One month ago a Soviet Guards Division with its three infantry regiments and artillery, supply columns, ambulance unit and other auxiliary services arrived at a fishermen’s settlement on the eastern bank of the Volga, opposite Stalingrad. The march was accomplished in unusually quick time—on trucks. Day and night trucks raised clouds of dust over the level steppeland beyond the Volga. The kites perched on the telegraph poles became grey with the dust raised by hundreds and thousands of wheels and caterpillar tracks. The camels looked round with alarm: it seemed to them that the steppe was on fire. The great open spaces were wreathed in smoke, alive with motion, roaring, while the air had become murky and heavy; the sky was enveloped in a rusty red shroud, and the sun was suspended like a dark sword of Damocles over a land plunged in gloom.

The Division made practically no halts on the way. The water boiled in the radiators, the engines became overheated. On their brief stops the men scarcely managed to swallow a mouthful of water and shake the soft, heavy layer of dust from their tunics when the command to return to the trucks was given and the mobile battalions and regiments were again roaring on their way south. The steel helmets, the faces of the men, their uniforms, the gun barrels, the covers on the machine guns, the powerful regimental mortars, the trucks, anti-tank guns, ammunition crates—everything was a greyish brown, everything covered with soft, warm dust. The roaring of motors, the honking of horns and the wailing of sirens were ever in the men’s ears as the drivers were constantly signalling, afraid of collisions in the murky haze of dust that hung over the roads.

Everyone was caught up in the fever of the rapid movement—the men, the drivers, the gunners. Only to General Rodimtsev did it seem that his Division was moving too slowly. He knew that the Germans had breached the Stalingrad defences in the course of the
last few days and broken through to the Volga, occupying a hill overlooking the city and the river and advancing along the main streets of the city. And the General spurred on the Division, cutting still shorter their already brief halts. The intensity of his will was transmitted to thousands of men until all of them felt that their whole life consisted in this impetuous march that never stopped day or night.

The road made a turn to the southwest, and soon maples and willows with their smooth red twigs and narrow silvery-grey leaves made their appearance, while all around stretched vast orchards of low apple trees. And as they drew nearer the Volga, the men caught sight of a dark cloud high up in the sky. It was impossible to mistake this cloud for dust. It was evil looking, billowing and black as death; the smoke of the burning oil tanks rising over the northern part of the city. Large arrows nailed to the tree trunks pointed in the direction of the Volga, and on them was printed the word: “Ferry.” That word made the soldiers uneasy; it seemed to them that the dark border around it came from that deadly smoke that hovered over the burning city.

The Division reached the Volga at a time of dire peril for Stalin-grad. They could not wait for nightfall to make the crossing. Hastily the men unloaded crates of arms and munitions. They were issued their rations of bread, sugar and sausage together with grenades and bottles of liquid fuel.

It is no easy task to get a full strength division over the Volga in the best of times. To get it across in broad daylight with Messerschmitts winging their way through the skies like yellow wasps, German dive bombers pounding the banks, and mortars and tommy-gunners firing from the hills on the broad unobstructed expanse of river before them is not only difficult, it is well-nigh impossible.

But the rapid pace of advance developed by the Division while on the march, coupled with the desire to come to grips with the enemy, helped them to cope with this task. The crossing was effected so quickly and so boldly that there were few casualties. The men embarked on barges, ferries and rowboats. “Ready?” asked the oarsmen. “Full steam ahead!” shouted the captains of the tugboats, and the greyish, mobile strip of rippling water between the vessels and the bank suddenly began to grow, to spread. The waves lapped the prows of the vessels, while hundreds of eyes gazed tensely, now
at the water, now at the low bank overgrown with leaves, already beginning to turn yellow, now over to where the fire-ravaged city that had been overtaken by a cruel and heroic fate loomed in a whitish haze of smoke.

The barges rocked on the waves, and the men, landlubbers that they were, shrank from the prospect of having to meet the enemy on the water instead of *terra firma*. The air was intolerably clear and pure, intolerably cloudless the blue sky, mercilessly bright the sun, treacherously unreliable the flowing, turbid waters. But no one took pleasure in the fact that the air was pure, that the cool river freshness cleared the lungs, that eyes inflamed with dust were soothed by the tender humidity of the Volga. There was silence on the barges, ferries, tugs and rowboats. Oh, for the stifling, heavy dust of the ground over the river now! Why was the bluish smoke screen so transparent and so thin! Heads constantly turned in alarm, while everyone stared at the sky.

"There comes a dive bomber!" shouted someone.

About fifty yards from the barges a tall, slender, bluish-white column with a crumbling top suddenly rose from the water. The column crashed onto the deck, drenching the men with its spray. And immediately, still closer, another column rose and crashed, followed by a third. Just then the German mortars opened rapid fire on the crossing Division. The shells burst on the surface of the water and the Volga was covered with gaping, foamy wounds; fragments rapped against the decks of the barges; the wounded cried out softly, softly, as if they were trying to conceal their wounds from friends, enemies, and even themselves. And now the rifle bullets spattered over the water.

There was one horrible moment when a heavy shell hit a small ferry. A sheet of flame darted up and a pall of black smoke enveloped the ferry. There came the sound of the explosion and a long-drawn-out human shriek that seemed to have been born of this thunder. And at once the thousands of men saw among the fragments of wreckage floating on the water the green gleam of the heavy steel helmets of swimming men. Twenty of the forty Guardsmen on the ferry had perished.

That was indeed a terrible moment, when the Guards Division, strong as the fabular knight Ilya Muromets, was unable to help the twenty wounded men who slowly drowned before its very eyes.
The crossing continued at night, and perhaps never before since the existence of light and darkness had people been so glad of the gloom of a September night.

General Rodimtsev spent this night in intense activity. Since the outbreak of the war Rodimtsev had experienced many trials. His Division fought at Kiev, routed the SS regiments that had broken through to Stalinka, had time and again broken through enemy encirclement, passing from defence to furious attack. A fiery temperament, a strong will, calm assurance, quickness to react, and the ability to attack at times when to any other it would appear impossible even to dream of attack, military experience and caution combined with personal bravery are characteristic features of this young General. And the nature of this General has become the second nature of his Division.

I have often had occasion to encounter in the army men who were staunch partisans of their particular regiment, battery or tank brigade. But perhaps never before have I seen such devotion to their unit, such loyalty, as exists in this Division. This devotion is deeply moving and at the same time it is often the least bit comical. The men of the Division take pride primarily, of course, in their military exploits, pride themselves on their General, on their materiel. But if one were to listen to the commanders, it would appear that nowhere else are there such cooks, who bake such wonderful pies, or such barbers, like Rubinchik, who is not only a masterhand at shaving but a gifted performer on the violin. If ever the men want to put someone to shame, they say: “Good God, how can you do that, and you in our Division....” In the same way one often hears: “I'll tell the General.... The General will be pleased.... The General will be disappointed....” Whenever the veterans talk about great military feats, they are always sure to introduce into the conversation: “That’s how it is, our Division always fights on the most important sectors.”

In the hospitals the wounded men of this Division are always worried lest they be transferred to another unit. They bombard their comrades with letters and when discharged from hospital they often undertake long and arduous journeys in search of the Division.

It may be that on this night, when the last units made the crossing to Stalingrad, the General thought that the friendship binding
his men would help him to win through in this unique and difficult situation.

And indeed it would be difficult to imagine a more complicated and unfavourable set up for the beginning of a battle. Upon arriving at Stalingrad the Division was split up into three sections: first, its reserves and heavy artillery remained on the eastern bank, separated from the regiments by the waters of the Volga; second, the regiments which had crossed into the city were also unable to maintain a solid front since the Germans were already wedged in between two of the regiments—the regiment that had made its way into the factory district and that which had crossed further downstream to the centre of the city.

I am convinced that it was this feeling of “Divisional” patriotism, love, habit, which cemented the commanders, a certain singleness of style in fighting, a unity of character in the Division and its commanders that to a great extent helped the individual units to operate as an integral whole rather than singly, that helped them to establish communication, to act in concert, and, in the final analysis, that brilliantly solved the general task by creating an unbroken front of all three regiments and establishing an uninterrupted supply of munitions and food. It was this spirit of unity that underlay the military skill, courage and persistence of the Division’s commanders and men.

In the city itself the situation was serious. The Germans considered that their occupation of Stalingrad was a matter of a day, possibly hours. The backbone of our defence was, as is frequently the case in critical situations, the artillery. But the Germans were putting up an energetic and fairly successful fight against the latter through their Tommy-gunners—the conditions of street fighting made it possible for them to creep up to the gun emplacements undetected and to put the crews out of commission with sudden volleys of fire. The Germans were sure that at any moment they would break through to the bank and force us back into the Volga. But it was not for nothing that columns of trucks had been moving up amid clouds of dust, day and night, not for nothing that the regiments had moved forward.

In the morning General Rodimtsev crossed to Stalingrad on a motorboat. The Division was assembled and ready for action. What should be the move of this Division that was joining the ranks of
the troops defending Stalingrad? The Division whose reserves were on the other side of the Volga, whose Headquarters were fifteen feet from the river's edge, and one of whose regiments was "wedged out" from the others by the Germans. Should they take up the defensive, immediately set about digging themselves in, entrench themselves in the buildings? No, that would not do. The situation was so serious that Rodimtsev decided to resort to another method, one he had already put to the test at Kiev. He launched an attack! He threw all his regiments, all his tremendous fire power, all his skill, and his ardour into the attack. He attacked with all the fury, pent-up bitterness and wrath that seized his men at the sight of the city with its white houses, its splendid factories, broad streets and squares lying there so grievously ravaged in the red glow of the rising sun. Like a great eye bloodshot with wrath and grief, the rising sun stared at the bronze figure of Kholzunov; at the eagle with the single wing outspread over the ruined building of the children's hospital; at the white figures of the young nudes that stood out against the velvety black background of the Palace of Physical Culture, now covered with the soot of a conflagration; at the hundreds of mute, blinded houses. And the thousands of men who had made their way across the Volga looked at the city that had been mutilated by the Germans with eyes just as bloodshot with wrath and sorrow.

The Germans did not expect an attack. They were so confident that by steadily pressing our forces back towards the bank they would succeed in throwing them into the Volga that they had not built any major fortifications in the areas they had occupied. The Guards regiment under the command of Yelin, together with two other regiments, stormed the streets of districts that had been occupied by the Germans. Their primary aim was not to link up with the other regiments but to thrash the enemy, to wrest from the Germans their advantageous positions which allowed them to dominate the bank, the river and the main crossing. Yelin's regiment went forward without seeing its two fellow regiments. But the regiment was confident that it was not alone in undertaking this bold thrust. It knew that the other two Guards regiments were near at hand. It felt their presence, heard their heavy tread; the thunder of their artillery sounded like the voice of brothers; the smoke and flame of the encounter rising high into the air told them that the Guards were moving forward, while dive bombers hovered over the fighting
battalions of the Guardsmen from morning till night like alarmed seagulls.

Yelin's regiment took big buildings—strongholds of the Germans—by storm.

Never before had they had to wage such battles. Here all generally accepted conceptions were turned on their head; it was as if the forest, the steppes, the mountain slopes, the chasms and undulating plains had moved up into the city on the Volga. It seemed that all the salient features of every theatre of war—from the White Sea to the mountains of the Caucasus were concentrated here. In the course of a single day a unit would pass through shrubs and trees reminiscent of the Byelorussian groves into a mountain gorge, where in the shadow of the walls rising on either side of narrow pathways it would have to make its way over the debris of fallen walls, only to emerge an hour later onto a great asphalted square, a hundred times flatter than the Don steppeland; and in the evening it had to crawl over vegetable patches amidst heaps of earth and half-charred ramshackle fences, exactly like those in some distant Kursk village. And this abrupt shifting of scene demanded constant tension, quick thinking and rapid manoeuvring on the part of the commanders. Sometimes a stubborn attack on some house would last for hours, battles being fought under the walls of the buildings, in the brick-strewn, half-demolished rooms and corridors, where the men would trip over torn-up wires, stumble over wrecked remains of metal bedsteads, kitchen and household utensils. And these battles in no way resembled any that were being fought in any other theatre of war from the White Sea to the Caucasus.

In one building the Germans had entrenched themselves so firmly that it became necessary to blow them sky-high together with the heavy walls. Under the withering fire of the doomed Germans six sappers carried 3 cwt. of explosives to the building and set them off. Just picture the scene to yourself for a moment: a group of sappers, Lieutenant Chermakov, Sergeants Dubovoy and Bugayev, Privates Klimenko, Shukhov and Messerashvili, crawling under fire along the ruined walls, each of them carrying half a hundredweight of death in their hands, their faces sweat-stained and grimy, their tunics tattered. Sergeant Dubovoy calls out:

"Don't funk it, you sappers!" And Shukhov, twisting his mouth and spitting out the dust, replies:
"Bit too late to funk now. Should’ve thought o’ that before!"
And while Yelin was triumphantly taking building after building, the other two regiments were attacking the Mamayev Hill—a spot with which much of Stalingrad’s history is connected, ever since the days of the Civil War. Here the children used to play, lovers used to stroll, sleds and skis flashed down in the winter time. This spot was heavily ringed on both the Russian and German army maps. When the Germans captured it, General Todt, doubtless, wirelessed the fact gleefully to German Headquarters. There it was designated as a “height, commanding both banks of the Volga and the whole city.” Commanding height! Frightful words those. The Guards regiments took it by storm.

Many splendid men perished in those battles. Many of them will never return to their mothers and fathers, sweethearts and wives. Many of them will live on only in the memories of their comrades and their families. Many bitter tears will be shed throughout Russia for those who fell in the battles for that hill. This engagement cost the Guardsmen dear. Red Hill they will call it. Iron Mound, they will call it—covered as it is with jagged bomb and shell splinters, with the stabilizers of German air bombs, with powder-stained cartridge cases, with fluted fragments of grenades, with heavy steel carcasses of overturned German tanks. But there came that glorious moment when Private Kentia tore down the German flag, threw it to the ground and trampled on it.

The regiments of the Division met. An attack of unprecedented difficulty, started practically from the river’s edge, was crowned with success. This ended the initial stage of the Division’s operations in Stalingrad. The front held by its regiments extended in a solid line over favourable and advantageous terrain. In these battles the men had acquired tremendous and priceless experience such as could not have been acquired in a single military academy anywhere in the world, for never before as long as the world has been in existence have there been such battles as these: soldiers fought in the streets and squares of a big city against tanks, artillery and mortar regiments, supported by powerful air armadas. In these battles hundreds and thousands of men and commanders learned what it meant to fight for many-storeyed buildings; signal corps men learned to lay wire not by the reel but in separate lines along the house walls; in these battles the importance of radio communi-
cation was thoroughly appreciated; sappers learned how to mine and clear streets and lanes. Private Khacheturov, who removed a hundred and forty-two German mines under enemy fire, could no doubt lecture on this question. Men and commanders both learned the full value of mortars, anti-tank guns, hand grenades and anti-tank rifles in street fighting. They learned how to camouflage the powerful Divisional materiel in houses and cellars. And as Major Dolgov, Regimental Commander, put it, "The Guardsmen acquired a positive affection for the bottle of inflammable liquid."

The second period of bitter fighting began—a period of defensive warfare, with scores of sudden, powerful thrusts by German tanks, fierce raids by dive bombers, counter-attacks by our units, sniper warfare in which all fire weapons, from rifles to heavy guns and dive bombers, took part; a new period of amazing, strange and wholly unprecedented battles. Not only hours, but whole days and weeks of life were spent in this smoky inferno where guns and mortars did not cease fire for a single moment, where the roar of tanks and aeroplane motors, coloured flares and exploding mines became as habitual to the city as were at one time the clanging of streetcars, the hooting of automobile horns, the lights of street lamps, the many-voiced hum of the Tractor Plant, the business-like voices of the Volga steamers. And here the men who were fighting lived their life—here they drank tea, prepared their dinners in huge cauldrons, played on guitars, joked, chatted, and followed the progress of neighbouring units. Here lived people whose nature, habits, souls and way of thinking were absolutely at one with the nation that had sent its sons to accomplish these arduous feats.

At nine in the evening we visited Divisional Headquarters. The dark waters of the Volga were lit up by multi-coloured flares that drooped on invisible stems over the shattered embankment, and all the while the waters kept changing from silky green to violet blue, or suddenly turned r'csy, as if all the blood of this great war were draining into the Volga. I could hear the tapping of tommy guns from the direction of the factories and volleys of gunfire kept lighting up the dark chimneys. For a moment it seemed as if the factories were working as usual, that the tapping was made by the night shift of riveters and that the factory buildings and chimneys were being lit up by the flares of acetylene torches. The night air alive with bullets whistled penetratingly and shrilly; German mortars
hissed viciously as they rent the stillness of the Volga with the crash of explosions. The light of flares disclosed the wrecked buildings, the trench-scarred ground, the dugouts plastered along the cliff and in the gullies, the deep pits roofed over with pieces of metal and boards against bad weather.

"Do you know whether they've brought up dinner?" asked a Red Army man sitting at the entrance to a dugout. From the darkness a voice replied:

"They went a long time ago, but they haven't come back yet. They're either lying low somewhere or they won't get there at all. The firing is something awful around the kitchen."

"Damn it, I'm hungry!" grumbled the Red Army man and yawned.

Divisional Headquarters was located deep underground, in quarters resembling a horizontal drift in a coal mine. The drift was lined with stone, reinforced with beams, and, as in a real mine, had water gurgling in its depth. Here, where all conceptions were changed, where an advance of yards was equal to a gain of many miles in field conditions, where in some cases the distance to the enemy besieged in an adjoining house was a matter of a few dozen paces, it was only natural that the dispositions of the Divisional command posts were also changed. Divisional Staff Headquarters were some two hundred and fifty yards from the enemy, and regimental and battalion Headquarters were correspondingly located. "Communication with the regiments in the event of a breakthrough," jokingly remarked a member of the Staff, "can easily be maintained by word of mouth; just shout and they'll hear you. And a voice carries just as easily from them to the battalions." But nevertheless the routine of Headquarters was the same as usual—this was something that never changed, wherever Headquarters might be: in the forest, in palace or in hut. And here, underground, where everything trembled and shook with the reverberations of bursting bombs, the Staff commanders sat poring over a map, and here the telephonist was shouting words that have become traditional in all sketches from the front: "Moon, moon!" and in a corner, smoking cigarettes rolled from home-grown tobacco and trying not to blow the smoke in the direction of their chiefs, sat the despatch riders.

Here, in the drift lit up by oil lamps, one felt that all the threads leading from the wrecked houses, factories and mills occupied by
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Here, in the drift lit up by oil lamps, one felt that all the threads leading from the wrecked houses, factories and mills occupied by
the Guards Division were held by one man, that the questions of the commanders were directed to one man, that one man with a slightly ironical, measured and deliberate way of speaking determined the way the Guardsmen lived. The men’s voices were calm, often drawling, and their movements were leisurely. Smiling faces were common and laughter was frequently heard. These men whose wills had been trained in fighting behaved as if they were doing the hardest job in the world easily, without effort, as if it were a joke. Yet it was stuffy here. When someone came in from the outside big round beads of sweat immediately stood out on his forehead and temples, and his breathing became rapid and uneven.

The floor of the drift, the walls, the ceiling, everything trembled with the force of the bomb explosions and the blows of the shells as if it were the foundation of a dam holding back the terrible pressure of the enemy forces pushing towards the Volga. The telephones jingled, the flames danced in the lamps, and huge indistinct shadows moved shudderingly over the wet stone walls. But the people were calm—they were here, in the thick of it today, they had been here a month ago, they would be here tomorrow. A few nights previously the Germans had broken through and had flung hand grenades down the incline. Dust, smoke and fragments had flown into the drift and from the darkness had come the shouts of commanders in a language that sounded strange and savage here, on the bank of the Volga. And in that hour of peril, Divisional Commander Rodimtsev had remained the same as ever: calm, with a slightly ironical turn of speech, every measured word of his throwing a weighty rock into the dam that the enemy force had breached. And the enemy had reeled back.

The Division had entered into the swing of the fighting. The men’s breathing, the beating of their hearts, their briefly snatched moments of sleep, the orders of the commanders, the firing of the guns, machine guns and anti-tank rifles—everything had entered into the swing of the fighting. It seemed to me that it was perhaps the hardest thing of all to acquire this feeling of rhythm to get into the swing of sudden raids by dive bombers, attacks of fascist infantry by day and by night, sudden onslaughts of dozens of tanks which would suddenly appear now at dawn, now at three in the afternoon, now in the falsely reassuring calm of the evening twilight. The rhythm of the storm! The rhythm of the Battle of Stalingrad!
Rodimtsev told me about a recent night skirmish in which German sappers took part.

He spoke in a low thoughtful voice although the teaspoon on the roughly-made table jumped about madly, as if it wanted to get out of this reverberating drift with the dim shadows flickering on the walls. The rat-tat-tat of an automatic rifle was heard here distinctly.

“That’s a German,” said Rodimtsev.

He spoke to me in detail, taking his time.

“The fighting here is mobile, flexible,” he said. “There are battles at night, battles in the daytime, or else tanks attack, and sometimes we get a combination of tanks, aircraft, artillery and mortars all concentrating on one point. The Germans deliberately change their tactics. But in the course of this month we’ve learned to fight under these conditions. We operate mainly in small groups. Buildings are tackled by two groups: one for the assault, the other to dig in. The men attack with grenades, bottles of liquid fuel and light machine guns. While the attack group is still finishing off the enemy, the other group brings up ammunition, food and supplies for at least six days, because as often as not they’re surrounded. Only today two men came in, they’d been fighting for fourteen days in a house surrounded by ‘German’ buildings. Calmly they asked for rusks, ammunition, sugar and tobacco, loaded up and went off, saying that two others were still in the house, taking care of it and that they were dying for a smoke. In general this fighting in houses is a peculiar business. What is characteristic of the fighting in Stalingrad is its flexibility, the abrupt and almost instantaneous changes in tactics and, in fact, in the whole nature of the fighting. Either there’s fighting for a single house, or you get what happened just a little while ago, when two German infantry regiments and seventy tanks suddenly swooped down on Panikhin’s regiment, attacking ten and even twelve times a day.”

I asked him whether he wasn’t worn out with the incessant strain of fighting, with this incessant roar and boom, with these hundreds of German attacks—day and night.

“I don’t mind,” he said. “That’s war after all. I believe I’ve seen everything there is to see already. Once my dugout was flattened out by German tanks and after that a Tommy-gunner threw a grenade, just to make sure, I chucked that grenade out, and here I am, you
see, still fighting, and I intend to continue fighting to the very last minute of the war.”

He said this calmly and quietly. Then he began to ask me about Moscow. Naturally we got onto the subject of theatres.

“We had two concerts here too—Rubinchik, our barber, played the fiddle.”

And all the men around us grinned, remembering the concerts. During the course of our conversation the telephone rang a dozen times, and the General, barely turning his head, said two or three words to the officer on duty. And these brief words, so easily and matter-of-factly pronouncing military orders, revealed the triumphant force of the man who had mastered the swing of the fighting, the man who dictated this terrible, precise rhythm of battle, which has become the rhythm, the style of the Guards Division, the style of all our Stalingrad divisions, of all our Soviet people fighting in Stalingrad.

Colonel Borisov, the General’s second in command, had issued the final orders before the attack on one of the buildings occupied by the Germans. This five-storey house was strategically important, for its windows gave the Germans a view of the Volga and part of the bank. The plan of attack amazed me by reason of the great detail and finesse with which it was elaborated. The house and all the neighbouring structures had been accurately drawn on a map. Symbols indicated that there was a machine gun in the third window on the second floor, snipers at two windows on the third floor, and a heavy machine gun at another window—in a word, the whole house had been reconnoitred by storeys, windows, back and front entrances. Mortar-gunners, hand-grenade throwers, snipers and tommy-gunners took part in the storming of this house. The regimental artillery and powerful guns stationed on the opposite bank of the Volga also took part in the attack. Every branch of arms had its task, strictly coordinated with the general aim, and all were in communication with one another; operations were directed by a system of light signals, by radio and by telephone. The guiding thought of this offensive was simple and at the same time involved: the goal would have been clear to a child, but the road to this goal seemed so involved that only a person highly versed in military matters could have travelled it.

And in this too you felt the peculiar features of the Battle of
Stalingrad. Here was a tremendous elemental clash of two states, of two worlds battling in a life and death struggle, combined with a mathematically and pedantically precise battle for a single storey of a house, or for a street crossing; here the characters of two nations and military skill, thought and will power were pitted one against the other; here a battle was going on that would decide the fate of the world, a battle in which all the strength and all the weaknesses of the two nations became evident: one of these nations having risen in battle for the sake of world dominion, the other for world liberty, against slavery, falsehood and oppression.

Late at night we slipped down the broad-bosomed Volga along the Stalingrad waterfront on a motorboat for a distance of six kilometres.

The Volga was seething. The blue flame of exploding German mortar shells hissed on the waters. Death-bearing splinters were whining. Our heavy bombers droned angrily in the dark skies. Hundreds of screaming blue, red and white tracer bullets sent by the German AA batteries sped after them. The bombers spewed forth the white trajectories of machine-gun bursts on the German searchlights. On the other side of the Volga it seemed as if the whole universe shook with the mighty roar of the heavy guns and the deafening blast of our powerful artillery. On the right bank the ground trembled with the explosions. Vast conflagrations caused by bombs flared up over the factories, and the earth, the sky, the Volga—everything was enveloped in flames. And one felt that the fate of the world was being decided here in the titanic struggle in which calmly, solemnly, amidst the smoke and flame, our people were battling.

October 20, 1942
Stalingrad