

## 44 • "T" Is for Tanya

IN THE CITY MUSEUM OF HISTORY IN LENINGRAD THERE are a few torn pages of a child's notebook, ABC pages in the Russian alphabet: A, B, V, G, D and so on.

On them there are scrawled under the appropriate letters simple entries in a child's hand:

- Z—Zhenya died 28 December, 12:30 in the morning, 1941.
- B—Babushka died 25 January, 3 o'clock, 1942.
- L—Leka died 17 March, 5 o'clock in the morning, 1942.
- D—Dedya Vasya died 13 April, 2 o'clock at night, 1942.
- D—Dedya Leshka, 10 May, 4 o'clock in the afternoon, 1942.
- M—Mama, 13 May, 7:30 A.M., 1942.
- S—Savichevs died. All died. Only Tanya remains.

The entries were made by Tanya Savicheva, an eleven-year-old schoolgirl. They tell the story of her family during the Leningrad blockade. The Savichevs lived in House No. 13, Second Line, Vasilevsky Island. The house still stands, no signs of war to be found on its bland surface, and even the building across the street, which was hit by bombs in 1941, gives no appearance of damage. All the wounds have been healed.

For years it was supposed that the entire Savichev family had died and that after making her last entry Tanya, too, died. This was not quite correct. Like many Leningraders Tanya was evacuated in the spring of 1942. She was sent to Children's Home No. 48 in the village of Shakhry in the Gorky area, suffering from chronic dysentery. Efforts by doctors to save her life failed, and she died in the summer of 1943.

Two members of the Savichev family survived the war. Both had been out of Leningrad during the blockade. An older sister, Nina Nikolayevna Pavlova, returned to Leningrad in 1944. Tanya's notations had been made in her notebook. The sister found it when she came back to the apartment on Vasilevsky Island, lying in a box with her mother's wedding dress. A brother, Mikhail, also survived. When war broke out, he was at Gdov in

the nearby countryside and fought with the partisans.

The obliteration of the Savichev family was not unusual. This was what was happening to Leningrad in the winter of 1941-42. Not everyone died that winter. But the deaths went on in the months and years ahead as the privations of the blockade took their toll.

In the measured words of the official Leningrad historian:

In world history there are no examples which in their tragedy equal the terrors of starving Leningrad. Each day survived in the besieged city was the equal of many months of ordinary life. It was terrible to see how from hour to hour there vanished the strength of those near and dear. Before the eyes of mothers their sons and daughters died, children were left without parents, a multitude of families were wiped out completely.

Party Secretary Zhdanov and his associates now knew the price that must be paid for the siege. Only the most radical measures would pull Leningrad through the winter, and how many would survive till spring was an open question. Hope that the offensive so boldly planned in Moscow by Stalin, Zhdanov and the generals in early December would liberate Leningrad was petering out. The attacks by the Fifty-fifth Army headed by General V. P. Sviridov on the Leningrad front, driving toward Tosno in an effort to unhinge the Germans at Mga, yielded meager results—and heavy losses. On January 13 General Meretskov of the Volkhov front and General Fedyunin-sky's Fifty-fourth Army of the Leningrad front launched a simultaneous attack, hoping to free the rail and highway connections between Moscow and Leningrad. The battles went on all winter long.

"I will never forget," General Meretskov wrote, "the endless forests, the bogs, the water-logged peat fields, the potholed roads. The heavy battle with the enemy went on side by side with the equally heavy battle with the forces of nature."

General Fedyuninsky, whose Fifty-fourth Army fought through the winter in the same operations, spoke of the experience in almost identical terms: "If you asked me what was the most difficult time I would without hesitation reply: The worst time of all for me was at Pogost in the winter of 1942. The four months of constant bloodletting and, worst of all, unsuccessful fighting in the forests and marshy regions between Mga and Tikhvin remain a terrible memory for me."

The Russian attack developed slowly. There could be no hope of surprising the Germans. The Nazis were strongly dug in, and a more vigorous commander, Colonel General von Kuchler, had replaced the aging von Leeb in early January. Just to move over the ground in the heavy snow required enormous expenditure of strength. Toward the end of January the Soviet Second Shock Army scored a small success, smashing through the main German defenses and capturing Myasny Bor in the direction of the Chudovo-Novgorod railroad.

Feverish efforts were made to achieve success in the winter offensive. Moscow had done everything—except provide the needed men and arms. Unsatisfied with the pace at which Meretskov was moving, Stalin sent one of his police generals, L. Z. Mekhlis, to the Volkhov front on December 24. The task of Mekhlis was to chivy and hurry the operation. The Fifty-ninth and Second Shock armies, according to the schedule of the General Staff, were to be ready for the jump-off by December 25. Actually, only one division was in place.

Delay followed delay. The date for the offensive was postponed to January 7, but by that time only five of the eight Fifty-ninth Army divisions had arrived and the Second Army was only half complete. There was no air support, and the Fifty-ninth Army had neither optical instruments nor means of communication with which to direct artillery fire. Meretskov sent an urgent telegram to Moscow, and Marshal N. N. Voronov appeared at Volkhov headquarters. The acid relations between police generals and regular army were shown in Mekhlis' greeting to Marshal Voronov: "Well, now the chief criminal has arrived, the one who sent us artillery which can't fire. Just watch how he tries to excuse himself." Voronov was able to help a bit but not too much, and January 7 found Meretskov still short of artillery, reserve supplies, fuel, forage for the horses and almost every kind of matériel. Nonetheless, the preliminary attacks were launched with expectable results. The commanders were not able to direct their troops, the Germans easily contained the infantry assaults, the whole movement was a disaster. Meretskov asked Moscow to let him delay the development of the operation by three days. On January 10 Stalin and Marshal Vasilevsky talked with him by direct wire. They expressed the frank opinion that the operation would not be ready even by January 11 and that it would be better to put it off another two or three days. "There's a Russian proverb," Stalin said. "Haste makes waste. It will be the same with you: hurry to the attack and not prepare it and you will waste people."

Meretskov regarded this as a serious reprimand, but he noted (many years later) that from the beginning there had been ceaseless haste and demands from Moscow to get the action under way. The Stavka had insisted by telephone and urgent directives to hurry in every possible way. Mekhlis had been sent in for no other purpose than to keep the pressure on.

Actually, the preparation should have taken at least fifteen to twenty days. But, of course, there was not a chance of getting that kind of time.

There was another serious problem. The Leningrad operation was designed as part of a triple winter offensive which was supposed, simultaneously, to lift the Leningrad siege and crush Army Group Nord, destroy and encircle Army Group Center on the Moscow front and defeat the southern German armies, liberating the Donbas and Crimea.

Meretskov, Fedyuninsky and the Leningrad commanders received a circular telegram from Stavka in Moscow dated January 10 which gave the

aim of the operation as: "To drive them [the Germans] westward without pause, compelling them to exhaust their reserves even before spring, when we will have new and larger reserves and the Germans will not have large reserves, and thus secure the full defeat of the Hitler troops in 1942."

The task was far beyond Soviet capability. It represented almost as fatal a misreading of the situation as that which had possessed Stalin on the eve of the war.

There was another problem. The general in charge of the Second Shock Army, Lieutenant General G. G. Sokolov, was a police officer. He had previously been a Deputy Commissar of Internal Affairs. He had plunged into army affairs with great energy and aplomb, ready to promise anything. But he knew nothing about military matters and substituted clichés and dogma for military decisions. He had what Meretskov called "an original approach" to operational questions. Among the instructions which Sokolov issued to his troops were orders about when to eat (breakfast before dawn, dinner after sunset); the length of the marching pace (one arshin, a little less than a yard); the hours for marching (units of more than a company were not to march during the day; in general, all movements were to be made at night); the soldiers' attitude toward cold (they were not to fear it; if their ears or hands froze, they were to rub them with snow).

General Meretskov managed to get Sokolov removed on the eve of the offensive, replacing him with Lieutenant General N. K. Krykov.

None of these measures helped the winter offensive. It bogged down. On January 17 Chief of Staff Marshal A. M. Vasilevsky warned Meretskov that the "situation in Leningrad is exceptionally serious and it is necessary to take all steps to advance as quickly as possible."

Marshal Vasilevsky's words did not bring results. What was worse, in spite of repeated requests, Meretskov could not get the supplies he needed to feed his horses, fuel his trucks, provision his men and arm his guns. On January 28 General A. V. Khrulev, Deputy Commissar of Defense, arrived to try to speed up supplies.<sup>1</sup> This helped a little but not enough. The Second Shock Army ground to a halt and finally had to go on the defensive. The Stavka showered down telegrams, Meretskov was charged with indecisiveness and treading water. Meretskov complained in his turn about lack of

<sup>1</sup> During most of the war Army General A. V. Khrulev, a responsible, able, energetic officer, was in charge of Red Army rear services. But every session he had with Stalin was an ordeal in which front commanders and members of the State Defense Committee (Beria, Malenkov and others) sought to shift responsibility for errors, mistakes and deficiencies onto him. Stalin was well aware of Khrulev's competence. This did not prevent him from telephoning one day and exploding, "You are worse than an enemy! You work for Hitler!" Then he slammed down the receiver. Soon Khrulev's wife was arrested as a member of a "conspiratorial organization." Stalin continued to invite Khrulev to his dacha. The General was present at a drunken New Year's celebration at Blizhny ("The Near Place," the nickname for Stalin's villa on the Mozhaisk Chaussée) on New Year's 1944. But he was soon dismissed, presumably on Beria's provocation. (N. A. Antipenko, *Novy Mir*, No. 8, August, 1965, pp. 154-155.)

tanks, planes and shells, shortages of troops, inability to give his men relief after the incredible tasks of fighting in the cold, wet, miserable morass.

It was mid-February. Everyone was angry, depressed, blaming each other. Stalin sent Marshal Voroshilov to the Volkhov front to demand immediate action. Meretskov gathered his military council and offered a new plan, based on giving his men some rest, regrouping and bringing in reserves and new equipment, particularly artillery for the Second Shock Army. Voroshilov went from unit to unit trying to raise spirits. It did little good. The plain fact was that the men didn't have the strength. They were to remember the winter as the worst they had ever spent. Losses were great, results almost nil.

It was obvious in such circumstances that there would be no early respite. It was obvious on the lips of all Leningraders—"When will the blockade be lifted?"—and no early confirmation of the persisting rumors that the armies of Meretskov and Fedyuninsky were about to save the city.

Party Secretary Zhdanov turned to such resources as he had. One was the Communist youth. Their ranks had been savagely depleted like those of the Party itself.<sup>2</sup> Leningrad boasted 235,000 Komsomols in June, 1941. By January, 1942, only 48,000 remained. The rest had gone to the front, had been killed or transferred to urgent production tasks elsewhere. They were almost the only reserve of strength the city had.

The Young Communists were organized into service detachments. Their task was to go from apartment to apartment, to help the living, if possible, and to remove the dead. The first Young Communist units went into action in December, but it was only in January that their work achieved an organized character.

They themselves were little stronger than the rest of the Leningraders. A meeting was called at Smolny on January 30 by V. N. Ivanov, secretary of the Komsomol organization.

"There were no streetcars," one of those who attended recalled. "The meeting was called for noon. People started out at 8 A.M."

It was a long walk and they had to rest time and again.

Ivanov told them: "We are being put to a severe test by the Party and the country. We look forward with confidence. Through the difficulties and deprivation which Leningrad is experiencing in connection with the blockade we can see our coming victory. For this we are fighting and will fight to the last drop of blood."

The sights which met the eyes of the youth brigades in the frozen and bleak flats of Leningrad were almost beyond the power of a Dürer or a Hogarth to depict.

G. F. Badayev, secretary of the Moscow region of the Party, went to one frozen apartment. He heard the feeble cry of a child and turned his flashlight into a room. On a bed lay a dead woman, and beside her were two tiny children, hungry, dirty, frozen.

<sup>2</sup> In the first half of 1942 the Leningrad Party lost 15 percent of its membership by starvation. (*Leningrad v' VOY*, p. 202.)

"How can we permit this?" he asked rhetorically. "Why did no one look in here sooner?"

It was a vain, pompous question.

Vissarion Sayanov met a young woman named Anna Ivanovna Shakova at a children's home. She had been wounded at the front and then took a job with a Komsomol brigade. One evening she went with a friend to an old house on Maly Prospekt. They entered a dark apartment and found a woman lying dead with an overcoat thrown over her body. On the bed there was a large bundle, wrapped in a tablecloth. Inside they found a nursing child, alive, whimpering and sucking on an empty nipple. They brought the baby to the nursery. No one in the apartment knew the child's name, all the neighbors were dead. "I told them to write down my name," Anna said. "Let him carry my name through the years." Before the winter ended she had taken in two more babies. She had a family of three and was not yet married.

In the great Kirov metallurgical plant there were about five thousand workers, still alive, still technically on the payroll, most of them living in the icy, shell-torn buildings, too weak to work, almost too weak to live.

After the blockade was lifted one of the girls, Anna Vasileyeva, a chubby, red-cheeked youngster, told of her life. She was a "Putilov girl," that is, her family for at least two generations had been workers in the Putilov, now the Kirov, plant. Her father and two brothers worked at the factory. The family lived in a house in a nearby suburb, close enough so they could walk to work.

When the war started, Anna, only fifteen, began to work at Kirov, too. When the Nazis swept almost to the Kirov gates in September, 1941, Anna's family had to abandon their house in the suburbs—it was in German-occupied territory. Then her father and one brother were killed by a German shell. The other brother went into the Red Army. Anna and her mother went to live in a flat in town. One day she came back from work to find her mother had been blinded by slivers of flying glass from a shell hit on a nearby apartment.

By January no work was being done at Kirov. No one was able to work. There was no power, no heat, no light. Several of the stronger girls, Anna among them, made up a brigade. Each day one or two started from Kirov with a child's sled. They visited three or four flats where their relatives lived—to see if they were alive, to remove any dead, to bring a little food, to light a fire or heat some water, whatever they could do. In late afternoon they would come back to the little room where their comrades huddled around a tin stove.

"Here is the way it was," she said. "The first thing you would do was to look around to see if everyone was there, if your friends were all alive."

It was the same each morning. When you awoke from your troubled, hungry, freezing sleep, you looked around the circle.

"Then," she said, "you'd notice someone sitting in a chair beside the

stove. At first he would look all right. Then you'd look closer and see that he was sitting there dead. That was the way it was."

Anna Vasileyeva was seventeen. She had survived. No one else in her family had.

Yelizaveta Sharypina visited a flat on the Nevsky where a worker named Pruzhan was supposed to live. He had failed to show up for work. She made her way along a dark corridor. The first door was padlocked. The next door would not open. Finally, she found an unlatched door and entered a dark room. There was a cold stove in the center and two iron beds. A man lay with his face to the wall on one bed, a woman, feeble but able to talk, on the other. Pruzhan, she said, was dead. His wife had died a few days before him. A daughter was at the store getting the bread ration. She herself was not ill, only weak. She had lost her bread card. "Obviously it is the end," she said quietly. Sharypina called a Young Communist team to see if the woman's life could, by some means, be saved.

At another apartment on Borodinsky Street Sharypina found the dying Stepanov family. The father had been out of work for three months. A few days before he seemed a bit better and sat by the window where a little sun came in. "Now it will be all right," he said. "We will live." A few moments later he toppled over dead. With the aid of a porter twelve-year-old Boris Stepanov had taken his father's body to the morgue. His mother, cloaked in a heavy coat, lay on her bed and stared into space. She had not said a word since her husband died. On a second bed lay sixteen-year-old Volodya. He did not speak. He chewed.

"What is he eating?" Madame Sharypina asked.

"He is not eating. There is nothing in his mouth," his brother Boris said. "He just chews and chews. He says he doesn't want to eat."

Despite Sharypina's efforts Boris and Volodya were dead within a few days. Only the shattered mother survived.

One February day Sharypina was walking slowly along Zagorodny Prospekt when she saw a child with a stick in his hand, a piece of blanket wrapped about his head. The child darted into the next courtyard and started digging at a mound of frozen garbage.

"What are you doing here?" she asked. The child, who appeared to be about seven years old, turned a pair of suspicious eyes on her and replied that he was looking for something for his sister Lena to eat. The night before, he said, he had found some cabbage stalks. Very good. Of course, they were frozen. Lena had eaten them and had given him a piece, too.

It was a typical Leningrad case—the father at the front, alive or dead no one knew, the mother long since taken to the hospital, alive or dead no one knew, the children living on frozen garbage heaps.

A doctor named Milova was called to Apartment No. 67 at 11/13 Borovaya Ulitsa one January day.

"The door to the apartment was open," she reported. "I found the room

I wanted and went in without knocking. My eyes met a frightful sight. A half-dark room. Frost on the walls. On the floor a frozen puddle. On a chair the corpse of a fourteen-year-old boy. In a child's cradle the second corpse of a tiny child. On the bed the dead mistress of the flat, K. K. Vandel. Beside her, rubbing the dead woman's breast with a towel, stood her oldest daughter Mikki. But life had gone, and it could not be brought back. In one day Mikki lost her mother, her son and her brother, all dead of hunger and cold. At the door, hardly able to stand from weakness, was her neighbor, Lizunova, looking without comprehension upon the scene. On the next day she died, too."

A teacher, A. N. Mironova, saved more than a hundred children in the winter of 1941-42. On January 28 she noted in her diary:

To the 17th Line, House 38, Apartment No. 2 (on Vasilevsky Island) to get Yuri Stepanov, 9 years old. His mother was dead. The youngster slept day and night with his dead mother. ("How cold I got from mama," he said.) Yuri didn't want to come with me. He cried and shouted. A touching farewell with his mother ("Mama, what will happen to you without me?").

Another entry from Mironova's January diary:

Prospekt Musorgsky 68, Apartment 30. Took a girl, Shura Sokolova, born 1931. Father at the front. Mother dead. Body of mother in the kitchen. Little girl dirty, scabs on her hands. Found her in a pile of dirty linen under the mattress.

V. N. Ivanov, secretary of the Komsomols, in a report on the winter of 1942 said, "I must tell you that nothing more terrible and difficult could have been possible. I worked under the weight of psychological trauma. I could not bear to see the people dropping around me. Human beings simply slipped away. They no longer could stand."

The Young Communists mustered 983 members for the service brigades, plus 500 to 600 additional young people enlisted in each region of the city. They visited 29,800 flats, provided medical aid to 8,450 persons and made daily visits to 10,350 starving persons—according to their official report. Another estimate puts the number of flats visited at 13,810 and the number of persons helped at 75,000.

Death, in a measure, was beginning to modify Leningrad's problems. The figures are not very accurate. All the Soviet authorities concede this. Probably 11,085 persons died in November of hunger. Nearly five times as many, 52,881, died in December. The figures for January and February are less precise. One of the most conservative authorities, A. V. Karasev, estimated deaths in January at 3,500 to 4,000 a day, or 108,500 to 124,000. Dmitri V. Pavlov, whose task it was to feed the survivors, puts the combined January-February death toll at 199,187. Pavlov's total is probably too low. The



a kilo of bread when they took their places in the unheated train for transport to the Ladoga base at Borisova Griva. There they were placed in buses or open trucks and driven across the lake to Zhikharevo, Lavrovo and Kobona for entrainment to rear evacuation points. It was not supposed to take more than a couple of hours to cross Ladoga. There were warming points and first-aid stations at frequent intervals.

In reality, of course, it was many winter weeks before minimum conditions were met. The evacuees were so weak that it took hours to load them. An echelon arriving at Borisova Griva on January 23 took a day and a half to load, the people were so feeble. Not many survived the ordeal. But they could not have survived in Leningrad either.<sup>5</sup>

The death roll grew: the author of fantastic fiction, A. R. Belyayev, the poet A. P. Kraisky, the author of the novel *Hunger* (dealing with the Petrograd famine in the Civil War), S. A. Semenov, and the children's writer Ye. Ya. Danko. In all, forty-five writers perished. The losses in the Academy of Science included the antiquities specialist, S. A. Zhebelev; the Semitics specialist, P. K. Kokovtsov; the historians, B. L. Bugayevsky and P. S. Sadikov; 36 members of the Mining Institute, 8 from the Chemical Technical Institute, 7 from the Railroad Transportation Institute; 136 architects; 6 the artists, A. I. Savinov, V. Z. Zverev, N. A. Tyrsa, A. A. Uspensky, I. Ya. Bilibin (in all, 83 of the 225 artists in Leningrad); the composers, V. K. Tomilin, N. P. Fomin, B. G. Golts, Professor P. N. Sheffer and many others; 9 artists of the Maly Opera Theater and 29 of the Mariinsky; 44 workers of the Russian Museum (to February 13); 130 of the 560 Hermitage workers who remained in the city; hundreds of physicians, teachers, engineers, professors and students.

The list of brilliant, able, scholarly and artistic men and women who died with their beloved city ran into the thousands. Many of them were men like the distinguished physiologist, Aleksei A. Ukhtomsky. Ukhtomsky was sixty-six years old when the war broke out. He had just completed editing his lectures on the nervous system for the University of Leningrad publishing house and was planning in the 1941-42 academic year to offer a new course in physiology. With the onset of war he put aside these occupations and began to organize special research on traumatic shock and other problems connected with the war. His laboratory and institute were packed up and shipped to Elabuga in the Tatar Republic and Saratov, but he himself refused to go. His lifelong associate, Nadezhda Ivanovna Bobrovskaya, was critically ill; she had suffered a brain hemorrhage on June 6 and he was caring for her in his apartment. Moreover, his own health was extremely

<sup>5</sup> Even in the winter of 1941-42 people continued to be evacuated into Leningrad from surrounding regions. It was estimated that 55,000 persons were brought into the city during the winter, most of them ill-clothed, starving, with no place to live or means of survival. (Karasev, *op. cit.*, p. 186.)

<sup>6</sup> L. A. Ilyin, who spoke to the meeting at the Academic Chapel January 9, was killed by a shell fragment while walking on Nevsky Prospekt in December, 1942.

	Flour	Cereals	Meat	Fats	Sugar
On hand in Leningrad	2,106	326	243	94	226
At West Ladoga warehouses	2,553	690	855	130	740
En route across Ladoga	1,020	210	220	108	90
At Voibokalo-Zhikharevo	6,196	846	1,347	360	608
Totals	11,875	2,072	2,665	692	1,664
Days' supply at existing consumption rate	21	9	20	9	13

To be sure, he had only three or four days' supply of flour actually in Leningrad. But he could see daylight ahead. On January 24 he raised the rations for the second time—to 400 grams of bread daily for workers, 300 for ordinary employees, and 250 for dependents and children. On February 11 he raised rations again—to 500 grams for workers, 400 for employees and 300 for dependents and children.

These steps were taken against the background of a major decision by Zhdanov and the State Defense Committee: to evacuate from Leningrad over the ice road at least one-quarter of the remaining population—500,000 persons. The official order was issued January 22, and Aleksei Kosygin, the future Premier of the Soviet Union, was placed in charge of the task.<sup>4</sup>

Actually, the Leningrad front had ordered the evacuation of residents via the ice road as early as December 6 and had set a quota of 5,000 persons per day to be reached by December 20. But only 105,000 persons had been evacuated from Leningrad from August, 1941, to January 22, 1942, of which only 36,738 were native Leningraders—the others being refugees from the Baltic states.

Conditions on the ice road were so chaotic in December and early January that most persons who left the city had to make it on their own. Thousands died on the ice. From Kobona to Syasstroj throughout December and early January could be seen wrecked and abandoned cars and trucks in which elderly weak persons and feeble infants had frozen to death. There were no facilities for housing or feeding evacuees. The evacuation commission was so badly organized that hundreds of persons waited at evacuation points for days and then returned home. The evacuees often perished. The director of the Second Manual Training School tried to take his youngsters out of the city. They were confined to a frigid barracks at Ladoga for ten days, and the director eventually returned the survivors to Leningrad.

Under these conditions it was estimated that 36,118 persons had been evacuated via the Ladoga ice road up to January 22.

Now, it was hoped, all this could be changed. An echelon of several hundred buses was brought up from Moscow and stationed at Voibokalo. Evacuees were taken first to the Finland Station. There they were to be given a hot meal and 500 grams of bread. They were supposed to receive

<sup>4</sup> Most of the evacuees were sent to the Urals or to Central Asian cities. Some, however, were sent to the Caucasus and fell into German hands when the Nazis broke through to Maikop in the summer of 1942.