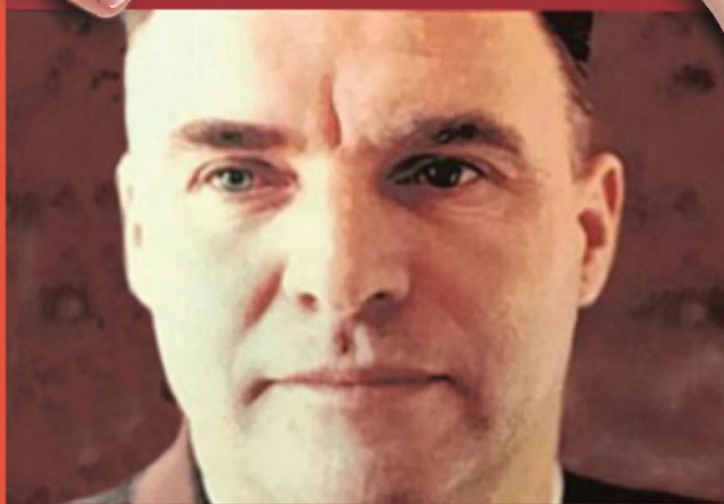




London Prize presents



**THE MOST RUSSIAN
PERSON**



London Prize presents

Vladimir Shatakishvili
The Most Russian Person

«ИП Березина Г.Н.»

2020

УДК 821.161.1
ББК 84(2Рос=Рус)6

Shatakishvili V. A.

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The generation that matured in the thirties of the last century fell on unprecedented ups and upheavals. All of them passed through the heart of Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik. New cities are associated with his name: Ozersk in the Urals and Lermontov in the Caucasus. Whoever he has not been in his life: a blacksmith, tinker, driver, tractor driver, tankman, pilot, battalion commander, and senior manager who performed important tasks of the government. When many documents were declassified today, it became known that I.N. Medyanik is involved in those who created the country's nuclear shield. “The Most Russian Person” is one of the documentary stories of V. A. Shatakishvili, dedicated to famous people, participants and creators of history, people of amazing fate, whose meetings gave him life. Shatakishvili is objective and at the same time delicate, he speaks with enthusiasm and interest. His work is full of wisdom and joy, in a simple and an engaging way it conveys to the reader the impressions of the author and with them — the realities of the old, already unfamiliar life.

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Vladimir Akakievich Shatakishvili

The Most Russian Person

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Vladimir Shatakishvili began to write books when his beloved wife got seriously ill. He had to do something just to stay in this world. The longing and bitterness overshadowed the whole world when the blue eyes of Lyudmila closed forever, but the fourteen-year-old Sandro (Alex), with a

desperate hope, was looking at Vladimir with the same blue eyes. He had to live! So, he wrote dozens of notebooks with confessions of “resurrected” toastmaster, whose good friends never ceased to invite him to feasts, where he said lovely words wishing them eternal health, love, happiness and wealth... Having found out about his diaries, the son persuaded his father to publish these stories, and soon his books came out: “The Casket of Colourful Contemporaries” (2004), “Ball Wanted” (2005), “The Most Russian Person” (2007), “Companion at the Feast” (2012), “How Well We Lived Badly” (2014).

Word of the editor

For every person, the ability to control oneself and one's emotions is the primary, necessary duty. This is more than once emphasized by the author of the book, Vladimir Shatakishvili. He writes about what he knows personally, what he himself has experienced. That's why he is so interesting. Reading his stories, novels, memoirs, you fall in love with his heroes: Russians, Georgians, Armenians, Ukrainians, Greeks, French, Germans, Americans, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Ossetians, British, Jews, Spaniards... And I really want to be among them (decent people), make toasts, enjoy life, be beautiful spiritually and physically, as they are. And mistakes, and mistakes? And who does not have them? Everybody does. As well the betrayal of loved ones, indifference of colleagues, buddies, and you want to howl like a wolf when you are left alone with your problems. Communication cleans the soul, enriches the person. Ill-wishers promised him and his friends defeat in life. And they've got a knockout. A living river, no matter what stones are in its path, must flow! Vladimir Shatakishvili stepped over the 60-year-old frontier, hasn't stumbled, fallen, and his heroes are alive: they create, raise children and grandchildren, overcome great difficulties with honor and are demanded by time and society.

After reading the book by Vladimir Shatakishvili, you understand, that the fate was generous to him, it presented tens, hundreds of friends around the world. Communicating with them is a priceless gift. Meeting everyone, he worries every time if others will be better after talking to him. Having read his stories about Shota Gabritchidze, Bitchiko Davlianidze, Ivan Medyanik, Andrey Gedikyants, Gennadiy Novakhov, Amiran Hurtsiya, Sergo Mgaloblishvili, Maysuradze, Vyacheslav Shulzhenko, Boris Arustamov, David Topuria, Gela Lobzhanidze, Boris Rosenfeld, there is a feeling that you are exchanging your thoughts and feelings with his characters.

In the first row, who Vladimir Shatakishvili describes, is the man of tremendous fate, a veteran of the nuclear industry, a strong-willed, demanding leader, Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik. The author had frank conversations with him for several years, not trying to declassify a highly secret industry – the production of atomic weapons, which he was involved in, but offered his interlocutor a sort of know-how: to talk only about feasts in his eventful life, when meeting iconic figures of the 20th century. If we apply the Lermontov formula “the hero of our time” to him, then in the twentieth century, of course, it will be Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik. Without any misgivings (he gave a non-disclosure subscription) he spoke about the most prominent scientists: Kurchatov, Korolev, Marshals Budyonny, Zhukov, Voroshilov, Minister Slavsky, director of the “Mayak” plant Muzrukov. He remembered Beria, Kobulov, Shvernik... The man of legend is exactly about him! He did not live a year to his century.

Nikolay Pavlovich Lobzhanidze – a man of legend. Thanks to his incessant talent cafes, bars and restaurants of the level of civilized Europe appeared in Yessentuki and Kislovodsk. He defended, and, in fact, saved Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev during the struggle for power in the Kremlin. We read in the book: “What a wonderful and wise man was Lobzhanidze! A professional, kindhearted, friendly, hospitable, and, of course, decent – a worthy son of the Georgian people.” “And if everyone improves oneself, his home, his country, not looking for enemies from the outside, but was aware of his advantages and disadvantages, the society would have been perfect. Maybe there would have been no wars”, Vladimir Shatakishvili writes bitterly. “My father, Akakiy Mikhailovich, is the first victim of the war. Seriously wounded in a battle near Poltava, a percussion bullet hit the face, tore off his cheek and nose. While the war was going on, for several years he moved around hospitals, and even when the war was over, he was still lying on hospital beds for a long time, mouth breathing for a year and a half. He underwent twenty-eight plastic surgeries without anesthesia! What kind of courage and willpower you need to have in order to consciously go through such anguish!” Awesome pages, the best in the book.

The US Deputy Secretary of State arrived in Tbilisi. He was greeted according to high status: with honor and respect. After a fascinating tour of the city the solemn dinner was held. One of the invited Merab Bochorishvili, an artist, began to talk to the American in familiar way. Animation arose in the hall; the guests laughed and joked. Guys from the guard asked the artist to behave more modestly. To which Bochorishvili declared, “Everyone sitting at the Georgian table is equal, regardless of the positions and titles, only one person is listened to – tamada”. So toastmaster tries to explain to people, who drink, how to behave well at a feast, to listen to him, who is responsible for everyone. The person having been chosen as the tamada is the most competent and responsible, otherwise who will listen to him. He always knows when and to whom it is necessary to “hit the brakes”, to stop at the right moment, before he does any foolishness. “Not to let down human dignity of the one, who drank in your presence and under your table leadership, is one of the main tasks of an experienced toastmaster,” the writer concludes. And adds, “There is help to the state, too. Explanatory work with people is obligatory: cultural, respectful behavior of a guest at the table allows you to observe discipline, activate self-control, make you think about the consequences that await you round the corner”. It's hard not to agree.

Vladimir Shatakishvili is in good shape. Thanks to the sport he has been going in for since his school years, and this gives hope for long years and the continuation of our meetings with him. Kind, sympathetic, he attracts talented, extraordinary people, knows how to talk to them, to open up, to remember something significant in life and in the life of their friends, acquaintances. He has got followers: philologists Georgiy Lobzhanidze, Rafael Avedisov, Jorge Alfonso Moran.

He was born in the twentieth century, but as a writer in the twenty-first. I can safely say this because I was side by side with him, I have edited all his books. And he has written and published six in 15 years from 2004 to 2019: “The Casket of Colourful Contemporaries”, “Ball Wanted”, “The Most Russian Person”, “Companion at the Feast”, “How Well We Lived Badly” and “The Toastmaster's Confession”. They have their own lives, their readers, their fans. I dare think: cheerful persons, like his heroes.

Alexander IVANENKO,
Chief Editor
North Caucasian Publishing house MIL

Vladimir Shatakishvili

The Most Russian Person

Time makes a man.
Russian proverb

A STORY ABOUT A MAN FROM “MAYAK” – IN INTERVIEW, EPISODES, LYRICAL DIGRESSIONS

NORTH CAUCASIAN
MIL PUBLISHING HOUSE
PYATIGORSK / 2007

The share of a generation that had matured in the thirties of the last century had unprecedented ups and downs. They all passed through the heart of Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik. New cities are connected with his name: Ozersk in the Urals and Lermontov in the Caucasus. Whoever he was not in his life: a blacksmith, a tinker, a driver, a tractor driver, a tankman, a pilot, a battalion commander, and a prominent leader who carried out important government assignments. When many documents have been declassified today, it became known that I. N. Medyanik was involved in those who created the country's nuclear shield.

V. A. Shatakishvili. “The Most Russian Person.” Documentary story, 2007
North Caucasian publishing house MIL, 2007

Meet: Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik

Year of birth: 1912

Place of birth: the most Russian river – the Volga, more precisely, a small village with a very Russian name – Rodnikovka

Name: the most Russian in the world – Ivan

Height: 194

Weight: 110 (before retirement)

First sat behind the car wheel in 1927

Still drives it today, in 2008

Member of the CPSU – since 1935

Employment record – since 1925

It all started with cabbage

I first heard about it in the year of 1984. The father of my school friend Volodya Avetisov – Georgiy Alexandrovich – told us a curious story about the benefits of consuming cabbage. We went with a buddy to the Yessentuki Hotel buffet to have a snack, and there were only boiled eggs and fresh cabbage salad, and, of course, tea. At this small meal I was told the story I have remembered many years.

The essence of the story was the following. One distinguished person ate cabbage daily for many years: in the morning, at lunch and in the evening. He ate cabbage habitual for each: fresh, sauerkraut, pickled, stewed, stuffed cabbage, pies with the appropriate filling, in addition to the borsch, cabbage soup, etc. On the one hand, there is nothing surprising in gastronomic passions of a man to like popular and beloved by people vegetable, of course not, but cabbage saved his life long ago.

This conversation took place two years before the Chernobyl disaster, and the world still has not known the horrors suffered by our country. All the facts were urgently classified about previous similar accidents. People who had information or were affected by this accident gave a subscription not to disclose state secrets and this is serious. According to Georgiy Alexandrovitch we found out that his good friend Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik, in the early postwar years, worked as the head of a major undercover unit engaged in the production of atomic bombs. There were tens of thousands of people under his command, among which, besides, were volunteers, prisoners and even German prisoners of war. The trouble happened suddenly, many got almost fatal dose of radiation. People were tested daily, taken blood tests, but the results were disappointing. Frankly speaking, it should be noted that at that time nobody knew that this was the disease with possible fatal consequences.

One day a German prisoner of war came to the reception to Ivan Nikiforovich and said he was well aware of the seriousness of the situation and being a medical doctor was willing to share with a known way of treatment by cabbage.

He said to let Chief try this method himself first, and, if blood tests improve, then this experiment can be applied on all affected. The Chief agreed and ate almost tons of cabbage in different forms for a few months. Soon he was invited to the lab and offered one more analysis because the previous had failed to conform to the established indicators. They did the second, third, 10th time... Everything spoke of a stable tendency towards improvement. And echelons with cabbage went to the Urals. Radiation receded.

Spring of 2003. I'm sitting in the office of the General Director of JSC "Gorjachevodsk" A. P. Sahtaridi. It was the time when the project for the construction of ice palaces was started in Mineralnye Vody. I and Alexander Petrovich were going to Moscow by evening flight for talks with Vice President of the Professional Hockey League of Russia V. T. Shalaev.

Before departure it was necessary to discuss and take some important organizational decisions. The secretary was asked not to let anyone come in the cabinet although there were a lot of people in the reception. Despite the warning she let in a tall old man decorated with orders and medals. I must say that the head office was located in the car service station No. 1, and the newcomer, familiar with the current owner of the cabinet, was introduced as its first director who had built it from scratch. The guest had been the friend of Pyotr Pavlovich, father of Alexander Sahtaridi, for many years. The veteran asked to help to repair his old Moskvich-2141. The foreman was invited and told to carry out a complete maintenance of the vehicle at the expense of the enterprise. Then tea with honey was brought, and the conversation about the problems of transport started.

I only joined the conversation when the guest said, that, by the way, he was going to be 91 in a month. I think you will agree that it is a considerable age for a driver. As my head was clogged with hockey and a possible solution, simple men's conversation seemed not to be interesting at all for me. But suddenly, I heard the name, which was in my head, Medyanik, plus his involvement in the testing

of the first atomic bomb in the USSR. One should be complete ignorant (and I don't consider myself to be such), so as not to realize that the very same man-legend was sitting in front of me, whose life was saved by cabbage. I had known this fact for two decades. Of course, I dreamed of meeting him, but I could not even assume that he was still alive and good (forgive me, Ivan Nikiforovich), and fate would give me a magnificent gift. Soon we became not only familiar, but friends.

I was very much excited and confessed to my new acquaintance that I knew about his miraculous healing. It turned out that not everything in the legend corresponded to reality: something had been changed taking into account the requirements of the post-war time, something was embellished, but in general this fact really took place in the biography of my hero. Printing of the book "Without guarantees of the century", dedicated to the brilliant biography of Ivan Nikiforovich, written by a well-known in the Caucasus and a member of the Writers' Union of Russia and respected by me Alexander Fyodorovich Mosintsev, was being completed. After reading the book, I was convinced that there were still a lot of facts left for me. And I also thought of writing a book about Medyanik. His fate is amazing. Awesome. Fiery fate! So I will try to interview this Fate. The Fate of a wonderful person.

On June 2, 2006, Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik turned 94, and this little story is about him. I hope it will be my gift for his jubilee, the 95th anniversary, in appreciation for what he had done for millions of people.

I'm on friendly terms with my memory...

WHEN Ivan Nikiforovich goes through the memory of past days and years, it takes me aback. Top secret ideas, classified towns, objects, names in his stories acquire the coloring of such frank commonness, the taste of the ordinary servitude that at the beginning of our acquaintance (I confess!), somewhere deep down doubt arises if it was in reality. Has his memory changed? Isn't there a natural desire to attach your name to the significant and fateful events of the Fatherland? After all, human vanity is a mysterious and incomprehensible category.

No, no and no! His memory didn't betray him, he was, in fact, a witness and direct participant of those bygone events. And he does not boast, does not expect the thunder of copper pipes of glory – this tall, grayhaired man with a piercing glance of intelligent eyes and a faint grin, that seems to forgive my disbelief, speaks calmly and confidently.

Yes, he is not a nuclear physicist, not a professor, not a doctor of science. He did not take part in “capturing” the evasive neutrino, did not invent the electron brain, did not split the atom, did not “weigh” the star from Andromeda or Cassiopea's, did not beat his head against the wall seeking the right solution in clever projects.

He introduced himself as an experienced motorist, builder, transport worker. He has got a lot more professions that he had mastered, complying to the most severe life circumstances. Later I will tell about it, too.

Now, at ninety-five, he continues to drive. He himself drives. The driver's license of the new sample is valid until 2009. The traffic police GAI (I use the old, familiar to the ear abbreviation of the team of law enforcement officers) do not stop him to verify the identification or for violation of the medical, precisely, age restrictions. Yes, they know, they know our grand-dad, they know Ivan Nikiforovich in Stavropol region, and Mineralnye Vody, in Moscow, in the Urals, he is remembered in all classified “Chelyabinsk” ones, and on the once super classified “Mayak”.

He is neither a professor, nor a doctor of science, nor an academician. But he has the title “Veteran of Nuclear Energy and Industry”. And he is proud of it by right. He was directly involved in the preparation of the testing of the first Soviet atomic bomb which our brilliant nuclear scientists, the finest scientific minds in the world, created “to fear the enemies and world imperialism”.

The first received radioactive plutonium – this monstrous deadly “stuffing” for the first Soviet atomic bomb – was delivered to its destination in February 1949 by Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik. It was dangerous. It was extremely dangerous! Both for the driver himself, and for his obligatory escort from the department of Lavrentiy Beria – colonel N. M. Ryzhov, and for classified cities, not-marked on any map, in which the bomb was grown from the idea to the real incarnation. Dangerous eventually for hundreds of thousands of people, for the earth, and the sky, and for the whole of Urals with its innumerable natural resources.

Winter, frozen roads, hard and remote, where every unexpected bump could turn a disaster – everything is remembered by Ivan Nikiforovich as if he had just brushed off cold sweat from the forehead from tension, natural excitement, and involuntary fear for a possible unforeseen error.

The car with a deadly cargo was sent in its dangerous trip by a well-known physicist Yuliy Borisovich Khariton, having “blessed” it in his “scientist way”.

Igor Vasilyevich Kurchatov met it at the destination point, openly pleased. He shook Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik's hand “like a nuclear scientist to a nuclear scientist” and smiled slyly.

Everything worked out. Plutonium, without which the bomb was just an empty shell, was delivered to the laboratory. The last months came before the test. The rest, just lazy or too young, do not know: *On August 29, 1949, the first Soviet atomic bomb was tested at a nuclear test site near Semipalatinsk.*

The USSR nuclear shield – as opposed to the United States – declared itself in full voice!

“And do you yourself, Ivan Nikiforovich, remember those famous scientists with whom you had to communicate or at least see on the famous “Mayak” (Chelyabinsk-40)?”

“Will you give me a piece of paper,” Ivan Nikiforovich gets excited, “I will write the names of those you probably have no idea about, no offense.”

And he took the pen.

I here give names and surnames written by Ivan Nikiforovich. This is an incomplete list of people, involved in the production of the atomic bomb at “Mayak”:

I. V. Kurchatov
A. N. Nesmeyanov
L. P. Beria
L. D. Landau
Y. B. Khariton
P. L. Kapitsa
B. L. Vannikov
I. E. Tamm
A. P. Alexandrov
L. V. Kantorovich
A. D. Sakharov
A. M. Prokhorov
S. P. Korolev
N. G. Basov
B. G. Muzrukov
A. F. Joffe
A. I. Alikhanov
M. G. Pervukhin
A. S. Nikiforov
P. A. Cherenkov
N. I. Bochvar
V. G. Khlopin
N. A. Dollezhal
V. S. Emelyanov
I. M. Frank
A. I. Alikhanyan
N. N. Semyonov
S. L. Sobolev
V. I. Alferov
I. F. Tevosyan
M. M. Tsarevsky
I. E. Starik
V. S. Fursov
I. I. Gurevich
M. V. Keldysh
I. Y. Pomeranchuk
D. F. Ustinov
N. L. Dukhov
A. P. Zavenyagin
E. I. Zababakhin
G. N. Flerov
K. I. Shchelkin

I. K. Kikoin
V. I. Vexler
V. A. Malyshev
A. K. Kruglov
E. P. Slavsky
N. V. Melnikov
Y. B. Zeldovich
A. P. Vinogradov

“Here you go! And this, of course, is not all. The list can be continued. But you, Volodya, aren’t going to compile a personalized encyclopedia of nuclear scientists?” Ivan Nikiforovich smiled. “The first one I put is *Igor Vasilyevich Kurchatov*. He was the chief scientific officer of the atomic project. Unusual man. The fire. Himself like a nuclear reactor. No wonder his nickname was “atomic boiler” – for the incredible efficiency. The man was just boiling! Everyone loved him. Respected by men, loved by women. They gave a gently nickname – Prince Igor, and his subordinates addressed in their own way – Beard. He wore a special beard, of unusual shape, cut off at the end “under the line”, with a gray at the chin. The forehead is tall and strong, and eyes sparkle cheerfully. Cheerful when not busy. Well, what about the “man”... I got excited. Although I said in a good way. On the contrary, he was a nobleman,” Ivan Nikiforovich laughs. “And, in general, a real man! Russian hero. It’s a pity he passed away early, well, what is this age – 57? He did not live up only a year before the flight of Gagarin, died in 1960 in February after the second stroke.”

“I know that you and Kurchatov often met and talked. How was it?”

“I remember the first meeting. I took up my duties at the very beginning of 1948. Somewhere in March Kurchatov appeared at the construction site. He was informed about a new head of the motor vehicle fleet at the plant. Besides, one of the drivers (there were several of them) spoke well of the “new broomstick”. They say I began to put things in order from the very first day. The academician conveyed through the head of the personal security Vasilij Vasilyevich Kulikov for me to show up. I came at the appointed time and was immediately received. A young, tall, handsome man, he impressed me. As it should be in such cases, I wanted to introduce myself, tell about myself, but Kurchatov decidedly stopped me, “I know everything about you. I had a meeting with the secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Mikhail Andreevich Suslov. He said that he had sent me two reliable guys he as a member of the Military Council of the North Caucasus had known since the war and vouched for them. He said about Trovchenko, the representative of the Council of the Ministers, and you, Ivan Nikiforovich. Suslov also added that they are military people, they will bring order.” Of course, I was flattered that I was presented to the world-famous scientist on the positive side and really wanted to justify his trust. Then we switched to urgent matters. A serious and important conversation took place. The main production – the creation of a bomb – consumed all the finances, and we understood that. But the transport was desperately needed, as well as good reliable roads. It’s a shame – impassable mud, even in sunny weather, not to mention especially in rain or sleet.

After all, when a new home is being built, and even more a city, they can’t avoid the thing that the earth resists, soaks to a slurry, sticks to shoes, clothes. To go two or three times, you spend a lot of time for washing shoes. And Igor Vasilyevich, despite being the “master” and “Prince Igor”, loved to go in the galoshes (rubbers). It was comfortable and the shoes were clean! Looking at him, soon everyone in “Mayak” put on galoshes. But it was not an option. I said that in Germany, before construction, they, first of all, build roads, asphalt them so that building materials could arrive on time, the garbage is taken out, and people are comfortable. This is a standard of work! And are we worse? Though the year we talked about was hard – the 48th, we didn’t still recover from the war, and the anger against the Germans was still hot – they were enemies after all. But I believe that it is possible to learn reasonable economic management from the enemy.

Igor Vasilyevich looked at me sharply (with understanding, it means) and asked for some patience. He said he knew how important transport was in our business. “In every sense, you are our “ambulance”. We are sure to help, I promise,” he said and kept his word. He always said simply, with jokes, which, of course, were relevant. He was always the center of attention. When we went fishing, he was busy with our kids and also with jokes. Through a joke, the boys were crammed with serious things about science, serious study, for example. That way he made his son Zhenka fall in love with these same sciences, so that when he grew up, he became submarine designer. He is now seventy-two years old, Honored Submariner of Russia, lives in Severodvinsk. Here is what else Igor Vasilyevich asked me about during that first meeting: “You, Ivan Nikiforovich, should be as military strict with subordinates. People from all over the country will soon come here, you need to continuously deliver them to the plant – from Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk. In addition, a huge amount of cargo will also go and they should not suffer. This is a responsible matter, but I hope you can handle it.”

“Sure I will cope, Igor Vasilyevich!”

Academician rose from the table, came close and firmly shook my hand. Our eyes met, he carefully began to examine me, from close range. We turned out to be the same height and it is when I was almost two meters tall! On “Mayak” people of this height are rare.

“And now about the main thing. All the country's science, famous academics, started moving to us. They need to be placed in three cottages specially built for them,” Kurchatov paused. “But remember that the academicians are the same children, they wear hats in summer and winter. Please meet each in person, do not reassign to anyone. And change hats to caps!”

From this day on, I met and placed “domestic science” personally. People were different: more silent, thoughtful, and there were capricious, and such as Yuliy Borisovich Khariton – cheerful, good-humoured. I went hunting and fishing with them. I got the most important thing: every academician was a secret person, the country would learn many of their names later after their discoveries, and in the case of Sergey Pavlovich Korolev only after his death.

For especially important guests I warmed two cars in stock. I made out sheepskin coats, felt boots, fur hats and, whatever happens, a few bottles of Armenian brandy.

Such a case soon came up. Boris Glebovich Muzrukov, director of the plant, calls me and says, “There hasn't been any news from the people meeting Korolev for a long time. You are at control”. It was almost the only time when someone else instead of me went to meet, and no one knew who Korolev was. I called the driver of one of the already equipped cars, and we rushed. Somewhere after ten kilometers we saw a car that had slid to the side of the road. The driver was busy under the hood, and two passengers and a welcomer were standing nearby. In order not to waste time, I gave the command to the drivers to take the stalled car in tow, and made the guests put on sheepskin coats, hats and boots, practically making them change clothes in the cold. Then I poured cognac into glasses, offered cheese, sausages, something else and soon brought the latecomers to the place. I ran to Muzrukov, reported that everything was in order (it was night, and our cottages were nearby), but he laughed, “Korolev has already called, said that some huge “chief”, as the chauffeurs call him, arrived and forced him change clothes and even made him drink brandy.” After that, I met Sergey Pavlovich more than once. He was a charming and modest person. Although neither a hunter nor a fisherman, he never refused to go to the country.”

“Ivan Nikiforovich! My interview with you has stretched out for long four years. An entire story was written, handed over to the editor, and on January 12, 2007, there came the centenary of Sergey Pavlovich Korolev. Let's go back and talk about what you have remembered from your meetings with him.”

“There were several such meetings. Where do we start?”

“Tell everything that you remember, and then put the episodes in chronological order.”

“To begin with, over the years of my work at “Mayak”, I met Sergey Pavlovich every time, except for the episode already described. His arrivals were associated with the development and

supply of fuel for future space missions. Train sets of tanks went constantly from us to Baikonur. He made closest friendly relations, I would even say, with Slavsky, Muzrukov, Kurchatov.”

“Did close communication with him happen after your eight-year work at “Mayak”?”

“Yes, the first such meeting took place in 1957. By that time I had moved to Mineralnye Vody and worked in Lermontov as the head of the motor transport at a classified unit. Once in the director’s reception I was informed that they had called from Kislovodsk and asked to get in touch. It turned out that on Korolev’s instructions, his assistant was looking for me and sent me an invitation to come to Ordzhonikidze Sanatorium. After work I started my new Volga and headed for Kislovodsk. The meeting turned out to be warm and friendly. While walking in the park for a couple of hours, we remembered mutual friends, acquaintances, some episodes from our life in the Urals. We planned a trip to Elbrus region. Vladimir Semyonovich Khomutov, chief medical officer, was the initiator of it. I took over the organization of shashlyk, pickled meat and picked up a set of stainless steel skewers brought from the Urals. All other problems were laid on the management of the sanatorium. The next morning we met on the highway Pyatigorsk – Nalchik, and three cars drove into the mountains. Elbrus region today still remains one of the largest centers of mountaineering and skiing in the country.

In Baksan, we were joined by an old friend of mine, the chairman of the village council, Azret Shokovich Bifov, with his sons Zhamal and Hassan. I contacted them late in the evening and invited to take part in the event. Somewhere a year before this episode, we rested in Elbrus region with families, and for my part it would be an unforgivable mistake not to invite these noble people to a decent men company, knowing how much honour and respect among the countrymen Azret Shokovich enjoys.

We got there two hours later. I don’t remember exactly what that place was, it seems, a recreation center for management, as there was security and staff. Representatives of the regional party committee of Kabardino-Balkaria, who met us, suggested a walk to the mountains. My legs ached then, and I had to give up climbing. Together with the chef of the sanatorium and the Baksan friends I took up cooking dinner. Kabardians brought with them a fat-tailed ram, dressed it and everything turned out at the highest level. Skewers of lamb and pork, shulum, skilfully cooked lamb entrails, greenery, vegetables, fruits, various slices of sturgeon and salmon fish and meat and sausage products. Guests came back from the walk about three hours later, pleased and full of enthusiastic impressions. We had already prepared a sumptuous dinner by that time, all the more so that everyone was pretty hungry. Sergey Pavlovich, impressed by the beauty of the nature of the Caucasus, was pleased and even made a toast and despite the sanatorium regime, took two or three shots of brandy.

We came back home late at night.

The second meeting with Korolev occurred in 1961. On a call from the USSR Ministry of Medium Machine Building, I once again had to visit the capital. By the way, I don’t know how it was in other ministries, but in those years our employees were summoned to Moscow and not sent on business trips by their enterprises. On arriving, I directly went to the reception office of Efim Pavlovich Slavsky, our long-term minister (from 1957 to 1986), who had served at his post until the age of 88. The receptionist knew me and both his secretaries usually tried to help get to the boss without delay, but this time they asked to wait. Just in case I asked, “Who is there with him?” It turned out that it was Korolev, and then, having rejoiced, I said that I had known him well for a long time. My arrival was reported. And I immediately entered into the minister’s cabinet, which I had known for a long time, and embraced him and Sergey Pavlovich. Slavsky says to me, “It is very good that you have arrived today. By four o’clock in the evening be with me. In the meantime, take a break from the road, or do something.”

There was always enough work in the ministry. I went around the offices I had planned, settled in a hotel, and at the appointed time appeared before Slavsky. Together, in the Minister’s “Chaika”, we went to the restaurant of the Moscow Hotel. We were met at the service entrance and taken to the luxurious banquet hall, where about twelve people had already gathered, all close to Korolev. It turned out that the event was dedicated to giving Sergey Pavlovich the second Golden Star of the

Hero of Socialist Labor. I was introduced to the guests as a colleague of Efim Pavlovich for work in Chelyabinsk-40 and who had worked for many years alongside Igor Vasilyevich Kurchatov. I don't remember who those people were, but there were the Stars of Heroes on the jackets of many of them, and Slavsky at that moment had two. The evening was solemn, everyone wished the general designer further space victories. Surprisingly, they drank little, basically brandy. Probably because many were already at a respectable age. When the word was given to me, I wished success to the hero of the occasion and expressed hope for future meetings, but this time at the resorts of the Caucasian Mineral Waters, where almost everyone went to restore health. Sergey Pavlovich could not resist talking about our first meeting, about the huge "chief" who made him put on a sheepskin coat, felt boots, drink a glass of brandy in the cold and safely delivered to his destination. We parted somewhere by midnight.

Then there was another, third, meeting with Korolev in Sochi. In autumn of 1963 the velvet season settled on the Black Sea coast. The new triumph of the Soviet cosmonautics! The flight was carried out by the first woman cosmonaut in the world – Valentina Tereshkova. That year I received a personal voucher to the Sochi sanatorium "Zvezdochka". Holders of such vouchers were settled in luxury rooms or in separate cottages. I got a cottage for two rooms. In the other half Nikolay Konstantinovich Baibakov, who for nearly thirty years headed the USSR State Planning Committee, was having resting with his family. In terms of age, he is older than me by a year, and, as far as I know, he is the only living Commissar of today (the Minister) of the Stalin call. Seems that he had headed the People's Commissariat of the oil industry since 1943. We talked much and learned about each other a lot of interesting things in twenty-four days of rest. Having come back from the beach one day, I found a note on my desk saying the chief medical officer of the sanatorium invited me to his place. It turned out that a meeting with cosmonauts was scheduled for this time. The neighbor also received an invitation, and together we went. Indeed, cosmonauts Andriyan Nikolaev and Pavel Popovich arrived, and about thirty minutes later Sergey Pavlovich Korolev arrived with a retinue of five people. He was having rest at the government dacha. We had interesting time: all the attention in those years was riveted on the heroes of space, they were celestials."

"Well, did you manage to talk to Korolev in presence of so many people?"

"Of course. We embraced, shook hands friendly and during the toast he again recalled the episode of our first acquaintance, thanked for the considerate attitude and even jokingly said that I was his bodyguard during the visits to the Urals."

"And what were the drinks?"

"There was everything on the table: Armenian brandy, Georgian wine, Russian vodka, champagne. This time I drank wine, Sergey Pavlovich only brandy and as always drank a little, my neighbor Baibakov – vodka. Korolev's friendly attitude, his story about the "exploits" on "Mayak" immediately won Nikolay Konstantinovich's favour. After this meeting and before the end of the holiday, we began to communicate more and almost made friends, exchanged phone numbers, although we never saw each other again."

"You know, Ivan Nikiforovich, what is the most amazing thing about your story? Of the listed characters of that memorable meeting, only Baibakov and Medyanik are still alive. On March 5, 2006, in the Column Hall of the House of the Unions, ninety-fifth anniversary of Nilolay Konstantinovich was solemnly celebrated. Speakers noted the outstanding achievements of our countryman. There were many honored guests from among the former secretaries of the Central Committee, union and republican ministers, representatives of CIS. Among those present and speaking there were congratulations from N. I. Ryzhkov, G. A. Zyuganov, Y. M. Luzhkov, Y. P. Ryabov, N. I. Maslennikov, Y. P. Batalin, E. S. Korshunov. Each guest was presented with souvenirs and a book "Baibakov from Stalin to Yeltsin".

And on June 2, 2007, Medyanik turned 95 years old. Hometown congratulated him adequately on this day."

“There has something gone absurdly wrong with the academics,” recalls Ivan Nikiforovich.” Most of them worked on a permanent basis in Dubna, Arzamas-16, KB-2, KB-3. They came to “Mayak” mainly to test their own inventions. Sometimes it happened that, where he had invented or discovered something had to be put into production, and then there were problems that affected the time of creation of the bomb. Time was running out, no failures were allowed. And then, according to Stalin’s personal instructions, all key scientists, project participants, were transported to our place for the completion of the installation and the commissioning of the main production facilities. So those three special two-story cottages were filled with renowned residents. Complete secrecy was observed. Only a few people knew who came or was leaving: the director of the plant, his deputy on security, representative from the Council of Ministers, I and maybe one or two people more. It was damn nice when at a solemn banquet in honor of the twentieth anniversary of the first testing, one of the academicians stood up and offered a toast, “To the “chief” who met and saw us off and wrapped in warm sheepskin coats!”

They made me stand up, and the whole hall, two or three hundred, men applauded.

There is one more thing to add. Most of the academicians – physicists, chemists, mathematicians – at the time of their work in the project to create the atomic bomb were classified. It was only after a successful test, on August 29, 1949, the party and the government appreciated their achievements and showered orders, medals, the Stars of Heroes, Stalin, Lenin, State and even Nobel prizes. If my memory doesn’t fail me, three times Heroes among those who were related to the bomb, were eleven people.”

“Ivan Nikiforovich, maybe I will surprise you now. We talked a lot about the great Kurchatov, but did you know that once he saved me from major troubles?”

“And when was it?”

“In the early eighties.”

“Well, you, brother, and exaggerate! Igor Vasilyevich passed away in 1960, toy were only eight then.”

“And, nevertheless, it is.”

I will cite for readers an excerpt from my first book, “The Casket of Colourful Contemporaries.”

"The table of the presidium"

In MOSCOW, I used to rent a room at the Orlyonok Hotel – a favorite, democratic, always hospitable and accessible. In the winter of eighty-three I and Volodya Avetisov stayed in Orlyonok for three days. On the eve of departure, we went to the center of Moscow, booked a table in the elite and closed to the non-artistic people restaurant of the WTO. Everything pleased there – excellent cuisine and excellent service, tremendous attention to the person and the opportunity to witness the capital celebrities – the people of the theater and cinema – meeting whom everybody dreamt in youth. I repeat, I do not belong to the artistic circle; in theatrical language I was introduced in this circle by Valery Shein, a great friend of Boris Rosenfeld, the manager of concert programs in Moscow. The restaurant began to live life to the fullest at midnight – from the hour when the theaters finished spectacles, and the artists went to have dinner, chat with each other, relax over a glass of brandy or vodka, move away from unrest, after the performance. During the day few people looked here. I really liked not to surprise Volodya Avetisov, but to show him that my frequent trips to the capital had paid off: I met interesting people, plunged into the world of art, gained connections, without which even the restaurant like the WTO was not possible.

Having wandered around the city, at half past seven in the evening, we went to Pushkin Square to that very restaurant. Boris Nikolaevich, the waiter with whom we agreed in advance, met us. He took us to the table I ordered, and I was surprised to read the sign, “The chairman's table.” Such a sign made it possible not to disturb us, because by half past ten the hall was full, there were not

enough seats. And the sign was a kind of security certificate, that's the way Boris Nikolaevich tried. "The chairman's table" was stunningly served. I think that the restaurant business designers were worth it for a reason: everything was decorated with taste, elegantly, richly. A lot of snacks, alcohol, although Boris Nikolaevich knew that I did not have an addiction to drinking. But he could not know my friend's taste, and, naturally, as the serving protocol required, put a bottle of Armenian brandy. The situation itself was disposed to drink off, and we took two or three shots.

Looking around, we noticed that there were no vacant seats in the hall, except for our two. And then Boris Nikolaevich asked us if we would be so kind as to let two ladies sit down at our table. We didn't object to ladies, but, frankly, we were not disposed to start new acquaintances. He explained the situation, "Our regular customers, both actresses."

I will be frank, both ladies were nice, beautiful and, as it turned out later, really worked in the theater – either in the Theater for Young People, or in the theater at the House of Culture of the Likhachev Automobile Plant. I can not be accurate today, for many years have passed. When young women appeared, we proposed not to order snacks as we had enough of them and everything is untouched – appetizing, beautifully decorated greenery, decorated various cooking fixings in the form of twisted in a spiral rings of carrots, onions. Outlets of vegetables, cold beef melting in the mouth, ham, olives – just an exhibition of the achievements of the national economy, no less no more! But alcohol was asked to add.

And it all started! Volodya, who always controlled himself, did not drink, and I, with my passion to making toasts, took control of the table. Our neighbors liked toasts, and it added enthusiasm. Things were gaining momentum and were worthy of attention by Eldar Ryazanov for his next masterpiece, when the master brings comedy to such an extent that tragedy could happen after it...

Somewhere by midnight I've had my doze and even exceeded it. When we were about to leave, I began to insist that our companions should be taken home. Volodya tried to stop me, persuade me, reminding that we had a plane early in the morning, that there was no time to sleep. But it was impossible to stop me. And Volodya, of course, could not leave his friend to the mercy of fate, to leave alone in Moscow at night with the drunk ladies, knowing my ability to throw money with or without reason.

We traveled by taxi for a long time, not knowing how far our lovely ladies had gotten. I was dozing, then came to my senses, and for this reason I did not remember the route. Volodya saw the road clearly, but he knew Moscow badly. The only thing that crashed into the memory was the monument to Kurchatov. I remember getting out of the car, how the ladies invited us to have a cup of coffee for vigour. And we went! What for? But having previously arranged with the taxi driver that he would wait for us for about fifteen minutes. Volodya was very unhappy with the night journey. Two o'clock at night, and we were far from the center drinking coffee on the outskirts... There was the reason to become indignant. Fifteen minutes or even more passed, finally, we said goodbye, to our luck found the taxi on the spot, got in and came back to the hotel.

At last! The concert was over, you could relax and even take a little nap... The clock hands showed three in the morning. The driver was in a hurry to the taxi park, as he had to be back and then like a bolt from the blue.

"Where is the jacket?" I howled like a wolf. "Volodya, tell me, where could I leave the jacket?"

Horror is drawn on his face too. In the leather jacket I took off in the hallway, there was everything: plane tickets, money, passports, other documents...

I sobered up instantly and remembered how we arrived, how I took off the jacket and stayed in a woolen pullover, and how I was leaving the ladies cosy home in the far outskirts, how threw on a sheepskin coat, forgetting about the jacket. Here it is, the very edge beyond which lies the tragedy! What to do? We did not know the names of random friends, their addresses, or phone numbers and was it at all? The only thing that I remember was a monument to Kurchatov! "Thank you, Igor Vasilyevich, thank you for that mark! Of course, you are a great scientist, physicist, we give you glory!"

But now it is you, Igor Vasilyevich, who must help, save me from being ruined!” In such a half-crazy delusion we ran out into the street. Fortunately, the hotel has taxi cars on duty.

“Where are we going?” one of the drivers cheered up.

“If you can find a monument to Kurchatov, we are going with you!”

The driver’s eyes popped out of his head. Just after three o’clock in the morning, two mad people rushed into the car and are crazily interested in the sights of the capital. How to react to it? Most likely, seeing us, he understood that it was a serious matter and got involved in the work. The monument was found. So what is next? We drove two or three blocks, but all in vain. There was not a single light in all the windows. At last we found the house. Seeing obscene inscriptions in the elevator we realized that we were on the right track. We rang the bell. The door of the apartment opened. Yes, it was them, our saviours! And the jacket was in the hallway, alive and good! We checked, valuables were in place – passports, money, tickets... All-in-all, the show was over! The public could go home. The women spoke in vying, “Your forgotten in a hurry jacket was immediately noticed, but it was late – you have already left the house. It became clear from the hotel business card where to look for, so we decided to inform the administrator in the morning.”

I don’t know if they would call the hotel or not, but I think that’s what would have happened. It’s good that the actresses turned out to be decent women, they didn’t touch either the money or the documents, otherwise we couldn’t get out of the trap we had made for ourselves. I instructed myself, children and grandchildren: taking alcohol, be circumspect and vigilant. Of course, first of all, I take it on my account, weigh this commandment up on myself, putting it in my own moral tablets.

“Yes, I agree, an interesting adventure. Good thing that it ended well for you.”

From molecular level to atomic!

Here is, for example, another case: when another star academician, Nikolay Antonovich Dollezhal, came to the Laboratory No. 2 (later it became Kurchatov Atomic Center) at the invitation of Igor Vasilyevich and the academician said right off the bat, “You are an expert in chemical engineering, so let's work together! We need a reactor to produce plutonium.” Ivan Nikiforovich smiled slyly, “I will not lie, I did not hear the conversation, and could not hear it. But read in the interview. Truly, many-many years later. Looks very much like Kurchatov. Well, and that Dollezhal was also a man of incredible mind and immediately understood what it was for and noticed that his scientific interests “do not coincide with atomic science...”

Kurchatov said, “You used to work at the molecular level – now work at the nuclear!” Igor Vasilyevich was witty, everyone knew that. And that he loved jokes, they also knew, but all the same, they swallowed the bait.

And now I remembered the galoshes. So here he gave people a lot to laugh at. All took galoshes at the entrance to the laboratory. And all the galoshes were with the same flannel crimson lining, they so shined, so shined! Well, so, as not to confuse this “mellow shine”, the initials of the host were attached to galoshes. So our Beard changed the initials of the chiefs of quite high rank. Laughter lasted for an hour when they tried to shove their shoes in their own... I almost said “sleigh”. Although it was really that way.

Here one more... All of us there, at “Mayak”, knew about the top secrecy in the “Kurchatov establishment” at Lubyanka: you couldn't take out even a piece of paper – everything was accountable. If you have taken a sheet, wrote it up – hand it over on receipt. It was impossible to break the security. And Igor Vasilyevich took it, yes he acted outrageously: he burnt the paper in an ashtray and then laughed, “And it smelled of broken security in the room for a long time...”

Let's stop for a while. Let us give Ivan Nikiforovich the opportunity to get over the excitement of unwittingly reviving memories.

Author's retreat

The documents I have studied, and they are publications in the press, recollections of eyewitnesses, the books by V. Novoselov and V. Tolstikov – “Mysteries of Sorokovka 40th”, P. Zhuravlev – “My Atomic Age”, the documentary book of V. Brokhovich “The “Mayak” Chemical Plant”, a collective jubilee collection, “The Creators of the Atomic Shield”, dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the city of Ozersk (the former Chelyabinsk-40 with the famous “Mayak”) created a picture of a difficult and heroic time. The picture, frankly speaking, of not the bright tone...

After the Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, and the world first learned about the consequences of this terrible monster, Stalin immediately responded to this alarming event: Americans need what we are made of.

This meant that the Soviet development of a nuclear project, begun in 1943 and interrupted by urgent military concerns, should be promptly restored. And naturally, it was necessary to mobilize the Soviet scientists involved in this problem: physicists, chemists, workers of small and medium special engineering to implement the task.

We needed a sensible scientific project manager.

In the Kremlin, the Politburo considered two candidates – Igor Vasilyevich KURCHATOV and Abram Isaakovich ALIKHANOV, a highly educated person who was a student of the famous physicist Ioffe. It was Alikhanov who in 1943 during the elections to the Academy of Sciences became academician, beating Kurchatov. Now it is Kurchatov's turn to go around Alikhanov by half a length.

Lavrentiy Beria, ingratiating and deliberating, turned to Stalin, “Maybe after all Kurchatov?”

"Kurchatov, let it be Kurchatov," Stalin agreed meekly, obviously pleased.

Igor Vasilyevich was assigned officer in both the Kremlin and the Lubyanka under the watchful eye of the KGB! There he studied the drawings, diagrams, documents, delivered to Moscow from abroad.

What kind of documents were they? Where from and who had got them? How many more undeciphered stirlitz are waiting for a date with our curiosity and ignorance? At what a cost and ingenuity, what savvy, how many lives of our intelligence officers had lost obtaining these secret documents, we, obviously, will never know. The truth can be learnt by our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Probably...

But the "feat of our intelligence officers" is the subject of a special conversation, true heroes of the invisible front, and, of course, the dream of cinematographers and writers.

Igor Vasilyevich appreciated the significance of these documents: these were well-known guidelines for scientific research on the uranium problem, enabling our scientists to avoid many mistakes and reduce the time to create their own nuclear bomb.

Do I have to say that all this was kept as top secret?!

Alikhanov was not just famous in the country at that time, but all over the world. But the preference given by the highest party leadership to Igor Vasilyevich Kurchatov had no effect on their friendly relations. There were never any disagreements, envy and offenses between academicians, they remained friends and likeminded people.

In those years, secret laboratory № 3, which was headed by Alikhanov, was later transformed into the Institute of Theoretical and Experimental Physics (ITEP), dealt with the same uranium problems as Laboratory No. 2, which became Kurchatov atomic center.

The difference is that the first atomic bomb told the world about the Soviet Union's nuclear viability in 1949, and the first test of the hydrogen bomb – the even more terrifying creation of the human mind (or – madness?) – happened in 1955.

It was then that academicians Alikhanov, Kurchatov, Alexandrov and Vinogradov appealed to the country's party leadership with a letter in which they warned the Central Committee against using this super-weapon, which threatens the world with complete destruction:

"We need to resolve all the differences between world powers only by political methods. We need new international policy. The new war is simply impossible."

Our politicians accepted and understood the meaning of this document in their own way. Malenkov supported the pacifist concern of scientists. Khrushchev held the letter and at the right moment used it "political myopia" against Georgiy Maksimilianovich Malenkov and overthrew the party comrade without pity.

Let us mentally return to the meeting of the Politburo, where the candidacy of the scientific director of the atomic project was approved. I imagine that "sacred" horror on the faces and in the eyes of the members of the Stalinist Politburo when Alikhanov's name and patronymic were spoken aloud: Abram Isaakovich. Readers of the new democratic society cannot understand that horror: what of it that Alikhanov has the face of "Caucasian nationality"?

What of the fact that his name and patronymic, on the contrary, are clearly of not "Caucasian origin"? But in those distant years everything had the meaning – down to the shape of the nose and ears. And during the interview Alikhanov behaved too independently, he was non-partisan, which was generally considered unacceptable for a Soviet scientist of such a rank.

There was no subordination at the institute, which was headed by Alikhanov: it was possible to communicate with colleagues at any time. Such a "rampant democracy" in the Soviet institution was almost a challenge to the existing order and the state system itself.

And another significant, almost criminal touch – Yuriy Orlov, one of the most seditious Soviet dissidents, Doctor of Physics and Mathematics, worked at the institute of Alikhanov. Endless "cleansing" didn't help, Alikhanov knew how to take a punch.

He was “forgiven” everything – his name and patronymic, and his Caucasian appearance, and independence, and non-partisanship, and Yuriy Orlov (for the time being, of course). The main thing that Alikhanov was a brilliant scientist. And the development of more distant prospects for the creation of the hydrogen bomb was entrusted to him. More precisely, – to his institute – ITEP, named after him. But it would happen much later.

And in that post-war period he had enough recognition and secret glory. He had enough of his work absorbing and responsible. He was valued and respected by colleagues and friends, among whom were “physicists” and world-famous “lyricists”.

It is said that when a dispute broke out among the intelligentsia who is more important – supporters of the rational world (physics) or its sentimental perception – through art (lyrics), the first one to discredit in the press the stupidity of such a division was Academician Alikhanov.

He himself was a man with a stunningly beautiful and significant face, thoughtful eyes and all the bright signs of “artistic appearance” – was more like an artist. This drove the women crazy who were lucky enough to be in his company and even more so to talk with him, which sometimes they failed to do.

The power of his intellect, knowledge, impeccable and subtle taste of the true connoisseur of art attracted to him people equal in value of the spiritual potential.

“There are two “Slavas” in our company,” Alikhanov joked. “Slava Otechestva and my wife, Slava Roshal... Well, if Rostropovich drops by, there will be three “Slavas”!”

“And where do we belong?!” Aram Khachaturian and Martiros Saryan playfully “boiled up”, cooled, however, by complacent Dmitriy Borisovich Kabalevsky.

Music was played in the Alikhanov's house in Cheryomushki. Perhaps, under the portrait of Alikhanov, written by Saryan's talented hand, Slava Roshal, laureate of the International Violin Contest, and Aram Khachaturian, a man of hot temper and an author of incendiary music, gave a concert. The music was most likely sublime, sophisticated, classical, from Mozart, Vivaldi, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev to Shostakovich, who was sitting right there and dying from fear while waiting for a sound musical typo in his own opuses.

This state was in any hall where his music was played (which is confirmed by many documentarists who wrote about Shostakovich, and his acquaintances, his friends, his wife Irina Antonovna): he, the genius of the musical Olympus, was as a schoolboy afraid of others' mistakes in own compositions.

As a rule were no typos. But there was a bewilderment from something else... Shostakovich was telling Alikhanov, “Abram Isaakovich, you have a beautiful house. But how can you live so far away from the conservatory?” The phrase, which later became popular, was replicated in a musical society in the famous dachas (summer cottages) of Leningrad and Moscow elite beau monde – in Repino and Komarovo, Peredelkino, Zhukovka and Barvikha. Childishly naive in life, Dmitri Dmitriyevitch thought that the Cheryomushki village near Moscow was in the “far away kingdom” almost at the edge of the world.

Exactly with the following “A true physicist should live closer to the conservatory”, the newspaper Izvestia, on April 17, 2004, published an article by Sergey Leskov, timed to the centenary of academician Abram Alikhanov.

Golden Stars of Heroes of Socialist Labor, the title of laureate of Lenin, Stalin, State Awards, orders of various iconic virtues rained down on nuclear scientists after a successful trial test near Semipalatinsk.

Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik was also awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labor.

“All the people mentioned in the list are famous in their own way,” Ivan Nikiforovich returns to the conversation. “You can write books about each. Well, they have, in fact, already been written. Some of them and they are in majority have fame with a “positive” sign, others with a “minus” sign. But then we did not know anything negative. We were children of our time: Communists, Komsomol

members, all brought up in one ideology, committed to the high idea of building communism. It turned out we were hostages of a false idea.

“Would anyone even try to give a hint about it!” The Great October Revolution was a reality, Lenin's covenants were a reality, the party congresses with kilometer long newspaper resolutions and reports were a reality, and everything seemed to be for the good of the common people.

And we believed. And we worked without looking at the rouble. And it was necessary to look around, this is the current understanding.

I remember Boris Glebovich Muzrukov with a kind word. He was the director of “Mayak” which was called Mendeleev Chemical Plant. Machine builder by profession. And before that he was in charge of “Uralsmash”! When I was taken to “Mayak”, he personally talked to me and asked to draw up a schedule for the restoration of the car fleet.

And the fleet, in essence, didn't exist. The cars stood in any place, the so-called repair shops were only just sheds above the pits, and the cars, as we called them by the status of a large enterprise as “rolling stock”, were almost missing.

I told him about my plans. He listened respectfully as a friend though was already in the rank of major general. A serious and fair man. He was able to admit his mistakes. Honestly spoke about it. Did not raise the voice. But even in a quiet voice, one can be cut to pieces so that he won't find it funny.

Just as it happened to me. As winter was approaching, and in the Urals they are extremely severe, the cars urgently needed heated rooms. I have had the experience of circumstances of this kind. Well, I started doing things in a big way: we put in order the workplaces and began to build a real repair zone, a parking garage. We also needed our own gas stations, as we brought fuel in barrels. I sorted out this thing, too. Then I traveled around the area and proposed transport workers to create, well, let's say, a production repair line – something is being repaired on some stands, something on others.

In a word, everything went according to the approved plan. But then I thought up to build on the garage a room for an office, as a second floor. Convenient? Convenient. In general, this case itself suggested a rational solution.

When Muzrukov saw the finished product, the building itself, he said sternly that it was violation of financial discipline, although we had built it at the expense of profits. He reprimanded me, as they say, without raising his voice. And it was a real reprimand, like a real scolding. But only before the holiday. By November 7, the reprimand was lifted. And for the same “violation”, just formulated differently, namely: “For good preparation of the garage for winter conditions,” I was thanked. Even more, I was given bonus.

Muzrukov worked hard, although he had considerable problems with his health: he had one lung. And he never complained. He was excellent leader, skillful. He decided everything, as they say, on the go. He did not stay in the office and swirled around the construction site, was aware of all the successes. And never humiliated the dignity of subordinates.

Imagine, Volodya, we built the warm garage, equipped repair parking. Everything seemed to be normal. But “Mayak” was expanding. There were needed more and more cars. And even more so there were not enough specialists like repairmen, road builders, qualified electricians, car mechanics, drivers of truck cranes, motor grader and bulldozer operators, engineering and technical personnel.

New premises for the repair and parking of rolling stock were required. Again, we did not need amateurs, not just practitioners, though with solid experience, but professionals with good institute training. All more or less important posts were held by ex-drivers. It was necessary to expand the scientific approach to this site.

And then Boris Glebovich said, “We won't be able to do without you, Ivan Nikiforovich, you are needed here. But specialists are also needed. So, come on, let's send personnel managers to let them look for people, bring them here, negotiate. Just give them the direction of where to search.” And our messengers went to all ends! To cities and villages.

A couple of years later we gathered auto specialists, engineers and technicians from Ivanovo, Samara, Kurgan, Moscow, Omsk, Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk (not classified!), Leningrad. In short, the team became knowledgeable.

And the economy grew and grew. Freight and passenger cars, buses, maintenance vehicles, warmed repair shops which were no longer afraid of a snowstorm, blizzard or snow drifts, although no one “canceled” them and they didn’t ask anyone permission for their winter outrage.

I also took care of the friendship with the paramilitary teams of firefighters: all their equipment was on the balance of my economy.

So Kurchatov who gave the word to help us, transport workers, and Muzrukov kept their word.”

Oh, neither tail, nor scales!

MEDYANIK unexpectedly changes the topic for me, “People have invented a monstrous weapon – the nuclear bomb. And the meaning of life is not in the good, but in life itself. People are becoming increasingly aware that the most important thing in life is life. And, having lost touch with it, they look for nature. They go hunting, fishing, seek privacy and peace of mind.”

“At our last meeting, we made a deal that you would tell me a couple of episodes about how you spent your free time in the Urals. Take fishing, for example, when having a rest, a person understands that life for him lies in a different plane, not in the one where the very question of “meaning” is possible. He asks himself what the difference is between a man and a beast? Only the beast doesn’t know any duty or thoughts about the good and the meaning of life.”

“Yes, there was such an agreement. I feel real pleasure to be alone with nature.”

“Let's start with that memorable fishing. I am sure that the reader will be eager to know about it.”

“Well, it was not really fishing. The drivers organized the recreation center on lake Beldym. They set up several tents, built a small pier out of wood, got a couple of boats somewhere. Since they worked in shifts, those who were given time to rest had the opportunity to go fishing. They cooked fish soup, grilled fish on coals, relaxed. In addition to a few tents, they built two solid sheds where they assembled at improvised common dining table and under another arranged bunk beds for rest. On the floor there was a large carpet of unknown origin. In any case, everything looked impressively enough for that time. With the years this base was rebuilt, and it really acquired the look that corresponds to the name of “summer camp”.

But then, in the late forties, it was much more modest. One day, the head of the first car fleet, Aleksey Fyodorovich Posheev, said to me, “Ivan Nikiforovich, do you want to try a real triple fish soup?”

“Where is it?”

“I have got such a place.”

We got into his car and arrived at a picturesque corner on the lake. The drivers, knowing that their boss had gone to invite me, had already cooked it by our arrival, thanks everything was all right with the fish at that time. We sat for a while, tasted some soup and drank a shot of cognac. I really liked it there and suggested inviting the management. Posheev was embarrassed, was it convenient?

“Not at all, it is convenient. I’ll talk to someone from the management and let you know.”

On the same day I drove to Lieutenant-General Tkachenko, my front-line comrade, “Ivan Maksimovich, why do not we go to try a triple fish soup.”

Being a true Ukrainian he asks, “Where?”

“There and there.”

He picks up the phone and calls Boris Glebovich, “Here’s the “Small” (the front commander called me this way during the war) invites to the triple fish soup, how do you find it? His lads arranged a recreation center somewhere on the lake and we are invited.”

Muzrukov agreed and made the list of participants. A couple of days later, having warned Posheev beforehand, they took three passenger cars and headed to that lake Beldym.

Here, I think, it would be appropriate to explain what kind of thing was a triple fish soup. Usually, the fish soup is made from several varieties of fish, primarily freshwater ones: ruffs, minnows, perch, burbot, sterlet, whitefish and others. Each fish belonging to one or another species has certain inherent qualities. So ruff, perch and carp give stickiness, richness and taste, gudgeon, burbot, whitefish and sterlet give tenderness and special sweetness. To make the soup come out rich small fish is added at the very beginning and is boiled for about two hours until it is completely cooked and turns into a porridge, and then it is filtered and cooled.

Then pieces of larger fish are added to a cooled broth, and again it is boiled for a long time. Only at the third time, the most valuable types of fish are cut (in our case, whitefish, sterlet and burbot) and cooked at low fire until it is ready.

The membership of our delegation was more than impressive: I. V. Kurchatov, B. G. Muzrukov, I. M. Tkachenko, Y. B. Khariton, E. P. Slavsky, A. A. Alexandrov, I. N. Medyanik. Suffice to say that four of the seven who came – Kurchatov, Khariton, Slavsky, Alexandrov – later became three times Heroes of Socialist Labor, Muzrukov – twice Hero, only Tkachenko and I were without stars. In any case, seven had fourteen Stars of Heroes, an average of two each, a joke, of course, though a pleasant one. Being warned in advance about the visit of the high management, the drivers did their best and laid a fabulous table. In addition to the amazingly tasty fish soup there were also sterlet and burbot fried on coals, something from vegetables and, of course, lard. We drank three glasses of Armenian brandy and having eaten tight walked to the next shed and seeing the carpet some of the guests wanted to lie down and rest. So they did, some rested, some sailed on a boat and some swam in the lake. A couple of hours later, we sat down at the table again, drank one more glass and cheerful, rested, smiling left this wonderful place, giving the word to the hospitable drivers to visit the place in future. And Muzrukov promised, if possible, of course, to allocate funds for the construction of a modern recreation center, and he kept his word later.

I often happened to be there with guests, because we were visited by a lot of the capital's authorities and major world-famous scientists. We sometimes came to ease stressful situations. Posheev, as the owner, always joked in such cases, “Shall we eat sitting or lying down?” It meant under which shed the table had to be laid. And on that day, despite it was day-off, everyone went to work. By the way, the working day of the management team lasted until one in the morning.

“Well, who do you want to hear about? After all, it is impossible to tell about everybody.”

“Perhaps, about Slavsky.”

“Efim Pavlovich was, perhaps, the only one whom I can safely call, one of the few of my friends. In addition to work, we had passion for hunting. All the years of joint service at “Mayak” we were neighbors, our cottages stood nearby just like the houses of Muzrukov, Kurchatov, Tkachenko. For almost thirty years he was in charge of the Ministry of Medium Machine Building, three times awarded the title Hero of Socialist Labor, winner of the Lenin and State Prize. Perhaps, sometimes, I even misused my relationship with the minister, because for many years after “Mayak” I was trying to get, to search for something and solve problems with the help of his ministry. In fairness, I will say that I never received a refusal from him to my requests and appeals.”

Here is his life story: chief engineer, director of the base. He got to the Urals during the war where the Zaporozhye aluminum plant was evacuated and there, in Kamensk-Uralsk, he quickly rebuilt it. A great specialist, knowledgeable, authoritative.

He started at the time serving in the First Horse division of Budyonnyi, was a straight man, sometimes unrestrained, even rude. Liked four-letter words. Muzrukov had to “correct” the seething character of Slavsky, sometimes complex, sometimes aggressive. By the way, when he once had a breakdown in his work and Beria removed Slavsky from all his high posts, it was Muzrukov who succeeded in returning Efim Pavlovich to atomic projects. Yes, and it was difficult to replace him, because then he was the most knowledgeable expert in the country. And he was the talented leader. He lived, by the way, 93 years.

“The human memory keeps pleasant recollections. I am excited at the case related to hunting for saigas in the Kalmykia steppes. I think it's worth telling about it and the reader is awaiting interesting facts.”

“You know the moments of my long life as well as I do, because I told you.”

“That case is not taken into account. You could have just told about some event not being sure that the author would be interested, because for so many years I have been listening to you, remembering, appreciating, weighing, building up my line of interrogation, because, as an

investigator, I need to extract maximum information. Today is another thing, our conversation is recorded, then I can only decipher this conversation.”

“Okay, let's try. As avid hunters, we immediately became friends with Efim Pavlovich Slavsky, back in 1948 at “Mayak”. Yes, and problems he had with Beria were because of addiction to hunting. Even this did not prevent us from continuing to go hunting together. After his appointment to the Deputy Minister of Medium Machine Building of the USSR, seems in 1949, he often visited us, and each time I was assigned to meet him. Well, there were always guns in the car, the outfit that matched the weather conditions, and brandy was also at hand. We managed to wander through the woods and shoot something. We went to the drivers for the triple fish soup. This has become a kind of ritual.

In 1957, Efim Pavlovich became our minister. I had already moved to Pyatigorsk by that time. I had worked at “Mayak” for about seven years, the most difficult and significant years of my long life. For more than half a century I have been languishing in Pyatigorsk, although even here I could not sit idle.”

“Yes, I have heard about your “inactive” period of life: the city of Lermontov was built almost from scratch, several car maintenance stations, four luxury sanatoriums for nuclear scientists in each of the Mineralnye Vody cities, the runway at Mineralnye Vody airport, a television tower on Mount Mashuk, a polyclinic of the “Impuls” plant, residential buildings for employees... But let's get to the point, how about hunting?”

“Every year Efim Pavlovich came to rest in our region. Most often he stayed at the “Krasnye kamni”, but he also liked to relax in our departmental sanatoriums “XXII Partsyезд” in Pyatigorsk, where Nina Vladimirovna Nikonova worked as the chief medical officer for many years, “Beshtau” in Zheleznovodsk, “50 let Oktyabrya” in Yessentuki, “Dzinal” in Kislovodsk and the fact that these sanatoriums appeared is the main credit of the minister.

That time Slavsky stayed at the “Krasnye kamni”, then the most prestigious sanatorium of our region. Usually he was met by a retinue from among the secretaries of the city committees where it was planned to spend his vacation. That was how it was supposed to be. Anyway, no one could occupy my “hunting niche” because our passion for hunting lasted almost until his death. So he called and said to give, say, about ten days for acclimatization and then we would go to Kalmykia. It must be taken into account that the saigas are wild, roving animals. Thousands of their herds are constantly moving across the steppes, at least in those years when their livestock was excessive and numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Rafailov, a very good and professional hunter, worked with me as the head of the personnel department. He had to be sent to Kalmykia a day earlier in order to learn in advance from the hunters where saiga herds drifted. We left in two cars: one guest car, the Volga assigned to minister, and my official UAZ vehicle, with guns, uniforms, food, alcohol stocks. This time there were two ministers. In addition to ours, there was Tikhomirov, the minister of chemical industry or chemical engineering. Before the Muscovites, it was necessary not to lose face and arrange not only hunting, but an overnight stay, food.

We arrived at the appointed place, Rafailov reported to Efim Pavlovich the situation and the approximate place of appearance of the herd. We settled in places and waited for the hunters to chase saigas towards us. Soon there came the approaching roar of hoofs, and a herd of thousands of wild, uncontrollable animals was moving. I was even afraid that we would be crippled or trampled down. After all everything went right and after the first shots the herd changed direction, suffering some losses. Slavsky shot down three, Tikhomirov one and I and Rafailov one each. And then there was an improvised lunch with shulum and shashlyks. For your future book on alcohol consumption this episode may not be suitable because we drank our beloved Armenian brandy very little, about 250 grams per person, and the age of my boss and friend didn't allow consume more. Although, in fairness, I should admit that in our youth none of us drank much.

I delivered our trophies to the Lermontosky ORS (workers' supply department) to the refrigerator where the experts skinned them (took off their skins), and the next day, together with

the driver, I took two carcasses wrapped in white sheets to the ministers. And there highly qualified cooks prepared intricate dishes to my friends. Memorable photographs were left from that hunt and the minister at all subsequent meetings said, “I remember the “Krasnye kamni” and that our hunt in Kalmykia”.

“You once said that Academician Khariton was also a passionate hunter.”

“Yes, Yuliy Borisovich loved hunting, but he was not a professional. He loved nature very much, to wander through the forest with a gun, sit by the fire, talk about life. Quiet, modest, conflict-free man, a genius and the greatest scientist. I say this because I worked alongside him for many years, I know the opinion of the famous academicians about him... I am proud that fate gave so many interesting meetings with worthy, one might say, outstanding figures of the twentieth century, and academician Yuliy Borisovich Khariton one of the first in this line.”

“In one of your stories, there was the name of a renowned military commander who was the only one four times Hero of the Soviet Union in our country, not counting condescending relation of Soviet people to the fun of Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgiy Konstantinovich Zhukov. Didn't you happen to go hunting with him?”

“Imagine, it happened. And surprisingly, as many as four times. But it is a long story.”

“Not at all, I have enough patience.”

“Well then, listen. At one of the meetings held at “Mayak” conducted by the chairman of a special committee formed to solve the problem of creating an atomic bomb in the USSR, Lavrentiy Beria raised the issue of providing milk and dairy products to the employees of our plant who suffered during the tests and received irradiation exposure. To be fair, it must be said that he resolved organizational issues quickly, without delays. All his instructions to the party and Soviet local authorities were executed instantly. So that time, the next day, a decree was issued by the Sverdlovsk Regional Executive Committee on the transfer of the state farm to us to create our own dairy production and provide milk products to all who were affected. Thus, the Kuluyevsky State Farm with seventeen thousand hectares of arable land was transferred to “Mayak”. And here a rather large cattle making quite a big herd of dairy cows arrived in railway carriages. There were pig farms and a few flocks of sheep in the state farm. The director appointed a good person who had a special education – Pavel Vasilyevich. I must say that the entire vast territory of the plant, due to its special secrecy, was fenced around the perimeter with barbed wire and strictly guarded. But along the same perimeter, the additional ten kilometers of space in front of the fence were also controlled by our guards, special services, rangers. Together with the state farm we got a lake on the border with the Sverdlovsk region, which even before the war was chosen by the Ural military district. Stocked up with valuable breeds of fish and good for hunting. In the end, at the request of the administration of the military district, they began with us to use this already mastered lake as if we were giving it them for rent. On the other, opposite shore, our guys had already built something like a summer holiday camp for fishing. By the way, I forgot to say that, in order to fully equip the state farm with people which were greatly missed, they began on the order of the same Lavrentiy Pavlovich to release the prisoners from the camps for settlement. In short, the problems were solved quickly, but the one not taken into account was that the state farm was two hundred kilometers away from the plant and the milk managed to sour along the way or, in some cases, was beaten from shaking into butter. Another problem was that the state farm was still far away from the railroad, more than thirty kilometers away, and this did not allow the construction of a dairy and meat processing complex there. The question was raised about the acquiring of another state farm, closer to the plant, and such one was found – just fourteen kilometers from us. A modern dairy and meat factory were built there. As for the first far-distant state farm, it was also left to us, and with time it was possible to organize a fodder supplies for the complete satisfaction of the near state farm. I had a direct relation to all this since all agricultural equipment: tractors, combines, seeders, threshers, dump trucks, and everything else was received and distributed to the directors of state farms. At my suggestion, at the Office of Workers'

Supply (URS), an agricultural department was created and strengthened by worthy personnel. Over time, at the expense of the plant we built good roads in the far state farm and the railroad. Once in 1950, Pavel Vasilyevich, the director of the far state farm, called and invited me to hunt, speaking in some mysterious, intriguing way. I decided to go. Only on the spot he told me that Zhukov himself would come. This was a real intriguing development! Indeed, at a certain time, there arrived several cars and about eight well-equipped hunters. Among them was Georgiy Konstantinovich, at that time being the commander of the Urals Military District. I don't know who was with him because everyone was dressed alike, I think that there was the guard and also the closest deputies."

"I wonder what impression the disgraced marshal made on you?"

"I saw him only on the hunt. Of course, there was some kind of power in him. I was introduced to him, said about my post at the plant. A strong, masculine handshake, a close look...

The hunt was successful, we shot a lot of game, ducks mostly. Then everyone was invited to the fish soup, which was cooked in advance by the workers of our state farm."

"What was the situation with alcohol?"

"We drank a little cognac, if you are interested, then Georgiy Konstantinovich was satisfied with just one glass. But there were a lot of jokes and he also told. He perfectly understood that he was the center of our attention, he behaved with dignity not allowing any indulgence or condescension towards himself. I say this to the fact that before the hunt he was offered a lucrative position among us, he immediately refused, and made a remark to the obliging subordinates."

"And how many times did you meet marshal?"

"Four times. And I remember each. Worthy, significant, man of few words. I am proud that fate has presented me such a grand gift."

"I have read the books of your colleagues on the creation of an atomic bomb in the USSR you supplied me with sufficiently: "The Secrets of the Fortieth" by V. N. Novoselov, V. S. Tolstikova, "My Atomic Age" by P. A. Zhuravlev, "About Contemporaries", "Kurchatov's Tragedy" by B. V. Brokhovich, "Atomic Firstborn of Russia", "First Steps" by GA In Lukhin. Several times there was a completely natural question about the role of Beria in this large-scale, unparalleled project. The book "My Atomic Age" mentions the arrival of Clement Efremovich Voroshilov in Chelyabinsk-40. I will cite this episode literally:

"Once in the early fifties, K. E. Voroshilov, having checked the Sverdlovsk military district, turned out to be close to Chelyabinsk-40 and decided to visit it because he had never been there before. The marshal, without any warning, arrived at the entrance to the zone along with a motorcade of several guards and military officials accompanying him. The duty officer of the guard, having learned who had arrived, refused to let the marshal into the zone and informed his superiors about the marshal. Further on, through the military commanders of the unit guarding the zone the message about the unexpected appearance of the marshal reached the authorized Council of Ministers for Chelyabinsk-40, Lieutenant-General EM. Tkachenko, who himself also did not dare let the marshal's car pass, but reported to Moscow personally to Beria. He reacted instantly, "Marshal has nothing to do in Chelyabinsk-40!"

As a result, after a long wait for about an hour, the head of the guard told Voroshilov that he could not let him in because of his unexpected arrival – they weren't ready to receive him. This is how K. E. Voroshilov, Marshal of the Soviet Union, a member of the Presidium, Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, was not allowed into the secret Chelyabinsk-40."

"Well, what surprised you here, the principled position of Beria?"

"I was amazed, and not the first time, by the power of this person. In our long conversations you mentioned him more than once, and I noticed the words about him were not very flattering. Therefore such a question arose, that maybe, really, there were no exceptions made even to members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU then."

“Yes, it was like that. Voroshilov really had nothing to do with the atomic theme, so he didn’t have the right to be on secret objects. In any case, the visits of such high-ranking officials were planned and agreed in advance.”

“Then let's put the question like this: did you personally meet Beria? And if so, and I know that there were such meetings, what impression did he make?”

“To tell you the truth, not very good. He talked to everyone haughtily and indulgently. He restrained himself only with those who were favored by Stalin, for example, with Kurchatov, Muzrukov, Tsarevsky, the head of construction at “Mayak”. By the way, only these three had the right to report to Stalin weekly bypassing Beria. This, of course, affected him but that was the will of the leader. In 1953, after his death, Beria was soon arrested and he himself was later shot. It was a real shock for us. Who then, when he visited us, could know what sinister and bloody things this crazy person had done. But he was our direct boss all these years.”

“Well, did you have to communicate with him?”

“More with his whims and nervousness. Well, and with him, of course. After all, according to the position, I had to personally meet him during each of his visits, provide transportation and escort together with his guards on the machines if the equipment suddenly broke down and an urgent replacement of the car was needed...

For example, Beria categorically refused to get into our “Pobeda”. He had such an arrogant feature in the conduct. Being a member of the Politburo, Marshal of the Soviet Union. And we had to urgently request ZIS- 100 and ZIM from the ministry and the central board. There had necessarily to be a gun in the car in case he unexpectedly would like to shoot game on the way to the “Mayak” because it is almost six hours of travel. During his first visits to our plant, Lavrentiy Pavlovich flew by plane to Sverdlovsk, there he was given a personal car and the second one with guards, and I accompanied everybody with my own transport. Later he came on a personal train with a personal armored limousine. I had more trouble because it was necessary to fill the train with water and it was difficult to do in winter. I had to mobilize all the watering machines we had. Relief came only after his departure.”

“And what do you think about the opinion that without Beria the USSR would never have an atomic bomb?”

“I agree with those who say so. I should admit he was a talented organizer, he had big power in his hands. Everybody was afraid and fluttered before him all. As for the bomb, we would have created it without his participation, another thing is that it would not have happened in 1949, but, let's say, two or three years later.”

“Well, the last question on this topic. Academician I. V. Kurchatov. You have repeatedly said about him: the greatest and indisputable authority for everyone who worked with him. I want to know your comment on his behaviour after the arrest of the all-powerful Beria. As a member of the CPSU Central Committee Kurchatov was asked to speak at the plenum and declare that Beria in every way prevented to creation of the first atomic bomb. Kurchatov categorically refused to speak and stated directly, “If not for Beria, there would have been no bomb.”

“If Kurchatov said so, then he, of course, knew better. Therefore, I cannot comment on his statements.”

“Did you ever see Stalin? If so, where and when?”

“Just once. On December 8, 1951, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR “On awarding orders and medals to scientific, engineering and technical personnel, workers and employees of ministries, departments and personnel of the Military Ministry of the USSR, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR, who distinguished themselves during the special task of the Government” was signed. By this decree I was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labor. Soon all of us, and it was a rather large number of people, were invited to the Kremlin. Exactly at noon, the doors opened wide and Joseph Vissarionovich surrounded by the members of the

Politbyuro appeared. All rose and applauded at their appearance. The award ceremony was held in a festive atmosphere. The awards were presented alternately by N. M. Shvernik and K. E. Voroshilov. I received my order from the hands of Nikolay Mikhailovich, he friendly patted me on the shoulder, wished me health and further success. Then there was a solemn banquet right there in the Kremlin. Stalin was present but not for very long. Under the continuous applause he drank a few glasses of wine and left. This was my only meeting with him.”

“In one of the conversations you mentioned that there was another meeting with Shvernik.”

“Yes, there was such a meeting, unexpected and pleasant, for me, of course. During the period of eight years of work at “Mayak”, under my command worked the chief mechanic of the motor transport industry Yuriy Maksimovich Sharapov. An intelligent, competent specialist, who managed to organize the service of his unit smartly and rationally. Being his direct manager I always liked his approach to the duties, the desire to redo everything and change it for the better. On top of that, he besides fell in love with my secretary, Vera, Vera Nikolaevna, and at the very end of the forties they got married. At that time the personnel management order was received to transfer Yuriy Maksimovich to a new responsible job as the head of the motor transport department of the Pskov region. After several years a new promotion came up as the deputy minister of motor transport of the RSFSR. Having had already moved to Lermontov I often traveled on business trips mainly to the capital where I had the support and patronage of the all-powerful Efim Pavlovich Slavsky, and the acquaintance with the Sharapov family also proved useful. In any case, we often met, called each other and together spent our free time when they came to have rest in Mineralnye Vody. Once, while in Moscow, I called Yuriy Maksimovich home and received an invitation for the birthday occasion of his mother, a responsible employee of the apparatus of the Central Committee of the CPSU. An official ZIM was sent for me and I was taken to an assigned cottage somewhere in the Moscow region. I was greeted cordially, the birthday girl was still a relatively young and beautiful. A government machine drove up and three men came out, one of them was Nikolay Mikhailovich Shvernik. The festive table was rich although there were not so many guests, about fifteen people. After the next toast, Verochka took the word and introduced me to the guests, she found warm, grateful words for this and recalled the years of work under my supervision. After such attention to my personality Shvernik said the words of gratitude to all the participants of the atomic project. I thanked him in reply for appreciating my modest role and trust from the country's leadership, because he, the then chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Council, signed a decree in 1951 awarding all distinguished participants of the project with orders and medals.”

And a day lasts longer than a century...(the event which predetermined the fate of man)

“Well, Ivan Nikiforovich, let's recall one more person from your list. As you classified – “with a plus sign.”

“Dollezhal! Of course, Nikolay Antonovich Dollezhal!

I have already mentioned about him as a designer of reactors for plutonium and tritium. Oh, and a wonderful grandad! Do not be surprised that I am under 95, and I am talking about him as my grandad.

He is the most famous grandad of Russia because in 1999 he was one hundred years old. I do not know if Nikolay Antonovich is still alive, God grant him health and well-being. At one hundred years old he grieved that he outlived all his relatives, all his friends, all his colleagues.”

“I'll interrupt you, Ivan Nikiforovich, Chinghiz Aitmatov has such a story – “The Day Lasts More Than a Century.” It has another name – “Stormy Station.” Did not have to read? It is about the Kazakhstansky, then Soviet Boykonur, from which our missiles and ships went to space. A wonderful story.

So it turns out that Dollezhal's today "... a century that lasts longer than a century?"

“It turns out that way. His century is more than a hundred years.

Now it has become fashionable to call scientists “fathers”. Who the father of nuclear bomb is, who of hydrogen is, who the father of thermonuclear weapon is.

So Dollezhal is also the “father” of the first Soviet nuclear reactor designed under his guidance.”

Word from the author

I take the liberty to interrupt the story of Ivan Nikiforovich with my own necessary additions about Nikolay Antonovich Dollezhal. From the dossier:

Twice Hero of Socialist Labor.

Winner of the Lenin Prize.

Winner of five State Prizes.

Academician, theorist and practitioner. Engineer.

Constructor.

Mechanical engineer. Rocket engineer.

In an interview, Nikolay Antonovich told an amusing story. After the explosion of the atomic bomb by the Americans in Japan, a book by Smith “Atomic Energy for Military Targets” was published. In America itself and around the world the book was not a secret. It was marked as “classified” in the Soviet Union.

Naturally, either Kurchatov, or Alikhanov, and Dollezhal, and all the scientists involved in the Soviet atomic project had read the book. More carefully they had time to read. Dollezhal did not just read, he studied the drawings. He thought about them, studied them, tried on his own ideas to the Americans. His own engineering thought worked non-stop.

“Once,” writes Yaroslav Golovanov in the article “Nikolay Dollezhal – a Man and a Reactor”, published to the centenary of a scientist, “he was twirling a matchbox in his hand, put it on a small edge and immediately a long-awaited thought seemed to burn through: “Why do we need to make the reactor channels horizontal? What prevents them from being vertical? After all, it will be much easier to operate such a reactor!”

It was then that he told Kurchatov that he was ready to design a new reactor on vertical channels.

Igor Vasilyevich understood that Dollezhal's version was bold in theory, technically sound, engineeringly competent... But the American project, although more difficult to perform, but it already worked.

“We will build both!” Kurchatov delivered his verdict. He knew what they and Dollezhal were risking: not much, not enough – LIFE... Each version of the drawing, which the scientists understood perfectly well, could become an arrest warrant!

And another interesting moment from those topsecret times.

A department at the Institute of Chemical Engineering was created specifically for... spies. Well, naturally, witty person used a joke very carefully. The department where the reactor was being born was officially called the “Hydrosector”. The neutral name was conceived as a distraction. And it turned out to actually distract the attention of spies, that is, technical intelligence in favor of foreign countries.

And then. Sketchy reactor designs were delivered quickly. An elevator shaft for the vertical channels of the reactor were prepared. Testing of individual stages took place directly on the machines of the pilot production. They say, probably, for good reason, all top-secret ideas, projects, developments, were made in super-super-super-secret areas, factories or entire cities. Such was the “invention” of the KGB, which Beria was very proud of.

At such a secret enterprise in Chelyabinsk-40, our first industrial reactor was built to produce plutonium according to the Dollezhal project.

The reactor was launched on July 19, 1948.

A year later, on August 29, 1949, an atomic bomb was tested.

With this bomb, as Kurchatov admitted to Dollezhal, we got the result a year earlier than we had expected.

There was a solution to the next regular task – to make the atom work for peaceful purposes.

It was about the construction of nuclear power plants.

Kurchatov's phrase, addressed to any employee of his Center he met in the morning, was like this, “Are there any achievements?” And no matter what the answer was, Igor Vasilyevich cheerfully suggested, “Go ahead!” He said to Dollezhalu in satisfaction, “There is progress. And what about new considerations?” Nikolay Antonovich had some thoughts.

After some time, Dollezhal, together with his assistants and, first of all, with the like-minded and talented engineer Pyotr Ivanovich Aleschenkov, created a super reactor for those times: with 128 fuel elements that ensured the power of NPPs at 5000 kilowatts!

For the creation of this reactor Dollezhal became the winner of the Lenin Prize.

As time flew, science did not stand still.

Soon the “military atomic theme” was raised again. The American submarine “Nautilus” was, as everyone understood it, created not for easy walks in the depths of the oceans.

Six months before his death, in September 1952, Stalin, realizing the significance of this step of Americans as an affirmation of US domination in the world's oceans, managed to sign the decree on the construction in the USSR of research institute No. 8 (NII-8). It soon became known as NIIET – the research institute of power engineering. Nikolay Antonovich Dollezhal was appointed its director.

In Moscow in Malaya Krasnoselskaya Street there was a small territory on which a poor and small reinforcement plant was located. This was the “inheritance” Dollezhal received for NIIET, which meant that the institute had to be started from scratch.

And again, to build a reactor of enhanced power, large dimensions and – as a result – “sew” larger than in the first atomic projects, or rather, in their incarnations, the “clothes” of radiation protection.

For the ubiquitous spies, again there was a “telling of lie”: this time the smoke curtain of secrecy was the mythical “crystallizer” for “object 627”. And under this code (as witty persons of science

used to joke) there could be, say, a workshop for filling siphons with sparkling water or production of “dry ice”, but in reality...

Well, it's like a joke: one short traditional Russian word of three letters is written on the fence, but there is firewood...

Only in 1958, the first Soviet nuclear submarine “Leninsky Komsomol” went out to sea. Captain II rank Leonid Osipenko was in charge of the first sea campaign of the submarine. A new era in the history of the Navy has begun.

In a word, the reactors built by Nikolay Antonovich Dollezhal began the rapid development of power engineering in the 70s. There appear The Beloyarsk NPP, Smolensk, Kursk, Leningrad, Ingalinsk, Chernobyl ones... This word “Chernobyl” has become the synonym of the blackest tragedy experienced by the scientist. In his book “At the Source of the Man-Made World” Dollezhal asserts that there was no atomic explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. There was a thermal explosion which had to be extinguished differently than people in panic began to do.

And he is absolutely certain that no responsibility of a scientist to the highest institution will ever exceed the responsibility of a scientist to his own conscience and duty.

There is no person engaged in the atom who would not think about this simple truth.

Didn't Academician Andrey Dmitrievich Saharov speak and write about this?

Wasn't it because Academician Alikhanov withdrew from participating in the development of a new generation of bombs, which, as they say among physicists, “the 16th group of Zeldovich” “calculated” in Arzamas?

But, probably, for thousands of years, the meaning of the ancient dictum remains accurate and true: “PARA BELLUM!” – “If you want peace, be ready for war.”

This is where the brand of the pistol comes from – “PARABELLUM”...

Time is painting, timelessness is black

"We, Ivan Nikiforovich, live in Mineralnye Vody. Readers need to be explained how you got to the resort region?"

"This is a long story... But my life is even longer – the 95th year I walk on the earth."

"But not for nothing. How many of your own, Medyanikovskiy autographs are left on it – and even what! City of Lermontov – one! Runway at the airport of Mineralnye Vody – two! Re-translational tower on Mashuk – three! Sanatoriums of the Ministry of Medium Machine Building in all cities of Mineralnye Vody – four! Car service stations – five!"

"Well, well, enough," Ivan Nikiforovich interrupts me, "the list is really long. So, this is my fate, I will not say that it is the worst. In any case, I am not ashamed of my life, there is something to be proud of."

We are sitting at the tea table in Medyanik's house. Bees are circling above the amber honey...

"Eat, eat," he treats me angrily. "Don't refuse. This is special delicacy. Or Caucasian dzhigits are not fit to eat sweets? Do you know how much wealth my honey contains? All chemical elements! I'm telling you not only as a beekeeper, but also as a person, firstly, who has experienced the medical miracles of honey himself, and, secondly, as a person who was close to the most famous chemists and physicists of the country in the past."

He laughs, so sincerely that I, enjoying his joke, try the honey. Ivan Nikiforovich is waiting for evaluation. There is nothing left but praise left: honey is really excellent.

"That's it!"

"By the way, your last name, Ivan Nikiforovich, comes from which word. From the word "honey" or from the word "copper"?"

"I do not know, Volodya. Probably closer to copper. So I say that if the tin is "tinsmith" or "zhestyani", well, and Medyanik is, naturally, from copper (med). It is a pity that the second letter "n" was lost when determining the surname."

But it is true: wherever you look, everywhere on Mineralnye Vody, in Pyatigorsk, Kislovodsk, Essentuki there is a medyanikovsky trace. From everywhere, from any point of Pyatigorsk, for example, the TV tower on Mashuk is visible. And these are all autographs of Medyanik! And the question is ready to slip from my tongue. Ivan Nikiforovich foresees my maneuver and asks, "Let's not get on this tower today. I want to have a nap. Will you let me go, comrade commander in chief?"

"Do it!" I'm saying in his tone.

I give him a break. I myself mentally leafing through his "personal record file". Photos are amazing evidence of the era. Through one eventful fate of a very dear and respected man, you can imagine an entire era.

And the life path of Ivan Medyanik began in the remote village of Rodnikovka on the Volga. The family was modest, hard-working. Vanya, Vanyatka, a little galoot, easygoing, obedient, diligent – a thirteen-year-old kid was sent for training in forge business. This was his first profession in life: a blacksmith. Then he mastered the profession of a tractor driver and during the harvest period became a driver bringing grain at night to the elevator. Yes, he even practiced in the repair of the first foreign cars in the country. Well, naturally, he became a driver. That was such an irresistible urge to the equipment.

So it went and went!.. In the late twenties, early thirties, the word Turksib thundered over the republic. The Turkestan-Siberian Railway was being built from Tashkent to Semipalatinsk. Ivan Medyanik went to distant lands. Still a boy, a boy of seventeen, but turned out to be indispensable among of builders: he tinned pans, shod horses and did pens for sheep and cows. They did not stop in one place – all the time in motion. The convoy of builders was doing hard work with no living

conditions: no washing up, no cleaning or properly eating. There was no planned supply of food, Ivan organized a hunt for wild boars, gazelles, ducks – and removed the problem with the meat.

His character strengthened, tempered. People's construction! Youth, happiness, strength, health. And – dedication. There were so many troubles, but it didn't matter, they coped. Along the laid railroad tracks they were pulling wires on poles. It was alright when they moved on a flat terrain, in the mountains it was more difficult, but not hopeless! It was worse with the raids of basmaches who had hidden after the civil war. They attacked, committed terrible massacres, flooded the villages with blood. Anger and powerlessness got hold. But they sent army, and they put things in order and did not go anywhere – right up to the end of the construction. Bandits were neutralized.

We reached Alma-Ata, where a desert plain began. The work went quicker. But unfamiliar difficulties were unusual and dangerous – snakes, scorpions, karakurts. The Kazakhs helped. They taught to defend ourselves against these merciless beasts by national methods...

Another convoy from Semipalatinsk hurried to meet us. It was 1930. It was then that the head of the convoy, Shemyakin, received a telegram, "The American Ford arrived at the freight station in Alma-Ata. Sent at your disposal."

The news is great. But where to get a driver? And here is the driver Vanya Medyanik! The car started, the engine roared, frightening the inhabitants and the local wildlife. The dogs choked with anger and fear, cows roared, people who had never seen cars ran away.

At the end of June 1930 a meeting of two convoys of builders took place. The construction was over. The first stage in the life of Ivan Medyanik was completed. And no one could call him a boy, a kid. He grew by as much as 27 centimeters. He went home to Rodnikovka on leave, he was barely recognized at home: he became broad-shouldered, a big boy, decently dressed, with gifts for his relatives. And even a single! And he also played concertina, sang, danced. But the main thing he was single!

Rodnikovka girls went crazy and were smartening, giving him the eye and luring the guy with tears, songs, iridescent laughter. Ivan just laughed, not arrogantly, even though he was guilty – you can't tell the heart if it is not touched by love.

And then he went at Uralmash. He also responded to the call of Uralmash workers at Turksib, agreed to work at the famous factory, which desperately needed young and strong hands. There, in the Urals, he began transporting wood to a construction site in a powerful seven-ton truck. But not long. Once he got stuck off road, was freezing all night with only a blowtorch as the heater. When he was found, he was still alive. But both legs were frostbitten. The Komsomol organization and the trade union took care of him, they got a voucher to the South.

"That's how I appeared in Pyatigorsk, Volodya...", concluded Ivan Nikiforovich, who woke up and quietly stood behind my back. Just some kind of mysticism! "It was in May 1931. I came under the supervision of a nurse and by the end of the month felt better. Well, what are the impressions of my old photos?"

"As if I watched a documentary called "Putevka v Zhizn-2". But I am expecting the continuation! That's the way you remained in Pyatigorsk, having arrived for treatment?"

"Not right away. Doctors recommended me the second term of treatment. I sent an application to Uralmash with such a request. They confirmed agreement. I was treated thoroughly. Doctors were great. They advised to change the climate, "Your illness require a warm climate. Stay for two or three years, take baths, the body is young, it will cope. Decide".

I liked Pyatigorsk very much. Greenery, mineral water, a lot of sun, and, in fact, it was the first city I saw where the hectic trams ran around, people walk sedately, smiled, had rest in public gardens, in Tsvetnik there was music, beauty and benefit. But there was no thought of any desertion from Uralmash. Not in my character to look where it is easier. Though my legs had healed, I walked with difficulty. And then my family moved from the Volga to the Stavropol Region to the agricultural community "Proletarskaya Volya", which was led by Semyon Lutsenko, and where my

father's brothers had already settled down. This led me to the final decision to ask for dismissal and send out medical recommendations.

And I plunged headlong into a wonderful peaceful life. If anyone needed help to fix the wiring, plumbing, repair the car I did it with pleasure.

But I was strongly attracted to the spaciousness, so that the wind would sort of tingling from running, from moving car, from any speed. And then the OSOAVIHM call came up: “Young people go on airplanes!” And I went as an airport driver, I got friends among pilots, they took me on board and I even sat behind the control wheel. But I didn’t become the pilot. I already passed the exams, but the problem with the chassis took place and the instructor took the control wheel. But nevertheless the accident happened, I was thrown out of the cabin. It ended in concussion and spinal disc movement. I came to consciousness in the hospital, where I was treated for four months... The military registration and enlistment office acknowledged me as non-combatant.

I started working at a military sanatorium, they gave me a room there, I was repairing all the equipment. For working well, they put me on extra fare. The salary was decent. I started getting better.

So, the time came – I met love. Her name was Lyubochka and then she became the wife, Lyubov Alekseevna. In 1933 there was wedding, and in 1935 the son was born – Yevgeniy. And daughter – Lyalya or Lydia Ivanovna appeared only nine years later after Yevgeniy.

I did not know, and no one could know what a bitter fate was awaiting my family. Lyubov Alekseevna would tragically die. And I did not know that the Urals, the steppes of Kazakhstan, Semipalatinsk would arise more than once in my fate.”

Ivan Nikiforovich thought and smiled, “According to your age you probably don't know such a song, but at the time of my dreamy youth, it was a match.”

“Which song? Maybe I know,” I replied. And he softly sang,

*"People dream sometimes about
Young cities
Which have no name..."*

“I know, why do you think not? I have heard it, Ivan Nikiforovich. But as far as I remember, there were not “young” cities, but “blue ones”!

“Okay, I do not mean that. I am about those cities that did not have a name like the cities of my fate: Chelyabinsk-40, Chelyabinsk-70, Arzamas-16...”

“Moretea?” apologizing interrupted our conversation tactful Vera Nikolaevna, the wife and faithful friend of Ivan Nikiforovich, whom he met in 1962.

I was always amazed how this woman managed to become for him such a well-cut half, replace his children’s mother and the first wife Lyubov Alekseevna who had died in the car crash. But she managed! She has been near for forty-four years. She strengthened the family so that the children of Ivan Nikiforovich, Lyalya and Yevgeniy, and her son from her first marriage Mikhail, right away when were still children, did not know the differences in their parents. There were just mom and dad.

“So what about tea?”

I thank and refuse. I say goodbye to the quiet house and beautiful people. Until next interview! And what happened then, we will talk tomorrow.

And tomorrow was war...

I'm giving word to the character of the book – Ivan Nikiforovich MEDYANIK.

“Well, it was in the global calendar sense. World War II was for the whole country. And my war started with the Finnish where I got after several changes in peaceful life. And here they are.

I worked as a garage mechanic at the Pyatigorsk regional executive committee. The executive committee was transferred to Stavropol but they did not part with me and I got an apartment there. The branch office of the Stavropol Tank School conducted classes for the officer school, where I studied at the distribution of the regional draft board and where I received the officer's rank.

Then I graduated with honors from Zhytomyr Tank School and was recommended to the Moscow Tank Academy.

I did not get to the academy because was recommended to serve in the NKVD. I graduated from law school and at the same time from Rostov road technical college.”

I cannot hold it, “Well, how many professions do you have, how many specialties, Ivan Nikiforovich?!”

“A lot, Volodya. And all my life something was added. Here, for example, being a beekeeper – a hobby or profession?”

“I think both. As well as a hunter, a fisherman.”

“That's it! So one can add a lot of things.”

Ivan Nikiforovich thinks for a minute. Then he continues the story, “So the war began for me from December 1939. I'm not the only one to remember it. There were terrible frosts at that time, snow piled above the head, the roads were not visible, a complete white veil! And we, with our BT-7 and BT-8 tanks, turned out to be helpless before the Finns, who very well knew their secret forest paths and roads covered with snowstorms. But against those frosts both people and equipment were powerless.

I do not want to stir up the wound that has long since healed!

It is only on paper that war fits in a few lines. And in fact any of the days of that short war, not even war, but as they called the Soviet-Finnish border dispute, is still experienced personally. And how humiliatingly Finns fooled us with their ski training. They ran like white devils, these famous “cuckoos”, but in fact snipers, elusive, accustomed to their swamps, forests, frost, skis.

What did we seem to them with our clumsy tanks, which even had no heating? Inside in the morning we were covered with frost. We spent half a day to start the engine. We used a blowtorch to heat up the fire bar...

And not to freeze we heated the salt in a tin and filled felt boots with it. Well, in short, it was necessary to finish this “forest tale” and as soon as possible.

A special, selective, mobile detachment of skishooters was sent. And our “skiers” were at their best – a defensive barrier defeated, and the Finnish campaign ended in April in 1940.

Ahead was a year of restless, anxious, but still peaceful life. Stavropol met me with windy spring. As friends were joking, this city is not in the seven, but seventy-seven winds. And nevertheless, it was my own house, it was my family, five-year-old Zhenka walked on the earth, in the evenings we gathered for dinner in the cozy dining room. A soft light poured from under the lampshade. Lyubov Alekseevna tried to keep the mark of a good housewife, a caring wife and mother.

June of 1941! How memorable it is to the present-day old men who have lived to the third millennium!

Light breeze blew on that day, poplar fluff flew, a crazy sweet smell of acacia teased enamored hearts. Life rang in all bells, youth – bright and happy time was spreading its wings, ready for peaceful labor, accomplishments, studies, love.

And no one could have imagined that this bright world and this silence, and this peace with fragrant acacias and poplar fluff would explode unexpectedly with the stern voice of Levitan, who announced Germany's attack on the Soviet Union.

The strings of this ringing joy broke off on June 22, the date that without a pity cut life to pieces before and after the war...

You know, Volodya, my friend, I have already told everything Alexander Mosintsev, the author of the book "Without Guarantees of the Century". Why should I tell the same thing again?"

"And still, Ivan Nikiforovich, what's wrong with that? Someone will read the book by Mosintsev, someone mine. And even more people will know about you. In fact, your fate is also the history of the country. I write in my own way. You will agree that repetitions can happen, the facts of your life before the war, during or post-war no one will cancel, change or alter. Do you agree with this?"

"Well, ok, let's do it? Just in general. There are so many books, poems, plays have been written about the war, so much research has been done, so many good and bad films have been shot that we will not repeat," Ivan Nikiforovich told me. "I can only say about the memorable facts in my life which happened during the war time.

The beginning of the war coincided with my appointment as the head of the autotechnical department in the Stavropol Territory, and it turned out that it was equal to the auto-regiment, and I, so to say, the commander of the regiment of the special autobattalion with three dozen cars. I got this appointment by direct order of Mikhail Andreevich Suslov. He then and almost all of the war was the first secretary of the Stavropol regional party committee, and the whole partisan war in the region was led by him.

We were transferred to the barracks. And we began to live by the laws of war. From the very beginning of the war the Germans began to send paratroops to the Caucasus Mountains, and our units took the fight, catching paratroopers.

December 1941. The Germans were overthrown from Moscow.

But in the rear of the enemy on the territory of Ukraine and Belarus occupied by the Germans General Dovator's cavalry corps fought giving the invaders a lot of trouble.

The corps was formed in the Stavropol region. So, Dovator'sy were fellow countrymen.

From the very beginning of the war to be in the rear of the enemy advancing to the east and not only happen to be, but also to fight was real heroism.

February 1942... Dovator'sy unioned with the operating units of the Red Army. The corps came out having preserved the banner and was not disbanded.

After the death of Dovator, General Pliev took his place as commander. Several wounded Dovator'sy came home to Stavropol. They told about what they experienced: hunger, cold, lack of fodder for horses, lack of weapons, ammunition, medicines. Fellow countrymen required urgent help.

The whole of the Stavropol region responded to the proposal of the regional Committee of State Defense and the Bureau of the Regional Committee of the All Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) to render all possible assistance to Dovator'sy. They collected twelve Pullman cars. Whole train! He was given a "green" light as a special train number 21.

The delegation of ten people for the delivery of aid to the capital was headed by the secretary of the regional committee of the party Vladimir Vasilyevich Vorontsov. And I was fully responsible for the entire train, for its movement, for the safety of the cargo.

So many thrilling moments come to mind! These were terrible bombings, each of which could turn out to be tragic, as, for example, in Lipetsk. We were taken to the second track. This was a violation of the charter for the movement of special trains, which, by Stalin's order, should have always be taken only on the first track and provided with a "green" traffic light.

But what was then going on at the stations!.. The railway stations were overcrowded with people who, in a panic, were moving from the advancing Germans literally in opposite directions... Getting

into any train was, as they say, “a fight”. Shell burst, blood, crying children, women screams. And in this inconceivable confusion the almost mad station master, where we were taken to the second track, was trying to preserve at least some order... He was almost torn to pieces by mad with fear passengers, military commanders, chiefs of sanitary trains who had to rescue people came directly in time of bombing.

And when our people burned trains standing on the tracks so that the Germans would not get them?

Everyone had good reasons. Because there was a legitimate reason – the war. And so. My assistant did not get reception of the Lipetsk station chief. He was simply not allowed to him. I had to take control. Later, it sometimes seemed to me that the top priority of our special train was just as important, as any human grief. And a woman, for example, saving orphans from the occupied regions, also needed a special train.

But such thoughts, I repeat, were later. But at that time I made so much effort, so much artistic invention unexpectedly taken from somewhere, that I was amazed for myself. I even overstated my military rank to a lieutenant colonel. Well, in case of non-compliance, I even threatened to use weapons. The train was urgently sent and immediately after its departure German planes raided the station. Bombs fell on the track where our special train stood a few minutes before... So if it were not for my vigour,” Ivan Nikiforovich waved his hand, as if chasing away memories.

From Moscow there was still a way to Volokolamsk. The Dovator’s corps was located there.

I will not speak much about the condition of our horseman-fighters. They simply could not believe their eyes that such necessary help came from their native Stavropol. That this help reached, that they could not look back at the last bullet again, that they could warmly dress up, that they could eat enough.

It was a joy! Great! And on the part of our team, which provided the load, and on the part of those who expected help.

And these hunger bitten people, exhausted by malnutrition, colds, the need to fight in the rear of the enemy, these people tried to dandle me in their arms – as an artist or a winner.

I quickly fought off such an expression of jubilation. I, well-fed and dressed young man of unusual height, as you know, had to experience a feeling of unsolicited and burning guilt in front of them. Although I understood that my participation in their fate was not the last one, that I also served and also fought in my place.

We stayed for a week with the Dovatortsy. Even Kalinin came, Mikhail Ivanovich, “All-Union headman”. We photographed for the memory.

Well, and when they came back to Stavropol, we brought bags of letters of gratitude from Dovatortsy, all of them were neatly delivered to the Committee of Defense, and the radio, and the newspapers were publishing this news from the front for a long time.

V. V. Vorontsov made a report on the trip at the meeting of the Regional Committee of Defense, and was there awarded to the Order Badge of Honor. I also got the medal For Military Merit.

But Germans were approaching the cities of Mineralnye Vody and Stavropol. And there I had to show my skills: there were more than a hundred and fifty trips to Nevinnomyssk in which the whole regional committee of the regional administration, the autotechnical department, repair crews and officer families were evacuated.

I myself was the last to leave because I had to blow up my own car fleet, stores of combustible-lubricating materials. But I was unable to complete the assigned task because there were still a few families left on the territory. I left by a miracle when Germans were already in the city, and Victor Fateev took me away on a motorcycle. He was the secretary of the Komsomol organization of the autotechnical department. I found my special squadron in Nevinnomyssk.

And then in Georgievsk an order came to go to Ordzhonikidze with a special squadron. It was the end of August. The chief of the border units read out Stalin's order that the Reserve of General

Command would be formed out of all the retreating border units and units of the internal troops. But then events developed rapidly.”

“All this is described in detail by Alexander Mosintsev.

I think he would not mind if we refer to his authorship: “Ivan Nikiforovich's auto-battalion was included in the RGC. Immediately an order was received to prepare fifteen trucks for sending a newly formed mountain squad to Tyrnyauz.

In Nalchik, they had to be completed with warm uniforms and ammunition. In Tyrnyauz the detachment dismounted and went to the mountains. And the cars were supposed to return to Ordzhonikidze. However, Medyanik did not wait till their return. Only a month later in November, the drivers said that eight cars had been taken by some military unit that had come down from the mountains.

By this time, the Medyanik auto battalion had already been transferred to Kizlyar.

And the drivers had a difficult journey to Kizlyar. They and the guide Boris Tsogoev, who knew the roads of Ossetia and Kabarda, had to get to Kizlyar without food and weapons. They ate whatever they could find. It was a good thing they managed to get. The auto battalion delivered fighters of the Reserve of General Command to the front, took out the wounded and killed to the rear. Day and night the wheels were turning next to Malgobek, Elkhotovo, Ordzhonikidze, where fierce fighting took place.

At the beginning of November 1942, the snow had not yet fallen in Ordzhonikidze, it often drizzled like in autumn. The roads turned into slush under soldiers' boots and equipment.

Medyanik had just come to the apartment that he had rented near the headquarters of the RGC as the adjutant of the commander called, “Are you sleeping? Urgent call from the general.”

It was half past eleven which meant it was something very important. Cursing while walking through the puddles, Ivan Nikiforovich returned to headquarters.

In addition to him, in the office of Maslennikov there silently sat the chief of staff, an unfamiliar colonel and a civilian – an unshaven man in a suit smeared with mud.

Ivan Nikiforovich reported on his arrival.

“Sit down,” the general nodded. “Here, listen to what comrade will tell.”

The civilian did not keep himself waiting. Somewhere near Malgobek his retreating medical battalion got stuck in a ravine. Gasoline and food ran out and there were fifty wounded soldiers in nine cars. Two, according to the stranger, have already died and, perhaps, some more while he was somehow trying to reach the city. In addition, in order to cut off the road to the medical battalion, Germans threw out the paratroopers. There is no one to defend just three paramedics and he, a refugee, joined the battalion.

“People need urgently to be rescued, battalion commander,” the commander ordered. “Take trucks, combatants, gas, and go now.”

Ivan Nikiforovich did not know that this trip would almost be the last in his life. As well as he did not know and could not know, he would be on the verge of life and death. He did not know that he, Medyanik, a strong and healthy man, could remain an invalid for life. He knew only one thing there was a task. People were in trouble. He could help them. He had to help them. And not only because it was an order. And also because it was his everlasting, personal order of Conscience...

Fortunately, the cars of the first company had just returned from the trip. They loaded barrels of gasoline, a dry ration and, having taken the signalmen of Lieutenant Bizyukov with the guide, moved to Malgobek in three cars – a cross-country vehicle, a bus, and a truck.

It was already dawning when having traveled about seventy kilometers, a gun fire burst from behind the turning. They had to back up.

Bizyukov had six people at his disposal, Ivan Nikiforovich had four. Medyanik set the task for the lieutenant to eliminate the landing force. Having taken submachine guns and machine guns, the

combatants went by the forest in the direction of the enemy. They agreed that, having completed the task, they would give a signal rocket meaning that the way was clear.

Waiting time always drag on slowly. Half an hour later shots thundered behind the turning and for about fifteen minutes there was a fierce firefight. Then everything calmed down and the raw November sky was lit by a rocket. It was possible to move on. Combatants were lucky as Bizyukov had not lost a single person. But when they descended into the ill-fated ravine, where the medical battalion had stuck, they were horrified.

Aside from the mud-stained cars there were four corpses. The wounded could hardly move their tongues, they had had neither food nor water for a few days. The paramedics somehow fed them and the drivers quickly refueled tanks with gasoline. It was necessary to get out of the ravine in a hurry. German motorcyclists could appear at any moment.

It became light when we took the road to Beslan. On the right there was a cliff, to the left there was a hillside of leafless forest. And there came down three Messerschmidts and hit the column with machine guns.

Immediately the car with medicines was flamed, the second one was hit too, the driver and the nurse were killed. Meanwhile, the planes turned for the second approach.

This time the wheels flew from the bus in different directions. Two soldiers were killed immediately; two others were seriously wounded.

The driver was pressed by a trunk that fell on the cabin. To release the hand, we had to saw a tree with a hacksaw.

Ivan Nikiforovich was not lucky either. He was lying in blood with unnaturally twisted legs. Without giving signs of life...”

From the almost unreal sensations of Medyanik himself:

Second gaps of consciousness. The fire burned, boiled, igniting the body with inhuman pain. It seemed that the pain would boil the blood, the vessels would burst and the blood would flood. On the black earth or on white snow.

And again the failure into the abyss without a name. Yes, no name, no kin... Unconscious. Unconscious, unconscious.

Then the flight was interrupted to overturn him into a new terrible abyss of pain which moved to his legs.

But what is it so unbearably pressing him?

Oh, this is probably a concrete slab, it will now flatten him, rub into dust, and this dust with its lightness – like on wings – will summon him from this trap, from this pitch darkness to light.

He screamed, as it seemed to him, loudly. He called for help.

There was nothing of it. No sound was made by Medyanik. The weakened mind drew to him the abyss and the depth, united the remnants of the will into a silent cry for help that no one heard.

Standing above the unconscious battalion commander, as Ivan Nikiforovich was called, Lieutenant Bizyukov and his communications personnel understood that it was necessary to immediately transport the one who didn't show any signs of life to the nearest locality.

Continuation of a chapter from the book by A. Mosintsev:

“One thing that made happy was that the planes did not make the third approach, they flew away. Hastily the wounded and the dead were moved to the bodies of other cars. In Beslan, in the hospital, as Bizyukov later said, Medyanik was washed and bandaged, having twenty wounds from fragments. He did not come to consciousness and his legs were still lifeless.

The lieutenant reported to the commander about the fulfillment of the task, informed about the victims and that the battalion commander was among seriously wounded. The hospital chief doctor was going to cut off his right leg.

Maslennikov asked to hand him the phone. The conversation was short. The commander warned that if he did not cure Medyanik, he could not escape the penal battalion. They did not always understand the possibilities of treatment in the conditions of war. If the commander had not warned the doctor, they would have cut Ivan Nikiforovich's leg off. But since this case was taken under special control, they found two very strong men who were osteopaths and they were straightening his legs for half an hour, although Medyanik himself shouted without ceasing.

Tied up with bandages, he came to himself, but he could not speak, the head was shaking. They looked at him with pity. He was in that condition for two days. On the third the head of the hospital came. "Well, battalion commander, come on, get better!" And Ivan Nikiforovich, repeating the word "come on," started speaking.

Twelve days he stayed in the ward. The situation at the front became worse. They were going to transfer the hospital, and Medyanik knew perfectly well that they could take him far away from his battalion...

Fortunately, a movie was brought to the hospital that evening and the entire nursing staff rushed to watch the picture. Ivan Nikiforovich, relying on the shoulders of his comrades, left unnoticed.

He was recovering in Ordzhonikidze in his apartment. And, as soon as he got stronger, although with a crutch, he returned to service. In fact, from that raid, Ivan Nikiforovich had become disabled, but he hid his disability until his retirement in 1972."

This passage is cited with a conceived aim: not to give Ivan Nikiforovich the opportunity to once again experience the terrible flashback telling me about this incident.

But it was impossible not to tell about it. It was too tactily filled with that wartime which Medyanik doesn't like to remember. Just as he does not like the state of his own, does not allow anyone to groan and gasp around, despite his forced weakness. He doesn't like the position of a person bent from pain, especially if it is him being a huge, strong, tall, brave, risky person as he was many years ago.

It seems to me that even now he is like this, only turned gray, wise with a long life experience, which is so necessary for young people.

Maybe you think that with such a mortal wound the war for Medyanik ended?

Not at all.

When the army of Paulus was defeated at Stalingrad, it became known that the 62nd Army under the command of General V. I. Chuykov, which with incredible efforts had gained the victory, was left without food, without ammunition. Who do you think was entrusted with the delivery of food stuff to Stalingrad? Of course, Medyanik, as an experienced transport worker!

All night they were loading cheese, sausages, a dozen of smoked pork carcasses, bread, boxes of vodka, barrels of alcohol and ammunition. In a word, everything that was available in the warehouse moved into the body of trucks.

It took more than a day to get to the unrecognizable ruined during military action, but once beautiful, city on the Volga. Neither lack of roads, nor cold and snow drifts could stop them. Medyanik delivered everything to the destination and handed over everything on receipt to the warehouse.

Vasilij Ivanovich Chuykov personally thanked Ivan Nikiforovich and, having called Suslov, reported that the task was perfectly carried out by Medyanik.

That trip was memorable for our hero for many reasons. But among them was another one – personal. At the ceremonial dinner hosted by Stalingrad defenders Ivan Nikiforovich met and became friends with the man sitting next to him. It was Yevgeniy Parkhomenko, a representative of the General Staff and the son of the legendary hero of the revolution and civil war division commander Alexander Parhomenko.

For half a century, for nearly fifty long years, this friendship lasted, the beginning of which seemed to be specially programmed by His Greatness – The Occasion in the distant wartime of February of 1943 after the fateful and crucial Stalingrad battle.

On that memorable evening, the commander made a toast to the Victory, which everyone who was sitting at the table drank standing. Besides alcohol there were several bottles of vodka on the table the assortment unthinkable in the wartime.

After Stalingrad, the country took the first step towards Berlin. There were still bloody battles along the way, a lot of young and desperate heads, young lives would be devoured by the terrible “Moloch” of the war, but Stalingrad was really a turning point...

Knowing Ivan Nikiforovich for many years, I have never asked him whether he was upset that he did not take part in major military actions, such as Stalingrad, the Dnieper, Kurskaya Douga, the capture of Berlin. He did not leave the autograph on the walls of the defeated Reichstag. Young, strong, brave fighter drove girls crazy who dreamt of the hero on a white horse. It would seem that his portraits should have been replicated by front-line newspapers.

I decided not to ask such questions. In conversations Ivan Nikiforovich himself touched this topic overthrowing all my Maksims with a simple and convincing formula: “A well-secured and well-organized rear is half of success and glory, and, ultimately, Victory”.

After the successful trip to Stalingrad Medyanik returned to Ossetia and immediately received a task from a member of the Military Council to pick up 28 new cars of the famous German brand “Opel” in Nalchik, which were captured as a trophy and move with the advancing Soviet troops to the west.

But how could Stavropol which had become his hometown during his hard service let him go? And it took him under his wing to the former place of the head of the car fleet. The truth is the base was barbarously destroyed, ruined, almost destroyed by the fascists.

And this new task to restore the economy and provide transport for the group of the NKVD troops who were eliminating the remnants of the German detachments in the rear, which had no time to leave the Caucasus, Medyanik did perfectly as he did everything.

Stavropol... The main street of the city is Lenin Street. On this street the Germans built their repair shops. With the offensive of our troops they had left them destroyed, but with the “capital” the price of which Ivan Nikiforovich knew well. And these were trucks, ambulances and cars, motorcycles – altogether over one hundred pieces of equipment. Some turned out to be in order, on the run. The rest were restored. For Medyanik and his team it was a familiar, everyday work, only then accompanied by military reports of the Soviet Information Bureau delivered from Moscow...

The geography of the war gained more and more “steadily western direction”. Medyanik carried the service at his post. His wife, Lyubov Alekseevna, began working as a stenographer at the regional executive committee. Their son Zhenya was growing up. And in 1944 a daughter was born – Lidochka, who in the family was called affectionately – Lyalka, Lyalechka.

And Victory break out!

Joint, long-awaited, won with blood, by sleepless nights, deaths of young and elderly Soviet soldiers, tears of widows and mothers, work in the rear.

Victory is a collective joy, a joint big and holy holiday.

And here is an insult. The insult is not a problem, but it scratches the soul. After the war the new head of the regional department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs arrived in Stavropol. The new broom, as it is known, sweeps clean... They dismissed Ivan Nikiforovich proposing to be the head of the fleet in Astrahan. He chose to stay, only as the head of the production workshops of the MGB and transport, on, so to speak, light duties.

1948 changed his fate. Ivan Nikiforovich was called to Moscow, to one of the ministries, to be transferred to another job.

“Where?”

“Destination – Sverdlovsk.”

Such was the response of the KGB chief of staff.

“I give you first-class coach ticket, they will meet you with impatience.”

“Who will be waiting?” Medyanik could not understand.

“Lieutenant-General Ivan Maksimovich Tkachenko.”

His heart was filled with warmth, the soul calmed down. He knew Ivan Maksimovich during wartime in the Caucasus. He was then in the rank of a colonel. And he held the post of representative of the Southern Group of Forces under the Reserve of the Main Command. It was under his leadership that the German agents were liquidated. And just in the first-class coach of the train going to the Urals Medyanik remembered the time that had tied his fate with the fate of Tkachenko.

While in Ordzhonikidze, Ivan Nikiforovich was ordered to deliver a group of a small detachment under Malgobek where German saboteurs savaged.

Then two Ivans, two warriors, two brave and courageous men, who did not fear the evil enemy, got together. When the German paratroopers were surrounded, Medyanik and Tkachenko walked alongside. They climbed a hillock, already naked in autumn, to look around and right there came the cracking of German machine guns. Without hesitation Ivan Nikiforovich fell to the ground and carried Tkachenko with him. And then, raising their heads, they saw there were new bursts from the next machine-gun fire at the place where they had just been standing.

Fractions of a second separated them from inevitable death.

These fractions of a second had bound forever their friendship born under deadly fire. Ivan Maksimovich never forgot that it was Medyanik who had saved his life.

And now they met again where the atomic saga in the life of Ivan Nikiforovich Medyanik began: the Kyshtym station, the secret “Mayak”, Chelyabinsk-40, Chelyabinsk-70, a deadly raid with Plutonium obtained in Dollezhal's laboratory, Semipalatinsk, terrible pictures of destruction as the result of the test of the first Soviet atomic bomb...

At that time, no one really knew the consequences of radiation, except, naturally, of scientists involved in this problem.

Did people die? Died. The way Igor Vasilyevich Kurchatov perished, the way Ivan Maksimovich Tkachenko, a remarkable friend of Medyanik, also perished in 1953. The way Academician Alikhanov died, buried at the Novodevichy cemetery next to the brilliant physicist Landau, whose life was interrupted by a car accident...

“But Khariton, Zeldovich, Alexandrov, Slavsky, and some more, have lived for much more than ninety years. I myself is over a century. Dollezhal lived over a century. As for me, the doctors are still wondering how I managed to live and work with such doses of radiation. This means that not all the resources of the human body are yet known and each one has its own life expectancy code...”

“So this is the fate...”

“The fate either leads or not. It’s as if someone from above watches you.”

Seven years from 1948 to 1955 were spent by Ivan Nikiforovich at “Mayk”. His service was acknowledged as excellent. The department he headed did not have a single major accident, not a single case of death.

By the closed Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the head of the transport fleet of the “Mayak” plant, I. N. Medyanik was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labor.

Life is full of changes. They touched my hero, too.

After the birth of his daughter Lida, his wife's health was shaken. Lyubov began to feel worse, and the doctors again recommended the southern territories, especially Mineralnye Vody, where they successfully treated heart diseases.

There was no choice. He had to leave the Urals and move to Mineralnye Vody. To his good fortune they needed a car fleet manager in Lermontov, a new miners' town under construction, marked as “mailbox No. 1”.

“And a star speaks to a star...”

The reader's question is quite natural: how will the author justify these famous Lermontov lines in connection with the fate of his hero?

The answer is not difficult. We can recall the list of Ivan Nikiforovich, given at the beginning of the narration: each scientist's name written by him is a star in the “atomic calendar” of science – I. V. Kurchatov, A. I. Alikhanov, N. A. Dollezhal, A. D. Sakharov, Y. B. Hariton, L. P. Alexandrov, space expert S. P. Korolev, in the management and construction of the nuclear site E. P. Slavsky, B. G. Muzrukov.

This allegory easily applies to the award “iconostasis” of our great contemporaries: Golden Stars of Heroes seem to make the quiet chiming of orders and medals recalling the glorious achievements of national science.

And, finally, I confess the well-known Lermontov stanza was chosen by me almost as a true documentary, it was in Pyatigorsk that this poetry of tremendous power was composed by the poet. Aren't his lines linked with the Mashuk mountain, which paths Lermontov walked along?

*"I go out on the road alone,
Through the mist the stony path shines,
The night is dark, the wilderness responds to God,
And a star speaks to a star..."*

The team of the motor depot, led by Medyanik, was transferred to the construction of a huge television tower on top of Mashuk, it was the construction of the first television center in the region of Pyatigorsk. The height of the tower, or, as the communicators say, the repeater, was so huge that the top of it literally caught the clouds. More over, it went off scale for the height of 1160 meters!

And at night in clear weather, when the stars shine in the sky, one hears how a star speaks to a star.

The sixties in the life of Medyanik were not quit easy. His health started to shake. Heartbreaks began and one hospital was changed for another. And then a huge grief sorrow happened to the family – the wife Lyubov Alekseevna died in a car-crash.

It was necessary to survive, it was necessary to survive the disaster and it was necessary to work!

And then came humiliating and false denunciation. Ivan Nikiforovich refused point blank to return to the Lermontov car fleet. Friends came to help. He had a lot of them, both in the Ministry of Medium Machine Building, where Efim Slavsky worked, and at “Mayak”. Pyotr Ivanovich Butenko offered him a place as the chief of the detachment in the Kislovodsk car fleet, and at the same time he could undergo treatment at a cardiology clinic. The radiation let know. He was treated also with folk remedies, in particular honey. During vacation he even went with beekeepers to Elbrus.

But without a well-organized life, without a female care for children who were not yet fully grown up, it was difficult. So Vera Nikolaevna became his second wife. Their acquaintance was blessed by “Mayak”.

How much inner tact, cordial motherly tenderness she had dislaid! She managed to turn the house into a real family hearth. By the way, she was like that until the end of life. The favourite of the family Lida (Lyalya) married and left for Poland to her husband's homeland. She was a chemist by profession.

He did not notice how his own children became grandparents.

His son, Yevgeniy, has long been called Yevgeniy Ivanovich, an extremely busy man, he is the designer of submarines.

And Mikhail, Vera Nikolaevna's son from her first marriage, has become an honored irrigator of Russia, and works in Sevkvagpirovkhoz.

Whenever the family gathered together, the holiday would come in the house of Ivan Nikiforovich.

The company is amused by ringing voices of six grandchildren and now great-grandchildren.

"And we are getting old," Ivan Nikiforovich grieves, stretching his legs. "They hurt, probably, to bad weather."

"Well, so, have you finished your interview with me?" he turns to me, squinting slyly. "I'm tired, do not blame me, my friend. Old age, nevertheless," he says in a cheerful voice, but sadness flashes in his eyes, It is quite understandable and explainable.

I felt sorry that our evenings with him were over, although I know that I can come to his house any time.

"No, let me ask you one more question. Is it true that Kurchatov did not like smokers?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roars Medyanik, laughing at me. And he immediately interjects a familiar Kurchatov phrase: "It strongly smells with violation of the regime."

"And another question, Ivan Nikiforovich. Recently, the life of the hero of my story, Vyacheslav Yevgenyevich Vasadze Game to an end. May he rest in peace. It turns out that he drove your car on a trip in Georgia."

"Yes, there was such a thing. Slavik was a good man, reliable. I had known him as a boy. Here it is. He insisted once on a trip to Georgia. Moreover, I allowed him to use my company car. I always treated him in a fatherly way, I wanted to help a guy with something, and then a trip to the Black Sea coast turned up. I took him with me and gave him an extra week to search for relatives."

I will allow myself another passage from my story about Vasadze.

"Today Vyacheslav Yevgenyevich Vasadze is over sixty. But when he was young, he passionately wanted to learn something about his father, to find relatives, to find his father's colleagues, to hear first-hand how his father fought, how and where he died. Having taken a vacation, he went to Georgia. The first on the way were the villages where the whole Vasadze clans lived. But no one knew about his father. Addresses in the villages of Nakalakevi and Ben also did not give results: they did not find any relatives of the father or the mother. They sympathized with him, expressed readiness to help in the search. The vacation was already coming to an end, it was time to go back home, and Slavik was keenly aware that he was losing his father for the second time, he was also missing in peace life. When he was almost desperate, someone advised him, "You know, the actor Akakiy Vasadze lives in Tbilisi, go to him, maybe he will help somehow. He is known man, no one will refuse him."

Slavik hesitated. More than twenty years had passed after the war, there is little hope of finding his father's colleagues, and he was ashamed to disturb a famous person. A sense of delicacy, or perhaps innate tact, stopped him. And yet he decided to use any chance. He arrived in Tbilisi, found out the artist's phone number, contacted him and asked for a meeting. With a feeling of anxiety, he crossed the threshold of the house of an outstanding actor and director, an idol of his father's generation. What did Slavik know about him? Nothing. Neither that Vasadze was a professor at the Tbilisi Theatrical Institute, nor that he had the title of People's Artist of the Soviet Union and, as an actor was busy in all theater productions, starred in films, that he was three times winner of the Stalin Awards. He did not know anything of this and could not know because his work was too far from art. He simply saw a handsome, great man, who at that time was already under seventy. He caught the look of his attentive and sympathetic eyes as he told the sad story of the search for the father.

"No, sonny," the actor Vasadze answered him, "I did not know your father. We are not relatives, just namesakes. In Georgia many carry names of Vasadze. And the fact that you are looking for people who knew your father-soldier is worthy of respect. A person should know where his kin had come to the world..."

His words, convincing and simple, were taken for the soul, reached the heart. And let the wine be left in the glasses and firmly brewed tea in the glasses, and ripe grapes, peaches, pomegranates, apples lay intact in the vases. Slavik simply did not notice this magnificent still life. With all his heart he regretted that the thread of his hope to find at least some trace of his father broke in Akakiy Vasadze's house.

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