boys?

– From Rechytsa [a town in Belarus].

– And why did you come here?

– Well, the Germans are in Rechytsa. Their tanks came in. They were at one end of the town, and we were at the other.

Osya and Igor looked at each other, and we hurried home. Rechytsa was less than 180 kilometers [about 112 miles] away from Chernigov. In the morning, panic gripped the town. There were no troops at all in the town. The authorities were fleeing the town in cars, in wagons, in whatever way they could. Many tried to leave by train to Russia. By the 10th of July some people were returning to the town after the Germans had bombed a train near Gomel; then German fighter planes flew at ground level to strafe the people fleeing from the wagons. It was a very bad situation. No one knew where the front was. The radio continued to report on the fighting on the Western front and how our troops were successfully resisting. A German prisoner of war was driven through the cities of Ukraine; he told everyone in Russian and Ukrainian how the German people did not like Hitler and how they were ready to help the Red Army. This man spoke Ukrainian without an accent, which caused some skepticism. Many began to think that he was not so German. On July 11 my grandfather came with unexpected news.

– Tomorrow we're going on a steamboat. I bought tickets. We'll take Yura to Moscow, and then we'll see. He mustn't be late to school.

We quickly packed our things. Grandma loaded the main treasure—a huge bottle of cherry liquor—into the basket.

– When the war is over, we'll celebrate and come back. Maybe I'll still have time to collect a new harvest, and we'll put another bottle on the table. There'll be one for next year.

And in the evening of July 12 we found ourselves on a small steamboat, to which a barge was attached. Up to Novgorod-Severski, the Desna River is quite wide. Osya Mezhirov had left for Moscow even earlier, while the family of Igor Moroko had decided to stay in the town. The town wasn't bombed, and we didn't know which planes were flying over our heads. At that time we could not yet distinguish the intermittent howling of German planes from the steady hum of Soviet planes. The steamer sailed very slowly against the current of the river. Both the steamer and the barge were full of people. I got to know my peers. I was closest to Vanya [nickname for Ivan] Skidan and his friend Dora Baskina. Ivan traveled with his mother and younger brother; Dora with her mother and younger siblings. Ivan was a handsome tall guy, very kind and brave. Dora was a beautiful and cheerful girl. At the time, I was only 14 years old, they were a little older than me. Ivan was Ukrainian and Dora was Jewish.

There were many Jews on the ship. In the USSR they sometimes wrote about Hitler's policies toward the Jews, and some people figured it was better to join the [Red] army or leave. On the road, I finished reading a book in German, *Eine Frau fährt durch die Welt* [A Woman Travels across the World]. It was the story of a German communist who was carrying out party work and traveled to all kinds of places on important missions.

We arrived in Novogorod-Severska and suddenly we heard on the radio that England had become our ally and that we were no longer alone. Some on the shore were so happy about this that they boarded the same steamer again and sailed back to Chernigov. I will remember this small group of people until the end of my life. They turned back, going straight to their death. The overwhelming majority of them were Jews; they immediately believed in a miracle. All the more so since the radio announced all the time how successfully our troops were fighting off all attacks by the enemy. But grandma and grandpa, Vanya and Dora boarded another,

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smaller, steamboat, and we continued our way up the river. We reached Trubchevsk. We dragged our things to the railroad and the first thing we saw were wagons lying near the tracks. It was obvious that the German air force had recently been here. In the evening we were given a freight train and we went farther to the north in freight cars.

Then our wagons were hitched to a large train carrying disarmed Red Army soldiers to the east. They were guarded by less than a dozen guards. A machine gun was installed on the locomotive. These Red Army soldiers were Germans from different places in the USSR. Suddenly, they were deemed untrustworthy, the authorities believed that they could go over to the enemy at any time and they were sent to the rear. These people spoke Russian just as well as we did, they were our people, Soviet people, but Stalin did not trust them. A whole train of soldiers was on its way to the rear, and it was guarded by Russian Red Army soldiers, who only yesterday had been the comrades of these fighters. There were very few guards, and the Germans freely left the wagons. When German planes dropped troops near Bryansk, all the escorts rushed into the woods to capture the enemies. None of the German Red Army men even thought of escaping.

We were sitting on the platform, waiting for someone to ask us to lend them a hand. Nobody asked us. Our elders strictly told us not to leave. We were the main men on the train. We ran to get food for the evacuees when the train stopped, we helped carry cans of food, we carried bread in our shirts from distant grocery stores—we took off our shirts, buttoned them up and stuffed loaves of bread in them. We didn't have any bags. The evacuees received all produce and food at the stations for free. It was important to manage to get back to the train in time. No one knew when it might leave the station. Military trains and trains with factory equipment were the first to be let through.

After we had passed Bryansk we were told that the train would go to Bashkiria [a Soviet republic between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains, inhabited predominantly by the Bashkirs, a Turkic people]. We met the first trains of refugees from Moscow. They were shouting from the wagons, telling us that Moscow was under heavy bombardment. In early August we arrived in Ufa [the capital city of Bashkiria]. After Ufa, the train sped up. Some people decided to go to Ishimbay—oil fields had recently been discovered there. But my grandmother and grandfather decided to go to the countryside. My grandmother had been born in the countryside and was more accustomed to village life. We arrived in Sterlitamak, and from there we took a train to the village of Saraisy.

And so our village life began. We were lodged with a *kolkhoznitsa* [collective farmer]. She did not speak Russian well, her son translated for her; he was a schoolboy around my age. On the second day, I went with my grandpa to the fields, and we would flail the grain with chains on the threshing floor. It is heavy work, and since I wasn't used to it, I became tired. Grandpa became even more tired, and he was relieved of this responsibility. I was sent to work with a combine. Together with a little boy from Bashkiria I poured grain from the hopper into bags and put them on the side. The bags were very heavy, but we had to hurry. The harvest was good and the bunker of the combine quickly filled up. Then we had to load the bags into a truck. Sometimes grown men helped us, a tractor driver and combine harvester. They gave us delicious food in the field and we ate until we were full. Everyone had a good appetite. I learned some words in the Bashkir language that were necessary for work: "utyr"—sit down,"etar"—it'senough,"tukhta"—stop,"ipmak"—bread,"pysak"—knife, and a few others.

One day when I came home from work I saw that the son of the house was reading a book. The pictures seemed familiar, but I couldn't read it. It was the novel by Jules Verne, *Eighty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* in the Bashkir language. And I again realized what enormous achievements Soviet power had made in a very short period of time. Before the revolution, the Bashkirs had no written language. The mullahs and the educated people read and wrote in Arabic, the language of the Quran. Within 10 years, they created not only a written language out of a mixture of Russian and Latin letters, but also translated many works of world literature into the Bashkir language, so that children could read them in their own language.

Hygiene in the village was poor and I fell ill with severe dysentery. Very quickly I became so weak that I barely made it to the regional hospital. The paramedic said: "The little one is very thin. He might live another two weeks." There was no medication. Grandma made me some skimmed milk, but this only worsened my condition. This was in early September. They sent a telegram to my mother, "Yura is dying. Come to say goodbye." After two weeks, my mother came. By some miracle, they had let her off work and gave her a pass [*propusk*, these were necessary to be able to move around in the Soviet Union.] She brought medication and white bread. I began recovering and mother returned to Moscow. She was the head of the emergency room at the Botkin hospital. Since the beginning of the war, the hospital had been turned into a military hospital.

I couldn't work in the field anymore and was assigned to be on duty at the village council. I had to be on duty at night and record telegrams and briefs of the Information Bureau. One day, I accidentally found an extraordinary book on the shelf: Ernst Henri, *Hitler against the USSR* [*Gitler protiv SSSR*]. This book was published in 1936 and then banned.[5] In it, I found diagrams of possible operations by the German troops in case of an attack by Hitler on the USSR.

The most amazing thing was that these diagrams corresponded exactly to the location of the flags on the map that hung in the village council. This means that there was nothing surprising about the German plans! We even knew about them well before the war! The next morning, when I told my grandpa about this book, he took me outside the village and said firmly, looking me right in the eyes: "If your father and his comrades were alive, we would not be sitting here today. Everything would have been different." We never spoke about it [the Great Terror] again.

My mother had already told me back in 1937, very strictly, that if I ever mentioned my father and his comrades, we would be arrested—as many of our neighbors in the house in Potylikha [a district in Moscow] were arrested. Back then, people were disappearing, one after another, and no one knew who would be next.

1942

After a week, mother returned from Ufa. The Germans had advanced to Moscow, the city had been declared to be in a state of siege, and no one was allowed into Moscow. Maria Aronovna [Dovzhik, his mother] was appointed the regional epidemiologist, and we moved to the regional center, Sterlibashevo. There, I attended school and finished eighth grade. In February, I turned 15. In the spring, after the Germans had been driven away some from Moscow, mother was allowed to return to Moscow and take me with her. Grandmother and grandfather went to Novosibirsk to stay with the family of uncle Sema [Samuil Aronovich Dovzhik, doctor of the technical sciences, the recipient of the Stalin prize for creating the first wind tunnel at the Central Aerohydronamic Institute]. On the way to Moscow, we picked up as much food as we could. Most important was a supply of dried potatoes. The Bashkirs had very good methods of preserving potatoes. The potato is peeled, cut into thin slices and dipped for a minute in steep boiling water and then dried on a Russian stove. It can be preserved for several years this way and tastes like noodles. This supply was a big help until mother received food ration cards. People in Moscow were starving.

In Moscow they let me work as an orderly in the Botkin Hospital, and in

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May I began to carry stretchers with the wounded. In 1942, the wounded were brought to us from the Central Front, the First Belarusian Front, the Ukrainian Front, and from the Partisan region [regions that were held and defended from the Germans by the partisans]. They were usually brought to us in the evening and at night. There were frequent air raids but, unlike in 1941, Moscow was no longer being bombed. I remember carrying a stretcher with a soldier who had been wounded in the stomach. He told me how he had managed to crawl back to his own people [the Red Army]. He had been wounded during the attempt to seize Mozhaisk [a city in the Moscow region] from the Germans. That was summer, 1942. The soldiers had one rifle for three men. The wounded fighter never made it to the German positions. Instead of a rifle, he had a shovel. In school in Bashkiria we had been taught techniques for a bayonet fight with a small and a large sapper's shovel. The entire school had only one training rifle.

The news coming from the front was not good. Our troops were retreating toward the Caucasus and the Volga. Sometimes I slept in our room in a communal apartment in Potylikha. We managed to plant a small vegetable garden for potatoes. That, too, helped in addition to the food rations. In the middle of the summer I attended school. It was possible to attend the ninth and tenth grades by distance learning. I learned during the day and had guard duty during the night.

In the middle of the summer, the husband of aunt Zhenya suddenly called us over the phone and came to visit us. Aunt Zhenya had been adopted by the Dovzhik family. Grandmother and grandfather took her in after the anti-Jewish pogrom in Chernigov in 1905.[6] Aunt Zhenya was the only one from her entire family who was able to escape. She was a very young child, just 5 years old, and nobody noticed her. Before the war, she managed to graduate from the institute and married a journalist from the *Chernigovskaya gazeta*. Both she and her husband, Samuil, were very good athletes, so I was stunned when I saw before me a completely worn out man in a commander's uniform.

Mother returned in the evening—she was on duty and required to stay at the hospital. But in those days few wounded were brought to us, because there was a lull on the Central Front and other Western Fronts, and the battles took place in the south, in Crimea and the regions of Rostov and the Don river. The Germans and their allies were advancing toward the Volga River. Samuil told us that Zhenya had managed to get evacuated after us, and that he had volunteered for the army (he was able to become a war correspondent); initially he had been a private. He told us how he had left burning Chernigov in August 1941. Goering had decided to demonstrate what the German air force was capable of, and the town, which had only one factory, a factory for musical instruments, was subject to heavy bombardment from the Kiev airfields.[7] The wooden town burned down entirely. The old churches were bombed to pieces. Walking on the street, Samuil saw how his editorial office was bombed out. They had finished constructing it just before the war.

Samuil was sent to a school for junior lieutenants near Moscow. They were given almost no food. In the winter of 1942 they had to be content with frozen potatoes and beets from under the snow. We had two food ration cards for workers, and, for the first time, he was able to eat enough. He was now completing the school for junior lieutenants and they were about to send him back to the front. Samuil Ushitsky fell in the Battle of Kursk [July-August 1943. It was the largest tank battle in history and the last time the Wehrmacht was able to launch an offensive on the Eastern Front.] He was the commander of a mortar platoon.

My comrade Volodya Veremeenko fought in a partisan unit. He proposed that I join the unit with him but I was substantially younger than he was, and, more importantly, I had become near-sighted. Before the war my myopia was -6 and by 1943 it was -7. I was not fit for the army. I also met a comrade from the soccer team from our court, Yura Babloyan. He was in a paratrooper unit that was deployed in Kerch [a city in the Black Sea region, near Crimea]. Paratroopers had no cannons or anti-tank rifles. When the German tanks went on the attack on the bare sand spit, the army sent the paratroopers to meet them. Each one had a bundle of grenades in his hands. The Germans retreated. Yura was a very strong and tall guy. He survived and returned to Moscow to recover in the hospital. Many, many guys were killed and wounded.

I continued to work in the hospital and go to school. Mother became very tired. She had to stay at the hospital continuously, she had no weekends off, and often had to work around the clock. In 1941 she again had to carry stretchers with the wounded during bombing raids. She had already been under fire during the February revolution in Petrograd and at the front during the civil war. She did not fear bullets or shells. One of her shoulders was lower than the other because of all the heavy weight-lifting she had to do, and her back hurt. But she never complained about being tired, she was always energetic, cheerful and caring. The wounded saw this, and they understood. Many in the hospital were full of praise and gratitude for her. Perhaps this helped her avoid repression during the time of the doctors' trial [after the war].[8] And she always kept her surname, Dovzhik, she never flaunted the fact that she was the wife of the commander of the Red Cossacks [*Chervonnoe kozachestvo*, an important cavalry unit formed by Vitaly Primakov during the civil war], and did not allow me to brag about our family.

Among the doctors who were working in the hospital ward at the time, I remember Ksenia Maksimilianovna Vitsentini, a friend of my mother's, very well. Her husband, Sergei Pavlovich Korolev who would later construct space rockets, was imprisoned in a camp at the time, but the director of the Botkin Hospital, Boris Abramovich Shimeliovich, did not fear employing the wives of enemies of the people. He himself was one of the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee.[9] During the war, the show trials had ceased, some who had been imprisoned were even released from the camps and everyone hoped that the pre-war nightmare of arrests and executions was over. In those years, no one knew that it was only a pause.

Aunt Fenya, mother's sister, was working for the newspaper *Krasnyi flot* (Red Fleet). The editorial board returned to Moscow. From her and the wounded we learned details that the newspapers would not report. The help from the allies was very important. Douglas transport planes sent by the Americans became commonplace in the sky, and on the streets most of the military vehicles were American—Ford, Studebaker, Dodge and Willis. The rations we received with our ration cards included American canned meat. That was the only meat we got during the war. Sugar and fats also came from America. The newspapers reported about American air raids over Germany, but everyone was waiting for a second front to be opened [by the Allies in the West]. The partisan movement in Europe grew. It was particularly strong in Yugoslavia where it was led by Josip Broz Tito.[10]

I remember how a young woman, a sergeant in the marines near Sevastopol, was brought to us one night. She had managed to survive heavy battles with the Germans safely, and had come to Moscow for a short vacation to see her young children. She was hit by a car at night, not far from the hospital. An ambulance brought her to our emergency room. I only had time to take her to the operating room before an anti-aircraft gunner was sent to me. We didn't have many medics—just Uncle Kolya and Uncle Misha, they were in their 60s—so they kept sending us anti-aircraft gunners from the neighboring battery. They worked together with me as medics. I ran into the operating room and saw the woman from Sevastopol lying on the table. Doctor Vitsentini ordered me in a strict voice: "Yura, wash your hands, put on a mask, and stand by the table. You will hold her leg." I was standing at the operating table, trying not to look at the bloody mess from which blood kept pouring into the basin. The sergeant's entire lower abdomen was plowed by the fender of the car that had hit her and then driven away. Then we took her to one of the distant wooden barracks that had been built back under Soldatenkov, the founder of the hospital. When we approached the barracks, the woman

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regained consciousness and asked for something to drink. I told her that she couldn't drink after such an operation. She could drink in the morning. In the morning she died.

Once, a member of a tank crew was brought to us; he had fallen off a tank while the tank column was passing along the Leningrad highway. The tank operator managed to fall so well that the entire column drove past him, and not one tank drove over him that night. He just had a minor head concussion.

To be continued

Endnotes

[1] Symon Petliura was a Ukrainian nationalist, whose troops were notorious for perpetrating numerous anti-Jewish pogroms during the civil war while they were fighting against the Red Army.

[2] Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov (1890–1986) was one of the very "Old Bolsheviks" who survived the Great Terror as a close ally of Stalin. Among his many high posts was that of Soviet Foreign Minister from 1939 to 1949. He was never held accountable for his monstrous crimes in the 1930s and died peacefully, aged 96.

[3] In August 1939, Stalin concluded a pact with Adolf Hitler, in the vain hope that it would deter Nazi Germany from attacking the Soviet Union. The agreement disoriented Communists around the world, not least of all those languishing in Nazi concentration camps. Shortly after it was signed, Nazi Germany invaded Poland, launching World War II. Over the subsequent two years, Stalin ignored many warnings of an impending assault on the USSR. Even in the early hours of June 22, 1941, when the Wehrmacht was invading, he refused to believe the news. Shocked and disoriented, Stalin retreated to his dacha and did not address the Soviet people publicly for weeks.

[4] After the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the Nazi invasion of Poland, the Soviet Union incorporated into its borders Eastern Poland, Western Belarus and Western Ukraine, as well as the Baltics. In *In Defense of Marxism*, Trotsky insisted that the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the Soviet Union's occupation of these countries did not change the class character of the USSR as a degenerated workers state. However, the bureaucratic maneuvers by the Kremlin and the Stalinized Comintern disoriented and confused millions of workers in the USSR and internationally, undermining their socialist consciousness. He stressed, "The entire foreign policy of the Kremlin in general is based upon a scoundrelly embellishment of the 'friendly' imperialism and thus leads to the sacrifice of the fundamental interests of the world workers' movement for secondary and unstable advantages. After five years of duping the workers with slogans for the 'defense of the democracies' Moscow is now occupied with covering up Hitler's policy of pillage. This in itself still does not change the USSR into an imperialist state. But Stalin and his Comintern are now indubitably the most valuable agency of imperialism. If we want to define the foreign policy of the Kremlin exactly, we must say that it is the policy of the Bonapartist bureaucracy of a degenerated workers' state in imperialist encirclement." For more, read Trotsky's *In Defense of Marxism* here.

[5] Ernst Henri was a German Communist who worked for Soviet intelligence. In this book, translated in English as *Hitler over Russia? The Coming Fight between the Fascist and Socialist Armies* and published for the first time in 1934, he revealed large parts of what would later become known as "Operation Barbarossa." The book appeared in at least two editions in Russian before it was pulped after the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. At least as early as 1933, Soviet intelligence, which had valuable sources in the German military, had ample information about the Nazi war plans against the Soviet Union. Leopold Trepper, also a Soviet intelligence officer and member of the anti-Nazi resistance network Red Orchestra, gathered extensive evidence, but his attempts to warn the Soviet leadership were rejected by Stalin.

[6] The Chernigov pogrom of October 1905 was part of a wave of anti-Jewish pogroms that were encouraged by the Russian state in response to the revolutionary movement of workers and peasants in the empire. It was perpetrated by the feared proto-fascist "Black Hundreds." Russian sources indicate that 76 people were murdered and many Jewish shops and houses were destroyed. The Chernigov region had a sizeable Jewish population, and about half of all the pogroms in Ukraine that year occurred there.

[7] Hermann Goering (1893–1946) was a leading figure in the Nazi party and head of the German Luftwaffe (Air Force). He was put on trial in Nuremberg in 1946 for war crimes and sentenced to death by hanging, but escaped his punishment by committing suicide.

[8] Starting in 1948, the Stalinist bureaucracy engaged in another round of purges with a marked anti-Semitic character. Jewish party members and intellectuals were removed from their positions and many were imprisoned. In 1952, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was dissolved and many of its leaders were arrested. Some were executed. The Doctor's Plot, in which the main doctors who treated Stalin and other Kremlin leaders were accused of having sought to poison Stalin, was part of this renewed wave of terror. Its victims were spared execution and released only because of Stalin's death on March 5, 1953.

[9] The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was formed with the support of the Kremlin in the fall of 1941 by the two leaders of the Polish Jewish Bund, Viktor Adler and Henryk Erlich. Following their arrest in December 1941 (both of them would die shortly thereafter), it was reconstituted at the behest of Stalin. The committee included major Soviet artists, among them violinist David Oistrakh and the actor Solomon Mikhoels. It was designed to influence public opinion in favor of the Soviet war effort. In 1948, a crack-down began on the committee. Solomon Mikhoels died in a car accident that is widely considered to have been an NKVD murder. In 1952, at the height of the post-war anti-Semitic purges, most of its prominent members were arrested and many were killed.

[10] Jozip Broz Tito (1892–1980) headed the Yugoslav partisan movement that developed in opposition to the Italian fascist and Nazi occupation. Formed as a guerilla force, it encompassed an estimated 650,000 men and women by late 1944. They succeeded in defeating and forcing out the fascist occupiers. After the war, a rift developed between Tito and Stalin, but the Yugoslav Communist Party never broke from the perspective of building "socialism in one country." The Fourth International assessed Yugoslavia as a deformed workers state. For more, see Chapter 12 in David North's, *The Heritage We Defend*.

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