

Letter from Russia

Dr. V. L. Tsvetkov

"Thank you for your promise to give serious consideration to my work which presents nothing but the truth about poor Russia."—Dr. V. L. Tsvetkov, January 27, 1992

My father came from an old family of Christian priests and for a long time preached at the village of Meshuiki in Kazan Gubernia. In 1883 a boy was born into their family and, breaking the tradition of their clan, entered the University instead of the theological seminary. On the threshold of the twentieth century, he showed off in a new cockade with a large silver sign on which one could see two entwined V's signifying *Vetorach-veterinary* placed under the two-headed eagle of the Russian Empire. He was dark-headed, with a nonchalantly twisted moustache, and admired by women. When he sang in an amateur opera ensemble, he conquered the listeners with his soft tenor. All that was in Kazan City.

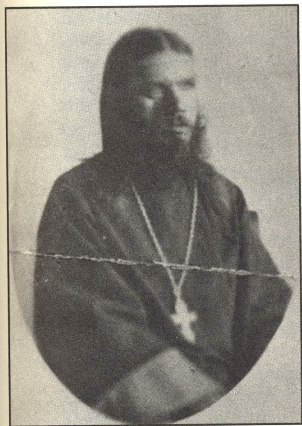
In 1907 Leonid noticed that his landlady's daughter cast timid but blushing glances at him now and then. When her strict mother came to know about her daughter's passion, she asked her lodger to leave, forbade her daughter to see the lad, and locked her in her room. Though Ludmila was only 15, she was clever enough to arrange secret correspondence using a pencil and a telegraph pole. They wrote in pencil on the pole the date and the time of their possible meetings on the way to the church or the shop, the only places the girl was allowed to go. When she was 16, they worked out a bold plan. Leonid and his friend made up their minds to kidnap Leonid's beloved when she left under the pretense of going shopping. Ludmila did not take any of her belongings and wrote a short note asking her parents not to worry. Leonid's brother was a preacher in Meshuiki and agreed to marry them secretly in his church. They were married by him on that very day. When a week later Ludmila's husband dared to face Ludmila's mother Euphemia Kharitonovna and ask

her for some of his wife's things, he was not let into the house, was given neither a kopeck nor a thing belonging to Ludmila. Instead he was scolded and damned to hell. The married couple began their life quite anew. Leonid had to find a place to live and earn money to support his family. In 1911 Galina, the elder daughter, was born and in 1914 Olga, the younger one.

Leonid served in the army at that time and he insisted on his wife entering Moscow University where she studied at the medical faculty. The course of her studies was interrupted several times as she worked as a nurse in hospitals. In 1923 she earned the qualification of a pediatrician and was sent to run the



Mrs. Euphemia and her husband, Mr. F. A. Negreus in Kazan, 1910.



Top left: Dr. Leonid Tsvetkov, 1910.

Top right: Miss Ludmila Negreus, 1909.

Left: Father Ioann, who married his brother Leonid and Ludmila in the village of Meshuiki, Kazan. Photograph circa 1888.

medical orphanage in Orel. Upon her arrival she had a severe, near-deadly septic heart attack. Assisted by her husband, she went to Moscow for a consultation with the well-known professor Konchalovsky. The professor warned the pregnant Ludmila that she could die during childbirth, but Ludmila immediately ruled out abortion. The professor's worrying proved unwarranted. Ludmila died at the age of 93. Her heart was strong enough to resist any disaster.

That was the time when there was neither radio nor telephone and electrical light was available only some places. Despite these limitations, the need for communication had always been strong in the gregarious Russians. They liked to visit each other, discuss various problems, go in for music, show their children, arrange outings and picnics, go boating, and master rhetoric and philosophy, as well as develop their musical, poetic, artistic and literary talents.

My father entertained guests, singing Faustus's cavatinas—merry couplets of rivers and lakes turned into wine. Everybody admired his oil and watercolor paintings, carvings, and poker work on the wooden cases. He made greeting cards with congratulations and invitations with a flowery ornament on them cut in with a razor in such a way as to be visible in the shade but disappear in the light.

When I grew a bit, I displayed my father's pleasant voice and a good ear for music. I tried to avoid dull music drills, singing false notes, and being forced to study music. Only sometimes when I was in a good mood, my sister Galya (who was fond of listening to her brother's soft, expressive voice) could talk me into singing. She even envied me.

I remember some episodes of my carefree childhood as if they were yesterday. I remember that in the 1930s, next to our house was a college under construction. This building survives to this day. This place became the place of our merrymaking. As we grew, so did our tricks both in number and intensity. Bottles with lime and carbon were blown up and the roofs were good grounds for running. Once while marching on the roof I found a five-pound jar and a brush with drying bright green oil paint on it. It was not too hard to climb down with the brush and jar, just a few moments to carry it into our garden. Thinking about the mischievous Tom Sawyer's popularity, I began to paint our fence with nobody in the vicinity except Venus, our small dog of un-

certain breeding and unpleasant white and grey color. Suddenly a brilliant idea, not thought of by Mark Twain, struck my mind: a green dog! Everyone would be jealous of my possessing such a rare thing! I grasped Venus with one hand and started making thick strokes of paint on its back, sides and paws. Poor dog! Venus did not share my ambitions and, preferring to be the sort it had been before the operation, it struggled for its life and eventually forced me to let it alone. Before its escape, however, obstinacy and ambition made me continue painting until its muzzle, neck and breast became green. Only after letting go of Venus's tail, and being bit by the infuriated dog, did I look at my suit. It was smeared and spotted as brightly as the dog itself. Oh, my new trousers and jacket! What became of them! For a couple of minutes I was absorbed in watching the green monster jump and gallop about the yard. Then I returned to earth and dragged myself to the house scratching my itching skin for the drying oil had hurt my face, neck, and body. It was Sunday and fortunately my father was out. When my mother saw me she opened her mouth and all that she managed to pronounce was, "What's wrong with you?" Then she boiled some water on the primus-stove and after ripping off my clothes, put me into a tin basin and scrubbed with a wisp and hot water. But the paint was not to be removed so easily. Only kerosene and spirits lessened the green spots on my face, hands and body. My new suit was washed in a pail of kerosene. Unfortunately, the attempt of concealing the incident from my father failed. The awful stench of the kerosene-turpentine mixture gave away his son's secret. The sight of green Venus running madly in the yard added to making his decision: "Whipping!"

In 1935 our father took us for a voyage along the Volga on board the century-old "Spartacus" of American type. The voyage was unforgettable. How many impressions I got! How many new things I saw! I could not tear my eyes from the picturesque banks passing by, piers with noisy bazaars. Once on the first-class deck, I noticed a multi-colored crowd of strange people dressed in queer clothes. Both ladies and gentlemen were wearing shorts and singlets with sombreros and cowboy hats. I was amazed that I did not understand a word in their speech. Their words sounded like a constant rapid flow of indistinct sounds. One of them caught sight of me, took my hands and began to show me how to move my legs keeping the rhythm of the noise-

music. My amazement grew. I thought they could have been taken for extraterrestrials. My dance partner took some sweets from his pocket and gave them to me. They were very tasty. Though I felt pleasantly cool in my mouth, still I was ill at ease because I could not make out their speech. I tried "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" but they were not German. I ran to my mother to ask her what words "Virginia, Norfolk, Russian boy" meant. When I found out that they were Americans I required a few English words for the initial communication. Thus began my introduction to a new language.

My new first-class acquaintance was delighted to hear my English words. He introduced me as a very capable Russian boy who mastered the language on the spot. Consulting my mother several times, I got to know their names: Bertran Brelsford, or Bert, and Tredwell Smith. I visited their cabin, saw the wonderful contents of their suitcases and like a trout swallowing a small fish, and in an instant, absorbed new words necessary for a talk. I was surprised that neither my father nor mother came out of the cabin to take part in our discussions. All the interpretations were made from deck to deck by me. By chance I heard my father mention to my mother the serious situation in our country after Kirov's assassination and did not recommend my mother leaving the cabin. But I made friends with the joyful lads from America. We spoke about many problems and events, such as the Pioneer organization in the USSR. I showed them all my knowledge derived at school lessons about America, i.e., the workers' struggle against capitalists in the USA. Mr. Bert looked at me in puzzlement but did not say anything. Mostly our talks were far from politics. I learned many interesting things from them apart from the class struggle. When we parted in Tsaritsin, we exchanged addresses. For two years I had a very lively post correspondence with my American friends. They sent me greetings, wishes, reckonings, photos, stamps, pictures, and books. It ended in 1937, for my parents were recommended by certain authorities to stop this childish practice. I was in despair to lose so many friends.

We believed everything our teachers said. I remember that we were told to cross out and smear with black paint beautiful portraits of Blücher, Tukhachevsky, Rikov, and others in our textbooks. We were told to modify the texts by saying "People's

Enemies" instead of their names and say that it was Comrade Stalin who wisely saved the people from danger.

On the 28th of February of that same year, I was awakened by loud voices and my mother's crying in the bedroom. Peeping into the room, I saw my father tucking his things into his suitcase hurriedly and my mother standing near a man in black, begging him about something and weeping. Two other men were looking through our things, thrusting them off the table and out of the wardrobe drawers. The "black man" noticed me at once, came up to me quickly, opened the door, switched on the light and asked, "Is it your son? Who else is there?" My mother covered me with her hands and murmured that I was asleep although I was not. It surprised me. I was frightened by that "black man" and did not say anything. He lifted my bed cloth, threw down books from my bookshelf, turned everything upside down, and started tapping my fish tank with a nail. I thought that he wanted to take the fish out and approached him. He grinned, kicked my books with his boot, lifted one to his eyes, turned a few pages and left the room without saying a word. I was ordered to stay in my room. I heard noise behind the door. Then the door opened, my father came up to me in the dark, bent his head, saw that I was not asleep, kissed me on the forehead and whispered, "Be a good boy, please. It is a mistake. Be a good boy!" I saw tears in his eyes glistening in the meager light of the opened door and then he left. I heard a clatter of horse hooves in the street when a carriage on rubber tires took away my father, my dearest father, forever. I knew I was losing him and, hiding my face in my pillow, I wept bitterly until morning.

After the war broke out in 1941, a volunteer corps was formed in Orel. All the male pupils of our school were admitted to Fighter Battalion 3. In August the disruptions became more frequent. We hid in covers and shelters at the outskirts of the town. The atmosphere was tense. Each shadow of a man seemed an enemy. Once there was an incident when one guard unit did not recognize another one and both were about to shoot each other. Eventually we became more experienced and informed. German aid raids became more and more numerous. First they bombed the railway station, the airports, then the whole town at

random. During the raids we, like many other rescue brigades, were on the roofs fighting small incendiary bombs, which splashed thermite from the garrets through dormer windows. Sometimes so many fell that here and there fires started. Sparkling flames and clouds of smoke arose from the burning houses. After each bombardment, we dug out slashings, found victims, and with a bitter feeling saw war's great losses. Our souls were brimming with anger and spite towards the invading Germans who started this bloodshed, this war that had ruined everything from head to foot, crushed our former quiet, peaceful life altogether. I felt many changes had occurred in me, that my inner world was undergoing heavy changes. A year earlier, I would have burst into tears watching the death or suffering of an animal; now I could drag out corpses from under ruins and carry the wounded and remain composed. All emotions got mixed in one spiteful wish, a wish of revenge. We were proud that our country was the best in the world and were ready to defend our Motherland, to fight against the enemy. Yes, we were made patriots.

In the morning of the 3rd of October, we were awakened by our neighbor who shouted, "Why are you sleeping? Germans are in the streets! They are laughing!" We were shocked with the last word.

We had expected cruelty, violence, slavery, executions, but not laughter. We rushed out of the house and saw them: strange bluish greatcoats, narrow shoulder straps, unknown signs of distinction on the sleeves. They were looting shops and houses of all that remained in them, loading their cars and motorcycles with the spoils. Many of them were talking loudly and roaring with laughter. I stood cautiously devouring them with my eyes and understanding that they were inspired with their victory of such an easy capture of Orel. I listened to their speech and suddenly distinguished many familiar words and the sense of their talking. My neighbor was glad that I had a good command of German and said, "Ask them for cigarettes. I saw them giving some away." I refused the suggestion bluntly. One of the Germans approached us on his motorcycle and beckoned my friend. The boy made a step towards him. We stood and watched with curiosity. Quite silently the soldier snatched the boy's hare-fur cap from his head and pulled it over his ears calmly, smiling all the while. We were struck dumb. The boy's jaw hung down and

it trembled. The German, satisfied with the effect of his practical joke and particularly with the warmth of the cap (it had grown rather frosty at that time), took a bottle of vodka from the baggage van of his motorcycle and slipped it into the boy's hands. The situation seemed funny to him. Grinning, he rode away. But we were far from laughing. Going home we met some more grey soldiers marauding in houses, and heard women's screams, and shots. We hurried and calmed down a little as we saw that they shot mostly dogs that dared to bark at them. My dear Venus did not escape this destiny.

Near the town post office a few corpses were hung with their tongues and heads bent aside, their bodies swinging from side to side ominously. I halted, terror stricken, unable to go nearer. The most disgusting thing was not the horrible sight of death, but the veneer boards on their breasts bearing the reasons for their execution, written in Russian. I could barely make out their meanings: "bolshevik," "jew," "saboteur," and something else. German punctuality! Suddenly I remembered that I had been developing my willpower. How could I give way to emotions? It was the enemy's criminal design to scare us. No, I for one was not scared at all! I tried to convince myself of it. My dear mother saved me, having supplied me with the good knowledge of the German language. A week later I came into contacts with Germans easily enough, causing jealousy in some and receiving blame from others.

We were preparing to fight and looked for weapons. Once I was walking home with a bag containing a few grenades found in a bombed police post. In my heart I hoped that an officer coming towards me on the road would pass me by, as it had been many times. But suddenly he blocked my way. I saw his shining boots and an exquisite walking stick on the pavement in front of me. I made a step aside trying to avoid the undesirable meeting but he repeated my movement like in a mirror. He did not want me to pass. I was seized by fear when an elderly dandy Hauptmann with two silver stars on silver shoulder straps tapped with his stick on my bag and asked, "Was holst du in der Tasche?" It seemed to me that he felt the shape of a grenade through the cloth of the bag. I was ready to run but my attention was attracted by a small woman's shoulder bag on which his right hand lay as if in case of emergency. I did not know what impulse caused my grimace. I smiled and told him in

German that my mother washed German officers' linen at home. Then I murmured "bitte" and encouraged by the Hauptmann's smile and his praising words about my German added, "My mother is a German." I went on lying, hoping for the better, and saw that his right hand changed its place from the shoulder bag to my shoulder while he rendered the instruction that my mother wash more carefully for the officers. Then he resumed his tapping along with his walking stick. I could hardly regain my breath from excitement. I leaned against the wall, almost in a faint.

Those who did not work were driven to Germany, so I found a job as an orderly in the Orel War Hospital, and I was proud to bring my first wages to my mother. Orel War Hospital was set on fire by the Germans. Against the storming flames, the white figures of the wounded were crawling around like ants. Many of them took their pillows and blankets with them and tried to protect their bandaged and plastered bodies from the early frost. Nobody knew who had shown them the way to our hospital. It was a starting point of the Orel underground hospital, or Russian Hospital, which saved more than a thousand prisoners of war under the near unbearable conditions of the severe occupying regime. A few days after the occupation all the doctors were threatened with death if they did not clean all the comfortable buildings of the hospital, get rid of the helplessly wounded prisoners of war and drive them out into the November frost. Prisoners of war! It's a frightful word! It meant the cold, unheated cells of prison, starvation, beatings, slavery, and eventual death. There was nowhere to go and nowhere to stay. The infectious disease ward was overcrowded with the terminally frost-bitten or wounded.

Doctor V. T. Tourbin dashed from room to room instructing how and where the wounded were to be placed. He spent nearly all the wood stock for disinfection and heat to dry out soldiers' underwear and clothes. He sent his personnel to the Orlik river to fetch pails of water for washing all the newcomers, examined each fold of their clothing and swore when he found a louse or a nit. He had been staying in his section for days, sleeping in a desocamera, and eating dried crusts of bread.

No one ever saw him sit. He saved hundreds of people from typhus and death. Starvation reached its climax. All were exhausted, some were at the point of death. The wounds ached and suppurated. We looked for ways out of hunger and this is

what we found: Somebody suggested the idea of cooking "soup" of wallpaper glued to the walls with starch and rye flour paste. There were about three pailfulls of that paste left over from last year's wallpapering. All the wallpaper was watered and this wet paper-flour mass was scraped from the walls with knives. The "soup" was not very tasty but the wounded ate it, chewing and swallowing the boiled mass. It saved many people. In the summer, we ate grass, nettle, goose-foot, buds, and leaves of a lime tree; many plants unknown were consumed. The Tsvetkovs discovered another source of protein—river shells of edentates that inhabited the silty bottom of the Orlik river in great quantity. Soup with them was not bad at all. We also tried to eat frogs.

In 1943, the Germans selected all those wounded who could work, about a hundred men, took off their clothes and footwear, pushed them into goods wagons, together with their doctor, A. S. Minakovsky, and sealed them up. The train moved to the West for a few days, with the people in the wagons deprived of both food and water. Barefooted, they stood on the frozen floor and died together with their doctor.

The wounded were to be sent to the POW camp after recovery. But our hospital arranged the transportation to the partisans of POWs who were registered as dead. Surgeons B. N. Gusev and S. P. Protopopov organized the march to the woods. Still the main body of the wounded perished.

In August, 1943, the former POWs shared the happiness of liberation with all other people. Unfortunately, almost all of them were repressed, interrogated, and arrested by NKVD, accused of being "enemies of the people." Among them were doctors V. Smitnov, L. Tsvetkova, V. Tourbin, and many others. Some of them were "reinstated" after death.

Long-awaited freedom came like a bolt from the blue on the fifth of August, 1943. The eighth of August saw a new stage in my military life in the Red Army, the army that won freedom for us in fierce battles, costing many lives. We, the soldiers of Infantry Division A69, played an active part in the liberation movement, not only of our Motherland, but Europe as well. What was to be expected? *Aut Caesar, aut nihil?* Glory or death?

The forceful four or five days march from Tula to Khotinets wore all of us out. I, for one, suffered from bloody, bursting blisters on my feet, making me lame in both legs. I put soft grass, hay, dried leaves of plantain, even cotton and wool in my

boots. I bandaged my feet with puttees, but nothing helped! I tried to go barefooted, but it caused more injury and pain. My body ached and my soul could not but suffer our officer's indignant shouting at me. He reproached me for having no guts, ordered disdainfully for me to rub my "corn," scornfully cried out hurting words about how I had an unworthy look for a Soviet warrior. I realized that he was right. After each short halt, I apprehensively stuck my sore feet, tied tightly with putters, into the damned hard boots already worn down to one side by a previous owner.

It was a time of great sorrow and deprivation for all of our people. I suffered hardships like all others, as well as constant humiliation by the rudeness of our officer. We waited for the first battle. What did my offenses mean compared to the meeting with the enemy in the first battle? Even my footache deadened due to our high mood when we, protected only by hillocks, bushes, trees, and other accidents of the ground, approached the Osier riverbed behind which the enemy hid, armed with machine guns ready to open fire at our ranks. Waiting for the attack, I was surprised to not be frightened. The predominant idea was to succeed in the battle. A lot of variants flashed in my mind. What was to be done? How was I to behave, or to act if . . . ? And of course, how could I escape bullets attacking the enemy?

The lieutenant remained in the trenches far behind. Only half of our squad were alive after a few minutes' run. The next moment, we realized the task could not be carried out. In front of us on the hill, two machine-guns and scores of other guns were firing at us, and the enemy was under cover from our fire. My sergeant fell on the blood-spotted ground. I was struck, but continued running like the other soldiers. In no time, the assault was used up. It is beyond my desire to describe the return to the company, wounded, and the swearing of our squad commander who had a lot to bear from the company officers for poorly training us soldiers.

After the first battle, I felt the urge to retreat. I felt my back turn cold, hearing the whining of bullets. I would involuntarily bend to the ground, though I understood that if I heard whining, that meant the bullet had missed.

We never got enough sleep. On the marches we had even less time for sleeping than at the front where half of the soldiers

dozed in their foxholes or slept lying in the communication trenches until a rare officer or sergeant coming from the second trench stumbled over them. It was a time of heavy rains and snow. It rained cats and dogs day and night. The fifty-pound weight of my equipment was added to with mud and water soaking our caps, greatcoats, even our underwear and foot cloths. On the march, soaked clothes dried rather quickly on our hot bodies, and water squelched out of our boots. We could manage without campfires, but night rains prevented us from drying out. The inner layers of our clothes were warmed by the body. In winter we felt better in spite of the cold and frost, for our clothing was dry. Snow could hardly melt under our bodies. Food supplies were satisfactory; however, when we marched, the food trains lagged behind and we were obliged to look for food by ourselves. In 1944, when the trucks "Willis" and "Studebaker" appeared, were our portions enriched with American canned pork, ham, and egg powder. The main defect of this food was that the portion was so quickly swallowed by a soldier that one could hardly taste it. This canned food was named "the second front" promised by Mr. Franklin Roosevelt as far back as 1943.

The further battles were successful. On the way there was Sozb Bridgehead, Pronya, the storming of the town of Vetka, and many more. We did not advance very far. Those battles brought me much knowledge and war experience. I became firm in mind



Vladi Tsvetkov with the Willis jeep his company received from the United States in 1945. Circa March-April 1945, Germany.

and body, more restrained, calmer, more stern, even indifferent to suffering and death. My worn-out nerves grew unable to worry or fear. I could sleep only 3–4 hours. I learned to fall on the ground, into the mud, and sleep embracing my gun. I learned not to cough and not to catch a cold from the biting chill piercing my wet clothing. The bloody blisters on my feet turned into scars and corns that no longer hurt. In short, I became a soldier.

I was wounded another time. Machine guns opened fire on our squad near a hut where our battle portions of sugar and bread were handed out. Dead soldiers lay around us with filmy eyes and red spots riddled in their greatcoats. The sergeant poured vodka from a can to each of us. I did not take it for fear of fogging my head at a decisive moment. Next to me, other soldiers stood up slowly and unwillingly. Another squad did the same to the left, guns in hands. We mounted the knoll where we could see the German breastworks-guns and machine guns pointing at us. I took a gun from a dead soldier to replace my broken, rusty one with only two bullets. I shot and a German, in his turn, fired back with his parabellum. I was dashed on the hip, feeling a heavy blow near the pelvis, and fell down into the furrow. I turned my head to see our ranks and then a machine gun started firing again, hitting my knapsack. My shirt was wet with blood on the breast and stomach. Blood ran through the collar near my neck. I thought only about shooting, and then my wound. When my thoughts turned to the fear of dying from a loss of blood, I began to crawl more quickly, took off my trousers, tore open the last medical parcel, and tried to bandage the wound and stop the thick stream of blood with one clog of cotton wool at the outlet where the hole was bigger. The second clog I placed on the bloodless inlet. I shivered with thirst. I saw a dead soldier in a furrow. I bit the knot on his knapsack, and resting for some time to save strength, I slowly managed to untie it and found a damp loaf of bread wrapped in a rag and a raw porridge of sugar. I devoured it, biting the bread with my teeth and swallowing sugar without minding the unpleasant salty, metallic taste. When I ate all I had, I stopped trembling and felt a large hole in the soldier's knapsack, leading to the flesh of his back. Both the bread and sugar had been salted with his blood. Though the thought that I had eaten bread mixed with human blood was nearly unbearable, I did not vomit. On the contrary, I felt strong enough to crawl further. In the dark,



World War II veteran Dr. V. L. Tsvetkov in 1984 at the age of 60.

amid flashes of gunfire, five or six hours passed before I got to the easily recognizable bank of our ranks. I felt relieved and there was nothing to fear anymore. I had endured the battle.

On the sixth of April, 1945, I was appointed the senior man in charge of a storm brigade entering behind the general troops besieging the fortress of Königsberg. Our group followed the attacking infantry with the task of cleaning cellars and buildings of hiding German troops in the town's northern districts. We moved from house to house along General Litzman Street. For the most part the houses were in ruins but people hid in the

cellars from the Russian soldiers. To avoid killing civilians, I used this trick: standing at the edge of the doorway, sheltered from a chance grenade, I shouted in German, "Get out. I am throwing a grenade!" Then I threw a stone. If no one came out, I went in looking for people in the cellar and mines. If I found civilians there, they usually cried that there were no military men among them and went out of the cellar. They generally could be believed though it was dangerous to meet them in the dark. If we noticed any shooting soldiers, we threw grenades. Those who surrendered were disarmed and sent to the rear. Such was our work.

In one of the cellars, behind a locked door, I heard many loud voices and dozens of boots marching up the steps of the staircase. My soldiers were ready to throw grenades and open fire at the running soldiers with their submachine guns. I recognized that the speech was not German and ordered my soldiers to stop. This moment saved scores of lives. We did our best not to press our triggers, as one after another, tall soldiers in unknown, threadbare uniforms rushed at us. Only their outstretched arms and their gay smiles on grey haggard faces showed that they were not enemies. In an instant my soldiers and I were embraced and covered with kisses. Shouting triumphantly and glad to be liberated, about two hundred POWs from the western front, mostly French, but with a few dozen American and British pilots, filled the yard. I spoke with the latter in the English I had learned long ago, and explained how they could get to the rear, and gave them a note for the Russian officers with an explanation of who they were and with a request to feed our starving allies. I warned them not to appear in Litzman Street for the German machine guns continued their fire. We were eager to talk but many parts of the town waited for our "cleaning." We reached Nord Bahnhof where I came to know that the group had gotten to the rear safely and was sent to the west. Afterwards, I was proud to realize that, though they were in such haste and had no time to say goodbye or to thank those who had helped, as it often happens in war, our bullets or grenades could have ended their lives. Instead, we helped them to return home. This belief was dearer to me than any award. I am sorry that I had no time to make acquaintance of some of them. Perhaps some of them will read these lines and write to me. It would be the greatest joy in the decline of my life. I wait and hope. 🍀