Chapter 22

Meanwhile, Back East

My name is Gavril Volkov. I have dark brown hair and hazel eyes. I was 27 in 1942.

Warm air and warm sunlight was slipping into the small house just outside of Stalingrad where I am stationed. The air was unseasonably warm for July day though I can remember when I was a boy that it used to be much warmer at times. This might be, however, because I live further south than this town but in Penza in southwestern Russia. My Russia is so big it seems that once this war is over, I still will never see even half of what lies beyond the initial borders and fronts. Perhaps after this war I will travel to other parts of this country and explore all my Russia has to offer me. I have no wife or children or parents and siblings, but I do have some childhood friends still residing back home. Though right now, most have joined the war effort to be rid of those Nazi pigs from my beloved motherland.

My motherland is so beautiful right now with summer in full swing with the warm air and the general sense of peace for the moment. Being a captain in my army, I have much information on the troop movements of our former allies, and there is no movement commencing to break this peace. It will not last though. The Germans will come to try and take the city that bears our leaders name. This is the only reason they will try to take it, but they might also because of its industrial importance.

Not long after I was thinking of these things, one of the men under my command brought in a note from the intelligence officers tracking the movements of the Germans. It seems that today on July 9, the Germans were seen to begin a drive toward Stalingrad with many of their tanks and divisions. My peace was effectively shattered for I had to plan and strategize the defenses for this town along with many other commanding officers. This went on for over a month until, on August 23, the Germans began a massive air raid attack onto the city. The battle was to begin shortly.

Oh how the battle began on September 13, but it did not go the way the Germans had originally planned for it to go it seems. The Germans wanted this because they knew of the symbolic importance of capturing the city with our leaders name on it, and it was a strategic point for further advancing into the Caucasus and a vital industrial/transportation center. The Battle of Stalingrad, however, was much more bloody and brutal than the Germans would ever care to imagine. We set up very strong defenses before they even arrived and continued to build them up and bring in many reinforcements as they attacked.

From street to street, we fought with all the blood, sweat, and bullets we could muster in order to regain an inch of ground we lost or to save an inch of ground the Nazis wanted. They had managed to knock us out of our positions just before the city and drive us into the heart of our comrades’ homes and businesses. The civilians who had not evacuated the area were often caught in the crossfire from both sides. They were warned of the danger, and they are expected to die for the motherland need be. This was the most brutal and bloody battle I have had the misfortune of fighting in. The casualties for both sides were heavy with no end in sight. I could tell, however, the Germans had expected to take the city quickly and easily because of the seemingly lack of supplies for more than a few weeks.

For two months, we defended as much as we could and took everything the Nazis threw at us. Orders came in soon that we would be unleashing a counterattack against these invaders. On November 19, the counter-offensive was launched with quite a surprise to the Germans around. They were steadily running out of men and munitions, but Hitler had ordered them to stand their ground at all costs. During our offensive, German planes could be seen over head, trying to resupply the troops. The drop zones of these boxes fell into the Red Army’s waiting hand instead. Reports came in, too, of a large rescue force moving east to end the fight at Stalingrad. Later on, reports came back of their movements halted and retreating back. We seem to be doing well over back in the east.

More reports came in later of the Germans withdrawing from the Caucasus where they had already entered. This took place during January 2/3 and continued for more than a month. They were withdrawing in the place of southwestern Russia, about ten hours south of our positions in Stalingrad.

On January 10, we launched a whole new offensive against these crumpling Germans and pushed them considerably back toward the other half of the army. For about a month, the fighting was as brutal a fight as you can get without the total destruction of lives and homes. Finally, on February 2, every German troop surrendered at Stalingrad. This was finally the turning point in this bloody war because it was the Germans first big defeat. The cost was high though. 91,000 men for the Germans surrendered but 150,000 were killed. Over two million soldiers and civilians combined had been killed from this battle.

More battles and fights were happening further north and further west than what was happening just in our area. On February 8, our Soviet troops took Kursk. One friend of mine had written of all that was happening in his battle at Kharkov. On February 16, they had managed to recapture the city after they had initially lost it to the Germans. However, 70% of the city lay in ruins and over 10,000 civilians were killed in the process. The biggest blow was the casualty count of only 11,500 Germans to the Soviets of 86,569 men. We may have won this, but we lost so much more.

I did not hear from my friend for quite awhile and now I understand why. A report of the other fronts and battles happening landed on my desk from one of the boys. I absently opened it to find devastating news. On March 15, the Germans had recaptured Kharkov after a long and hard counter offensive being launched on February 19. They had attacked our troops and positions with large Panzer and Tiger tank divisions. The near surprise attack had cost the Red Army 40,000 casualties with the Germans only suffering 4,500. They also had set the local hospital on fire with many of our men still inside. The report said it was for “revenge for Stalingrad!”

I had lost so much to this war already with many of my friends gone. My parents have already left me for a better place, and I am all alone in this war. The Germans were fighting fiercely everywhere. However, what if they had more fronts they had to fight on? I was 27 years old. Could our allies invade the mainland and help us take control of all of Europe?