

Boris Trefimov

Portartur

1940

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«Издательские решения»

Trofimov B.

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Historical novel about the defenders of Port Arthur. Trofim Borisov is a writer who was one of the first in Russian literature to recreate the panorama of the defense of Port Arthur. His book can serve as a truly truthful document of a past heroic era. “Portarturtsy” is reliable not only from historical materials, but also from personal memories. Indeed, its author himself was a participant in the events described.

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Portartur

Part one
Chapter one
one

Tikhon Podkovin fun counting down the steps of the wide staircase, heading for the exit. An hour ago, the secretary of the Irkutsk Court of Justice told him:

– You can be our registrar.

The huge words on the marble plaque “Truth and mercy and reign in the courts” today seemed to him especially important.

In the evening, at the insistence of his sister, Fima, and her friend Vari Berezkina, Tikhon explained in detail how he was “produced” to the registrars.

Varya laughed loudly.

“So everything will go well,” she said. “You will be an official soon.”

– It will go... But I will not be an official. You need a higher education. I even will not reach the regular registrar.

Varya looked inquiringly at Tikhon.

“You still forget that I should go to the soldiers...”

Varya lived in the same yard with her mother-nurse and her brother in the same room.

“I never even took my hand,” the girl thought, running across the courtyard. – What is he like? Don’t you dare or not love?”

Mother Wari sat at the table and sewed.

– Tikhon registrar appointed.

– I did not doubt him. He can be appointed as clerk.

– And he says: I will not be an official. Soldatchina hurt.

– Reasonable guy. He will not marry before the end of military service.

Varya sighed heavily. Mother looked at her daughter.

– I approve Tikhon. You should not marry head-on, a lot of family soldiers have misfortunes... We will wait. He is more than a year old before being drafted...

Varya turned away and began to uneasily smooth her dark hair; her wet eyelashes shuddered.

Prior to entering the court chamber, Podkovin was a clerk in the fish shop of a merchant Kytmanov. He was tired of naughty lady-buyers. But in the clerical work, he did not find satisfaction.

“Two years – in the court of justice, four – in military service, – and then – to new places, to the Siberian rivers,” Tikhon often thought.

Six months ago, he met the family of merchant Rychagov. From his son, Elisha, he took books for self-education.

Shortly before this acquaintance, young Rychagov traveled to Port Arthur. It was necessary to look after a place for trading activities, and in Manchuria, new cities were being built, a railway was built.

“The Far East needs us like air,” Elisha liked to say. “We Russians must master it.”

During the conversation, Elisha often closed his eyes. He stood leaning against the wall, leaning his left hand on the back of a chair. A rant and a game with a chair jarred Tikhon.

A hanging lamp lit the table at which the Levers-Father sat. On the lean and oblong face of the old man, a grin wandered.

“If we do not fortify ourselves in Manchuria,” continued Elisha, “then the Americans or the Japanese will fit in there.”

– Japanese!.. – Father exclaimed, – Trifty country, hairdressers. Danger – from the British, but most likely from the Germans.

Young Levers leaned forward, leaning on the back of a chair.

– You’re right, dad. However, the British would elect the Japanese against us. And we will overcome them! In Port Arthur are our warships.

– Have you been to them? – asked Podkovin.

– was. And the port-arturskie forts saw. They are disguised, prepared several lines of defense. But we hardly have to fight on land. The Russian fleet will not allow the enemy to go ashore. The fortress is being built just in case... Now the emphasis is on expanding economic influence. We need a non-freezing trade port, and the port of Dalny will be such a port.

– Why didn’t you choose a place for yourself there?

– We have with you, Dad, pocket thin. To work in the Far or in Harbin, you need capital. The Chinese are first-class merchants and it is very difficult to compete with them. To look around and grow roots among them – money is required. We’ll move there for a year or two. And during this time there will finish the fortress and strengthen the fleet.

– Heather boy, – said the old man and pushed Shoe in the side. – Although, to tell the truth, this is a good deal to miss.

– In vain worried. We not only Amur region is waiting for enterprising people. And you, and especially us with Tikhon work enough.

“Tikhon must go to the soldiers,” remarked Elisha’s mother. – He will serve his term and nothing will happen to him.

– What if the war?

– There will be no war.

3

Talk about Port Arthur was often conducted in the court of justice, where Podkovin worked. One morning, the secretary of the office, Nikolai Vasilyevich Delusto, rummaged in folders and filed a signature list for the lawyers.

– Gentlemen, a cathedral is being built in the fortress of Port Arthur. Donate as much as you can.

The first on the sheet signed a young lawyer Patushinsky.

– They say our new fortress will be an impregnable stronghold. The Russian command also took into account local conditions and the latest data from the engineering of military science, he said.

– Whom will she have to deal with? – Interviewed Delyusto.

“Undoubtedly, with the Japanese,” the sworn attorney Stravinsky said, signing for a hundred rubles.

– In this case, the fortress will be idle! – Patushinsky exclaimed. – The Japanese will not be allowed to land.

– The enthusiasm is characteristic of youth, – the famous defender Zverev interfered in the conversation. – But the enthusiasm before the beginning of the case is harmful, because it does not allow to study the danger in detail. Meanwhile, Japan is growing by leaps and bounds.

“Japan likes to compare itself with the UK, but it’s a pimple,” said Patushinsky.

– Moreover, all the more... Acne is different. And you need to approach them skillfully, and then a malignant tumor can form.

– According to the latest data, more than two million rubles have been released to Port Arthur. There are several commissions from military specialists. Probably, not only we, Ivan Nikolaevich, are concerned about protecting our state interests, “said Stravinsky, who did not like Zverev and was jealous of him.

– That’s right, Rafail Sigismundovich. Your concreteness is known to all. But we must not forget that Japan is not alone. In addition, the theater of military operations will be, figuratively speaking, three steps from it and ten thousand miles from our center. There are rumors about the slow equipment of the fortress... Good would go there and see... By the way, why hasn’t there ever been an exit session of the court chamber? Nikolai Vasilyevich, what is your opinion on this matter?

– Cases from there comes decently. Treasury money, unscrupulous contractors... By the spring it will be possible to come up with something.

The bell rang. All went to the meeting room.

four

On the last Sunday of January Valya Inova came to the Podkovins. Tikhon met her on the third day of Christmas at Rychagov.

“Come to us now,” suggested Valya Tikhon and his sister. – Our people left for the village, and no one will interfere with us... I am afraid that we will soon leave Irkutsk. Pape offer a very profitable service in the Far East. I’m sorry to part with you, but apparently I’ll have to.

Tikhon began to dissuade.

– And do not think. What kind of news?.. Come on, let’s go!..

The apartment of the bank clerk Modest Vladimirovich Inov was large and luxuriously furnished. Nobody came before dusk. Valya played the piano, Tikhon sang. Fima looked at illustrations in the rich editions of the Inov library.

– From you, Tikhon, you can make a singer, even for the stage.

– I would never become an artist. But I love to sing. Occasionally sing something for friends is not bad.

Vale suddenly wanted to explain to Tikhon.

– For Wari?

“Varya is a good girl, but I did not give her any reason...”

– I can see...

Tikhon’s cheeks were covered with a blush.

– Listen, Quiet, I want to give you a riddle. Are you offended by my joke?

– I am afraid of your jokes only in a big company. Speak

– You decided to marry, and you have two beauties in mind. Both of them you like, and you are sure of success. In what order would you make an offer?

– First to you and last Vare. I'm sure of her, but you are not. And if I had made an offer to Vare, I could not have given you pleasure.

– That's what you are mocking... But you would have lost. Would I have missed such a falcon?

Valya laughed loudly.

– And what kind of mansion will I take my fairy to?

– Won that came up! We have a different social position, you are the son of a peasant... But the heart, not the reason, participates in the choice of the beloved, "said Valya.

– All this is correct, but not for the husband, but for the beloved.

You're intolerable boy, – bit her lip, answered Valya. "You argue like an old man, but you, with your dark gray eyes, lad..."

In May, the Inovs were to go to Harbin, and in late April it became known: the session of the court chamber would travel to the Far East in June. Tikhon was included in the session.

– One of your trips can justify your work as a registrar, – said Valya, having heard the news that was pleasant for Podkov.

Tikhon looked at the girl with embarrassment. His heart was beating fast.

five

The fertile plains of Manchuria turned around the Khingan Range before the Podkovin and judicial officials who left Irkutsk for a session. Around treeless, hilly expanse. There were still few villages, but herds of cows were often encountered. The train crossed fields with thick thickets of kaolin and corn. On high beds green soybeans. The fields sown by her seemed like striped fabric.

Delyusto and a member of the judicial chamber Kostinsky did not move away from the carriage window. The comrade of the prosecutor Yerakov, the defender Zverev, the member of the chamber Malinovsky and the chairman of the civil department Baron Taube played cards.

– A rich country lies at our side. Wild and desert country. Even the Chinese learned about its economic opportunities only after the Russian Chinese-Eastern Railway, "said Delyusto.

"The Chinese should be grateful to the Russians for this road," said Baron Taube.

"Mmmmm," muttered Zverev, smiling crookedly.

Along the roadway, after three or four kilometers, small fortresses of the railway guard, built to protect them from the Hunhuz, adorned the raids, still flaunted.

Behind Sungarii Bridge, on a large plain, noisy Harbin grew fabulously fast. On the river near the piers there were a dozen and a half beautiful river steamers plying along the Sungari and the

Amur from Harbin to Blagoveshchensk, Khabarovsk and Nikolaevsk. Life in Harbin was in full swing. Huge flat-bottomed barges loaded wheat, beans, bean oil, barley, and eggs. The pipes of flour mills continuously smoked. At the stations, the products were fabulously cheap. The edge rose to life.

The sotolok of the Harbin station stunned Tikhon. Thick crowd of Chinese buzzing on the platform. It was difficult to get through it. Every now and then he was snatching a suitcase with the proposal to take him to the hotel.

– Tikhon, Tikhonya! – Podkovin heard a female voice behind him. – Where are you in a hurry?

– Valya!

Podkovin flushed and lowered his eyes. He became happy, and at the same time something confused him. He was confused.

– Yes hello! – Valya grabbed Tikhon by her free hand and kissed her cheek. – Not expected? Fima is well done, telegraphed.

Placing the suitcase, Tikhon took Valya by the hand, looked into her eyes:

– Hello, Valya!

– Oh, my God, how I missed Irkutsk... You have completely changed. A tunic suits you.

Podkovin looked at the judicial officials.

– You need to talk with the secretary! Let's go together.

Delas was surprised. Valya met him and said:

– Today release Tikhon Stepanovich to us. We were friends with his sister when I lived in Irkutsk. Tomorrow morning, he will come to you, wherever you indicate.

– I am very happy. Tomorrow he can find us in the hotel “Far East”.

While members of the court chamber sat on dirty cabby cabs, Valya and Tikhon drove past them on a pair of well-groomed horses harnessed to a brand new carriage.

– Seems our registrar? – asked. Malinovsky.

“Yes,” Delauce laughed. – Today he was met by the daughter of a local bank employee. The guy is growing!..

– A sign of the times! – exclaimed Zverev.

The train raced between the hills. On the left stood jagged mountain. Podkovina satellites were military and two merchants. “Mount Samson,” said the soldier. “We will see Kinzhou soon.” The strongest position! And here are the first fortifications of the Kvantunsky Peninsula, see – trench belts.

On the left, the Gulf of Tiena was spread. The morning was quiet. The sea drew on itself, and Podkovin did not want to think about war and fortifications. He was full of experiences from Harbin. And at the same time, some awkwardness confused him. It seemed to him that in Harbin, in the presence of Vali, he did and did not say what was necessary.

“That seems to love – and suddenly so much doubt! I am afraid of her, I do not believe her, and therefore I cannot love her. But there is no mile and no find. Soon parted forever. For her, I am a toy, a hopeless raznochinets ...”

At a train station in the city of Far, an unfamiliar fair-haired man approached Podkovina.

– I have the honor to introduce myself – Alexander Petrovich Lykov. For the duration of your stay here you are my guest. I carry out the orders of the Inovs. Here is a telegram in which all your signs are described... Fight! Take a suitcase!.. Probably need to notify your colleagues? Come on!..

Holding Tikhon under his arm, Lykov led him between the cars to the nondescript station building. There were fragments of bricks, sleepers, beams, barrels of cement lying around. It was hot and dusty. Pushing the passers-by, rickshaws ran up to Lykov.

– Allow me. I will walk on foot, “said Tikhon, embarrassed, when he saw a half-naked man who obediently stood at attention by the hand-carriage.

Ever and always the same story with the newcomers, – Lykov scoffed. Trying to be as courteous as possible, he took the Shoe under his elbow and sat him in the stroller. The crowd respectfully parted. Cab drivers and station workers, people knew Lykov as a rich man of a petty tyrant; tipsy, he did not give way to major local officials.

“This is my hut,” said Lykov, pointing to the mansion. “A decent house, but here I’ve become damn cheap.” Working hands in abundance.

In the hallway of Lykov and Podkovina, a tall, slender Japanese woman in a rich dress bowed low. She crouched so low that she touched the floor with her knees. Podkovin involuntarily backed away.

– Come in, Tikhon Stepanovich. Meet... My mistress. Sasha-san.

The Japanese woman bowed once again to Podkovin and, straightening out, extended her hand:

– Hello.

The guest looked into the face of the woman – it was beautiful. Crouching and backing back, Sasha-san led Tikhon into the living room and sat in a soft armchair.

– Smoke?

– No, I don not smoke.

“Yu ar notes tuxedo... do you not smoke?” The woman said in surprise. – Yes, yes, I forgot, Russian is very much not smoking... This is good.

– The battle! Prepare the captain of the batts [1 – Batts – bath.] – Lykov shouted and addressed Tikhon: – You are my friend, let’s speak at once to “you”. Take a bath and put on what they give you. A uniform hang in the wardrobe. I do not like at home uniforms. You look, it, on it and you think: to chop off, kanalya, came. And you and the buttons of the bailiff...

We dined in the dining room in a European way, but in dressing gowns and slippers. Sasha-san was sitting on the spot of the hostess and skillfully – mimicry and gestures – commanded the servants.

Japanese girl, and even so close, Podkovin saw for the first time. Her narrow face, bordered with thick hair, slightly matte skin and bright black eyes were charming.

– Eat, please, soup, and tomorrow we will cook Russian soup. Oh, this is very strong food! Lykov-san always shout: bow, come on!

The Japanese laughed loudly, White teeth, like mother-of-pearl, glittered.

“Every nation has beautiful women,” thought Tikhon.

– Irkutsk big city? – asked Sasha-san.

– Big and beautiful. There is a rapid river Angara.

– An-ga-ra-ah, what a resounding word! – Sasha-san said melodiously.

– And Baikal. – the best lake in the world, – put Lykov. – You are great, Mother Russia... Sasha, you need to drink before fried chicken. Pour our minister cognac,

– I do not drink cognac.

– Do not drink?.. So it is impossible! We also have a heart-to-heart talk. A drink should be. So why instead of brandy?

– Ryabinovki.

– Wonderful. Sasha’s favorite drink. Sasha-san, pour yourself and him more quickly. And I brandy. Lykov, raising his glass, glanced at Tikhon and, slightly screwing up one eye, began to examine it unceremoniously.

– Do not drink or smoke... This is good, my father would say. Here with whom would you see. Wonderful old man!.. —

Podkovin looked at the Japanese. She listened intensely to the conversation.

“My Sasha wants to learn and know everything,” Lykov sneered. – Curious nature... Drink, and after dinner on the side...

Podkovin lay on the sofa, but could not sleep. Soon everything went quiet in the house. Turning from side to side, he got up and went out to the front. The door of the corridor leading to the courtyard was ajar. Carefully stepping on a soft rug, Tikhon approached the exit and looked at the porch. The Chinese man and the little Chinese kept his tunic in the floor and carefully examined the buttons, trying, apparently, to understand the sign that was pressed out on them.

Podkovin backed away, and then, loudly slapping shoes, opened the door. The Chinese began to rub the cloth with a brush, and the old Chinese servant indifferently lit his pipe.

“Our departmental buttons are of deep interest. I remember, and Sasha-san very carefully, looked at them, “thought Podkovin and said to the little Chinese:

– I want to get dressed.

“Now, captain...”

In the city of Dalny were carried out haste. The bay was filled with merchant ships. Only one, the military cruiser stood out among them with its tall pipes and white paint. The city was surrounded by bare yellowish hills. A thin curtain of dust hung over him. The cranes puffed off the embankment, the locomotives whistled, pushing the cars to the pier. Tikhon for a long time could not take his eyes off ocean steamers with green sides and white cabins. From the pipes, smoke lazily was rising. Small boats snooping around the bay and the bay...

The city was something noteworthy in architectural terms. Its stone buildings, erected in the Gothic-Chinese style, with fancy facades, were far from the modern architectural ensemble. Observing from the mountain it would seem that before them theatrical scenery. Many-sided gabled roofs with gray tiling, decked out but with all faces with cemented crests and Chinese sculptures, strongly protruding dormer windows, also decorated with images of dragons and other mythical animals, colossal chimneys draped over a Chinese sample, high gable walls – all of this carried off into the world of fantasy. The diversity of eyes hurt. It was felt that the builders did not have a serious attitude to the matter that they were assigned. They shunned Russian originality even in cases where domestic architecture techniques, without disturbing the beauty of the streets, could provide significant savings.

Podkovin climbed to the nearest mountain, and his heart beat happily. He saw the picture of the seashore for the first time. Large and small capes went into the blue distance. Mount Samson rested against the clouds. Fishing boats bobbing in the waves. In the distance, on the horizon, three steamboats smoked. Turning to face Port Arthur, Podkovin tried to guess where there is a fortress there, but I saw nothing but a chain of hills.

– Captain! – he suddenly heard the voice of a little Chinese.

This is Lykov sent for the Horseshoe battle. He himself stood below, under the mountain.

“We are slaughtering millionaires,” he said to Tikhon, stretching his hand towards the Far. – Manchuria is a real treasury. Thousands of possibilities... And I like you. I did not fall asleep after

dinner, the Russian heart could not restrain myself. Yes, we must admire the new acquisitions and rejoice... Your judges, I made inquiries, are going to spend the evening in a restaurant. Well, we are at home. I do not like restaurant sprees. Is it when the case...

– Is the money spent on the fortress properly?

“Ah, what are you thinking about?” – Lykov took Tikhon by the hand and looked into his eyes. – I will tell you that there is a lot of disorderly and, of course, there are abuses. Eye and eye need. Between us, the fortress is built slowly...

Twilight was gathering. In the east the sky darkened. The wind ran. Lights flashed on the ships. A huge cloud caught on Mount Samson, hanging in white gills in a ravine. The Kwangtung Mountains shrouded in a dark yellow haze. The noise in the city subsided.

Tikhon did not recognize the living room. It was decorated with paper lanterns and light Japanese screens. In the middle of the room on the carpet was a table with low legs. Lykov lay down on the pillows. Sasha-san met Podkovina with a low bow:

– Sit down. We will eat in Japanese.

– Now let's drink as it should. Do not refuse. Ryabinovka invigorates only, you can not get drunk with it, – said Lykov.

The rooms were quiet. Podkovin enjoyed eating long noodles, round, like pasta, called “udon” in Japanese, and “skiyaki” – especially delicious cooked chicken meat.

– Japanese women have a subtle treatment. No whims, no requirements. And what cleaners!..

Tikhon looked into the eyes of a Japanese woman. Her eyelids lifted only for a moment.

– Frankly, I did not imagine that there are such beauties in Japan.

The owner burst into loud laughter.

– They are there to hell and for every taste. When a Japanese commissioner came to me on this “women's issue”, I told him: first, slender and tall, second, oblong face and small mouth, third, straight and narrow nose, fourth, not to cheekbones... Writing down my requirements, the Japanese man said through clenched teeth: “good”, and ten days later, on the threshold of my house, I saw beautiful Sasha-san. As you can see, the order was executed exactly. Here with the acquisition of the hostess is very simple... Stay! We will find the case. And you are under the contract.

– Under the contract?

– Wonderful custom. Signed a paper for a year or two – and live. Sasha-san is very cheap for me: two hundred forty rubles a year. And for ten thousand yen I won't give it up. Isn't it Sasha?

The Japanese woman smiled and slightly ran a hand over her hair.

– Prepares tasty, speaks Russian and in English. She draws me all the papers with foreigners, serves as a translator. Plays on Japanese market. A delicate soul!.. Changes in my moods in one instant she catches. Wait for the coffee, I'll explain everything.

Lykov lay back, stretched out and said:

– Call another girl. Let him dance...

After dinner, he began to drink liquor, pouring it into a cup of Japanese, then in a glass of Tikhon. Lykov smiled and often stroked his kept woman on the cheek.

– Economy is a big deal! – winking Tikhon, he said. – Japan now has only one product for export – women. Mosume [2 – Mosume – women.] Are exported to foreign brothels.

– Wildness! – exclaimed Podkovin.

At that moment a small Japanese girl with a plump cheek came in and, falling on her knees in the middle of the room, bowed low.

“Kon-ban-va, my spring, white cherry blossom,” Lykov greeted her. – Come here, I will look into your eyes. You are slim and flexible like a young birch... Meet me. This is Tikhon-san, our future soldier.

– Sordata? – the women were surprised.

“Yes, soldier... He knows the way that it will not be boring to fight in Japan.” There are many, many charming mosume.

“Why war?”

– Ha ha ha ha... I frightened you? No, this is not a soldier, but the future Minister of Justice. We have to do this soon...

While the owner was talking, the guest silently repeated: the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Justice...

– Sit closer to him, and he will see that you have the most elegant legs and the thinnest fingers in the world.

Japanese crawling close to the feet of Tikhon. He turned away in disgust.

The owner, as if noticing anything, continued:

– My Sasha-san is a thrifty person... Honestly working, and saving thousands and a half yen – he will leave me, go home and become a prolific mother...

– You're lying. I do not need your money. I will serve you and your wife all my life. You're evil!..

Two large tears appeared from under Sasha-san's eyelashes.

– What art! Playing out in love!..

– Tikhona-san! – exclaimed the Japanese. – I love him, but he does not believe. My heart hurts, it hurts... When they made a contract, I thought he was an old man. They made me... They force us to do many things... Without him, I will kill myself.

Sasha-san sobbed. The guest, having moved closer to her, embraced her. Podkovin silently examined Japanese women.

– How do you look at my home life? – Lykov asked inquisitively.

“Pampering,” Tikhon said through clenched teeth. – Sheer hangover from you. After all, you can marry a Russian girl...

– The point is said!.. – Lykov shook his head, – There are many brides in Russia. And in my eye they are. For example, Valya Inova.

Tikhon flinched, straightened his legs and pulled the pillow under his side.

– Beautiful man, a rare girl, beautiful.

“That would have been the matchmaker,” said Podkovin, almost with malice.

– Dowager! The father is the servant. How much with her? Some thousand, many – two.

Podkovin laughed.

– Did you forget about the man again? Yes, there is no price!..

The owner approached the guest to pour him liquor.

– Stay here. We heap with you business. And in the fall you get married... I have a bride. Millionaire’s daughter. Young, beautiful, interesting, educated. The same musician, as well as Valya. Looking for a husband of a young official, not a merchant’s son.

“In the fall I am called for a call,” Tikhon answered evasively.

“Ahhhh... sorry,” Lykov said. His gaze faded, his face showed fatigue.

During the entire conversation, the men Sasha-san vigilantly watched Lykov. Noticing a sharp change in his mood, she crouched down and asked quietly:

– you what? Do you have a bad deal? Failed deal?

– Yes, dear Sasha. Broke down. I found a man, so it seems that yours is not there, “Lykov said in a falling voice. – It’s a shame... Come on, honey, play, and Cherry-san will dance.

Tikhon looked puzzled at the Japanese and Lykov. Sasha-san prepared to rise, her cheeks were covered with a blush. Moist eyes looked softly, and a kind smile lay in the corners of his lips. Tikhon reached for Sasha-san, and she stood beside him full-length, adjusting her kimono.

“No, this is a rare beauty,” he thought, and when Sasha-san moved away from the table, he turned his head to Cherry.

“My God, how is it painted,” he whispered under his breath, and barely restrained himself from the squeamish grimace.

Sasha-san began to play the Japanese guitar. The rattling, dull sounds of some motive torn into small pieces struck Tikhon’s consciousness, but did not irritate him. He tried to catch the melody and could not.

“Like smoke is perceptible, but elusive,” he thought.

Lykov poured himself brandy. Tikhon drank liquor. Cherry – san danced, slowly waving her arms and shaking her body. In the faint lighting of paper lanterns, a Japanese woman, dressed in a long blue, with large white kimono flowers, seemed to be a casual, airy Tikhon. Dance and music weary him.

“The Japanese still have beauty: in music, in dances... But they are not in our character. When Russians are dancing, people walk like a walk... I would cook them here, “flashed in Tikhon’s head.

From liquor he felt suddenly sick. He jumped up and ran out into the corridor. When he appeared, three people departed from the hanger: a Chinese servant and two strangers. Booster Jacket with unfolded floors rocked.

– What the hell... How do they like brass buttons!

The servant picked up the shoe under the arm and led it out onto the porch. The cool wind fanned Tikhon’s face, and his head began to spin. Cherry-san ran up to him with a glass of seltzer water. At a sign from Lykov, she led Tikhon into the room prepared for him.

“We will sleep, my Russian hero,” she said.

At the door, Podkovin stopped and set Vishnyu-san against himself.

– I am very grateful to you, Cherry-san, for dancing and affection.

The Japanese clung to Tikhon’s chest and, gently pushing him into the room, whispered:

– I love you, my hero... You are very blue. I love blue, strong...

– Thank you, goodbye... Go home to sleep, go home.

The girl just now realized that the young man had removed her. Embarrassed, she lowered her head and, inhaling the air, muttered:

– Cy-o-nara, con-ban-va...

As soon as Lykov and Tikhon fell asleep, both women retired to the living room, taking with them the skit. Emptying their pockets, they began to look at the paper. Sasha-san, dipping the brush in the ink, wrote in beautiful hieroglyphs on thin paper:

“Passport of Tikhon Stepanovich Podkovin, a peasant from the Nizhny Novgorod province., Lukoyanovsky district, Mareseveka volost, the village of Malaya Polyana. Minister of Justice”.

Chapter two

one

In November 1903, the Podkovin had to draw lots for the fulfillment of military service. He was frontal. A brother who was fourteen years older than Tikhon received a privilege on marital status in his family. According to the law of that time, the eldest son remained in the assistance of parents to feed and raise young children. There were three of them in the Podkovins family: Tikhon, his younger brother and sister.

Very often, recruits for the latest draw numbers were not taken to military service. In that year, when Podkovin was called, 320 people were to be collected in the city of Irkutsk, and 260 people were required in military units, therefore, sixty young men could count on staying. Tickets with insignificant numbers pulled out and weakly chested, and myopic, and obsessed with various diseases. During the medical examination, the defectives fell out, and instead of them they took healthy ones, even if they had long-range lots in their hands, above the two hundred and sixtieth. In addition, every year there were both delayed and hiding from conscription.

On November 13, recruits gathered in the great hall of the city дума. When checking it turned out that twenty-three people did not come to the draw. Then they will be found, punished and sent to serve, respectively, freeing those taken with high numbers. But sometime it will be, and today the mood of the youth has been lowered: few lucky numbers remained.

With the recruits came their relatives. They passionately discussed all sorts of opportunities to get rid of military service.

The bell rang. A minute later there was silence in the hall. The chairman of the draft board, a gray-haired man in pince-nez, smiling, invited the recruits to approach the urn and gave a sign to the clerk.

– Arkhipov! – rang out in the hall.

Everything is quiet. A blond guy came out of the thick of the crowd. His steps boomed loudly on the steps of the platform. He was breathing heavily. Sweat came out in large drops on his forehead. Rolling up his sleeve, the guy ran his hand to the bottom of the urn and took out the ticket rolled up. His hand shook.

“Raise the ticket higher and unroll it,” said the chairman.

Suddenly the guy’s face lit up, and he cheerfully, but still in a hoarse voice, shouted:

– Two hundred and eighty second!

– Well done! – the public roared to a friendly applause.

Podkovin worried. He did not like the behavior of Arkhipov. “In a firm step, calmly, in a clear voice,” Tikhon suggested to himself. The hall fell silent again.

“Tell me your number,” heard Podkovin and looked at the platform.

Near the urn stood a tall, curly guy in a new coat. The tassels of the belt with which the maroon woolen shirt was girded dangled at the tops of a varnished boot. The recruit’s lips were shaking, and he, choking on tears, babbled:

– The third st...

– Louder! – shouted those present.

“He has a third number,” said the chairman.

– In the guard of the young man!

The guy moved away from the platform.

– Podkovin!

“To rummage or not to rummage in an urn,” thought Tikhon, striding towards the platform. He took a ticket from the top layer and quickly turned it around.

– Thirteenth! – shouted Podkovin.

There was a loud, universal laugh.

Happy number! Well done! Do not be lost! By God, you will not perish, – said Podkovin, when he came down from the platform.

2

In the evening, in order not to hear the mother’s lamentations, Tikhon went to the Berezhkins.

– Well? – in one voice asked him Varya and her mother. Podkovin stopped at the door and cried out:

– Happy!

– happy? – repeated Varya and, putting the work on the table – she was busy sewing, – got up.

Thirteenth, – answered Tikhon.

Brother Vari, Kostya, clutching at his sides, laughed loudly.

– What is sold, you fool? – Mother grumbled. – Tikhon – a frontal one, his number is his neighbor, he could not escape soldiery.

The old woman, Berezhkina, turned to the stove and raised the corner of her apron to her eyes. Her hunched figure shuddered.

– Poor Evdokia Ilinichna... I will go to her.

“And I’m with you,” said Varya.

Mother Podkovina sat at a table with tear-stained eyes. Varya ran to her and put her arm around her shoulders.

– Nothing bad will happen. Tikhon will return from the service tselehonek.

Weasel girls reassured Podkovina. The old woman loved Varia more than her other friends. Still sobbing, she said:

– God will hear the prayers of the mother. Obviously, he will return... But the human heart is changeable. Forget each other not for long...

Varya flinched. The last words of Evdokia Ilinichna burned her, as it were. She wanted to shout: “No, no, this will not happen to me. I know the price of love.”

Chapter three

one

In the barracks twilight. Near the gray walls, especially in the corners, hung haze. It was cold. The lamp, suspended under the arch, lights dimly.

Podkovin woke up from a jab in the side.

“Get up, you have to clean your boots,” he heard his neighbor’s voice.

Throwing back the blanket, he sat down on his bed and looked at his neighbor. The rookie rubbed his boots, but the desired shine did not work.

– You put on your boots and walk. As soon as they get warm, rub with a brush.

It was about six in the morning. In the second half, the barracks were still asleep: there were old soldiers there, and taking care of the boots, apparently, did not bother them anymore.

“Let me write a letter to my homeland,” said his neighbor, Podkovin, when he was finished with his boots. – In the village, I signed for others, if the paper that came. I can read the written, but the letters do not add up. Missed, – the guy sighed heavily.

– Get up! – the command of the person on duty was distributed. – Come on verification!

The barracks boomed. The air was even more saturated with the smell of rotten cloth and horse sweat. The soldiers’ clothes smelled like horses. Each rider has two horses, which he cleans daily.

Recruits went to the middle of the barracks and lined up along it in one row. All the clothes were still homemade. The lamp sparsely lit their anxious faces. The soldiers’ large red hands hung awkwardly along their bodies. Uncle came.

– Motin, why did you not clean your boots?

Motin's bootlegs got off their feet: a minute ago he was back from the restroom.

"Just now, when I got up, I cleaned it," answered Motin, frightened.

– Do not talk!.. Walk along the line with a goose step.

Motin turned red and out of order. He squatted on his haunches, put his hands on his sides and, without raising his body, moved along the barracks, throwing out one or the other leg. Ten more people were sent for Motin. The punished returned to their seats with bloodshot eyes. They breathed heavily and, bending down, rubbed their knees.

After checking and prayers, young soldiers were seated in beds for practicing "literature".

"Prikshaytis, read" Our Father, "heard Podkovin. Prikshaytis – Lithuanian. He has a small face with a sharp nose, and eyes with flushed eyelids.

"Father us," said Prikshaytis, blinking, and stopped. His lips moved, the fingers of his outstretched hands convulsively clenched into fists, his ears reddened, but no words were heard.

– Farther! – shouted uncle.

"Who else is in heaven," exclaimed the recruit, delighted.

– What-oh! Again, "weigh"? – yelled uncle. "I suffer for fifteen days, but you have not learned five words properly!"

Prikshaytis face was covered with white spots, he wrinkled and closed his eyes.

– Why are you blinking?

But Prikshaytis still stood with his eyes closed, he only stretched his neck more towards his teacher. – So asks for a slap in the face...

The teacher came close to him and backhand hit on the cheek. Prikshaytis reeled, but resisted. Tears streamed down the rookie's face.

Tikhona smothered anger. He jumped up, but remembering the words from the military charter, the first pages of which he quickly ran through, "Complaints about the chief can be brought individually and only for himself," he sank down helplessly on the bed and turned away from the unfortunate Lithuanian.

2

At ten o'clock in the morning, Captain Ali-Aga Mehmetinsky, a senior battery officer, came to the barracks. On the large oblong face of the captain, a hunchbacked nose was sticking up. His head is bald, his thick mustache lay magnificently, his eyebrows raised, his brown eyes this time reflecting a grin. Small hands with thin white fingers, the captain held behind his back. Greeting, Mehmetinsky shouted:

– Antonov Valentin Pavlovich.

“I,” one of the recruits said.

– Are you illiterate?

The soldier babbled something in response, and the captain summoned Morozov.

– You are also illiterate. What is it? From the big city, and the illiterate sent. Why didn't you study?

Morozov blushed deeply.

Mehmetinsky walked along the line and, smiling tenderly, called new recruits by last name, first name and patronymic, although he did not have a list in his hands.

– And we waited for you and thought: Siberians will not let you down... The same illiteracy as in the Baltic provinces, and in central Russia. Not good. An artilleryman must be well-educated...

The captain's face became serious. The buggies sagged slightly, but their eyes still gleamed. Talking to the recruits, he squinted them.

“Keep your head straight and lift your right shoulder,” said Captain Podkovin. – Have you worked in the court of justice for a long time? Two years? And before that, he worked somewhere?

– Was a clerk. And my main occupation is a fisherman.

– Do you have a good handwriting?

“I, your Honor, do not want a clerk.”

– We'll see. Who do the clerk do? See for yourself. And the clerk needs... Abramovich Moses Iosifovich! Are you a craftsman, a mechanic?

“That memory is memory. I read the list once and remembers everyone,” thought Podkovin.

– Good locksmith we need. What can you do?

– I can repair sewing machines, I made new locks.

– By the cannon lock do you make new?

– With the tool – everything is possible.

– Do you make a new gun? – Wishing to cheer the soldiers, asked the captain.

– Give the tool and the room, I'll make you a gun. Only one mess around unprofitable.

“This is fine,” the captain laughed. – We will send you to the arsenal. Verevkin Matvey Karpovich... Was a cab driver? Do you know horses? That's what we need. Be your ride. Good horses will give you a pair. Illiterate?.. If you quickly embrace the teaching, then you will be the senior fireworker. And you will have a riding horse, and you will command a whole platoon... Y-yes... Your diploma is weak, guys.

Twenty recruits went to their beds. Today they are exempted from general studies. The day was clear and frosty... Through the large windows, icy below, the sun illuminated the inside of the barracks. In the middle of it, between cast-iron columns supporting the ceiling, there is a wide passage along the whole room. On the sides, by the walls, in several rows were bunks of gunners; in the corners, where it was more spacious, older and younger fireworks were placed. In the aisle, young soldiers marched in groups. There were stomping and squawking platoon.

Before lunch, after being freed from classes, his neighbor approached Podkovin.

– Write me a letter something. To Oryol Province...

– Okay, I'll write. What is your last name?

– Konevyazov.

– We will agree with you like this: you do your job, and I will write.

– How can it be without me?

– Okay. Do not bother me. I'll write, then we'll talk.

Half an hour later, Podkovin called him.

– Here is the letter ready. Read it out loud.

At first he stammered, and then, rather briskly, Konevyazov read:

“My dear parents! In the first lines of this letter I ask for your blessing, which will be indestructible over the grave of my life, and I kiss you warmly, and I also bow deeply in love. I send my bow to grandparents, brothers and sisters, and my uncle with my aunt and my dear wife a hot kiss, and I will write her a separate letter. May he love you all and be your own daughter.

I tell you all that my health so far, thank goodness, is good, and my soldier's training is proceeding in its own way. And now I live in the city of Nerchinsk in the barracks, and all of us young soldiers were sent to the battery only from our lands eighty people.

We traveled for a very long time, twenty-five days, and all of Siberia. That's where the spacious! There are few cities and villages, and more and more mountains and dense forest. In the mountains, gold is dug, and in the forests of fur animals are beaten. A resident of the local, in sight, in abundance. Log houses, under a skeleton roof. All around, even in the forest, hedges, and a lot of livestock.

Transbaikalia, where we now serve, is also a rich side, but it is painfully icy and snowless. You go out into the yard – and the boots freeze, and their tops are immediately exactly wooden. More than fifty degrees are frost. Trans-Baikal peasants (they are called here Gurans, and that is, the Old Believers are exiled) are engaged in arable farming and cattle breeding. Their cattle are small and non-dairy. Bread is eaten rye and wheat.

Although we traveled from the Oryol province to Nerchinsk for a long time, we did not get to the end of Russia. It can be said that the Amur River begins from here, which is more than three thousand miles long, and there is a gulf of different fish in it.

Once again, I wish you all good health. Write me a detailed letter.

Rookie finished and said:

– Good.

“No, not quite well,” Podkovin stopped him. – Sit down and rewrite the whole letter with your own hand, but do not forget to put your first and middle names. When you rewrite, insert more of your words...

3

A week later, Podkovina was summoned to the office of the battery and charged him with the correspondence of the lists of allowances. The senior clerk on the first day said to him:

– Read the statutes of the military service, and you will know literature better than your uncle, yes, and perhaps Feldwebel.

Every morning, until nine o'clock, Podkovin still had to be in the classroom language. He was jarred by the abnormal relationship between teachers and recruits. In the entire barracks there was not a single thoughtful uncle who would lovingly impart his insignificant knowledge on the charter of military service. They were all rough, petrified faces. Only anger was reflected in their views. They spoke or shouted in hoarse voices.

The uncle of the ten, in which Podkovin was listed, had one “tag” on his shoulder straps, that is, he was a scorer. Only with this tidbit he was different from the rest.

At first, the uncle abruptly took up the Podkovina: forced him to make jumps, turns, questioned about the ranks and names of the nearest bosses. All of his demands, which did not go beyond the framework of the training program for young soldiers, Tikhon carried out quickly and distinctly. But in the face of the guy it was clear that he was still unhappy. In his orders, a desire to set up the Shoe in front of the whole system in a ridiculous position, and Tikhon became alert. Subsequently, it turned out that the guys and fireworks did not like literate subordinates, and the Shackles for the barracks was the “black sheep”.

The unkindness of the uncles to Tikhon intensified after the first days of his stay in the office. They followed him, listened to his conversations with his comrades.

Once, on a routine basis, everyone got up early in the morning, cleaned his boots and made beds. There was a forty-degree frost in the yard. The windows were frozen from top to bottom. Despite all the efforts of recruits, their boots did not receive the proper shine.

The training in the ranks was conducted by Osipov, the junior fireworker, who was the separated chief of the fourth platoon.

– Attention! – the uncle has ordered.
Separated, pulling his chest out, walked up to a line of young soldiers.

– Great guys!

– Good morning, Mr. separate!

Junior fireworks quickly walked along the line.

The recruits kept their eyes on him. From the right flank, he turned back and frowned, staring at the feet of the soldiers.

“Why are boots poorly cleaned?” Loafers! Pay for the first and second!

Half a minute has passed.

– The first – to the right, the second – to the left!..

The soldiers turned and found themselves face to face.

– Hit each other on the cheeks!

Podkovin received a slap in the face from a soldier standing opposite, but did not beat him. Separated jumped to Tikhon:

– Bay!

Tikhon was still standing, stretching his arms at the seams.

– To the right! Two steps forward!

Podkovin out of order.

– Konevyazov, come here! Shock Podkovina.

He-hit lightly.

– Bay is stronger! The fireworker commanded.

Konevyazov hit harder. Podkovin said:

– Sir, separate, report to the platoon about my beating in the ranks.

– Oh, are you complaining?!

– Yes, I will complain and demand that you be punished.

“Why didn’t you beat your neighbor, since I order?” – hoarsely asked fireworks,

“I know that your order is illegal and, therefore, I would respond with you.” Why do I need it?

There was silence. All pulled neck. Separate reddened.

– What will happen to me if I download a stronger ear?

Raising his shoulders, the separated walked over to Tikhon and raised his right hand.

“Lose your titles and get into a disciplinary company,” answered Loudly, loudly, rejoicing at the question.

The fireworks hand dropped and he stepped back a step.

– Report in detail! – shouted Tikhon.

– Look, broke! Do not worry, report your disobedience...

The learning has begun.

In the evening Tikhon was summoned to the platoon.

– What are you, Podkovin, want?

“I want you to report to the Feldwebel about my beating in the ranks.”

“But you are guilty because you did not fulfill the order of the chief.”

– you, mister platoon, allow to beat the soldiers?

– Guilty.

– Then, if you do not give up your words, you will answer as well.

– This is too... Go!

Turning around, Tikhon glanced at the nearby young soldiers. They nodded their heads approvingly. From afar, Podkovin saw that his neighbor, Konevyazov, was sitting on coal. He would have jumped, but was afraid to betray his excitement.

– So the statute says? He asked in a whisper.

– Clear. You do not hit anyone else...

– Now they swell. You said well in front of the line: as if only for yourself, but there will be benefits for everyone...

The soldiers saw that in the last three evenings the statute did not go out of the hands of the teachers, who were gathered in groups. Separated Ostapov fell silent. Lessons in literature were now without slaps and goose steps.

More and more often, the teachings on the question: “Who is our external enemy?” – the word slipped: Japan. For the first time in the barracks it was mentioned by Lieutenant Karamyshev. Testing the work of teachers, he asked young soldiers questions about “internal” and “external” enemies, and he himself replied that Japan was the external enemy in the Far East, which was preparing hard for war with Russia.

Chapter four one

In the beginning of January, Modest Vladimirovich Inov with his family left Harbin for Dalny to work as an assistant director in the branch of the Russian-Chinese Bank. The small town, originally laid out on the beach, first liked Valais. Enveloped on one side by hills and bays on the other, it was not like the cold Irkutsk and dusty Harbin. It was a lot of exotic, and in the early days he fascinated the girl. Most of all she liked the beautiful harbor, filled with huge steamships. The long pier protected the inner pond from the swell. In the streets, among the original red-brick buildings, lively crowds often gathered from Russian, German, French, American and English sailors. There were also negros who stood out for their curly hair and tall stature. There were shouts and curses in different languages around Chinese shops and stores.

The Japanese kept themselves apart. Anger and envy were concentrated on their yellow faces. They viewed the harbor, ships, new buildings and merry Russian sailors frowningly.

A capacious theater was erected near the sea. The cathedral, hospital and city government were already built.

From the very first days of her stay in the Far, Valya noticed that in the town they live happily, even too merrily and carelessly.

Inova occupied a beautifully furnished apartment. The whole furnishings of the apartment belonged to the bank and were handed over to the newly arrived employees during their work in the city of Dalny.

Two weeks after arrival, Modest Vladimirovich gave a semi-official evening, to which representatives of the city, military units, as well as commercial dealers, the bank's main customers, were invited.

Inov's wife, Serafima Prokopyevna, was worried. She wanted the first to come family colleagues, but the servant introduced Lykov.

– Old friend. Very happy.

Lykov, shaking his head, wanted to say something, but a group of guests arrived, and the hostess rose to meet them. In the first days of the arrival, the Inovy Lykov often came to them. Valya did not go into the living room when Lykov was there.

One of the guests, a supplier of the forest, obese, with a drooping chin and small eyes, after adjusting his long mustache, asked:

– What's new, gentlemen?

“The Japanese are moving,” said Lieutenant Gladyshev.

“And the fortress is poorly armed, including Kinzhou,” said the captain in gold glasses, and his voice seemed to everyone somewhat squeaky and irritated.

“It’s unthinkable to imagine a fortress appearing by magic,” the colonel of the engineering troops remarked with a grin.

“They spent twice as many millions on a toy town Dalny,” the captain shouted even louder. – Meanwhile, the place chosen absurd. Firstly – far from the fortress, secondly – the device of the harbor requires tremendous costs and, thirdly – once far from the fortress, it is necessary to put batteries here against the attack of the enemy from the sea. One attack of the destroyers – and all commercial ships captured in the commercial port, will fall to the bottom of the bay. We need a fortress as a safe haven for naval military vessels, and not a trinket like the city of Dalny.

– Nikolai Stepanovich, you are an impossible person. You look at the surroundings from your bell tower... The main task of the Russians is the commercial development of the region. We must show the British, the French, the Germans, and the Japanese, that we are engaged in peaceful affairs on the Kwantung Peninsula.

– Politics, politics... Measure, but do not get carried away, do not forget the danger – the captain did not let up. – A fist hangs over your head, and you have a decoration with the words “peaceful construction”.

– Do not exaggerate the danger.

Modest Vladimirovich entered. The owner was an elegant and pleasant-looking man. His broad face with a broad forehead enlivened large light brown eyes.

– Hello, master. It’s boring without you, – rising from the table, said Lykov.

– Sorry, today I unexpectedly stayed in the bank.

Almost after Modest Vladimirovich, the mother and daughter of Lastochkin entered. Tanya Lastochkina looked at the guests with surprised eyes.

Lykov, leaning over to his neighbor the lieutenant, whispered:

– Here you, Lieutenant, and the first swallow.

– Pretty but impassable fool. I am familiar with her. Finger about the finger does not want to hit, and reads only the application to the magazine “Homeland”.

Tanya went to the room Vali. The captain was still arguing with the colonel. The lieutenant approached them.

Inov knew about the restless captain, whose judgments aptly hit the mark. He was disliked.

“I wish the currency would come and play,” the owner thought.

Serafima Prokopievna returned to the living room, accompanied by Tanya and Vali.

– Gentlemen, I ask for a glass of tea.

A Chinese servant appeared in soft shoes on high soles because of the drapery, followed by a fight with a dish filled with biscuits and sweets. None of the guests paid attention to the servant and the boy, dressed in silk national costumes. Everyone looked at Valya. Her large, oblong face was stern. She smiled with her eyes and that was enough: the guests saw before them a beautiful and calm girl. Valya matured. Thin wrinkles lay on her forehead near the bridge. Guests with a low bow shook the girl's hand. The captain greeted the last. Holding her hand, he asked:

– Valentina Modestovna, play for us something. In this city, we so rarely heard good music.

Valya broke out. The words of the captain seemed to her the first technique of courtship. Without taking away her hands, she replied:

What do you? I'm just learning.

– Beg. The music is comforting, and I miss my family so much. I have a small, eyed daughter...

– Aaaa, – Valya gently stretched out and squeezed a hand to the captain. – We will choose together what to play.

The girl took a tray with sweets from the battlefield – he was waiting for her at the portiere – and went around all the guests.

The captain stood by the window.

“I would like to listen to Tchaikovsky,” he said when Valya approached him.

– I'll play, Nikolay Stepanovich, but later. We do not know the guests... What do you say against the “Storm on the Volga?”

Nikolai Stepanovich nodded approvingly and thought: “What a clever girl, exactly like my Natasha.”

The musical play was listened to in complete silence, and when Valya finished, Lykov approached the piano.

– Divinely! Russian motives, our Volga...

How is your health, Valentina Modestovna?

The captain winced and stepped aside.

Valya looked at Lykov and smiled.

“Firewood and T-beams have been well studied, but I have not mastered the approach to people,” she thought.

“Play something else,” the lieutenant shouted. – Strauss waltz. While Valya was playing, more guests came up: the director of the bank and a trusted local large trading company Churin and Co. with their wives. Modest Vladimirovich announced that the dancing would begin now, and he sat down at the piano. The evening was lively. Valya danced with Lykov, the lieutenant and the captain, but talked exclusively with Nikolai Stepanovich. She asked him about his family, about his service, about the province.

“I do not know much about China, and even less about the Japanese... I turn red with shame...”

At the end of the dinner, men more and more began to be put to the glass. Lykov reddened and revived. The lieutenant purred the tune from the Merry Widow. The captain drank brandy, but with restraint. He stopped the lieutenant, who was headed to the living room.

– Let’s drink... I dug up the Martel cognac of the highest brand... A curious thing with a lemon... Let the girls play. From here it’s even better to listen.

Valya played a potpourri from Russian songs.

– Here it is, holy Russia! – exclaimed Lykov. – Let’s drink to the great Russian people, gentlemen! What are you pouring in there, captain? For the Russian people – and brandy? No, you need a glass of little white!

“Agreed,” said the captain. – Russian vodka is so Russian vodka...

They all drank and began to eat, and the captain stood with an outstretched hand.

– Well, you, Nikolai Stepanovich? – asked the lieutenant. Everyone turned toward the captain.

– And I will drink. But let me, dear Lykov, tell you, as a Russian man and a merchant, a few words ... – The captain with an outstretched hand in which he held the glass, approached Lykov:

– Chase away the Japanese girl who lives with you.

– Allow me. This is my private affair.

– Not! This is a purely public matter! – cried out Nikolay Stepanovich. “In your house, not a beautiful Madame for your pleasure, but a Japanese agent.”

Lykov blushed deeply.

– It can not be! She accepted the Russian faith.

– I know. In Japan, Russian money contains a factory of Japanese spies. She is nicknamed the Russian Orthodox mission.

The lieutenant tried to pull out the captain.

– You forget, Lieutenant! I understand what I'm saying. With knowledge of the Russian language and with a prayer, it is much better to fool... No, this is a disgrace! The captain cried out again, responding to the puzzled looks of the guests. "We pay spies for our money, we warm them in our breasts... Laundresses, hairdressers, battles, tailors... All this horde of hundreds of eyes looks at what we are doing here and how many of us are on Kvantun. Try to hide from them and keep state secrets. All of them – rope loop, in which we stand with both feet. The time will come, they will pull at its end, and we will clatter... We will clash at full length.

Lykov lowered his head. Most of the guests thought, and the supplier of the forest said:

– It is necessary to pour on a glass and wash the eyes... The coppers and kept women were frightened. Eka, think, passion!

– You are a scoundrel! – screamed the captain. "Come out to the courtyard, I'll rip you by the ears." And here, you know, with ladies uncomfortable.

– What? What? – blinked eyes supplier of the forest.

"Let's go for some fresh air," said the bank director, frightened, and led the fat man to the porch.

– I'm sorry, gentlemen. But please carefully think about my words. Not today, then tomorrow is war, and we are hung up with helpful Japanese... Oh my God, when will everyone understand this danger!

The voice of the captain trembled. He wiped his glasses and made a general bow, he left.

– What an impossible person! – exclaimed the guests.

"You do not know Nikolai Stepanovich Rezanov," said the colonel. – There is a lot of truth in his words. Japan is growing. Authoritative military experts do not deny serious danger. My colleague, engineer Colonel Velichko, who was sent here to draft the fortress, wrote in his report for 1899: "The more the port of Dalniy develops commercially and is more widely supplied with all port facilities – docks, marinas, coal, etc. he will be more suitable for the services of the enemy... And if the enemy seizes the port of Dalniy and will have to meet his concentration in Arthur, then the railway connecting the Dalniy with Port Arthur will bring him great benefit and allow him to concentrate under the fortress Yew significant siege means. "Undoubtedly, a trade port should have been built in Pigeon Bay and its adjacent gulfs. There was a project – to connect the channel of the western basin of Arthur with the Pigeon Bay. Then, of course, it would turn out very stable.

The noise in the dining room made Valya alert. She sat at the piano and waited for the captain, whom she promised to play one of his favorite pieces of music.

A lieutenant came swaying.

"I never expected it," he laughed. – Lykov has a Japanese spy lives on. – The lieutenant, having learned about Lykov's courting for Vale, was offended. – Merchant licentiousness! Naughty! Lykovschina!..

Valya got up and, turning, looked sternly at the lieutenant.

– Where is Nikolai Stepanovich? Gone home? And you, Igor Sergeyevich, know Lykov well? I am not inclined to praise him, and yet, I beg you, do not lose respect for yourself...

The lieutenant instantly otrezvetel and clutching his head, ran out of the living room.

– What tactlessness! Tikhon would not do that, “whispered Valya.

2

As soon as Lykov went to visit, Sasha-san sat down at her desk and began to carefully write down the numbers from the railway consignment notes and steamship bills of lading.

“Larch bars – 1,200 pieces, pine bars – 20,000 pieces, T-shaped beams – 6,000 pieces, cement – 1,500 barrels”.

– Sasha-san made such notes calmly and freely even in the presence of Lykov.

After the scandal at the Inovy Lykov before everyone went home. He felt sad and annoyed. He laughed internally at the captain’s conclusions, but the doubt crept in.

Sasha-san met her host with a joyful smile and wanted to go with him to the bedroom.

– . Wait, my dear. I need to read one letter. It lies on the desk.

They entered the office. Seeing a long sheet of fine Japanese paper written up, Lykov laughed:

– Again, a letter to dad and mom? You teach me to write in Japanese. Beautiful squiggles you go out.

Lykov put his hand on the letter and looked at him.

“Numbers. Why the numbers in the letter? “He thought, and the blood rushed to his face. He leaned on the table with his whole chest, as if searching for the paper he needed, he looked at the results of the consignment notes and bills of lading. The letter had the same numbers.

– I can not find. Did put in the safe? Did you finish writing? Stop it Let’s go to sleep. Go get the bed ready and I’ll lock the paper. You, my dear, tortured with translations of bills of lading. And I still walk. Sabbath! Seriously take up the Russian case.

The Japanese woman kissed Lykov and went into the bedroom, and he grabbed all the correspondence from the table.

“Wait! I have another key to a fireproof cabinet. It probably does not fit here, “thought Lykov, locking the safe. He took the key out of his wallet. – Very similar to each other. Does not fit. Fine... It will be funny if thieves steal the keys ...”

Sasha-san was lying in bed with her eyes closed. Lykov was not allowed to sleep by surging thoughts. Right or wrong captain? Having stretched his arms, Lykov pretended to snore. It took ten – twelve weary minutes. Sasha-san pulled her legs out of bed and put her hand under the pillow behind

the keys. Rising, she stood to her full height and, pouring cold water into a glass, listened to Lykov's snoring, then moved away from the bed and quietly moved toward the door.

Finding herself at the safe, she used the usual gesture to take the key and shoved it into the well. Excluded. Turned over. Again not included. Sasha-san's forehead was covered with cold sweat.

"Any new keys? Why don't I know anything about them?" She thought, and returned to the bedroom. Lykov was still snoring.

"Likhomanka shook. Are you worried? The key did not fit? So it's a serious matter. Cleverly I thought up! Dad and Mom will not receive another letter." Lykov could not resist and laughed.

– What's the matter? – screamed the Japanese and threw back the blanket.

– I had a merry dream. Sleep Tomorrow I will tell.

The troubles of the night tired Sasha-san, and before dawn, lulled by the light snoring of her host, she fell soundly asleep. Lykov played the sleeper all night. It was not difficult – the annoyance of himself inflated his nerves.

At eight and a half hours he got up and, having chosen yesterday's bypass from the safe, went to the bank.

– There, probably, there are translators. I'll check, and tomorrow I'll take action. Scandal!..

Returning to dinner, he did not find the Japanese. It soon became clear that she had disappeared along with Cherry-san.

3

And the second night Lykov was worried, but already alone. He did not regret the Japanese woman, but he was stifling anger: how was that? He, a Russian merchant, was suddenly held by the Japanese! Babu fooled! A captain is right a thousand times...

The next morning, Lykov went to Arthur, instructing a reliable person to watch the departing Japanese women on the pier.

Port Arthur lived the life of a large port city, and Far from it seemed an abandoned exhibition that played its role and was subject to destruction. The plans of the governor Alekseev were opposite to the plans of Count Witte. The deputy did not pay attention to the Far, and tried to build more commercial buildings in Port Arthur itself. Forty millions spent on a commercial port hung in the air long before the declaration of war. Port Arthur would look completely different if these millions were spent on it.

As soon as Lykov arrived in Port Arthur, he was stunned by all sorts of rumors. Tokyo still defends the demands made of St. Petersburg, and in every way intimidates our government; in turn, in Petersburg they talk ungraciously with the Japanese ambassador. The Japanese living in Arthur, liquidate their affairs and leave. Lykov was personally convinced of this: the Japanese barber shop

of the “chief chief of the Kwantung Oblast” (as it was written on the sign) was closed. Lykov spent the whole day unshaven and often mentally exclaimed:

“All is fine with them.” They will come to shave, they talk, and the Japanese spy listens. There are no Russian hairdressing salons, but the Chinese are not very clean...

Particularly intriguing was the rumor about a treaty between the Chinese government, Japan, and the United States, according to which the Celestial Empire gave some of its ports to the designated states.

Lykov was surprised to see the fighting ships repainted gray. Many of them were urgently filmed with excessive rigging and inventory-disturbing equipment.

The soldiers marched in full ammunition, and decently dressed civilian Japanese walked around the harbor.

“There are plenty more Japanese,” thought Lykov, “but there really shouldn’t be any on Kvantuna at all.”

An alarming condition swept the inhabitants. And only the military looked calm and, it seemed to Lykov, even careless.

– However, what to worry? To be ready for everything is their direct duty, – decided Lykov.

four

It was the eve of the Chinese New Year. The streets were discharged merchants and coolies. Red stickers with various good wishes glittered on shops, carts, gates of dwellings, hauliers of peddlers and even on rocker arms of water carriers.

In the restaurant, Lykov met a familiar naval officer.

– How are you in the Far? – he asked.

We live as if in an abandoned village. Meanwhile, events seem to be brewing.

– Yes, the Japanese squash.

– Are we ready?

– Sure.

“I don’t like the external raid,” said Lykov. – It is difficult to keep track of the enemy destroyers.

“Sorry, but this is a naive question.” Every night there are patrols of combat light vessels. But we, the sailors, do not assume that there will be military actions, although we want them. Japanese should have taught a lesson.

– Tell me, do you have our vessels in other nearby ports, for example in Korean ones? In my opinion, in such an alarming time, all vessels must be assembled so that they will not be shot one by one.

– You worry in vain.

– I will tell you in a friendly way, there is much carelessness among the military. They say that naval officers do not always spend the night on their ships.

– It happens. War is not declared.

“One shouldn’t lose sensitivity,” said Lykov, sighing, and blushed, remembering the Japanese woman.

– Are you worried. I am pleased to hear how Russian people care about our fleet... But Alexander Petrovich, you merchants often obscure your mind, and you, not you personally, of course, go to criminal deals, although they are to the detriment of the treasury.

– For example?

– We are released bad coal, poor quality provisions.

– Watch, check.

– You have to be everywhere and honest in everything. We, the sailors, can be blamed for drunkenness, but by no means cheating.

– Drinking is also a waste! – exclaimed Lykov. – You are wasting your health and time. Meanwhile, both should be used to study the environment and new advances in technology. Sorry, captain, I have been told many times: young naval officers are inert in their studies. Not many follow Admiral Makarov’s example.

– Quite you worry. Everything is good. Sleep well... But you, dear friend, are you a weak drinker?

– I quit drinking and smoking.

– What is it?

– I decided to marry. And the girl from such that does not love drinking and smoking.

– Spit and find another.

– You can not, sir, heart, sir! – smiling, answered Lykov.

Chapter five

one

January 26 evening, the Chinese began to celebrate their new year. Fireworks and firecrackers cracked everywhere. An unimaginable noise hit the strained nerves of the Russian inhabitants.

“Has it really begun?” – each of them thought. But, having learned what was the matter, the Porturtians calmed down.

...The night was dark, moonless, cold. A light fog enveloped the combat vessels that stood on the outer roadstead. Lighthouse lights blinked warmly. Rays of searchlights ran and then glided along the horizon. Port Arthur Harbor, not yet in-depth, did not have a permanent free passage for large vessels. At the entrance and exit, they used the clock tide.

The squadron stood on the outer roadstead in three lines: in the north – the battleships “Petrovsk”, “Poltava”, “Sevastopol”; in the south – the cruisers Angara, Diana, Pallada, Bayan and Askold; in the middle between the two groups are the handsome battleships Peresvet, Pobeda, Retvizan, and Tsarevich.

The destroyers Thunderbolt and Fearless cruised along the line of long-distance protection. Cruiser “Novik” and “Boyar” stood near the shore.

A light southerly wind enveloped the ships with a warm mist. By ten o’clock at night there was silence, which was disturbed only by a slight splashing of the waves.

Around midnight there was an explosion of a mine at the port side of the Retvizan. A minute later, the Tsarevich opened fire on the Japanese torpedoes rushing at him. Following this, volleys of rapid fire rang out from other ships.

Huge pillars of water soared near the “Tsarevich” and “Pallas.” The unfortunate vessels lurched and, choosing anchors, headed towards the harbor entrance. Enemy destroyers pursued the “Tsarevich”, but were met with amicable fire from ship guns. A few minutes later one of them sank. The rest turned back.

Wounded “Retvizan” first went to the Tiger Tail and buried his nose on the shore. At the “Tsarevich” they did not become confused and filled the corresponding compartments with water in time, otherwise the battleship would turn over.

The inhabitants of Arthur took the first shots of the outbreak of war for practice shooting.

In the army rose turmoil. The commandant of the fortress Stessel arrived at the headquarters.

– All rotam immediately take shore batteries.

“Your Excellency, there is no disposition,” said the chief of staff.

Stoessel’s eyes widened, his mouth parted, his fat chin sagged.

– Ugliness! – Stoessel swore. – It was necessary to think about it before. Would develop and submit for review and approval... Call and send messengers so that each company takes the appropriate battery and guards the approaches to it.

“What company and what battery?” Which flank to strengthen?

– Children’s questions. The chief of staff and company commanders themselves must know their business. Do I have the right to rely on their ingenuity and quickness?

– They have nothing to do with it. Your Excellency should have all the threads in his hands and a plan developed with your participation.

– Give me these threads, give me these threads! – Stoessel grabbed his head and ran out of the headquarters.

Sea battle subsided. From the starry sky breathed calm. Stoessel stopped: he did not know where to go and where to begin the defense of the fortress.

Awakened garrison clutched his guns. Many companies came to positions only with sentry cartridges. The soldiers saw the confusion of the officers and decided to discard the enemy with bayonets.

Lykov ran vey a night along the embankment. And at dawn I saw aground ships damaged.

– The three main combat units lost overnight. Awful – He looked at the harbor, at the narrow strait into the sea, – These fools will all go to hell. Nikolay Stepanovich here! The captain is wearing glasses here!.. Things, how many things! I’ll run to arrange my own...

Near the gate leading to the port, there were police officers. A drunken lieutenant with two ladies came to them.

– I told you that it was educational shooting. See what a clear and calm morning. And you got scared and shouted: “To the station, rather to the station!”

The lieutenant laughed out loud. Approaching him approached him.

“Let me tell you, the war has begun.” “Tsesarevich”, “Retvizan”, “Pallas” undermined by enemy mines.

The sailor shuddered and, glancing at the entrance to the harbor, fled at the gate of the port, without saying a word to his ladies.

2

At 10 hours and 35 minutes in the morning on January 27, the cruiser “Boyar”, returning from intelligence, brought the news of the approach of the enemy squadron of fifteen combat units.

The meeting with the governor stopped, and everyone hurried to their seats. Admiral Stark arrived on the flagship with the first shots at the enemy. General Stoessel went to the Electric Cliff, the governor wanted to watch the battle from the Golden Mountain.

Japanese fire was aimed mainly at our ships. Several enemy shells flew over coastal fortifications and exploded on Mount Perepelina.

Huge clouds of smoke from simple powder, which was still used by the Russians on mortar batteries, covered the Golden Mountain. After each shot, white smoke rings jumped up and then slowly floated toward the bay.

With an electric cliff fired from long-range guns. They threw out long flames. Instead of smoke, yellow dust flashed over the battery.

Our and Japanese ships fired continuously. “Novik” and “Bayan”, despite the fire concentrated on them, kept on keeping in front, without ceasing to respond to the enemy.

There were fires in many Japanese courts. Electric cliff hit the enemy, but the shells of the remaining coastal batteries before the enemy ships did not reach.

The fight lasted thirty minutes. The Japanese retreated. It was the first attack by the Russians on the Kwantung Peninsula.

Chapter six

one

In the second battery, the message about the outbreak of war was made by the battery commander, Colonel Mehmandarov, a short man with a proud posture. His mustache was famously curled, his thick beard split in half. Hard, red-streaked eyes looked stubbornly. In a long knee-length uniform, in boots with round hard tops, he looked like a museum mannequin.

Throwing his hands back, he stood in the middle of the barracks in front of the line and said in a hoarse voice:

– The war has begun. Get ready for a hike. We are facing combat trials. Anyone who truly loves his homeland and father-king will show the valor of the Russian arms to the whole world. The Japanese are not alone. Starting a war, they hope for the support of other states and especially of England. The batteries of our division will face the very first Japanese, because you and I are close to the border. A few days later we will march towards an insidious enemy. We have to perform difficult and responsible tasks. You, battery riders, gunners, bombardiers, gunners and fireworks, I know how well done, well prepared for firing from our beautiful guns. The Japanese do not have such guns in the field artillery. We will undoubtedly have an advantage in accuracy and range. Our 1902 model guns are improved. The motherland and the emperor hope that you will show the enemy the strongest resistance, using your strength and ingenuity in difficult moments. You will cruelly persecute him when he falters and runs... So, ahead, to victories and royal awards! I wish you to return whole and healthy... Hooray!

Podkovin saw Mehmandarov for the first time. In January, due to illness, he never showed up at the barracks. According to the soldiers, Mehmandarov was an extravagant, evil man. An old bachelor, he lived alone in a huge apartment. His batman was very tight: thousands of quibbles per day. In addition, the colonel had hemorrhoid surgery a few days ago. Once the sergeant-major assigned to him a soldier of the 1903 Arshinov draft, a big quitter and a dandy. Not even one day passed before Arshinov returned.

– What’s the matter? – asked his comrades.

– I come. Asks: parents are alive, where are they? I say – in hard labor. For what? Cried the commander. – A visiting man was killed off... He looked at me, grunted and sent me back. So I did not have to, thanks to God, candles from hemorrhoids, he put.

“How will such well-trained campaigners behave on the battlefield?” Thought Podkovin, failing after the end of the message.

2

Ten days later, Podkovin received a letter from her sister.

“Dear Tikhon! We are very sad. The war has begun, and you will soon be in Manchuria. Perhaps the letter will not find you. We hope to receive letters from you more often. We will know where you are. Our letters are unlikely to reach – you will be shifting all the time – and we will definitely receive yours. We have nothing special happened. Mom cried heavily on the day of the declaration of war. Varya enrolled in a voluntary squad of sisters and soon leaves for the front. After your departure, she behaves closed, lost weight, We all discouraged her, but she did not obey. Maybe it's all for the better: you now have your own sister of mercy.

I did not understand you, why did you dry out Varya dryly? Even if you don't love her, she is your childhood friend. You did not want to commit yourself... Girls, and women in general, do not forgive such delicate calculation and circulation. In case of Vari, I would have spat on you – that's all... I remember you saying that you would not marry before returning from military service. The statement is good, but still Varyu should be petted... A year ago, she was jealous of you for Vale, and when she left, she calmed down. Yes, and we all decided: Valya will not wait for you, but the main thing is that she is not a couple to you. Varya swore in front of me is waiting for you. “Come what may,” she said.

By the way, in the last letters from Harbin, Valya asks about you. We told her where you are. Levers not married. He made me a second offer, He is a good man, but I cannot become his wife.

Sworn attorney Zverev was very requested to convey his regards to you, Delusto was appointed a member of the court. He said that when you went to a session in the city of Far, a local big merchant Lykov came to his room and said: “Give me your employee Tikhon Podkovina. I have a big deal, of national importance, but there are no honest people. What does he get from you?”-“Received fifteen, but will receive twenty-five,” Delyusto told him. – “Ugh, you, abyss! At such a penny place, and such a valuable person got”. “How do you know him?” Asked Delyusto. – “Chance helped. Inovs from Harbin telegraphed for me to meet. I immediately saw him through the dinner. The merchants on the people have a great scent. In money matters, intelligent people are needed.” Delight spread his hands: “He is free, his will.” “So, then, a freelancer?” Said the merchant happily. A day later, at a new meeting, he told Delyusto: “The guy doesn't want, he doesn't need to, he says, to tie up, in the fall, all the same as soldiers... I wanted to buy it from the soldiery, but he refused. And it would cost a couple of thousand ...”

Varya is glad for that evening, which was arranged in honor of yours, conducted by our good friends Pestsov.

You in your burgundy cashmere shirt made a good impression on everyone. It seems that only that evening Varya had kissed her deeply with you. She always remembers this evening with a sad smile.

Having received this letter, you do not imagine much about yourself there. All kiss you tightly. Do not brag on the war. Remember – you still need a mother. Levers you wrote a separate letter. He came and showed yours – to him.

If we receive a letter from Vali, then what should she answer? Do you love her as you once loved, or are you still offended? She told me more than once: I did not understand Tikhon, he was so unpretentious and clumsy. She regrets that she didn't see you right away... Valya is, of course, an exceptional person. She loves you sincerely. With someone bind her fate? For our family, it is not suitable. It may be a tragedy. Although, who knows, in life everything happens. Valya Valya, and Vare must write a letter. Just look, rather. Mom sends a blessing and kisses, and we and Varya and even more so. Here she stands and cries. Your sister Fima.

3

The second battery marched on a February frosty night. Arriving from the city at the station Nerchinsk, the gunners immediately loaded the guns onto the platforms, and the sledgers introduced the horses into the wagons. The soldiers were trained to work quickly, but they waited for a very long time. The single-track Great Siberian Route was not able to fulfill all the demands made on it by wartime circumstances.

People housed in the frozen greenhouse. Thick steam clubs enveloped every artilleryman; the walls of the cars were covered with hoarfrost. It was ordered not to heat the furnaces until the morning.

Sleep on this night subsided without undressing. In the carriages, they drove by the platoon: from the first day of the march, the old and young soldiers were mixed. The battery was the gunners and rideable life from 1899 to 1904.

Most of all boasted of his seniority sled Semenov. He rode in the same carriage with Podkovin and was arrogant towards the young soldiers.

– Hey, recruit, bring boiling water! – could be heard from Semenov. Most of all he attacked Konevyazov's orlovtsa, who was with him on the lower tents of the carriage. Semenov kept his head and combed his beard in the same way as Mehmandarov. On the calves, he rolled up a lot of rags so that the tops of his boots seemed as thick as that of the commander. Yearlings scribbled Semenov, saluted him in front. In fact, the figure and straightening of the gunner and the colonel were very similar to each other, but Mehmandarov was black-haired, and Semenov was blond.

– Wash the tank! – shouted Semenov Podkovin once.

“When it is my turn, I will wash it, and today is yours.”

Semenov turned purple. He did not expect such resistance. – A scientist, a clerk... you are still young to disobey.

– I do not intend to carry out someone's whims.

“On, go and wash you,” shouted Semenov angrily at the orlovts, “learn to live with your elders.”

Konevyazov and Podkovin met their eyes.

– Today I will not go. I'm busy. See, I'll fix my uniform, "he answered. – Enough... Doing a favor, and you have one conceit.

– I'll show you arrogance! – shouted Semenov.

"Than to shout, let's go to Feldwebel right now," said Podkovin. – During the war, we are all equal. Everyone is responsible for their work.

Remembering the reprimand received by Osipov for Podkovin, Semenov became quiet, but his eyes remained evil.

The soldiers of the second battery almost did not see Manchuria. Their train followed more at night, while in the daytime it stood for long hours at minor stations and deaf journeys. This was done on purpose – away from the wine shops where vodka was sold for sixteen kopecks per bottle.

In Harbin, a military train was inspected by an inspector. The gunners were dressed in new uniforms, forced to tie the underbelly. There was a thaw. Podkovin tried to go to the city, look for the Willows, but the inspection review prevented him.

Chapter seven

one

The train stopped early in the morning at the small station Nanguin. As soon as the doors of the cars were opened, the gunners heard the command;

– Get up! Get ready for unloading!.. Arrived at the theater of operations.

The last words of the team spurred the soldiers. They rose as one. Everyone tried to look out of the car. All saw only the stone building of the station. On the platform stood one railroad attendant. It was quiet. Cool air burst into the cars. The sun illuminated the tops of the nearby mountains. Their gray, bare slopes struck the Siberians with their lifelessness: no forest, not even a bush. Desert terrain stretched around.

Podkovin, having heard the name of the station, said:

– From here, about two hours to Port Arthur and three quarters of an hour to the city of Far. Nanguine – junction station.

– And all he knows! – growled Semenov.

– How can I, uncle Semenov, not know if I was here last year?

The Gunners approached Podkovin to listen to his story about these places.

– What kind of theater is this war?! – disappointedly handed orlovets. – We are again at home, in our land. Kwantung, I heard, was rented by us from the Chinese for ninety-nine years.

2

During February, the Japanese squadron stayed close to Port Arthur, trying to paralyze the exits of our large ships from the harbor. Russian pursued failures. The mine transport “Yenisei” and the handsome cruiser “Boyar” died. Both ran into their mines and submerged ships. Heroically fought the destroyer “Stereushchy” – one against four Japanese destroyers and two cruisers. In an unequal battle, the Russian sailors put up courageous resistance. The destroyer “Imposing”, surrounded by Japanese cruisers, had to be thrown onto the stones.

Portartur depressed and waited for the Japanese landing near the fortress. Ground troops were transferred from one coast of the peninsula to the other. At the station Nanguin was duty train loaded with infantry and artillery.

During these days there have been some regrouping in parts of the troops. The first and second batteries of the Trans-Baikal Artillery Division were included in the fourth artillery East Siberian Brigade. The commander of the second battery was the colonel Laperov, who had arrived in the Far East, and Mehmandarov assumed command of the seventh artillery battalion.

Chapter eight

one

The second battery is located on the outskirts of the semi-neglected village of Nanguin. The well-to-do villagers left the north from the very first days of the war, having left their homes. The gunners are located in the empty fanzah. Daytime, from sunrise to sunset, was held in intensive study with guns and on trips to the surrounding fields and hills. For a short period, the entrances to all promontories and coves located near Nanguin station were studied.

The Kwantung Peninsula is filled with short mountain chains of considerable height. Their slopes are steep and cut by valleys of mountain streams and streams. A close examination of the Kwantun relief can be established that the main mountain spurs on it stretch not along but across, forming several natural barriers. The Tafashinsky heights should be considered the first barrier, and the largest group of mountains, connected to the Perebali range, which starts from the village of Longvantan on the Korean Gulf beret, stretches northward through Mount Huinsan and further through a series of heights to Mount Yupilasa, ending with a chain of hills at Hecy Bay. In front of the “gates” to Arthur there is also a barrier called the Wolf Mountains, separated from the Perebali range by the valley of the River Tahe and the plain that reaches the Ten Ships Bay. Significant heights in the last barrier are Xiaogushan and Fenhoanshan.

The slopes of the Kwangtung Mountains are treeless and stony, and the peaks often protrude toward the sky with separate rocks and stone teeth, forming natural walls similar to cock combs.

During the drought period, the Kvantuna river becomes very small, but in rainy time they turn into violently flowing streams. Most of the Kwantung roads pass through their valleys, and sometimes the riverbeds.

The declaration of war disturbed the inhabitants of the Far, but the alarm did not last long. Soon fresh troops began to arrive on Kvantun. The Japanese have become silent after the first speeches.

– Since nothing significant has been done at the very beginning, there is nothing to be afraid of. “Reinforcements will come from the north, push the enemy aside, and life will go on as before,” said Modest Vladimirovich to his wife and daughter.

Valya never stopped making music. She often went to the beach and looked away for a long time. Dark silhouettes of enemy warships with black clouds of smoke did not frighten her.

Back in Harbin, just before she left, she received a letter from Irkutsk from her friend Zoya Remneva. She told her that Tikhon had been taken and assigned to the second field battery of the Trans-Baikal Artillery Division.

– Where is he now, this Trans-Baikal division? Maybe on Kvantun? – asked herself Valya.

Walking through the streets, she looked into the faces of young soldiers. She learned from kanta on her caps to distinguish artillerymen from infantrymen.

Once the arrows told her that not far from the city, at the pumping station, there was a field battery of the fourth rifle artillery brigade. After that, Valya began to go on the road to the pumping station.

At the end of March and at the beginning of April, it was the second battery that Valya so often asked about. Podkovin walked with Orlovtshev Konevyazov twice to the Far. Walking along the street past the building of the Russian-Chinese Bank, Tikhon once heard a familiar motive. In the next wing, the same melody that Valya played to him on the piano was performed on the piano.

“Where is she now?” Does Tikhon remember? Maybe become an important lady? But, although as a joke, she was going to marry me ...”

The game stopped, and Podkovin went to the bazaar to look for the orlovtsa, who bought tobacco and cigarettes on behalf of his comrades.

3

In the evenings, Lykov often sat with the Inovs. Valya avoided him. Being alone with Serafim Prokopievna, he talked to her for a long time in the hope that Valya would seem to him. Inova met Lykova affably. He gave her a bunch of military news, expressed favorable assumptions and, thus, extremely pleased Seraphim Prokopyevna. Two times mothers managed to call her daughter into the living room and make her play the piano.

Valya noticed a big change in Lykov. He leaned over, walked with his head down, stopped drinking vodka and smoking.

On the fifth day of the war, Lykov transferred to the state gratuitously the remnants of building materials worth fifty thousand rubles. His father telegraphically approved the act, but demanded that he rather leave home. Showing the telegram to Seraphim Prokopievna, Lykov said:

– I can not decide to leave here.

– We are going back to Harbin in April. The movement of goods has stopped, and the entire composition of the bank's branch has nothing to do here.

Talk with Valery failed. Lykov grieved.

“How short-sighted I am! The judge boy was right. Dad will approve the choice.”

Alexander Petrovich wrote Valais a letter. Week waited for an answer. Sent the second.

“You do not believe that I love you madly,” he wrote. – Time of my reasoning is over. I dropped the calculations. You made me turn round. I will do everything you order.”

Valya answered:

“No sacrifice is needed for me. How do you not understand that you need to marry after a year or two and, moreover, a girl who would not know you yesterday... I have a feeling of disgust for you... You smell like a foreigner... Maybe it's cruel, but you are not a boy, but everyone a recognized smart businessman... I don't need anything. But homeland needs you. Go to the headquarters and take on the share of concerns for the construction of fortifications in dangerous places. Work and live among the soldiers.”

four

In the courtyard occupied by the servants of the seventh cannon, the big fanza was cleared, and the Chinese family lived in a small one. The host and the teenage chinchone each morning went to the field. There were three Chinese women: an old woman and two young women, one of them pregnant. At the threshold of the fanza, three small girls played all day.

Konevyazov memorized a few words of Russian-Chinese jargon, and at each meeting he tried to encourage the owner of the court, who went to hang his head. Orlovets decided to prove to his master that he must definitely leave Nangual.

– You what, the kind person, you sit here, but you don't leave somewhere far away from war? You have a horse, you have a cart, and so go.

The Chinese looked at the orlovtsov and shrugged.

– Captain Shango... My booty.

Apparently, the master assumed that the soldier wanted to get some thing from him. Konevyazov thought about himself:

“Why did the Chinese stay here? Why didn't you go north with the others? The Japanese landed, the path is cut. Is it a pity that he should leave his native village? A pregnant wife is about to be resolved... How can he explain?”

One evening he called the host to the arba. – You have to go, you have to go soon.

The Chinese again wondered. An old woman came out into the yard. The girls ran to the orlovtsu, they have become accustomed to it.

– What, again, wanted sugar? I will give sugar, dam, – the gunner laughed and put the children in the arba. Turning to the fanzi host, he said:

– Grandmother sit, madame sit, and then let's go. – Konevyazov harnessed himself in a cart and drove her a few steps to the gate.

The girls laughed and waved their hands, but the Chinese did not understand anything. The seriousness with which the orlovets spoke, worried him. He looked around in bewilderment and, crouching down in the middle of the courtyard, lit a pipe.

– Tunda? – asked orlovets.

“Butunda,” the Chinese replied, and his face showed annoyance.

On the next day, the gunner remained pragmatic. Women often came out of the fanza and looked at the familiar Russian soldier who walked around the yard with an important look, guarding sacks of barley and hay bales. Around noon, the host approached the Orlovs, took his hand and led him to the corner of the fanza. A Chinese with a pale face came out to meet them; having examined the artilleryman, the stranger bowed and said in Russian:

– Hello. I came here at the request of the owner. You ask him for something, but he does not know what it is. Tell me, and I will tell him.

Ege, what a suave, thought Orlovets.

– I do not ask for anything and the Russian soldier does not need anything. Why did he stay in the village and not leave, like other peasants?

The stranger spoke with the host fanza, replied:

– He has a family secret.

– When he tells a secret, then I will give him advice.

The Chinese held a long meeting.

– The question concerns his wife. She has to give birth in a month. He has no son. We, the Chinese, cannot have a son. The oracle said: if his wife resolves under the roof of his ancestors, then they will have a son. So he waits.

– Hitch. Ancestral roof? Own home means. – Konevyazov thought. – And you tell him that the wife should give birth under the open sky. It is the roof of the ancestors. Do you understand?

The translator opened his mouth, opened his eyes, and the soldier continued with enthusiasm.

– The sky – our common roof forever and ever. Fanza host new. Therefore, his father, and even more so, his grandfather, could not be born in it. Ask.

In the eyes of the translator flashed a spark of satisfaction.

“He says father was born in the north.”

– So I knew! – exclaimed Orlovets. – Let him take his family and go away from here. Yes, that his wife must have given birth under the open sky. Then there will be a son.

The peasant, having listened to the words of the translator, happily nodded his head:

– Shango, captain!

– That’s it! – Konevyazov looked around, but the translator had already disappeared.

The owner hastily left the fanzu. Soon all the women came to the threshold and bowed to the orlovtsu.

About an hour after the departure of the translator, the thought struck:

– Why, it was a Japanese, a Japanese spy! What is I gaping. He needed information, and he took the risk. Scoundrel!..

Chapter nine

one

The sky was gloomy. It was raining. A steam locomotive puffed around the water pump station at Kinzhou. The top of Mount Samson is shrouded in a grayish cloud. On the platform is empty, but behind the station building, A little further wire barriers, noise. They stopped to rest field batteries. Fed black horses snorted and bellowed. The gunners fussed at the cannons, clearing dirt from the guns and wheels. Past south along the road were arrows.

Gunners, army soldiers, fireworks, non-commissioned officers and officers often raised their heads and looked to the left of Mount Samson. They all knew that far ahead of them were horse hunters, watchdog chains and Cossack patrols. But nevertheless, they intensely peered into that strontium, where a few days ago the enemy attacked the railway, cut the wires and blew up the bridge.

And here is the latest news: the Japanese land a Bitszyvo. Soldiers and junior officers were preparing for a serious business, and were eagerly awaiting orders to march to destroy the landing force. Cheerful mood did not leave them.

Twilight was gathering. Lit fires. Troops arrived from Arthur. On the left, on the Nanshan Mountain, looming fortifications of the Kinzhou position. She was the key to Port Arthur.

An infantryman and an artilleryman with bowlers stopped under a roof canopy. – Where we are going? The infantryman asked.

– Landing smash.

– Why was it allowed to go to the beach? You had to sink him from your cannons on the water in boats. Let go and shy.

– The authorities know what to do. For the time being, you should not frighten off... Lure and rivet.

– Still strange.

– Clear picture. If our fleet had not been treacherously blown up, they would have been cracked into the sea, but now cunning and caution are needed until they repair our warships.

“Yet it would have been more convenient for the enemy to destroy the sea.” The boat is full of people, the wave shakes, and then bang shrapnel – and all to the bottom. And we, the infantry, it would be easier to kill those who reached the coast.

The infantryman thought his own thought: five or six miles of artillery should not allow the enemy to the infantry, and the shooters only need to secure the positions left by the enemy. The soldier believed it. He liked guns, horses – fire, and gunners – hefty guys and, you see, dodgers.

– Do not perish – grinned Gunner. – Look, what kind of artillery we have and what position?.. But the commanders know how best to finish off the enemy. Now, mate, everything is cleverly invented. Your head is spinning, and they have everything to the point... We shot at an invisible goal on the doctrine. The officer commands: the target is such and such, the level is so and such, the angle is so much! The gunner twirls there different screws, the steel stands at the protractor turns. Aims in one direction, and the barrel of a gun at another looks. I lit it. The projectile flew over the mountain and hit the target. I saw it myself... Twenty shells per minute can be released. But this is to the extreme. If many consecutive shoot, the gun perekalitsya. We, brother, in the whole calculation and arithmetic. The figure means beats. You do not understand in numbers – and in the artillery is impossible.

Rain stopped. The northwest wind blows. Smell the sea. The sound of the surf was heard. Officers gathered at the station. Soon after inspecting the fortifications of Kinzhou, General Fock and Colonel Tretyakov were to arrive. Brilliant epaulets of junior commanding officers gleamed in the reflections of the burning dawn.

– Tell me, please, gentlemen, what are the differences between the division commander and Colonel Tretyakov? – asked the staff captain Dwight, who arrived at the station a few hours ago from Bitszyo, where the Japanese troops landed successfully.

“Our general doesn’t quite agree with the Qinzhou defense plan developed by the commission in the twentieth of January, and the colonel protects him, since he himself is a member of this commission, – said Captain Stempkovsky. “The general demands the descent of a line of trenches to the base of the fortification and the construction of new trenches protecting the approaches to Battery No. 15 and preventing the bypass of our left flank along the shore of Qinzhou Bay. Admittedly, we have paid very little attention to the line of the sea surf.

The captain fell silent and lit a cigarette.

“You worked there, tell me more,” the commander of the border guards Boutiques entered into the conversation.

The dispute was big. The commission noted that the left flank was completely inconvenient for an attack. And most importantly, experts said, in the presence of batteries of the ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth and fifteenth, even thoughts about the possibility of movement of enemy chains and columns along the coast should not be allowed. The main danger is from the side of the railway and the spurs of Mount Samson.

– The irrefutable truth. The Japanese will not turn up along the shore of Kinzhou Bay, we will destroy them in any quantity! – the ensign Tsvetkov exclaimed, blushing. – Do not forget our land mines.

“All this is so until serf guns are shot down,” Stempkovsky chuckled.

“You, like General Fock, do you not believe in the inaccessibility of Kinzhou?” – interviewed staff captain Dwight.

– It’s not just the fortifications, but also the people. I don’t think that the Japanese launched an attack right away without preparing their artillery. And we must fear that they will achieve much.

– But why? – polled the ensign.

“The heights that, with the tight laying of Kinzhou, will be in their hands, dominate the fifty-three Nanshan Mountain.” This is the first. We must assume that they will bring here hundreds of two guns of the new model with devices for bombing an invisible target. Next – their artillery park is unthinkable without mortars.

– You still tweak support fleet? – put the staff captain of the High.

– Consider, consider everything, – the captain calmly answered. – Our fleet is wounded, and, most importantly, in the head.

“Yes, after the death of Makarov, the Japanese became impudent at sea,” said midshipman Shimanovsky. “Most of the guns here are old, piston, and Cana’s cannons, brought recently, are still not installed.

– The misfortune of fortresses is that their guns are somewhat outdated technically against the guns of the attackers.

– What to do? – exclaimed infantry officers.

– To create more favorable conditions for the infantry, on which the head of our division insists.

“There are contradictory rumors about him,” the artillery officer told the infantry in a whisper. – Many consider him flighty.

– Soldiers love him. He is a little crazy. And we will learn about his fighting qualities. He cares about soldiers and officers and does not want them to perish in vain.

– They say he is a supporter of the rare placement of soldiers in the trenches.

– Although this is against the charter, it is not without meaning.

“Statutory provisions are aging,” hurried to insert the infantry lieutenant.

The command “quietly” was distributed. The officers looked at themselves and pulled themselves up. Generals Kondratenko and Fock approached the station, followed by Colonel Tretyakov. Having greeted the officers, Fock stopped at the edge of the apron and, turning his face to the north, looked along the way. When Colonel Tretyakov approached him, he continued the interrupted conversation and said:

– I also because against the trenches at the top of the mountain, against your swallow nests, that there is a great concentration of enemy fire.

– At the foot of the mountain a large radius, the length of the trenches is increasing. To fill them will require new groups of shooters – objected Tretyakov.

“You, Colonel, of course, are happy to plant your regiment under the very sky.” But what is the use of it? What good is I asking? The top will be shrouded in dust and projectiles. And suddenly, right in front of you, the enemy.

– A breathless enemy, Your Excellency.

– Wrong conclusion. The height of Nanshan is fifty-three fathoms. Although the western and eastern slopes are steep enough, they can still be skipped fully armed all the way to the top. The northern slope of the fortified mountain comes to naught and you can ride in a wheelchair at a trot right up to the cannons, as if on a highway. And then Samson, with its spurs, as ticks, covers our fortifications. Additional trenches are needed, so even with visors from shrapnel bullets.

– Every extra hundred sazhen trenches will require new shooters, and they are needed to repulse the flank movements.

– I will not give extra soldiers, because I consider it harmful.

– Our arrows are not fired, most of them are recruits and spare... We will scatter them twenty steps apart, and they will feel lonely, and in difficult times will be beyond the moral influence of the boss.

“This is an outdated opinion, Colonel,” General Fock objected with fervor. – Do you think the soldiers slaughter?

– No, you, Your Excellency! But still, with closer contact, each in the hope of comradely support.

– You can not fill the trenches of people! – screamed Fok.

General Kondratenko turned and looked at the group of officers, in the middle of which Fock was waving his hands.

“He always argues,” Kondratenko sighed wearily. – Is it up to disputes now, when things are in the throat, when there should be cohesion, when, the enemy is hanging on the collar? Heavy. Events unfold, and we are like children. However, who is to blame for all unpreparedness, all the confusion?.. And then there is also this Easter egg – Far... Expensive toy, but you have to quit!”

The general sighed and ran his hand over his forehead. Everyone saw that he was very tired. Detour positions, conversations, dissatisfaction with the erected fortifications, passive actions of the northern army upset him.

“Unclear! – mentally exclaimed Kondratenko, – No movement from the north. It means that they have still greater immobility and unpreparedness.”

The general took a sheet of paper from a side pocket and made some notes.

“Why brew porridge? – he thought. – Why hammer millions on Far Far? Why was the entire fleet pushed into the Port Arthur puddle? Would sit in Vladivostok, and here left small barriers”. Kondratenko shook his head, shoved Stoessel’s order in which he made notes, and approached General Fok.

– It is necessary to distinguish cowardice from feelings of self-preservation, feelings inherent in every living organism, – Fock was excited. “Without this feeling, all living things would die, but the extreme is harmful in everything, so nature, as opposed to it, gave people a feeling of love, and society developed a concept of duty. The so-called brave does not notice this, and, having escaped from the misfortune, into which he climbed without reasoning, he acquired the nickname of the desperate. All cowards should be divided into two categories. Underwear, minority underpowers lose their ability to think; they cannot give an account of their own actions. Some individuals of this category have an automatism of the primitive man, who, owning only a cudgel, hoped for his feet in case of danger, simply fleeing away. Fortunately, we do not have such. Many of the lower ranks often show strange activity in case of fear that has seized them, for example, they try to stick several cartridges at once into the bolt or begin to take things out of their bag and pack them again. There are even those who, under the influence of danger, as if numb, fall and try to get into the ground, working hard with their knees. – Ek, enough! – Kondratenko frowned. The rest of the listeners looked at each other.

– But it does not last long. Suddenly, someone shouts: “I was scared.” And laughs. You look, everyone comes to their senses and begin to work in the new environment, and quite calmly and rationally, as before the appearance of danger. I personally succumbed to the same fear as everyone else, but then immediately the thought came – did anyone notice my fear? I look at others, I see – no one noticed. I was usually amazed at the amazing calm and simplicity of all the lower ranks around me. No matter how hard I tried to be calm, I felt that I was far from being calm. Gentlemen officers are more sensitive and do not come to their senses so soon. But between them there are those who make a brilliant exception. Between the lower ranks of such exceptions I have not seen. Maybe this is because of them, no one thinks to stand out. Consequently, one cannot count on any particular moral influence that many officers think of. It’s good if the officer himself comes to time and starts to fulfill the tasks assigned to him by the situation. This should be firmly remembered by gentlemen officers.

“Inappropriate speeches,” Kondratenko wanted to say, but he resisted. Fok paused and looked around. The officers stood, heads bowed.

– What do you say on this issue, Roman Isidorovich? – addressed Fock to Kondratenko.

Kondratenko did not like Fock. He was tired, he wanted to rest and think about the situation.

“There is no help, no help from the north,” spun in the head of the general. “A huge area, innumerable values are concentrated on a small dusty barren peninsula... What to rant?.. Act, act!”

“What are you talking about, General?”

– On the duties of officers, on their moral impact on the soldiers.

– This was said and said. We need a well-developed and trained soldiers’ masses, dedicated and understanding the honor of the nation. But if one or another military unit flinches and turns to flight, then I will completely blame the officers. You need to love the soldiers entrusted to you, and then in battle we will get exceptional examples of stamina.

The generals went into the station.

“We listened to an impressive teaching,” said Dwight ironically. – But the old man is right. In the heat of anger, we must not bear the soldiers. Their mistakes are our mistakes.

2

During dinner, Kondratenko looked at Fok for a long time. The slouching figure of an army general was not in harmony with his impetuous, angular movements. The straight and long nose on the haggard old face seemed too thin and transparent. The sideburns and the boring gaze of the deep-seated eyes emphasized the paleness of the skin.

“I think,” Kondratenko began the conversation, “in addition to the trenches dug in your direction, Alexander Viktorovich, we will instruct the engineer-captain von Schwartz to lower the trenches only on the Eastern front.” As for the other slopes of Nanshan, then we will work on them later. Let’s strengthen the most vulnerable places more reliably.

– And how, loopholes and visors along the edges of the trenches?

– Colonel Tretyakov seems to be against the loopholes, but they are useful, you are absolutely right.

– Experience has shown that the visors are fully justified. The Japanese do not know about them yet and they will run. – Fock, with shoulders up, smiled smugly. “But you shouldn’t make them from long boards, otherwise one projectile will cause a lot of damage.”

“The two tiers of the trenches are very good, but you need to have more soldiers,” said Colonel Tretyakov, who entered.

– The lower tier is good for flat shooting, but for firing ravines should keep the shooters at the Verkov position. The case will show itself, Roman Isidorovich, “Fock continued, referring only to Kondratenko. – Neither you nor I would like to keep the trenches empty during the battle. But, I repeat, I am against cohesion in the trenches when they are pelted with cores and showered with shrapnel.

The generals fell silent. The cheeks of the youthful face of Kondratenko dropped. He had thoughtful, round eyes. Thick mustache and wedge made the face of Roman Isidorovich dry and stern. – Loafers! – swore, wry smile, Fock.

“What are you talking about, Your Excellency?”

– Yes, here’s a telegram from the headquarters of the commander in chief.

Chapter ten

one

The next morning, the second battery and the regiment marched north along the Bitzvy road. We drove slowly and carefully. Shooting chains moved in front. Along the long elevation, from its southern side, our horse rides were visible. The battery commander stopped at the edge of the road and let all the tools pass by him. After the show, he and the senior fireworker galloped forward. It was felt that the Japanese were close, that the battle was about to begin.

Podkovin looked at the hill, behind which there was an enemy, and thought: “So, the Japanese are not yet visible. We are going openly, as if in a parade.”

No matter how Calming himself, Podkovin reassured himself, but he could not restrain a nervous tremor.

About three o’clock in the afternoon the battery stopped. Dry plowed fields stretched to the right and to the left, and Mount Samson towered above them. The western slope of the massif was illuminated by the warm April sun. In the sky – not a cloud. On the right, on the road from the ravine, a group of horsemen rose up on the hill. They drove up to the battery. That was General Fok with his orderlies. Colonel Laperov, prancing on his horse, approached him.

– Before the evening, you need to find out the situation and decide how to act. The Japanese are advancing by superior forces. – Fock shrugged. – Requires extreme caution. Push the battery a little more to height. Let one of your officers get up on that hill. Give me as an orderly for your gunner, but please, well-educated.

“Call Podkovina,” the battery commander ordered the sergeant-major.

“Damn, son of a damn thing, how it goes into people,” thought the sergeant-major.

“Come to the general,” said the battery commander when Podkovin came to him.

Podkovin made a half turn and, taking a peak, stood in front of Fock.

“I have the honor to appear, Your Excellency.”

– Ordinary? That’s what, brother, you will go with me, you will have to write down orders for your battery. Can you? Briefly and clearly?

– Yes sir!..

The general rode ahead. Soon the rider appeared, galloping full speed. Fock spurred his horse. The horse hunter, having caught up with the general, handed him a package.

– Great, brother. Tell me what you saw?

– The Japanese are moving regiments, and with them artillery.

Fock waved his unopened letter, looked it up into the light, and handed it to the adjutant. The hunter's horse stood, legs splayed, and breathed heavily. Again we moved forward and drove into the hollow. Soft soil all the time crumbled under the hooves of horses. Having dismounted, we went up to the very crest of the hill dissected by a ravine. Clouds of dust rose from the far end of the unfolding valley.

“The Japanese, Your Excellency,” said the hunter, “We have seen them more than once, but we are not shooting.” Such an order to force to find out. They are moving to Samson.

Look! Again their chief on a white horse jumped out onto the tide.

Podkovin heard the hunter, but did not see the enemy rider.

General Fock took off his cap and, stretching his neck, looked out of the ravine.

– Yes, moving there. Lieutenant, what is written in the report?

– On the thirteenth of April morning, the Japanese went on the offensive along the Bitzvoekoy road, and at 11 hours 50 minutes the battalion of the 15th regiment took Tojialin and advanced on the village of Shimmynzy. But, owing to the superior forces of the enemy, our units moved to the village of Ig-dian.

Ahead Podkovina – overgrown with bushes mound.

“A grave or a field altar? Get to it, see what's going on there.”

Podkovin, with a horse, approached a group of officers and, stopping five steps away from them, shifted from foot to foot.

The officers talked among themselves and did not pay attention to him.

“Your Honor...”

– you what? – wearily asked Podkovina captain with glasses.

“Allow me to crawl to that tubercle.” From there you can well consider them.

The officers looked at each other.

– Do you want to crawl under the bullets?

– The Japanese are far away, they will not see beyond the hill.

– Go. Just what are you without binoculars? Take the binoculars, – and the captain, smiling, gave the Podkovin his binoculars. “And give the horse to our messenger.”

Climbing crawling on a mound, Podkovin froze. A battery galloped right through the trough to the right.

“One, two, three, four,” he gasped. – Ten guns! But the infantry!.. The white horse on the knoll on the left... What is the distance? Perhaps five miles away. That would be to move them now. See ours or not?

Podkovin looked back. The battery was half a verst. Our observers were to the right, but the toe should hide the movement of the Japanese from them. It was quite clear that the Japanese were moving significant parts to the south while evading combat.

Podkovin went down. The general stood, surrounded by officers, at the bottom of the ravine.

– Well? – turned to Podkovin Fock.

– The enemy moves to the south, Your Excellency. I counted ten guns, followed by infantry. Rotami. I missed five groups. I saw a man on a white horse.

– Well, now what are you going to do? The general grinned. – Would you shoot from your guns?

Podkovin caught the irony in the voice of the general, but you need to answer. So they taught: not to leave a single question to the authorities without an answer.

– First move to the spur of Samson. There is no safe position. In the evening, it is light to determine the place for the battery. At night, hunting teams grope the enemy. The battery cocked to stay at night somewhat away from the selected position.

– What is this for?

– The first shots – from two guns. The enemy will pay attention to them. Show himself. Then, from the other position, the other six suddenly shoot.

Fock thought. Podkovin turned his eyes to the officers. The captain, putting forward his right leg and gazing at him closely, spoke to the lieutenant standing next to him.

– To be immediate, that’s what’s important sometimes. The gunner in this case was guided by logic. He was not trained in tactics, but he feels it with his whole being... War descriptors are often surprised at the actions of the soldiers left to themselves... It is noticed that Fock often addresses the soldiers with big questions. Clever!..

The general seemed to wake up.

“So, brother, go back to Colonel Laperov and tell him what you saw and heard, but keep quiet about your projects.” And tell him: General Fok ordered his battery to return to the village of Shimnzy. Got it?

Our infantry detachments more and more often clashed with the Japanese. Once Konevyazov and Podkovin returned with a dangerous foraging. Seeing the Chinese on the road ahead, Orlovets started.

– Is he! Old friend! Listen, Podkovin, it seems to me – this is a Japanese. We will grab it. In Russian speaks no worse than we are with you... Do everything I say.

The traveler walked calmly.

– Is he! – jerking the sleeve of a shoe, Orlovets said. – Stop the horse. Prepare a revolver.

“Chinese” began to bypass the wagon loaded with dry Gaolian.

– Hello my friend! What, did not know?

“My butunda, my own fanza, go,” said the visitor in a shaky voice.

– Drop pretend. Yes, it’s me. Remember, the ancestors talked about?

“Yes, captain,” as if reborn, the “Chinese” nodded with a smile and grabbed the orlovtsa by the arm.

– Come with us. You treasure for the authorities.

– Goodbye, please. I can not. I’m in a hurry to go home. Wife is worried. The time is now alarming.

– Nothing. Not for long. To the big captain we will go. He will pay you a lot of money. You will ride a foraging with us.

– Yes, I can not! – with anger exclaimed “Chinese”, but the soldiers, not listening, put him on the gig. “The Chinese” immediately calmed down and smiled and said: “Let’s go.” Very nice to see the Russian captain.

The Fox, Orlovets thought.

At Shimenza Podkovin, Orlovets and their unwilling companion saw the shooters surrounded by a crowd of women, children and the elderly. The soldiers led the Chinese with their hands tied back. Orlovets recognized the host fanza.

– Brothers, what’s the matter?

– Spy caught. He lived and lived among Russians in Nanguanine; and when the Japanese came close, he leaned on their side with the whole family. Now the court was, and now we are shooting.

– Wait! – gasping, said orlovets. – Where is the officer? Who is your senior?

Elder and Orlovets moved aside.

“The real spy is sitting on our gig.” Tie his hands, so that the convict with his eyes did not meet. Wait a minute here, and I’ll run down the officers.

Ten minutes later, Konevyazov returned with the commander of the hunting team.

“It was me, your excellency, who seduced me to go.” And another came as a translator. Then right away I didn’t get lost, but then he fell into our hands at just the right moment.

Orlovets, stammering, told about the first meeting with the pale-faced “Chinese” who speak Russian fluently.

– You said so: the roof of the ancestors is the sky? Well done, – praised the staff captain. – But another time, look, do not let go of reasoning.

The commander of the hunting team, having examined the Chinese translator, said:

– A rare figure... Senior, come here!

The crowd of villagers grew. Day sloped in the evening. The cries of women and the crying of children were heard.

– Under the reinforced escort take to the headquarters of the Chinese, caught gunners. Tell me there that he speaks Russian well and that my report about him will be in an hour. And that convict to keep under protection until tomorrow, until the new order.

Chapter eleven one

On the second of May evening, Podkovin realized that preparations were being made for the first skirmish with the Japanese on the Liaodong Peninsula. After the trip with the general, he was very excited. The second battery is located at the bottom of Mount Samson, but the third battery and the battery of Second Lieutenant Sadykov, composed of piston guns and moving on the bulls – “bull battery”, as its soldiers called, moved closer to the enemy.

Early in the morning of the third of May, Fock, driving around the locations of the units, met with General Nadein.

“The Japanese are being cheeky, Your Excellency,” said Fock, “and they should be taught a lesson.” Move by day and open.

– We have a weak position center...

– Do you think they will go along the Bitszyvock road? Oh, this is the height of self-confidence.

“So far we have not resisted them, and even when landing in a storm,” Nadein said, pursing his lips.

Fock turned away and looked at Samson’s bare top.

– Lieutenant! He shouted. – Write. Lieutenant Colonel Prince Machebeli. Immediately come out of the bivouac with the three battalions of the 13th Regiment and the batteries attached to them and follow, without stopping, along the Bitsevos road to the Tunzalizon bridge.

Meanwhile, the Japanese are more and more deployed. Before them was one goal – Mount Samson, from which one can see so well around. Their numerous spies extremely accurately informed about each step of the Russian troops. They knew all the weak points of our position.

In 1894, when disembarking, the Japanese army did not encounter opposition from the Chinese. The same thing happened in 1904. The Russians in the eyes of the Japanese soldiers were not smarter and not braver.

General Fock has not yet had a definite plan. What to do on this day and the next – he did not know. He was disturbed by Kuropatkin's telegrams. Of all the messages, she realized that she should not wait for help.

– But this is wild! Where are we going far away? – Fock polled himself a thousand times. “There are so few, so few soldiers, that the landing will be further south of the isthmus.”

At ten o'clock in the morning on the heights about which the general was a few days ago, battalions of Japanese soldiers appeared. Gunfire and salvos of one company drove them into the hollows.

Having received a report on the movement of the enemy in an open area, Fock exclaimed:

– This is undoubtedly a demonstration. General Oku is teasing me to crawl onto the shore somewhere near Suantsaygou. Mischievous! It's not easy to fool me. I will be able to properly arrange and these little strength. Quantum is not bare...

Hearing a gunfight on the right flank, Fock, in a hurry, ordered that the first battalion of the 13th regiment stopped at Nanguin station and did not move to the north.

The adjutant wrote the order and filed it for signature. A written sheet of paper annoyed Fock, he winced and waved his hand:

– Is it really impossible without these formalities? How they interfere with me in responsible moments. In a field setting, catch orders on the fly, and then accurately and quickly transfer them to the destination.

– Yes, sir, Your Excellency.

After repeating the order twice, the orderly galloped off.

The fight flared up. It took about an hour. From the village of Hondyaden, the enemy's heavy chains moved again, and behind them, just a few miles away, four columns from our position, a thick column of two regiments appeared, with mountain guns on packs.

– Where is our field artillery? – the commander of the sixth company of the fifth regiment, Captain Gomzyakov, was perplexed. – When I, General Fok ordered that they should come here. After all, this is a brilliant order. See which chain.

“There has certainly been some kind of confusion,” said Lieutenant Pushkov, “Our old man has become unrecognizable in recent days.” He has a big drawback – to give oral orders, not written. We stand at a certain tip. You see, nobody still knows what we will do around Kinzhou. So today. A fight ensues. Was there a disposition? The enemy is visible, but there is no field and mountain artillery. We – the army of a great power – have a battery on the bulls from old piston Chinese guns. Laugh! We have nothing to do with the upcoming Japanese. We have no machine guns! You notice at every step – a misunderstanding.

– The position has a battery Romanovsky. Eight quick-fire guns. Can shoot at an invisible target.

– And they are arranged so that the first two shrapnels will sweep away all the servants and knock down thin instruments for firing at an invisible target. I, passing with my team, was surprised. Again, some kind, forgive, in my opinion, just rotozeystvo. My heart hurts today, and I’m afraid for that day.

Shooting on the line continued. The sun was shining brightly; clouds of dust spoke of advancing the enemy. General Fok traveled near the right flank and waited for Prince Machebeli and the batteries. The Japanese, without meeting artillery fire, were pressing.

“But where the hell are they?!” – asked Fok adjutant. – How did you send the order to the prince?

– Orally, Your Excellency.

– I ordered, do you want to say? But you could send a written order, even if it was not signed by me. Equip a second orderly!

Ten minutes after the newly sent orderly left, the first one returned. Fock pounced on him.

– Where is the battery? Where are the battalions?

“They are at your command at Kinzhou Station, Excellency.”

– Moron! Nit! Scarecrow! Under arrest!

The shooter held his hand under the visor and blinked his eyes. On the enemy side gunfire boomed. Japanese mountain batteries, sitting in the bushes near the village of Chenboloso, opened fire on the battery of Colonel Romanovsky. Inadvertently, the guns of this battery were installed in an open area. The first shells of two Japanese cannons fell not far away. But as soon as the distance was determined, the core of twenty-four enemy guns fell on the unfortunate battery. Although the cruel fire and mowed the gunners of the third battery, but their guns were not silent. Shells brought arrows infantry cover. The wounded commander and officers did not leave their post, awaiting revenue and support.

– Where did Laperov go? – worried Romanovsky, seeing the wounded captain Benoit. “The General assured me that he had called two more batteries on the front line.

“The guns should be removed from this position with the help of shooters,” said Lieutenant Ouspensky.

– Not! Now only answer, and this is our salvation. Until they distract the attention of the enemy, we cannot move. If all of our batteries were here, then the battle would have been twenty-four to twenty-four... Oh, then they wouldn't have time for it!

In the midst of a duel, when almost the entire cannon servant was out of action, the lieutenant Sadykov entered the artillery battle with his bull battery. And immediately the picture changed. The hits from piston guns were exceptionally successful, and, in addition, they beat the enemy's flank. The Japanese were silent and began to rebuild, waiting for the strengthening of our artillery fire.

– On the front! – commanded Romanovsky.

Horses, wound up in a continuous roar and the crackling of shrapnel, with a whirlwind of dust, took out one weapon after another. The teams were released on the right, then on the left. Distracted by the shots of the “bullish” battery, the Japanese did not immediately understand the Romanovsky maneuver. The battery has been saved. Launched after the shells fell far behind.

The first and second batteries never arrived at the height of the battle. The enemy attacked in thick columns: he understood our artillery impotence. On the left flank they wounded General Nadein, and on the right flank General Fock went out of himself. Lieutenant Sadykov stopped two field guns of the retreating third battery and took command of them.

“Let them go now,” he grunted to himself. – We will beat for sure and wait for support.

2

The fight subsided. Enemy guns were silent, not visible, and the chains of infantry. At this time, the battalions of the 13th regiment and the platoon of the first battery approached the railway bridge. Long before sunset, we moved away from our original positions. The departure deeply stirred the soldiers. Especially struck by all the careless attitude to the artillery. The third battery lost almost half its entire staff of officers and gun maids.

In the evening, wounded officers, soldiers, and gunners gathered at the Tafashin station waiting for the train.

“I don't understand why we have a bad connection,” said Lieutenant Pushkov. – One battery is shot, and the rest somewhere far in reserve. They say that in the morning they were given the order to move to the bridge, but then some kind of confusion happened, and all because of an oral, rather than a written order. And now they do not know who messed up: the orderly, the adjutant of the general or the general himself.

– The command of the battery is also not at the height of his vocation. They installed the guns in the open, so much so that there is no place to remove them, said Second Lieutenant Bordyug.

“But they fought perfectly,” continued Pushkov. “Imagine shrapnel from twenty-four cannons that shot with quick fire fell on them. Let's calculate how many bullets are per second. A modern

field gun can launch about ten shells per minute without warming up the body. In each projectile two hundred sixty bullets. Within half an hour about two million lead bullets on the heads of forty people! Despite the huge decrease in people from the lead rain, our gunners responded with almost four shells per minute from each of their guns... Resistance showed extraordinary. For some reason I think that the Japanese would not have sustained such a murderous fire and would immediately abandon their guns.

“We don’t know our soldiers well,” Captain Benoit responded to the officers’ conversation. – In peacetime, we are far from them. Daleks, I would say, with their drinking and smartness. It would seem that they should boil malice towards us. It would seem that they should have left us in a difficult moment. But we see the opposite. Why? Soldiers consider us to be idlers, an inevitable evil, and their work sacred. When the danger of the country – not the time to settle personal scores. This formula must be firmly seated in their being. For them, the honor of the country, the nation is dear... Our soldiers are an amazing people. They are in the excitement. In my eyes, the gunners worked after being injured. If only arms and legs were intact.

– What did we pursue by engaging in battle today? – asked Pushkov.

“It was necessary to find out the strength of the enemy and his intentions,” said Staff Captain Steding. – As far as I know, we assumed to go on the offensive in the morning, but the Japanese warned us, so we had to stop on defense. But still the Japanese and the third of May did not count on resistance. Only this can explain the movement of significant Japanese columns in the field of our artillery fire. They did not advance their artillery sufficiently, apparently, concealing it for more active operations at Kinzhou. If we had three batteries near the front line, we would have done a lot of damage. It is clear, with patient waiting and from closed positions!

– We have poor intelligence set. Horse hunting teams are poorly organized. The enemy groped, but did not study his movements, clusters, kind of weapons. Each team acts at its own risk.

– In the group of our commanders. noticeable confusion. Some extraneous thought oppresses General Fok. Apparently, there is some disappointing information from the north. In fact, why not hit the Japanese directly from Bitszyo from there? And we would support.

“Philosophy,” said Steding. – One battery enters the battle. The enemy shoots her...

“We have already spoken about this,” said Lieutenant Ouspensky.

– They said... Look at the morale of the gunners and gunners now. They the devil knows that they will weave... And already weave... The orderlies carried me on a stretcher. Under what circumstances I fell on a stretcher – I do not remember. On the way I woke up. Medics stand and smoke. I hear their conversation:

“Sold out,” one says hoarsely. – By all means. Look, you put the battery on. Bay, Japanese! And the rest of the guns sent away.

– Really?

– Is it possible to let the whole battalion through an open area without a reservation? Where have you seen it? The Japs with the ceremonial march were allowed to enter, but they did not beat them. There were no cannons, they were held in Nanguanine, the orderly wheezed.

– They are what! They only have money for their pleasures and clothes.”

– I could not stand it and turned. A terrible pain pierced my bullet punched hand, and I again fell into oblivion... We should find this youngster. I recognize him by a hoarse voice.

– Do not try! – exclaimed Pushkov. – There are thousands, tens of thousands! This morning I laughed at the reasoning of the soldier... He see, he would have done things quite differently than his superiors. “I would, he says, attack the Japanese at night. Each company would give a plot: study it during the day before the arrival of the enemy, consider what everyone should do during the battle. All the grooves, all the pits would know my arrows. Then he would lure the Japanese to this position and strike on them. So much so that none of our people dare to go beyond their limits, so that, therefore, they cannot touch their darkness. And in advance to take artillery a sight. And as soon as the enemy trembled – a signal to her, she would have showered them with shrapnel.”

“Here common sense is heavily seasoned with fantasy,” the staff captain chuckled.

– But, they say, the gunner of the second battery a few days ago puzzled his response to our divisional general. Fock, in his habit of making fun, asked the gunner what he would do in this position. And he is calm: first go to the spurs of Samson. The Japanese will press on the right flank – they need a mountain to observe and lead the battle at Kinzhou. Six guns should be set to shoot at an invisible target, and two from each battery to push, but not for long. They will attract the attention of the enemy, he will reveal his batteries, and then shoot the rest. Dexterously! Imagine how much savvy the people!

– And what?

– He was very pleased with the answer. And, apparently, this advice wanted to use today. Fock ordered the “bullish” battery to become exactly in a place from which she could demonstrate. But there was confusion. Some speak about the guilt of the orderly, others – the adjutant... There are voices also because the general himself hastily mixed up the names of the stations... They say that Fok is very afraid of the landing south of Kinchzhou and therefore keeps impressive reserves there.

So it really was. The critical situation in which the third battery was located during the skirmish on May 3 sowed bewilderment among the soldiers. Over the past few days, gunners have often discussed senseless battery losses. The Russian troops of the Kvantunsky fortified area for the first time began to worry about the integrity of the fortress, with which, after the break of the path and the landing of the enemy landing, they were firmly connected. The enemy persistently attacked, but they did not detain him, he was given to quietly land on the shore, without using stormy weather, and even at night.

In the evening of the twelfth of May a strong wind blew. The second field battery received orders to leave the village of Nanguin and settle down on the Tafashi Heights. Move slowly. Either one or the other of the front end of the cannon run up to the high edges of the grooved roads. The gunners jumped from their seats, supported the gun or charging box. Chinese country roads always brought trouble to the gunners. Riding on antediluvian carriages, wind and rainwater turned them, once lying

on the same level with the surrounding fields, into deep ditches with sheer walls. Try here to roll or disperse with the counter! Roads-ditches go into a wide path only on passes through elevations. At the entrance to the ditch-like section of the path, the drivers click their whips and scream, suggesting wait on extensions. But it is not always possible. Those who are confronted first have long disputes about who to return back to, and then one of the sides harnesses the horses and wraps the shaft.

The sky was dark, without stars, a thunderstorm was expected. About eleven o'clock in the morning, not reaching the village of Mondzy, the battery stopped on the Mandarin road. On the left was clearly heard the surf of the sea. Ahead rumbled guns. Lightning flashed – and the searchlight rays hurried along the mountain slopes and the ridges.

On this day, the enemy strenuously bombarded the city of Jinzhou and the batteries of our fortified position. Even during the daytime, two enemy gunboats with six destroyers entered the Jinzhou (or Kinzhou) Bay and became outside shots. From the bay of Ker moved Japanese infantry. The location of the Japanese batteries could not be precisely groped, although they let in a kite. But the enemy could perfectly target our batteries, crowded at the same height.

After examining the side roads, the second battery's guns moved left to the sea to a selected position on a low hill protecting it from enemy shelling from the sea, and charging boxes and a spare carriage were put on arable land in a hollow behind one of the Tafashi heights.

Arrows of lightning fell menacingly from the sky. Thunder rumbled. Rare raindrops hit the charging boxes. The command was given to settle down for the night, but without setting up tents. Hit a shower. Gunners and riders sat down at the front, some climbed under the charging boxes, trying to escape from the rain. But it did not succeed. Jets of water flowed from the caps by the collar. The ground has become slippery and viscous.

Tired of the day's work, Podkovin escaped from the rain at the reserve gun carriage. After removing his overcoat, he hung it on the right seat and sat down under a kind of umbrella. His knees were wet, but his head, back and chest were well protected from rain.

Half an hour later the rain stopped. The shooting subsided. Anxiety subsided. The gunners got crackers and, chewing on them, they chose places where they could lie down more comfortably.

For a long time, Podkovin could not find a dry piece of land for himself even under the charging boxes. There was sticky and fluid dirt all around. Having trampled at the spare carriage, he lay down at the wheel, right on the damp ground.

Clouds flew low. Stars glittered here and there. Mount Samson in the dark seemed lonely. Rays of searchlights constantly glided over the hills. To the right there gleamed the Hunuey Bay; he seemed like a big quiet lake. The sea rustled to the left. Terrible and inaccessible Nanshan clouded by fog. For a few minutes, guns and rifle volleys fell silent. There was silence, ominous and painfully heavy.

3

Everyone, not only the soldiers, but also junior officers, considered the Kinjaw position as impregnable, reliable and believed in its invincibility. What did this position represent?

Sixty-two versts north of Arthur, the Liaodong Peninsula has a width of about three versts with a group of heights (Nanshan), which, strengthened by the Russians, became known as the Kinzhou

position. To the north of the heights lies a plain, surrounded by inclusive heights, and from the east – the Samson mountain range. The southern slopes of the position merge with the Tafashinsky hills.

The Nanshan fortifications consisted of fourteen batteries located at the top of the position, with three strong points and a common trench around. The belts of the fields of the fortifications were pushed seven hundred steps forward and connected to a common trench. For the message of the center position with the lower tier, the message moves were made and numerous deep ravines were adapted for the same purpose. Between the individual batteries and the fortifications was a telephone. Telephone communication was available with the bay of Ker, Dalny, Jinzhou, Taleenwan and Arthur.

On the advice of Admiral Makarov, two batteries were prepared on the left flank for long-range serf guns with shelling of Jinzhou Bay, but the six-inch Cana cannon could not be installed until the thirteenth of May. Chapter twelve

one

The old Chinese city of Jinzhou, located off the coast, out of the blue, represented an excellent target for enemy batteries, but still its walls were a safe haven from both rifle bullets and field battery shells.

Captain Eremeev knew all the positive and negative properties of his site. The town as a fort or redoubt could not play a big role. Life in it stopped. The Chinese left their homes during the first Russian failures.

After the clash of the third of May, the Japanese advanced heavy chains to the spurs of Samson for a long time did not show any active actions. At the headquarters of General Fock, there was talk of intensified reconnaissance in the direction of the village of Palizon and further to the southern spurs of the mountain, Samson.

Captain Yeremeyev had a spy Chinese Lee Yang-tzu. The commandant was always pleased with him. His information was confirmed by forays, observations of hunters and subsequent actions of the enemy.

Lee Yang-tzu remembered well the invasions of the Japanese and their rule. Living and working was hard. And only with the arrival of the Russians, the revival began in the region. Russian soldiers and officers were cheerful and good-natured people. They didn't scare like the Japanese. Lee Yang-tzu met Captain Yeremeyev through the supply of food and fodder. The captain liked the Chinese for being respectful of the graves of their ancestors and lovingly asking about the past of the Liaodong Peninsula, about the greatness of the Chinese empire, about the works of Chinese art. He often quoted the words of famous Chinese poets Li Yang-tzu. Captain Eremeyev studied the life of Eastern peoples and was known as a connoisseur of China among his comrades.

On May 8, Li Yang-tzu returned with hunters excited:

– It's bad, captain. There are many, many Japanese soldiers. A lot of big guns. Russian is one old cannon, and Japanese is four new cannons. I put it all around. He set up Tyndyl, put Palizon near, put it here near Liudiagou. Their general walked around, everything looked.

“Yes, we are late,” thought Yeremeyev. – Probably, all their army is already concentrated around Kinzhou, but now I will send a report. This is an important message: “Russian is one old cannon, Japanese is four new cannon.” The captain grinned bitterly and spat out loudly, exclaimed:

– I am ashamed!

On the morning of the tenth of May, a small enemy infantry squad appeared in front of the northern walls of the city. The arrows opened fire and drove the enemy away. But the captain saw that the activity of the Japanese was increasing. On the same day, they tried to occupy the old Chinese port, located near the village of Chudyatun. The next evening, the Japanese infantry began shelling the city. I had to use the guns and ask for help from a fortified position.

At night a strong wind blew. Our hunters brought disturbing information. On the twelfth of May, long before dawn, shells of Japanese field guns fell on the city. Siege guns began shelling fortified Kinzhou. But the shells put to blow, not all torn. The sound of the shots, as well as the marks on the remote tubes could be concluded: Japanese guns are far away and shoot from a distance.

– But where are the batteries? – Captain Yeremeyev asked himself the question and sent for Lee Yang-tzu.

Despite a thorough search, the Chinese were not found. Apparently, he left the city in the evening.

– So, the danger is not far off. If not today, then tomorrow there will be a general attack.

The wind was still raging. The bay was noisy with breaking fine waves. Throughout the shallows in the pre-dawn haze glowing boils broke, from the walls of the town were visible outbreaks of guns, which are no no no and light the foothills of Samson. On the breastwork of our batteries, clubs of earth and gases rose. An hour later, the siege batteries fell silent, but shells of small-caliber cannons continued to fall into the city.

“We are on the road, We need to be destroyed,” said the defenders of the city. “But the enemy has been bombing for five hours now, and only four of our people have been wounded.”

– And the Chinese?

– Maybe five people, and even less. All left, like a cow licked. Their intelligence works better than ours.

During the day the wind did not subside, but in the evening it even increased.

At dusk, Captain Yeremeyev received reinforcements. Now he had a company and a half, one foot team, two guns and two machine guns at his disposal.

The Japanese acted on this site assertively. They tried to bypass the city from the west. Having been repulsed, they launched an offensive from the north. At midnight, surrounding the city, they dragged a mine to the gate. The sentinels noticed the enemy, one of them ran up to Captain Yeremeyev.

– Your honor, at the gates of the Japanese with a bomb.

“What kind of talk,” the captain laughed. “They would have blown it up a long time ago.”

– By golly! – exclaimed the shooter. “And don’t worry about the explosion,” they know what they are doing. Reinforcements are waiting to be flocked to the city.

– But you’re right, Schetkin.

Captain Eremeev chose five hunters and, heading them, went to the gate. The case was very responsible.

“If they didn’t get me wrong,” thought the captain.

The Japanese with a bomb, lay along the wall at the gate. They were already in a dead space, where gun bullets did not reach. Captain Eremeev through the embrasure slot saw their legs. There was some scuffling. Obviously, they moved landmine. By order of the captain, the soldiers gathered two buckets of ash from the outbreaks. Spread out the shooters, Yeremeyev bared his sword and quietly commanded:

– Pour the ashes on the wall! Open the gate!

While the Japanese were rubbing their eyes, the captain cut the wire, and at the same time the bayonets plunged into the Japanese miners. Ours from the city wall opened fire. The Japanese responded with machine gun fire. The landmine was dragged into the fortress and the gate was closed.

Rainfall interfered with the monitoring of the Japanese, located around the city.

– Eh, if regiment two is now right here. And during the night you could destroy all the plans of the enemy on his right flank. All batteries placed so carelessly would be ours... Do we really know the terrain badly? – reasoned Captain Yeremeyev.

Fires began in the city. The ranks of his defenders melted, but held tight. The arrows were waiting for reinforcements and strikes against the enemy along the seashore in addition to the city walls. All the language spun phrases:

– Lure and flatten.

– Fock is an old fox. He knows what to do...

At four o’clock in the morning, Captain Yeremeyev received orders from Colonel Tretyakov to clear the city and retreat to the position.

Chapter Thirteen

one

The highest point of the Nanshan Fortifications was Redoubt No. 13, located on the edge of a steep southern slope. The main approaches to Kinzhou were well visible from it. On the redoubt was the commander of the fifth regiment and the head of the position of Colonel Tretyakov.

At the first glimpses of dawn near the height of seventy-fifth, they found an enemy column. Our gunners hit it with shrapnel. This first morning shot served as a signal for the Japanese. All the siege light and heavy guns of the enemy suddenly opened fire, concentrating fire on the lonely mountain Nanyian.

The daily battery of the second, on hearing the first distant volleys, shuddered and whispered:

– It's them...

Behind the mountain was buzzing, the earth shuddered. In our positions exploded enemy shells. Measured group shots lasted about ten minutes. Then the sounds of gunfire and explosions merged. Our batteries responded vigorously. He stopped shaking, he was numb. Riding rifles and gunners rose all around and anxiously examined the sky in the north. Suddenly, on the left, a deafening and dense click, as if here – twenty to thirty paces – struck thunder. The horses crouched, began to tear, shaking the guard post. Litter ran to Podkovin, who was getting tired and relaxed.

– I heard! What are these things?

– The enemy ships fire their long-range cannons.

– How are they allowed? – confusedly said the daily.

– In the morning they will disassemble and drive off.

Podkovin scraped dirt from his overcoat, rolled up and tied his overcoat to the front end of the carriage.

– I'll go look at the hill. – He may hit the hill.

– It is clear, maybe, but later, and after our battery starts to shoot.

Riders harnessed horses, and Podkovin ran to the top of the mountain. Samson Peak hung its teeth over the low-lying Russian fortifications. Numerous spurs of sinister tentacles moved into the hollow. Across the entire isthmus, the fires of enemy volleys flickered continuously. From a distance they seemed to be a trembling grid of illuminated advertising, on which intricate fiery signs ran from right to left and vice versa. In the dark expanse of the sea, long flames of crimson flames flashed in pairs: the gunboats fired. On the Nanshan hill was visible the dancing of lights from the bursting enemy shells and shots of serf guns. Looking closely, Podkovin realized that the enemy half-ring of fire was narrowing, threateningly approaching a lonely position.

Our right flank, including the Lime Mountain, began to operate at dawn. The enemy moved his infantry battalions as well as the batteries rather closely. Simultaneously operated variegated guns. The fire is – amplified, then calmed down. Apparently, while some batteries were active, others moved closer. From the very beginning of the artillery duel, the Japanese guns began to hammer ours. About thirty Russian field-firing guns till ten o'clock in the morning were almost inactive. The places chosen for them were unsuccessful. The first battery of Lieutenant Colonel Sablukova, when trying to drive on the Lime Mountain, was fired upon by the enemy.

Podkovin could not tear himself away from the exciting picture unfolding before him. The Japanese chains advanced confidently and pushed on the right flag. “They will break through – and all is lost. Will not ours hit them?”

– Look look! On the hill, which is to the right of us, the flags are shown, “said Gunner Pavlov, who rose after Podkovin in a whisper,” They are spies!” We go down.

The soldiers of the artillery convoy revived, they waited for orders to transfer the battery to a new location.

“The big fight has begun,” the rider Borodkin said hoarsely, frail and small.

– They say, on one of our projectile ten Japanese arrives.

– Where is the shoe? The senior fireworker shouted.

– Here.

– Sit on the left prong of the reserve carriage and immediately ride with the bag to General Fok or Nadein. They should be at Nanguin Station. After receiving written and oral instructions, return here. Be sure to find the generals.

– Yes, Mr. Fireworks.

Podkovin spurred his horse and hid in a ravine, on which there was a path to the railway. The horse ran fast. Feeling the bag behind the overcoat cuff, Podkovin breathed a sigh of relief: the sounds of cannonade here in the hollow were less sharp.

The sun was shining brightly, it was warm. The guns still thundered threateningly, but only those that were far away. Suddenly, in front, a little to the left, sharp cannon strikes swept through the mountains, exactly the same that awakened Podkovina at dawn.

– Is there really enemy fleet here?! – He exclaimed and, driving the horse, rushed to the village.

On the country road from the battlefield to the station, the train of the fifth regiment was stretching, and after it the sailors dragged the bolt from Cana’s gun.

– The gun is good. It would give heat to Japanese gunboats, but did not have time to install it, the sailors explained Podkovin. Suddenly the train stopped.

“General Fok is going to the position,” the message ran from one soldier to another.

“Yes, it seems late,” the sailors grinned. – Slept the old man.

Fock pranced around the gig and shouted:

– Who ordered the movement of the regimental convoy? Colonel Tretyakov?! Immediately return the gigs back. Cartridges are needed only for positions.

Podkovin drove off to the side, waiting for the moment to get closer to the general. Fock spun in the saddle. His eyes were bloodshot, his lips quivered, his hands nervously fingered the reins. He was losing his temper. The main phases of the battle went without him. It turns out that almost all the guns shot down. The gunners, wounded and healthy, left their batteries on the orders of Colonel Tretyakov.

“How did this all quickly happen? – thought the general. – Damn it! Letters and telegrams of Kuropatkin made a decay. Nobody cares about maintaining their positions, about restoring the battle... Everyone is thinking about retreating to the fortress, And what about the Far One? What are we going to do with the damned miscarriage, with the toy Witte?”

Fock abruptly turned the horse and saw the shoe standing at him.

– Come here, what is it?

– From the commander of the second battery of the fourth rifle East-Siberian artillery brigade, Colonel Laperov.

– How are you doing on the left flank? Far Japanese?

– Very far.

– Far away, you say? I knew it would strike in the evening. Tell the colonel to keep a keen eye on the shore and not leave the Tafashi heights until further notice. Moving to the village of Modza is not worth it. Let him choose a safe position in this area.

Podkovin repeated word for word the order of the general.

“I’ve already seen you somewhere.” Do you want to smoke?

– I do not smoke, Your Excellency.

“Write what I said,” the general said to the adjutant, “and add that reinforcement to the left flank will be sent immediately.”

2

The hottest battle was in the morning on the right flank. The third battery of Lieutenant Colonel Romanovsky, who was injured in the battle of May 3, drove to a closed position at a height near the village of Ludyuten. On this day, both the battery servants and the command staff behaved very carefully. The hollow hid the cannons, and from the slide, which was somewhat to the right, Japanese moving regiments and guns, arrogantly advanced along the eastern shore of the Hunueza Bay, were clearly visible.

The morning rays of the sun very well illuminated the folds of the terrain and the accumulation of the enemy in them.

“Today is a holiday on our street,” said the bombardier Erofeev, who was wounded during the skirmish on May 3.

Gunner Petrov came running from the observation slide, supporting the connection between the battery and the slide.

– Military vessels enter the bay!

At the same time there were sharp shots of nine inch ship guns. The battery maid crouched in fear. But after a minute, everyone was cheerful. Heavy shells fell on the enemy. This was shot from the gunboat “Beaver” and with two destroyers. Our nearby batteries, forgetting caution, joined the battle even more fiercely. The Japanese columns could not stand it and quickly rolled back to the villages of Madjaten and Yandyaten. A servant of the Japanese batteries, located along the line of the old Chinese fortifications on the eastern shore of the Hunueza Bay, threw down the cannons and took refuge in the nearest ravines.

“Damned, damned,” shouted the gunners and the gunners. – Spies did not help either. Erofeev, in the intervals between the shots, said:

– Japanese cowards, not like our gunners. See what is being done in our positions. From dawn to this day, shells fall there, and the cannons all respond and respond.

– Rapid fire! – commanded the officer. – Three seconds – a shot!

The slopes of Samson began to be bordered with white clouds of our shrapnel. They were torn where the fiery enemy tongues glittered from gunfire and where companies and battalions moved from.

3

The officers of the first battery corrected their shooting from the height of number 37. The Japanese paid little attention to the Russian field guns placed on the Tafashi heights. They were fully engaged in the defeat of Nanshan and attacks on him.

An employee of the newspaper Noviy Kray Nozhin approached a group of officers.

“The picture of the battle is amazingly beautiful,” said Lieutenant of the second battery, Mikhailov, who had arrived at a height for communication and clarification of the situation.

“I have to admit, I didn’t expect such agility from the Japanese,” said Lieutenant Colonel Sablukov. – See which columns, and in plain sight. Today there is no void on the battlefield. The gunboats stand in the bays, and on their decks even the naked eye can see people. Sorry, killed Vereshchagin. He would have immortalized this fight and, perhaps, the last beautiful fight.

– Why?

– Our artillery is more and more improved and soon there will be no such day attacks. Even now, if we had more riflemen, had we set up Kana in time, it would have been possible to destroy the entire Japanese army advancing on Kinzhou.

Reason, Nozhin thought. “Everyone is covered in painful loquacity.”

Meanwhile, our field batteries with accurate shots drove away the enemy's left-flank columns from the lower trenches.

– Hot go to Kinzhou. We miscalculate – sighed the lieutenant. – More than two hundred enemy riflemen, and large caliber, against Chinese junk, installed on our batteries. General Fock went to Kinzhou. There is trouble. They say that Colonel Tretyakov dismisses the artillerymen to Arthur during the battle, and the general catches them and returns them.

– incomprehensible, Lieutenant. Not a single long-range cannon. We could have an armored train...

“Could, it would be necessary,” Nochin chuckled to himself. “What did you think before?” The youth are dandy, and the high command is in the hands of pig-like Stesley. They see spies in Russians, and the terms are hundreds of people hostile to Russians.”

Nozin winced at unpleasant thoughts. He terribly disliked Stoessel. The general of the last days pursued him intensely.

By eleven o'clock in the afternoon all the attacks of the Japanese were repulsed. Enemy artillery fell silent. The chains of attackers lay down a thousand steps away from our trenches, supporting gunfire.

Arriving at the station Tafashin, General Fock took over the leadership of the battle. Field batteries fired poorly. Only from Izvestkovaya Mountain, our batteries still strenuously fired left-flank Japanese guns, abandoned by servants. “Beaver” and destroyer went to the Far. From the side of the Ker Bay, fresh enemy columns appeared.

The orderly arrived from Colonel Tretyakov:

– In the Kinzhou position, all the batteries were hit, the servants were killed. Colonel Tretyakov is afraid for the right flank and is waiting for reinforcement...

– I know! The general exclaimed, frowning. – How do the Japanese behave? What is there for advanced trenches?

“Hundreds of guns, Your Excellency.” At altitude number 75 is the highest Japanese command, openly watching and sending in all directions its orderlies.

– Nonsense! Can not be.

– Yes, Your Excellency.

“Well, we'll show them to the bitch children,” the General shook his hand. He was strangled with malice. – Oh, scoundrels! Oh, scoundrels!

One thought terribly oppressed Fock: he, the Russian general, the division commander, the cavalier of St. George, by his absence at the beginning of the battle had actually entrusted the command to the little-known general Nadein, who had confused the direction for the reserve units.

The two battalions of the thirteenth regiment were not sent to their position, but to the village of Tunselafan.

“Everything, everything messed up. I forgot everything in the hottest minutes of the battle. Rustling Baba!”

Fock spat in the hearts. He could not calm down. He was introduced to the height number 75, which is so close to the main fire, and on it the Japanese generals. They are there, despite the imminent danger, and he, Fock, was twenty miles away... This will be shouted over the course of long centuries.

“Nonsense! Who knew that the offensive would begin precisely at night, Fock comforted himself. ‘But they, of course, knew... However, suppose that I was on one of the batteries and would have killed me there.’ They would laugh again. ‘Why did the old fool get, envied Skobelev’s laurels?!’ You have to look around. I will go to the arrows and Colonel Tretyakov. The Japanese are unlikely to launch an open attack by nightfall.”

Inspection of the area adjacent to the railway track, confirmed the plight of our troops, deprived of support artillery.

The cannonade fell silent, and Fock headed for Kinzhou. A few dozen fathoms from the station Tafashin, he met with three artillery officers.

– Where are you going, what’s new? – asked Fock.

“To Port Arthur, Your Excellency.” Now on Kinzhou we have nothing to do, the guns have been hit.

– The colonel is very kind. But at such a critical moment each officer should be closer to the fire ring, where soldiers suffer and where brave officers die... It’s far from evening, and there may be an acute need for you. Come back.

The officers moved aside.

– What are we going to do there? – asked one of them.

– Talk with him. And where did he go? – officers turned to the adjutant.

– On Kinzhou.

The arrivals sadly hung their heads.

The attention of the general drew rowan Yanov.

– Again from Colonel Tretyakov? Who are you?

– Yanov, engineering foreman, Your Excellency.

– God knows what! – shouted Fock. “They are linking military affairs with civilian officials... If you see the commandant of the position, then tell him that he is not the commandant, but a woman!” Sits in the trenches and requires reinforcement. I will not give him a single person.

Fock waved his hand, turned round, and went to Tafashin.

“Nits,” the general grumbled to himself. – How soon panic and demobilized! And this is the colonels! What to expect from the younger composition? Does Mr. Tretyakov think that the order will follow to clear the positions? This will not happen!

Fock called the orderly and handed him a package with the following letter: “On May 13, 11 o'clock 50 minutes in the morning. I propose to stand in position until my order to retreat; about retreat not to think, to defend to the last man.”

The orderly rode away. For a moment, the general calmed down. “Do not retreat before my order, in no case do not retreat! – he thought. – Do not retreat... Oh, why did I put in this unnecessary word at the moment? It gives hope and there they will prepare for a retreat... They will tear off repulsed attacks! You can not do it this way”.

The General sat down at the station hall and wrote: “May 13, 11 hours 55 minutes. I suggest to stand to the last person; about retreat not to think. Ammo send. I met gigs with ammunition going to Nanguin, returned them.”

On the positions there was a lull. Reassured, the general went to inspect the location of the Japanese. Seeing the captain-engineer von Schwarz on the road, Fock frowned: “Where are you going?” Why are you here?

– Colonel Tretyakov sent with a report to you about the difficult situation on the front lines. We need reinforcements, Your Excellency.

– And he sent you, because he finds that you have nothing to do in the position? Strange and annoying! And you panicked! You, who do not tear landmines, when they need to break. You are running from positions, instead of really understanding what is the matter, and by night to correct what remains in our hands. My God, what can be done with such commanders?!

five

General Fock passed in the rear of the position to Kinzhou Bay. Wounded soldiers walked along ravines and roads, and often stretchers came across. General; frowned, but hurried forward, in order to properly understand all that had happened in the first half of the day.

His steps were hard, his eyes gleaming feverishly.

“The position is covered,” thought Fock, “and so quickly...”

He keenly felt his deepest mistake.

“We must by all means fix the matter. Not everything is missed. The Japanese are tired and shot shells. There are a lot of them. And I have all the parts in combat readiness. I will remove the

fifth regiment, let it rest, and here the shelves are on the counterattack. We must find Tretyakov soon. I will inspire him with my personal example. What kind of tactlessness on the part of Kuropatkin is to write demobilizing letters. And me too! Why was to talk about them. And Stoessel is good at announcing orders. The isthmus must be in our hands, otherwise the Far Far Kaput.”

The general wrote to the Tretyakov a note: “12 hours 35 minutes. For the right flank, do not be afraid – there are two regiments. Look at the left flank, where the case can be solved.”

The wounded arrows that met the general looked at him inquiringly. As far as they could go, they stood up to the front and saluted him.

– How are you? The general shooter asked, with his right hand bandaged.

– All the trenches ruined. Their guns are beating, and ours are silent. Machine guns would be more. Dense wall go, creatures. – Fock’s face remained calm.

“What a tactic! And I was not. Two or three deft maneuvers under the cover of trenches – and it was possible to surround them,” thought Fock and turned to the arrow:

– You want to smoke, take a cigarette.

The soldier stretched out as far as he could, went up to the general and extended his hand to the silver cigarette case. Fock also got himself a cigarette, struck a match and offered it to the soldier.

– Smoke.

– I humbly thank, Your Excellency.

Rising up the hill to the battery number 10, General Fock all the time received reports from Colonel Tretyakov:

“I don’t have any part at hand that I could restore the fight to.” All in their places, and one hope for the boldness of the soldiers and the courage of the officers.”

– Well well. “Everything is in its place,” Fock grinned. – And those that are dead. Childishness Lyrics. Nothing efficient. I would have looked good in the trenches.

Fock immediately sent the Tretyakov a reply: “I thank for the boldness. You have enough strength. On the left flank, in reserve, I send two more companies to the battery number 15.”

When he finished writing, the general straightened up, furrowed his forehead;

– And I forgot about General Nadein! I will write to him:

“To General Nadein. May 13, 1 pm Send immediately to the ravine north-west of Tafashin two companies to the battery number 15.”

“We must prepare for the night, we must prepare for the night,” the general repeated. Colonel Savitsky approached him:

– What are you, your Excellency?

– The matter is fixable. General Fock is not a fool, “Fock continued aloud his thought,” he knows what he is doing. General Fock will always be right no matter what happens. General Fok is wounded in the head, and in the wounded and confused forged brains...

Colonel Savitsky shuddered and walked away to the orderlies, but Fock called out to him:

– Colonel, send to the position of the eight gigles of cartridges at the disposal of the commandant Tretyakov. He reports that there are no bullets. What’s the matter? He himself recently sent two gigs, and now he is asking. It must be relieved from the heart. In addition, assign two companies at his personal disposal. I go uphill, mouths follow me.

“The devil will disassemble this person, mumbles something incoherent, looks like a madman, and gives sensible orders... But still, he overslept the fight. Sat in the rear. Now it is difficult to do something substantial, – thought Savitsky. – The results of the battle would be in our hands if there was one spare division on Tafashin. The enemy goes berserk, advancing during the day in such thick columns. And we have nothing to beat...

The enemy gunboats were silent.

The companies of Russian soldiers stretched along the road. The general rode on horseback. The higher up the hill, the more came across the wounded.

Fok stopped and gave him a new report Tretyakov:

“On the left side of Samson (between the height number 75 and Samson) there are 25—30 mouths. Half – in a column, half – in a deployed system. From the left flank of the position, bypassing it, there are two companies on the water. A large mass of versts in four from us. On the left flank there are about 10—12 companies and twelve guns.”

“What do you say to that, Colonel?”

Sawitsky, listening to the report, counted: “Twenty-five plus two, plus ten, a total of thirty-seven mouths visible, so what the hell knows how many invisible ones. And we have: two plus two, a total of four.”

– By evening, Your Excellency, are grouped.

“Immediately inform the Laperov battery, which is on the left flank, about the enemy moving through the water,” Fock ordered. – Hurry to Colonel Tretyakov.

The general spurred the horse, but immediately besieged it:

– Again report. Read, Colonel.

“From under Samson near the height of number 75 two 7—8 mouths go in two columns. Artillery also moves. Redoubt number 9 is completely cut off from the left flank by shells; the trench is also spoiled, but people still hold on.”

– Forward, follow me! – Fok shouted and rode away.

Savitsky wanted to follow him, but he was stopped by a train soldier:

– Your Excellency, two horses killed.

The colonel let the horse gallop to catch up with the division commander.

– Your Excellency, two horses harnessed in cartridges, loaded with cartridges, killed. There is a danger for others.

– To deliver cartridges to the Tretyakov in public.

– Why ammunition for the position, there is their warehouse. – What do you think the head of the position is lying and the warehouse does not burn?

– Cartridges are burning with a bang, Your Excellency, like fireworks.

– Investigate. If there are cartridges in stock near Battery No. 10, send the gigs to the rear.

Climbing onto the highway, Fock walked slowly. The general threw uneasy glances at the foothills of Samson, in the nearest ravines, at the railway track, looking for the location of the enemy's batteries and chains. Looking around and crouching a little at the whistle of bullets, he considered the batteries maimed and already abandoned by the Russians.

Behind the battery number 10, the road went through completely open terrain, and there were at least four hundred steps to the nearest trenches. The general sat on a stone. The enemy shells now fell solely on the trenches and the ravines adjacent to them. Clouds of dust and smoke hung over the heads of the defenders. Lead balls and sharp fragments poured thickly on top, abruptly whipping along the walls of trenches and wooden shelters. It was impossible to stick your head out. Shrapnel rain was replaced by explosions of shells.

“Find Colonel Tretyakov, I need to see him,” Fock ordered and immediately wrote a telegram to Stossel:

“Now I am in position; examined left batteries. They are literally bombarded with shells. The enemy sent his artillery and rifle fire to the northern front. As the arrows hold, I can not imagine, but keep well done. Almost all the guns are silent, ‘the division commander wrote further,’ therefore the 5th regiment will not be able to keep another day in this position. One thing remains – to withdraw the entire detachment and attack hand to hand, as our artillery currently cannot assist the northern front, or use the night and retreat ...”

– But where is the Tretyakov?

The general lowered his head.

“You understand, Your Excellency, the head of the division, the commander of all the land forces of the Kinzhou Isthmus... You understand, the esteemed General Fock... You didn't have control of the battle, you don't have it now! And at this moment there is no, you old fool... You were

demobilized by Kuropatkin's letter... You fell under the influence of a sleek commander. Oh you are a genius, a genius"...

Fock lowered his head even lower.

A sharp shot from enemy gunboats made him wince and straighten up:

– Again this is unforeseen. But where is the Tretyakov?

6

When the Belly returned, he was immediately called to the commander of the battery.

– Saw the division chief? How on the right flank? Tell me more.

– From a position the wounded go, only them a little. The fortress guns shoot single-handedly, but the third battery of our brigade, the Beaver gunboat and the battery on Izvestkovaya Mountain shot down the enemy's left flank, so that the Japanese

guns abandoned and sitting in the ravines. – Having told in detail about everything he had seen, Podkovin added: – Now everyone is afraid for the left flank, there the Japanese gunners help.

– What do the soldiers say? You talked to the wounded.

– Trenches thickly fall asleep with shells. Their cannons are two versts from our shooters. Shrapnel is thicker than rain, but so far there is no great harm. In the trenches visors are arranged, so that the bullets slap uselessly.

Colonel Laperov exchanged glances with staff captain Yasensky.

“The commandant of the city of Kinzhou, Captain Ereemeev,” continued Podkovin, “he turned out to be a brave man.” It was hard for him with a handful of soldiers in the city. But he retreated only on orders. Now he is again on the left flank in the most advanced trenches. Brave captain, and still safe and sound.

– What else did the soldiers tell?

Podkovin hesitated.

– Speak, do not be shy.

“They learned that I am an artilleryman, and they ask: why were there so few good cannons in such a formidable position as Kinzhou?.. Why are they poorly sheltered?” Why are there few shells? Asking where you hid your firearms? They say that they would get closer to the trenches... Davit, they say, a Japanese with machine guns and light shells...

– OK, go! Keep your horse ready. There may be urgent orders.

7

Captain Ereemeev remained at the tenth company in the advanced trenches of the northern line. It was the “forehead” of a fortified position. The arrows saw the hordes of the Japanese approaching them. The enemy shells, continuously falling from above, forced them to hide. Acrid smoke covered the field of fire. Its artillery beat occasionally. Reinforcements did not fit.

– What is it that our generals have forgotten us? – the noncommissioned officer of the fifth company addressed to Yeremeyev. – Look, behind the riverbed, at the very water there is a reinforced movement of Japanese infantry. Shields some expose.

– No, do not forget, – smiled Ereemeev. – Waiting. What is the use of filling people in trenches now? It is necessary to save reserves, and then in the twilight – to counterattack. Of the entire division in position, read, one-fifth of the regiment. Japanese shields will consider and report to headquarters.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. With binoculars, Yeremeyev saw a row of wooden dummies on the shallows.

“Shields for averting eyes,” he guessed, “they want to deceive our artillery.” Who is lightly wounded, that and send with the report.

Under the cover of shields, the Japanese soldiers were moving along the chest in the water.

“Fire over the heads of the enemy, to the left of the shields,” Yeremeyev ordered.

Along the seashore from Tafashinsky heights, a shell boomed and hit the shields. After five seconds, the first pair of shrapnels exploded to the left, just above the heads of the attackers. Three seconds later, eight shrapnels were showered with lead bullets by the entire enemy force. The sea was boiling up, the shields stood intact, like dumb witnesses to the shooting.

Soldiers of the fifth and tenth companies clearly saw the death of the front ranks of the attackers. But the back came new forces. The enemy soldiers held their guns and cartridge belts high above their heads. From a distance it was difficult to determine the accuracy of the shooting of our gunners, but the Japanese guns falling into the water spoke eloquently of this.

The wounded and surviving Japanese crawled ashore, but they were shot from the lower trenches by hunting teams of the thirteenth and fourteenth regiments.

A whole battalion of cannons advanced on the water. Laperov's field battery, having shot, hit the enemy. The Japanese could not move quickly on the water: the living stumbled over the dead, the wounded floundering. Waves of the tide, flying ashore, captured more and more land areas. Arrows advanced trenches were delighted. Despite the suffocating smoke, not only healthy, but also the wounded cheered up. There were jokes, the soldiers encouraged each other.

Captain Ereemeev walked around the trench and said:

– If only to hold on until dusk. Fresh companies will come, will replace us, and the battalions will rush to the attack. Field batteries cleverly cleaned. Break the enemy.

“Eh, if only four dozen of such cannons,” the soldiers spoke with excitement.

– The battery already hits the Japanese cruisers! Cried the noncommissioned officer. The shooting of the Japanese battalion, aptly hit by the shells of the second battery in the Japanese gunners made confusion in the advancing enemy columns. In the trenches it became somewhat easier. The gunboats and part of the Japanese batteries directed their fire on Tafashi heights. The orderlies began

bandaging the seriously wounded and carrying them to the rear. The dust has settled. From the sea a breath of coolness. The tired defenders remembered that they had not eaten all day.

– There is nothing worse than to sit and fight back from the enemy. And who came up with these fortresses?! To advance is much better, said the sergeant-major. – First of all, you yourself choose where to strike you. The enemy does not know about this and is waiting for an attack along the whole front. Second, you move your guns, and they are screwed to one place from the enemy.

“And third,” the corporal snatched up, “the man will go on the attack full. Oh, and I want to eat, brothers!”

The sun went down. The foundation of Samson plunged into a light haze. The ravines stood out. The top of the mountain was exactly copper. Sunset glints glided over vzdeblenny dust mixed with powder gases. Below, very close to the advanced trenches, there was a ring of enemy batteries. The fiery tongues of the shots with the drowning bottom seemed long and sinister.

eight

Colonel Tretyakov immediately, at the beginning of the battle, tried to determine as precisely as possible where the enemy would send his main attack. The flanks are most vulnerable: the right – from the shallow water of the Hunuez Bay, the left – from the channel of the river that flows south of the city of Jinzhou. Especially disturbed right flank. In the case of his breakthrough, the entire value of the position was reduced to zero. But the enemy, on the left, leaving the city with its thick walls, could concentrate reserves there, and use the riverbed as offensive sap.

“It’s a shame that it was not Kondratenko who commanded, but Fock,” thought the colonel. “It’s hard to understand what this old man needs.”

Lieutenant Gleb-Koshansky went down into the dugout.

“All the main attacks are on our right flank,” he said.

– I knew it! – exclaimed Tretyakov. – Write to General Nadein, to give reinforcements people.

– The placement of shooters in the trenches is now dangerous. We fall asleep with shells. Kanonerki cut off the parapet of the lunettes.

“Send for reinforcements.” I’ll go take a look.

Samson – so beautiful at sunrise and sunset – now looms over the Nanshan hill a heavy boulder. Every enemy cannon salvo, the fiery tongues of which were clearly visible, every chain of enemy troops openly advancing, forced the colonel to suffer deeply. And not because he was a coward. He annoyed himself. The paint of shame flooded his beautiful face. More than three months ago, he participated in the position survey commission. He was entrusted with the improvement of the fortifications, but he reacted rather calmly to his duties. It was necessary to shout, to prove that Nanshan required long-range cannons and concrete structures, the shores of Hunuez Bay should also have heavy and long-range artillery, and Tafashi heights are no less, and perhaps more important, in protecting the isthmus than Nanshan high ground. Cana’s wonderful cannons roll around and fall

into the hands of the enemy. Can it be that Fock and Kondratenko will not come to the rescue, they will not think of anything against the Japanese?! The soldiers behave well, you can hope for them.

Von Schwarz and staff captain Debogory-Mokrievich approached Tretyakov.

– What do you want to offer, gentlemen officers?

Von Schwartz grinned. Tretyakov noticed this and looked at him in surprise.

– You know, Mr. Commandant, that I am an engineering officer. My suggestions are valuable for several months before the enemy attacks. Now I am waiting for your orders for general actions and follow the damage to fix them, if possible. – But you smiled?!

– I remembered the telegram of General Fock, which said: “All workers, free from repairing batteries, put on the lower trench, as I indicated. The quarries should be adapted for placing kitchens and warehouses in them, providing a grenade from aimed fire. Will the Japanese, it is still a question, but Kuropatkin will. He is already in Mukden.”

– The old man firmly held the question of the trench, but he, as well as we, lost sight of the importance of the position of the spurs of Samson. What about you? – Tretyakov addressed the captain.

– It is necessary to mine positions and trenches, so that, in the case of their occupation by the enemy, blow up by pressing a button.

– We need to think first about repulsing the attacks, and then about the retreat... We started talking to you, and before our eyes the battle is in full swing! Our batteries mow down with rifle fire as good as shrapnel. That's where the machine guns would work!

The Japanese attacked thickly and with concentration. Tretyakov looked at the lunket No. 3 and at the trench between it and the railway embankment. Along the edge of the trenches, the right and the left, the arrows moved and continuously fired. The main forces of the enemy were no more than a thousand paces. Yellow foxes of Japanese caps flashed in the ravines that ran along the entire front.

Fully preoccupied with the obvious danger of a breakthrough, the colonel did not hear the rifle cannon and the cod of torn grenades.

– I will send Belozor and Seifulin to the upper reinforcement trenches. It is necessary to keep the right flank.

Tretyakov saw that the regiments of his regiment accumulate and scatter in the same way as the enemies along the ravines.

– They play hide and seek there. Well done! How convenient was the trench! Whatever the end of the enemy, the arrows are already there. A volley... and the attackers fall. And reinforcements quickly shot. The ranks of the attackers are less common.

“See how well the trench is planned,” the colonel addressed the officers, “how all the features of the section are taken into account!” General Fok is right. It is commendable that he insisted on the construction of the lower trenches. Especially successful combination of the trench with the upper fortifications.

“The visors are well invented,” the staff captain remarked.

– By the way, do you know that this is my offer?

“On the contrary, everyone ascribes him to the general, not to your highly honored.”

Tretyakov winced.

The uphill fifth company, sent by Captain Fofanov, approached the colonel.

“Our company has a hard time, your honor.” Further stand in the trenches can not.

The colonel ran to the red embrasures. Looking in the direction of the northern front, he recoiled. Along the trenches of the fifth company, shells continuously exploded. The enemy’s batteries were beaten point-blank in a small area.

– And yet people keep there! – exclaimed Tretyakov.

A column of Japanese, rushing to the center of the position, was swept away by bullets from the defenders.

“Go and tell Captain Fofanov that reinforcement will be given to him.” Why, look how the Japanese are falling from our bullets.

Gornist with sunken dusty cheeks and burning eyes fell to the loophole. Struck by the spectacle, he no longer heard anything, only saw: people in caps with yellow bands, carrying death with them, fell, spreading their arms.

– So another hour and nothing will be left of him, your excellency.

– Absolutely. Run. I, too, will soon come down to the trenches.

The hornmate has disappeared. The colonel glanced at the batteries. Most of them have calmed down. Only on the battery Baranova fiercely fired. Von Schwartz headed there. The yard was littered with corpses, fragments of bombs and earth. All the instruments, except one, were silent. There were no wounded: they were carried to a ravine. Chaos struck von Schwartz. He did not recognize the fortifications, which were built and equipped under his direct supervision.

– How long is being built and how quickly is destroyed!

The Beauties, as von Schwartz called the guns, stood silently and were unrecognizable. Some pulled the munts too high, others fell to the side... Stumbling over the sacks, bypassing the corpses of the gunners, the captain ran into the yard of a single-acting cannon. Gunner Petrachenko used to tinker with the core, trying to raise it with bloody hands.

“Wow, I can’t,” the gunner said to himself and looked back. Eyes von Schwartz and Petrachenko met. – What are you doing here alone?

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