

SHORT STORY

SERGEI KOVROV was an experienced military scout on the 3rd Byelorussian Front during the second world war. He had carried out some 300 intelligence missions, captured 64 enemy soldiers for interrogation. He was called by Front Headquarters and assigned a mission to Vitebsk in the enemy rear.

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“Comrade Senior Lieutenant Kovrov, you will go to Vitebsk, where our people have obtained plans of the enemy’s defence zones, and bring them back to us.”

I had previously seen General Chernyakhosky only in photographs, which was why my first thought upon seeing him in the flesh was how closely he resembled them. He was tall, powerfully built, good looking, a man of evident courage; my admiration for him as a man was aroused and I forgot that before me stood a great military leader.

The general looked at me attentively, then invited me to sit down on a sofa, seating himself beside me. He began to talk about the mission.

“Vitebsk is about 18 kilometres from here. The intervening territory is a tactical zone and therefore one of heavy troop concentration: second echelons, artillery units, headquarters staff, supply dumps, etc. Parachuting in this zone is dangerous and, in any case, even if the drop were successful, you would have to return on foot: an aircraft could not land and pick you up. Is that clear?”

“Yes, comrade commander.”

He motioned me to remain seated and went on.

“You will have to get to Vitebsk and return on foot. Your superiors have recommended you as one of our best military scouts, who has been in the enemy rear on many occasions.”

“I shall do everything necessary to carry out your orders comrade commander”.

“Excellent, you must leave today — this is an urgent matter. And you must return as soon as possible.”

“Comrade general, I believe that papers are ready for him?”

“Yes, comrade commander. It remains only to photograph him in German uniform and his identity papers will be ready in an hour.”

“It is more difficult to cross the front in group,” General Chernykhovsky told me, and you must therefore go alone, wearing German uniforms, but avoiding encounters with the enemy. How good is your German?”

I confessed that at school and in military college my marks had only been average, the fear crossing my mind as I said this, that he might interpret it as an attempt to get out of the mission.

“All the more reason for avoiding conversation,” he observed. “Some of our men speak fluent German but they do not know how to operate under field conditions — their job is to work deep in the enemy rear. You on the other hand, are quite at home in areas where enemy troops are densely concentrated.”

He shook my hand and his voice took on a more informal note as he fare-welled me:

“Your task is not an easy one. Take care of yourself. Remember that you are a Russian and must outwit the nazis.”

In the administrative section I put on the uniform of a German lance corporal and was photographed. Then I began to study the password routine I would use to contact our people in Vitebsk and memorised a map of the town. I had never been there and I should know in advance from which side to approach Vitebsk and how to find my way

about the town without asking.

I then turned my attention to a topographical map of the area I must cross to reach Vitebsk. In about forty minutes I was brought a service card with the name of Paul Schutter, a lance corporal in the 86 infantry division, duly stamped with the eagles and swastika and having my photograph. The card was genuine and looked worn. Only the name of its former bearer had been erased and Paul Schutter written and the photograph replaced with mine.

I was driven to the front in the company of an untalkative major. We were met in a village close to the front by the captain in charge of divisional intelligence in whose section my crossing was planned. The captain told me of features specific to the terrain and how the Germans operated within it, and behind the enemy lines to a depth of five kilometres.

When we arrived at the front it had become completely dark. Five scouts and three sappers from the division awaited us in the first trench, wearing white camouflage dress, their weapons wrapped around with white cloth. I also put on a white camouflage dress and said good-bye to the officers and slipped out of the trench after the scouts.

Crouching, we moved from bush to bush, following the gullies. The scouts knew this section of no-man’s land well and advanced confidently. As we approached the barbed wire our advance became increasingly slow and cautious. Machine-gun fire began to crackle nearby and the scouts dropped to the ground. From here we moved on hands and knees.

The nazis were firing not because they had discovered us but because this was their usual practice. They raked the surrounding area with short bursts. I knew that the

from above, from the outside; they must procure everything themselves."

And Lenin goes on to stress that 'under no circumstances should the formation of the group be abandoned or postponed on the plea of lack of arms'.

In reply to the account of the Combat Committee of the St Petersburg Committee, which noted the slowness with which the combat contingents were being formed and the shortage of arms, Lenin urged:

"Go to the youth. Form fighting squads at once everywhere, among the students, and especially among the workers etc., etc. Let groups be at once organized of three, ten, thirty, etc., persons. Let them arm themselves at once as best they can, be it with a revolver, a knife, a rag soaked in kerosene for starting fires, etc."

Lenin's instructions on how to form the revolutionary army contingents and how to procure arms remain valid to this day.

It must be reckoned that in future insurrections, in the East as much as in the advanced capitalist countries, the proletariat (or at least certain elements of it), until it has managed to seize an adequate quantity of modern arms (i.e. at the outset of the insurrection), will often have to content itself with the most unsatisfactory weapons. But it would be quite wrong to make this a reason for abandoning the whole enterprise, since with these primitive and unsatisfactory weapons the fighting contingents can and must obtain real, modern arms.

The insurrection is led by the Party, and each Party member is a soldier in the civil war. This principle makes it obligatory for every communist to have a weapon. This is most of all true in those parts of the country where the class struggle is most turbulent, and where all kinds of specific conditions make a revolutionary explosion more likely.

ORGANISATION OF COMBAT SQUADS

Returning to the formation and structure of the red guard (revolutionary army) the following main factors emerge from such experience as has been acquired in this field in various countries.

When an immediately revolutionary situation arrives, the red guard must be formed in all factories and cities, while the Party issues ever more radical fighting slogans, and invites the masses openly to prepare the armed uprising. The red guard detachments must be composed in general of non-Party workers, students and poor peasants.

The Party must make the most strenuous efforts to ensure its leadership in these detachments: to have reliable men in position of command; to supervise their military training, etc. In many countries, it is not impossible that red guard detachments will have to be formed illegally, at least initially. The degree of legality of the red guard will depend on all kinds of conditions: above all on the depth of the revolutionary movement among the oppressed classes; on the extent to which the ruling class apparatus of government has disintegrated, etc. The Party's duty is to take account of the real political situation in each region, and to propagate among the masses slogans whose realization will ensure the legal existence and the progress of the working-class organizations, including the Party and the red guard.

It must never be forgotten that the question of the red guard's legality will ultimately be resolved by the struggle of the working-class masses, and only by that. The Party must make every effort to explain to the masses that a successful struggle to create the revolutionary army will, to a considerable extent, determine the possibility of a successful outcome to the struggle during the

insurrection. For this battle for the creation and legal development of the red guard is in fact a battle for the principal means of access to the decisive positions, i.e. it is the beginning of the direct struggle for power.

In this period, skirmishes with the armed forces of the bourgeoisie (troops, police, gendarmerie, fascist units) will be inevitable. And partial defeats will be equally inevitable.

In the light of past experience, the basic organizational structure of the red guard detachments can be resumed as follows. As long as they have to operate in conditions of illegality, the armed forces of the proletariat will consist of small groups (of three, five or ten men) organized in each factory, etc, and subordinated via their commanders to the higher instances (factory or neighbourhood red guard commanders, etc). The formation of larger units (companies, battalion) is not to be recommended in this period, for security reasons.

With the development of the campaign to create a red guard, as soon as the idea has fired the working-class masses to the point where they are bursting all the bounds of legality, and as soon as the formation of revolutionary army contingents takes on a mass character, the Party will have to provide the red guard with an appropriate organizational structure, based on the requirements of street fighting and on the weapons available. This structure must be simple and comprehensible to every worker. It is a mistake to aim for a complicated structure, or to form large units. The Party should rather strive to group together the small base units in a really solid fashion: squads and groups (from ten to twenty men), sections (from thirty-five to forty-five) and companies (two or three sections). In certain cases it will be possible to combine two or three companies into a battalion.

The formation of still larger units (regiments or divisions), as was done in Germany in 1923, is not advisable

— indeed is even dangerous. For it obscures the importance of the smaller red guard units in street fighting, and is symptomatic of a failure to understand the nature of this kind of combat, all of whose weight falls on groups and detachments corresponding numerically to the squad, section or company.

The formation of large-scale units will only become necessary after power has been seized in the city, when conditions exist for the struggle to be extended outside — i.e. for warfare in open country.

In the formation and military training of the red guard, great attention must be paid to the preparation within base units such as the squad or company, of men or groups with special functions: couriers, scouts, nurses, machine-gunners, artillery-men, engineers, drivers, etc. This is extremely important, for the presence of all these specialized skills (even when the weapons in question are not available) will in the first place allow a better defence against those weapons when they are used by the enemy, and in the second place, when such weapons have been captured, will allow them to be used effectively. Couriers (on bicycles if possible) and scouts will always be indispensable in street fighting. It is therefore absolutely necessary to train certain comrades or groups of comrades in each section and company to carry out scouting and liaison work.

In appointing and training the commanders for these detachments, it must be borne in mind that during the fighting they will be required to display great independence and initiative; the ability to orient themselves in the complex conditions of street fighting; personal courage; the ability to take independent responsibility for solving any tasks which may arise during the fighting; and, lastly, a limitless devotion to the revolutionary cause.

The selection of the red guard's leading personnel must take th

requirements into account. It must not be forgotten that in street fighting and during insurrections, the ability of the individual commander plays an immense role. — END

A EULOGY TO NTSIZWA NICKY HLONGWANE

THIS is an eulogy for a giant, this is our belated epitaph. This is an obituary we could not read at your lonely grave the dirge we never sang. Toyou Dear departed Commander, Commissar, Fighter and Hero this is our silent salvo in your honour. It is in place of a deserved gun salute.

These are tears that dried on mother's cheeks; the words that stuck in our unbelieving throats. This is our love, our pain, our loss. This is an affirmation of a vow. As men lives, so shall he be sung in after-time. Ntsizwa lived nobly, he graced our world with virtuous attributes and left us a legacy of good to imitate.

Let us tell the story of the short life he lived so fully. . .

Alexandra, that seething, strutting, robust township welcomed its new inhabitant Nelson Nicky Hlongwane in 1952. the first child in a family of six. Soon the child was beckoned to the inviting, beaten, screaming streets to be schooled in survival.

In Alexandra in those years, everything gun blazed, knives flashed. At dawn the lonely muddy roads were peopled by corpses awaiting the arrival of the 'black maria.' This tale of violence, and widowed mothers is a grim reminder that apartheid and all oppression brutalises its victims and turn them into fratricidal animals.

People lived with danger, so did Ntsizwa. He escaped its wicked fate, the knives, the bullets, the tomahawks and kwashiokor. Life seemed hopeless, but courage held sway. All seemed so vain, so base, but loftiness persisted. The dark hand of oppression sought to suppress all, drown all, but talent could not be contained, men reached out for freedom. Leaders were born, great struggles were fought. Alexandra emerged from the dark abys of crime, ignorance and despair to which the architects of doom had sought to consign her. Today, she stands as a model of struggle and sacrifice.

Ntsizwa escaped some of Alexander's cruel fate, but one blow caught him in his young days. His father died as he entered high school and that was the end of his schooling career. He had to support his family. He learnt to play guitar, and joined a band. E when the Soweto up-risings took place, Ntsizwa dropped his guitar and took off to Swaziland to join Umkhonto we Sizwe.

He had seen children cut down like dogs in the streets; touched by the plaintive cries of unconsolable mothers and beheld the piteous despair of man; for his rhythmic guitar, he chose the cold staccato of the machine-gune. He had seen it all.

All that is *darm, vile, and base*. He decided that only the ANC could purge our country of the evil, and that he will join Umkhonto we Sizwe. For a man so deeply scarred, you would think a wild, fire eating, hell-bent beast would descend on MK enjoining a pogrom of blood-letting to redress his sacred land from centuries old devastation and profanation. However, a dove came to nestle in our midst. The ready smile, the mild manners, the utter humility . . . Johannes Ntsizwa Maduke simply warmed himself into every heart.