

シズルマテン

shizurumaten

Requiem - 祈り - #1

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ファミ通文庫

シヴァルスマケン

Schwachsachen

Requiem - 祈り - #1





シュヴァルツ01 隊長
アイリスティナー・
ベルンハルト 大尉



「黒の宣告」隊員



シュヴァルツ05
シルヴィア・
クシャシンスカ 少尉



シュヴァルツ02
ファム・ティ・ラン 中尉



シュヴァルツ06
アネット・
ホーゼンフェルト 少尉



シュヴァルツ09
リイズ・
ホーエンシュタイン 少尉



シュヴァルツ07
カティア・
ヴァルトハイム 少尉



シュヴァルツ03
ヴァルター・
クリューガー 中尉



元・シュヴァルツ07
イングヒルト・
ブロニコフスキー 少尉



シュヴァルツ08
テオドール・
エーベルバッハ 少尉



シュヴァルツ04
グレーテル・
イエッケルン 中尉



「必ず守って
あげるから……」

イレーナ・マリノフスキー

カーヤ・ザヨンソ

シルヴィア・クシャシンスカ

「……………」
痩せ衰えた子供たちが
何を望んでいるかは
ひと目で分かった。
シルヴィアは
微動だにできなかった。
食料は持つておらず、
また市民に食料を与える
ことも厳禁とされている――。
真つ先に動いたのは、優しく、
誰よりも正義感のある
イレーナだった。
「……ごめんね、
何も持っていないの、
衛士なのにね」
子供の手を取り、
懺悔するように呟く。
イレーナの瞳には、覚悟が
込められているようだった。
「だからせめて……ううん」

「私なんか、胸ばかり……」

インクヒルト・フロコラスキ

「まあ、その胸は偉大なぞー」

恋人作るとかー」

アネット・ホーゼンフェルト

ユンカ
地主貴族出身のインクヒルトはいつも言うんだ。「私なんか」って。
自分に流れる血のせいで不幸が決まるなんて、絶対に間違っている。

だから、インクヒルトには、幸せになつて欲しいんだ。

Schwarzesmarken

Requiem -Prayer- #1

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The 666th TSF Squadron (Schwarzesmarken)

Heil dem Vaterland!

- **Schwarz 01** (Eins): Commanding Officer (CO) Irisdina Bernhard
- **Schwarz 02** (Zwei): First Lieutenant Pham Thi Lan
- **Schwarz 03** (Drei): First Lieutenant Walter Kruger
- **Schwarz 04** (Vier): First Lieutenant Gretel Jeckeln
- **Schwarz 05** (Fünf): Second Lieutenant Sylwia Krzasińska
- **Schwarz 06** (Sechs): Second Lieutenant Anett Hosenfeld
- **Schwarz 07** (Sieben): Second Lieutenant Inghild Bronikowski
- **Schwarz 07** (Sieben): Second Lieutenant Katia Waldheim
- **Schwarz 08** (Acht): Second Lieutenant Theodor Eberbach
- **Schwarz 09** (Neun): Second Lieutenant Lise Hohenstein

From Right to Left

Sylwia Krzasińska, Kaja Zając, Irena Malinovsky

".....!"

The emaciated children.

What you wished for

I could tell at a glance.

I

couldn't even quiver.

I didn't have any food,

And It was strictly forbidden,

To give food to citizens.

The first to move was the kind one,

The one who had a better sense of justice than anyone else.

She was Irena.

"I am sorry,

we don't have anything.

Even though we are surface pilots"

Murmuring as if in penitence

The determination in Irena's eyes.

It was encompassing.

"So, at least.....no"

"I'll always protect you....."

Inghild Bronikowski

"I have nothing going for me except my big breasts...."

"Then put these breasts to good use, and find a sweetheart"

Anett Hosenfeld

Inghild the Junker always says "The likes of me".

It's absolutely wrong to let your misfortune be determined by the blood that flows through you.

That's why I want Inghild to be happy.

Table of Contents

- In the City of Death
 - Scorched Earth Flowers - Reason for Happiness
- Steel Grave Schulenberg 1981
- Anett's Melancholy
- World Setting
- After Word



ポーランド崩壊：1979年のヨーロッパ

ポーランド人民共和国は第二次世界大戦後に建国された社会主義国家である。人口は約3000万人で、国民の反共感情の大きさからある程度の言論の自由が保証されていた。

1979年3月、BETAはミンスクハイヴから西進を開始、ポーランドに襲いかかった。ポーランド軍はワルシャワ条約機構軍の主力として抗戦を図ったが、BETAの圧倒的物量に押されて敗北、同年冬までに全土の6割がBETAの制圧下となった。

疎開を主導するべき政府も首都ワルシャワの陥落と同時に消滅、一般市民の犠牲者は1500万を数えた。しかし、こうした絶望的な状況下でも、軍の残余はひとりでも多くの一般市民を救うべく各地で激戦を展開していた。



In the City of Death

In the frozen city of death
The girls continue to fight against despair.
Even if more despair awaits them in the future.

The Fall of Poland: Europe in 1979

The Polish People's Republic was a socialist state founded after World War II. The population was about 30 million, and a certain amount of freedom of speech was guaranteed due to the great anti-communist sentiment of the people.

In March 1979, the BETA began their westward advance from the Minsk Hive and attacked Poland. As the main force of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO), the Polish forces tried to fight back, but were defeated by BETA's overwhelming numbers, and by winter of the same year, 60% of the entire country was under BETA's control.

The government, which should have led the evacuation, disappeared with the fall of the capital, Warsaw, and the civilian casualties numbered 15 million. However, even in this desperate situation, the remnants of the army fought fiercely in various places to save as many civilians as possible.

October 14, 1974 Republic of Poland
Gądów Base, Wrocław (Wrótsław in Polish), Śląsk Region

A giant made of steel and composite materials descended on the runway, billowing a huge cloud of dust. Inside the cockpit block, the girl gulped at the scene projected onto her retinas.

Destroyed TSFs and vehicles lay abandoned throughout the base, and the wreckage of stranded TSFs was also rotting away, probably because there was not enough room to move them.

In the distance, abandoned condominiums stood side by side, and from the section of the city that used to be the urban area, there was a lot of black smoke shimmering and the sound of explosions and gunfire echoing. This was proof that this city was a battlefield, and that battles were still being fought.

A dozen or so transport helicopters, one of the few means of transportation available, were parked on the cargo apron, and the wounded, some with reddish bandages, were boarding the helicopters. It was easy to imagine that the severely injured must have been abandoned to increase the number of people to be accommodated, because there were no people who could not walk.

『—Hey, what's that, Sylwię? A refugee camp? Or am I mistaken?』

My Fellow surface pilot, Second Lieutenant **Kaja Zając**, muttered in a voice that was a mixture of confusion and fear. Her straight black hair, reflected in the communication window, trembled slightly.

When I hit the console key to project the large park adjacent to the base onto the internal monitor, I saw a cramped row of crude tents and barracks, with people wearing layers of rags to keep out the cold. Just as Kaja had said, it was a scene reminiscent of a deserted refugee camp.

『—Those are people from this town, right? Why are they here?』

『—The city of Wrocław is already saturated.』

Second Lieutenant **Irena Malinovsky**, the flight leader, answered Kaja's question.

『—It was originally a densely populated area, and the population nearly doubled probably due to the avalanche of evacuees Maybe people who were evicted from the city center and have nowhere else to go are gathering here.』

It seemed that Irena gathered information beforehand, as there was no hesitation in her voice.

『—But the people here are better off. As long as we allow the BETA to infiltrate, and unless they are near a military depot, there is always a risk to their lives.』 [\(1\)](#)

『— That's absurd....』

『— But for now, thanks to the low incidence of the Destroyer class, the city center is still holding its shape.』

We were reminded of the reality — we were not here to rescue the citizens of this city besieged by BETA, but ordered to defend this city.

This was not an uncommon story in Poland, where most of the country has been overrun by the BETA. This spring, more than a million citizens were killed by BETA in the capital city of Warsaw. Irena's family and mine were among them.

I felt disconsolate and overwhelmed with a sense of helplessness — I was aware that I had not yet recovered from my family's death.

It was then that countless white crystals began to fall from the sky above.

「Snow?」

The girl that Kaja called "Sylwię" — Me, Second Lieutenant **Sylwia Krzasińska**, looked up at the sky.

『—Winter has finally arrived』

Kaja's voice sounded like a cry. I agreed. Unlike when I was a child, snow was not something that made my heart skip a beat. Since the outbreak of the BETA war, Poland's winters began to show extraordinary harshness, with average temperatures falling below 10 degrees below zero. In the past few years, tens of thousands of people have frozen to death every year.

Now that most of the refugees were trying to flee westward on foot, the arrival of winter was tantamount to the dawn of hell. I shuddered at the realization that I would not be able to escape, let alone endure in this place.

(Will we make it out of this city alive?)

Wrocław is the fourth largest city in Poland. With the Oder River and its tributaries ⁽²⁾ flowing through the city, it used to be known as a scenic and historical city, but it was caught up in the massive BETA offensive after Operation Palaologos, and had been under a desperate siege for a month.

Friendly forces — the East German and Czechoslovak armies, as well as the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) forces centered on the remnants of the Polish army — were positioned 60 kilometers west of the city, but they, too, were just recovering from a crushing defeat, and at present, they were doing their best to reorganize their forces and outpace the westward advance of BETA. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces, which should normally be fighting alongside the Warsaw Pact (WTO) forces, were also severely damaged by the BETA offensive, and three months ago they announced their total withdrawal from Poland, citing a "reorganization of forces". This was followed by a retreat to the

west of West Germany under heavy criticism from eastern countries. From then until now, relations between the two camps have been tense, as if they had reverted to the Cold War era.

Sylwia and the 303rd Polish TSF Battalion, "Jan Zumbach" ⁽³⁾ were reinforcements to Wrocław. The battalion broke through the BETA siege and arrived at the Gądów base, a TSF base near the city. When I secretly looked at the expressions of the battalion's surface pilots projected on the window, most of them were clearly dissatisfied and anxious.

『—It's okay, Kaja, Sylwię』

Irena called out to us to encourage us. The two pigtails on her shoulders flickered.

I was fifteen years old, Irena and Kaja one year older, and the three of us had grown up together as childhood friends on the outskirts of Warsaw, attending different surface pilot training schools before being reunited in this battalion.

『—No matter how much BETA attack, even if winter comes, if we do our best to protect this city, our friends (friendly forces) will come to our rescue. Because there are still people here to protect. We must not let this place become the same as our hometown.』

Then she muttered to herself.

『—If we don't.....』

I gave a small nod. My hair, which was gathered into a ponytail, moved up and down as I did so.

From the moment I was born, I had always been a fainthearted person, but Irena and Kaja had always encouraged me. The reason why I became a surface pilot was that I admired them. The reason I am here is because of these two people who have supported me since I was a child.

(That's right. I'm scared, but I can't lose. We must protect this city. For those who are left behind.....)

Gazing at Irena, I hardened my will — and Kaja looked as if she wanted to say something.

一九七九年九月時のヴロツワフ包囲陣

ヴロツワフは、ポーランド南部のシロンスク県の中心都市である。市街地にはオーデル川が流れ、大きな中洲も市街地に取り込まれている。自動車や化学製品などの工業が盛んで、ポーランド有数の大都市となっていた。

一九七九年九月、ワルシャワ条約機構軍の防御ラインが両翼から突破され、BETA群の包囲下となった。包囲された兵力が市街に布陣したことで長期戦に耐える態勢とはなったが、市内に武器弾薬や燃料、食料の備蓄は殆どなく、包囲陣内の兵力は物資の不足に苦しみながら、多数の一般市民とともに抗戦を強いられることになった。

シルヴィアたち第303戦術機大隊が進出した一〇月の時点で、市内には約20万以上の兵力、60万以上(推定)の一般市民が立て籠もっていたが、食料不足と寒さ、それによる飢えや疫病、凍傷の蔓延、そしてBETAの攻撃によって日々千人単位で死者が発生していた。辛うじて生存している人々も、その殆どが身動きの取れない状況となっており、大規模な救出作戦が行われない限り、包囲陣の破滅は時間の問題と思われていた。

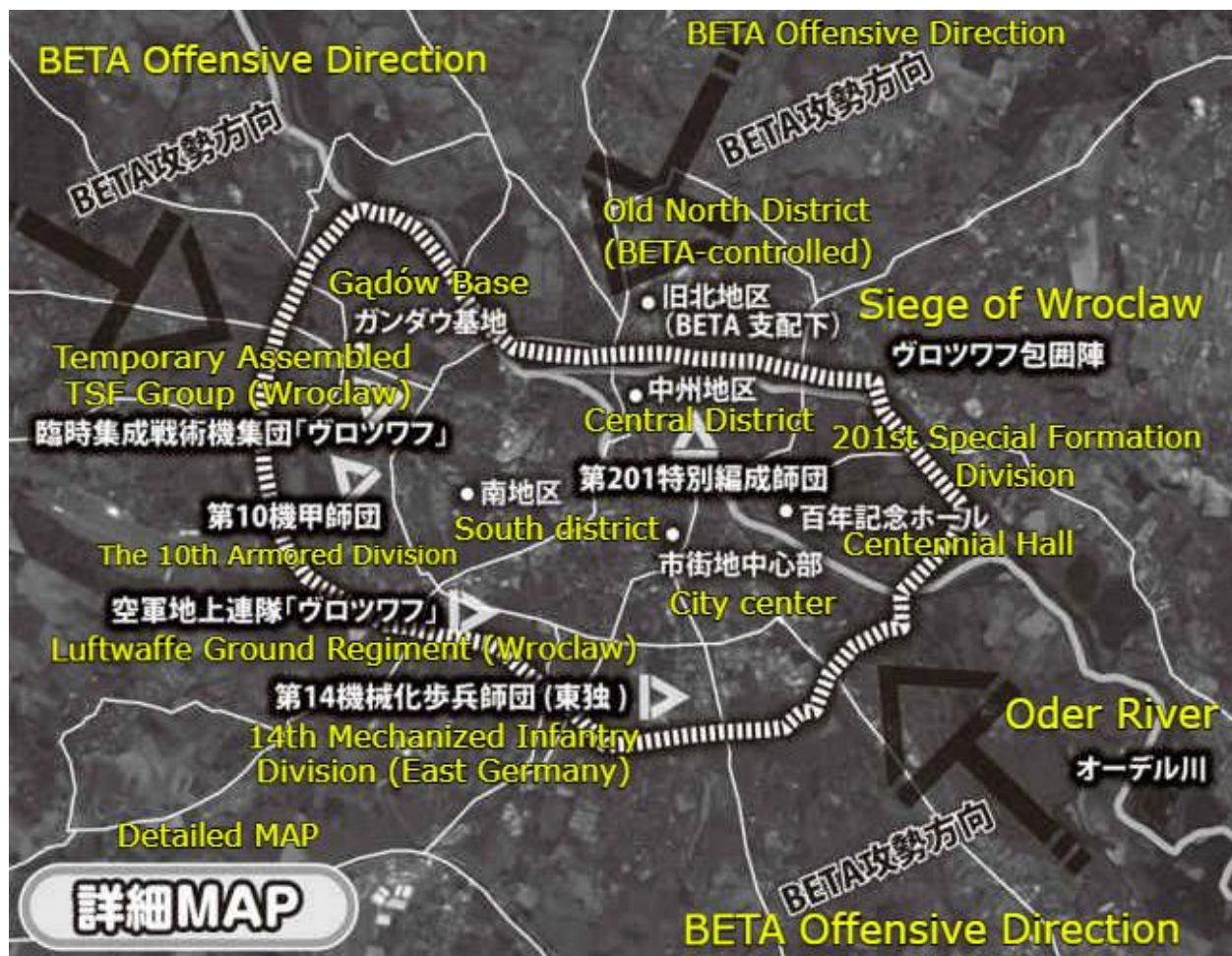


The Siege of Wrocław in September 1979

Wrocław is the central city of Śląskie County in southwestern Poland. The Oder River flows through the city, and a large sandbank is incorporated into the city center. It was one of the largest cities in Poland, with a thriving automobile and chemical industry.

In September of 1979, the defensive line of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) forces was breached from both wings, and the city came under siege by BETA groups. The besieged troops were positioned in the city and were ready for a prolonged battle, but the city had few weapons, ammunition, fuel, and food supplies, and the troops in the siege were forced to fight alongside a large number of civilians, suffering from a lack of supplies.

By the time Sylwia and the 303rd TSF Battalion entered the city in October, there were over 200,000 troops and 600,000 civilians (estimated) holed up in the city. but food shortages and cold weather, the resulting hunger, epidemics, frostbite, and BETA attacks were killing thousands of people every day. Even those who barely survived were mostly stuck in a situation where they could not move, and unless a large-scale rescue operation is carried out, the destruction of the encircled camp seemed to be just a matter of time.



December 14, 2:00 p.m. Polish People's Republic
Wroclaw City, Śląsk Region, Poland

The urban area, which had been destroyed beyond recognition, was now a pile of rubble, covered in white from the snow that had fallen and piled up.

The blizzard was so fierce that our field of vision was dyed white, and even with correction, we could only see about 200 meters ahead. The temperature was slightly 30 degrees below zero, and everything we could see was completely frozen.

But to me, who had been fighting in the ruins for two months as a surface pilot of the 303rd TSF Squadron, it was a scene that could be called everyday life, including the remains of BETA scattered around my feet.

「D-16 ward, sweeping completed Now, continue searching for remaining enemies ...」

I let out a ragged breath as I stared at the milky white world in front of me, littered with blackish-red colors.

A few tens of seconds ago, we had been hit by the third wave of BETA attacks of the day in these ruins, and together with my companions, we had succeeded in crushing all of them. What was lying at my feet was the result of that battle.

I checked the remaining ammunition display — the 36mm had only one magazine and one spare magazine loaded in the assault cannon, and the 120mm had three rounds left, which meant that I had used up half of its ammunition at the time of the sortie. ⁽⁴⁾

(I need to use it carefully in order not to extend the duration of the battle.....)

The dwindling number of artillery shells was a real fear — imagine being haunted by BETA after your ammunition is depleted. Most of the TSFs lost in the squadron so far have followed the same path.

By order of the Wroclaw Fortress Command, which commands all the troops within the Wroclaw siege zone, the amount of ammunition that TSFs can carry per day was strictly limited. The reason for this was that the BETA encircling the area showed no signs of slowing down, and a stable supply line could not yet be secured. It seemed ridiculous when considering the amount of labor it takes to resupply, but we could not disobey the officer's orders.

The TSF was armed only with a single assault cannon on its right main arm, and did not have the multi-purpose supplemental armor (Schürzen) that should normally be installed on its left main arm, nor did it have any reserve weapons on its rear Gun Mount. ⁽⁵⁾

Due to the cold weather and lack of maintenance, the carbonic actuator ⁽⁶⁾ in the joints may have begun to deteriorate, and the fuselage ⁽⁷⁾ felt heavy, as if it were covered with lead.

『—Sylwię, there's no time to rest! We received orders for the next point!』

Irena, the squadron commander of the 303rd Tactical Surface Fighter Squadron, and her colleague, Kaja's MiG-21s (Balalaika), were retreating from the blizzard in short boosts. ⁽⁸⁾

For the past few days, Sylwia, Irena, and Kaja, as the first flight of the Squadron, have been in charge of the delayed defense ⁽¹⁰⁾ of the Wroclaw city center area, which has become the new main offensive direction of the BETA. This area was the responsibility of the 201st Specially Formed Division of the Polish Army, but every surface pilot in the Squadron knew that most of them were already depleted in strength. As evidence of this, a police battalion was supposed to be deployed in the area where the flight's three TSFs were located, but only sporadic gunfire could be heard from the surrounding ruins.

As if she didn't care about the situation at all, Irena gave the order.

『—New Grappler class at 12 o'clock! Tank Classes on the right and left streets! Kaja, let's go! Sylwia, cover the rear and flanks with support fire!』

『—Roger, I got this!』

「Copy that!」

Irena and Kaja's TSFs leapt forward again, cutting into the white curtain. I was one step behind them and began to leap. As the rear guard, my main mission was artillery support, but in this situation where the effective range of the sensors was narrowing, I needed to follow the two TSFs in the vanguard.

『—Take that!』

With Irena's voice, the two MiG-21s (Balalaika) plunging into the BETA swarm - approaching right in front of the Grappler class - stopped suddenly and opened fire from close range. As soon as they were defeated, they used a short boost to get distance and then rushed forward again. This maneuver was designed to increase the efficiency of destroying BETA by firing at them at close range, and to reduce the consumption of ammunition.

I landed behind them — my chest shaking more than humanly possible, and stared at the battle situation window again.

The group of tank classes that had begun to infiltrate from the street was approaching us. It was only a matter of time before we were pinned down — the tank class moving down the street on the right was somewhat ahead of the rest.

「.....Tsk! Take This!」

Without hesitation, I leapt to the right and upward — a moment later, after jumping over the ruins, I landed in the path of the tank class and started shooting at the same time.

Once the ruins are infiltrated, the tank class will use the ruins as a foundation and jump at you from above, below, left and right, dramatically increasing the risk. The road surface in the city center is at most 50 meters wide, and in narrower areas, less than 10 meters, making it a nightmare for TSFs to maneuver in warfare. However, if we flew too high over the buildings, we could be hit by the laser class at any time.

「Stay away!」

The tank classes burst open as soon as they were shot, but that didn't stop them from getting closer.

(At this rate, the left flank will...!)

With sharp movements, I changed the type of ammunition and fired a 120mm Armor Piercing High explosive shell (APHE). This was one of the three remaining shots. ⁽⁹⁾

The armor-piercing shell (APHE), which was fired at a shallow angle, collided with the earth's surface a moment later, leapt, and exploded over the heads of the tank classes. Rebound shooting originally was a tactic to create a surface suppression effect with the APHEs used to crush BETA. We had hoped to use shotgun shells for surface suppression, but we had run out of our allotment a few days ago.

The recoil fire of the 120mm APHE cleaved away most of the remaining tank class. I went through the ruins again without confirming the results of the battle and tried to face the other group of tank class.

「No way!」

The moment I saw the front monitor image at the same time as I landed, my whole body froze. It showed something that shouldn't be there — a road covered in debris and snow, with dozens of people heading south across the Oder River. Everyone was pulling blankets over their heads in an attempt to keep out the blowing snow, like a flock of ghosts.

(Why at this time?)

『—Sylwię, buy us some time!』

I gulped — Irena had been monitoring my situation while engaging in close combat with a swarm of Grapplers on the street across from her. She might have caught the civilians on the ground with her infrared detection.

『—We're almost done here! All you have to do is rush to the tank class and break them up! At least until everyone has crossed the river.!』

『..... ! 』

I shouted "Copy!" while hearing Kaja's startled breathing, and after distancing myself from the fleeing people, I shifted to boost jumps and plunged into the tank class. In my left hand, I held a short knife that I deployed at the same time as the boost jump. Fighting without the Schürzen would be suicidal, but it's better than having nothing.

「You bastards!」

I rushed into the tank class while firing 36mm — near the center of the flock, I spread the Jump Unit at a wide angle like an intersecting cross and turned the TSF around while firing. The jet stream that was created at close range blew away the tank class one after another. This was not enough to destroy the tank class, but it will buy us some time.

As soon as I landed, I resumed maneuvering and shooting, always keeping my distance from the hordes of tank classes, and swinging my dagger indiscriminately at anything that came close to me, making mincemeat out of them.

In less than a few seconds, my surroundings were filled with the remains of the tank class. However, the warning window of the remaining 36mm ammunition fluttered in my retina.

(.....!? I will load the spare mags — With this, all of them are.....)

『—Kaja, we're going to finish this in one go! 120mm APHE... fire!』

I heard two gunshots from behind — Irena and Kaja, who had taken out the Grappler class, jumped across the street in an instant and rushed to help. Two 120mm APHEs slipped through the left and right sides of my MiG-21 (Balalaika), bounced off the surface of the earth and exploded at the same time, blowing up the tank class.

The citizens on the ground were in mayhem, but in spite of that, they continued heading towards the southern district. I predicted that the Oder River would be completely frozen, so as long as they could reach the shore, they would be fine.

『—They're still coming, Kaja, Sylwie!』

Irena shouted severely. Our sensors have picked up a new swarm.

『—Attention squadrons! A new battalion of BETA has broken through the Old North District and is approaching the Oder River... all flights continue to engage!』

『—I can't take this anymore! If we don't do something, we're gonna get wiped out!』

At Irena's order, the lieutenant leading the second flight shouted in a voice that exuded anger and hatred. His flight had also depleted 90% of its ammunition.

There was no one to interject with his coarse manner. It was well known that he and Irena had been like cats and dogs since their days at the TSF Training School, and what's more, he and Irena had been on equal footing until five days ago when the Squadron commander, a captain, had fallen ill with typhus ⁽¹¹⁾ and Irena had been chosen to be the temporary Squadron commander.

『—The orders we were given were to stall and defend! Retreating to the southern sector does not violate those orders!』

Irena answered immediately. She didn't seem to have any doubts at all about her decision.

『—There are still tens of thousands of civilians left in the center! We have a duty to protect them!』

『—How am I supposed to fight without ammunition.....?!』

『—Ignore the small ones and aim only for the big ones! If it's just the tank class, maneuvering should be enough to deal with them! The spearhead of the BETA group, which is a grappler class, has crossed the Oder River and entered the city center...! Kaja, Sylwię, let's go!』

「Roger ! 」

With a heavy heart, I kicked in the foot pedal and followed the two of them.

**Same day, 4:00 p.m. Polish People's Republic
Gądów Base, Wrocław, Śląsk Region**

"I have had enough of you"

The angry voice of the 2nd flight commander echoed through the TSF hangar at the Gądów base. His shoulders shook with anger as he glared at Irena in front of him. Both of them had just returned from the control unit ten minutes ago — still in their fortified suits.

"If we had retreated even one minute later, my flight would have been surrounded by BETA and wiped out.! Ever since you became our squadron commander, we've been"

"That discussion should be over by now."

Irena replied in a firm voice. He was more than two times her size, but she was not intimidated at all. She looked up and stared back at him with her chest outstretched.

"Our mission is to protect the citizens of this city, and a delayed battle with BETA is just a means to that end."

The second flight commander was silenced by Irena's overly righteous argument.

"The nation and the army exist to protect their people. That's what you should have sworn when you joined the army."

As soon as they heard the words, most of the other surface pilots who had been watching the argument between the two of them wore expressions of disgust. The only exceptions were myself and Kaja, who was looking at Irena with concern.

"Also, a friendly rescue mission should be starting soon."

"That's why we can't die! Why should we be here for them!? Damn it.....!"

"We can't help it! If the evacuation had gone smoothly as planned, this would not have happened, but the reality was different. Trains were commandeered by the military, and roads were blocked. Most importantly, no one expected the country to be in such a state just six months after the BETA resumed its westward march."

"Do you want us to take the blame for that"

"Yes. Because we are surface pilots. As long as we are given the mighty power of the Tactical Surface Fighter, we have a duty to bear — I believe so." ⁽¹²⁾

"Don't you dare talk to me like that! A cocky girl like you should just"

"I'm your superior now, remember? Don't tell me you don't know that!"

Irena thrust her modest chest, wrapped in her fortified suit, at him. Her two fists remained clenched.

The second flight commander backed away involuntarily — perhaps he was aware that Irena was the best Russian self-defense fighter in the squadron, or perhaps he remembered that she had been elected squadron commander by order from Wroclaw Fortress Command.

After a moment, Irena disdainfully looked away from the second flight leader and looked at us. Ignoring the acrimonious mood of the room, she made an effort to smile in a cheerful voice.

"Kaja, Sylwię, let's go change. I'm starving from all the yelling. We need to wipe ourselves down. Too bad we can't use the shower."

"Yeah, uh, um..... it's really regrettable"

I was flustered, so I nodded only at the last word, and followed Irena after. Kaja followed with a pained look on her face.

After the water purification facilities were destroyed by BETA just after the siege began, the supply of freshwater stopped, and even the surface pilots were not allowed to take a shower. Because the soil and air were polluted by heavy metal clouds, it was not possible to draw water from the Oder River or melt snow. Of course, it's the same for the general public. It had been two months since I had been assigned here, but the situation was only getting worse.

Do we still have to protect this city no matter what? — I could not decide.



The Gądów base was located in a section that combined a civilian airfield and a nearby tractor factory. The TSF hangar was converted from the latter, and the surface pilots and mechanics would walk to a separate building to access the base's main facilities.

Since the siege by BETA, food has been collected in one place in the siege camp for the purpose of strict control, and was cooked in several places before being handed out. Therefore, in order for the surface pilots to receive their meals, they had to go outside no matter what the weather was like.

In order to survive the cold, we wore sweaters and coats in addition to the BDUs provided, and protected our faces with hats and mufflers as we headed for the base facility. However, even with all these cold protection measures, as soon as we exposed ourselves to the blizzard, our entire body temperature was lost in the blink of an eye, our breath froze instantly, and our eyelashes were covered with frost.

I was silent. The quarrel I just heard was still lingering in my chest, but more than anything I was too cold to think about it. If I had been equipped with a fortified suit, this level of cold would not have been a

problem, but I wasn't permitted to, because it was a rule that I had to return the suit to the maintenance team for adjustment after the sortie.

In a gloomy mood, I made sure to tread on the snow step by step. If I didn't, I was going to lose my footing in the snow.

"Hey, they increased again"

Kaja let out a breath like steam and stared at the vast space lying between the base and the city area beyond the fence that divides the base.

"How many people are over there now.....?"

I looked hesitantly in that direction. Just as I thought, I saw a scene in the darkness that I didn't want to see.

The park was a refuge for ordinary citizens—a place that Kaja mistook for a refugee camp when she first set foot in this Wrocław siege zone. ⁽¹³⁾

But now, two months later, the situation in the park was even more dismal. Hundreds of thousands of people had been forced by the BETA invasion to leave their homes in the city and other reception centers, ⁽¹⁴⁾ and the number of people taking refuge in the park had swelled several times over.

Tents and barracks, which two months ago were still considered passageways, were now built haphazardly to fill the gaps in the park, and those who couldn't even get into them were covering the edges with carpets and plastic sheets to make simple dwellings. The trees in the park had been used as firewood for warmth, and now the land had been cleared as if it had been leveled by BETA. The sight of people clamoring together in murderous density, losing their energy and strength to flee due to cold and hunger, was like a concentration camp in Nazi Germany that I had seen in a history textbook. ⁽¹⁵⁾

There was a rumor going around that many people were dying of starvation and disease due to the limited supply of food and medicine... I could tell that this is not a rumor by looking at the pile of naked corpses with nothing but bones and skin in the former crematorium. Snow was covering the bodies that had been left out in the open because the fuel for incineration had run out.

There was a completely different world from our own, where we were given priority as soldiers and surface pilots, where we were given shelter to keep warm for the time being and enough food to survive.

"Rumor has it that the field hospital in front of Central Station is in bad shape."

Kaja muttered, staring out at the park beyond the blizzard.

"There were so many sick and wounded that those who couldn't be accommodated were laid out on the road surface. In addition, one-third of the soldiers who came to the hospital feigned illnesses or had

self-inflicted wounds, and the Milicja Obywatelska ⁽¹⁶⁾ was posted there to drive these people to the front."

I just nodded silently. I'm sure the rumors were true, as is the sight in front of my eyes.

The generals fighting inside the siege, especially the infantry who are forced to fight BETA in close quarters in the city, were also under the same extreme conditions as the general public. Lack of weapons and ammunition, hunger and cold, fighting day and night against the BETA... After two months in such conditions, only a few can maintain a sane mind.

The reason why the 201st Special Formation Division hadn't deployed defensive fire in conjunction with them in the earlier battle must have been because they had run out of ammunition and had lost the strength to fight.

(If the war continues at this rate, we will eventually)

"The city center can take the cold better than here, but the last time the Centennial Hall, ⁽¹⁷⁾ which had been used as a shelter, was attacked, thousands of people died. In the war zone where the frequency of BETA attacks were high, the secret police forced ⁽¹⁸⁾ the civilians to fight the BETA at gunpoint. just because it was a better way to cut down on the amount of mouths to feed. I don't know what we're going to do anymore"

Kaja sounded like she was about to cry. She had always been a gossip, but she must have heard too much bad news. It seemed to me that she had fueled her own anxiety, but I didn't have enough time to comfort her either.

"It's gonna be okay."

When Kaja muttered anxiously, Irena smiled at her in a cheerful voice.

"It's been two months since then, and I'm sure they've been reorganizing their forces. Besides, Kaja and Sylwieg must have heard that broadcast..."

We nodded in silence — the radio broadcast that Irena had mentioned was the one that had been sent out by the WTO military headquarters to the besieged Wroclaw a month earlier, promising to carry out a rescue operation. Since the WTO military headquarters is also the head of the Eastern European countries, and seeing that the announcement was made over the public airwaves, it seemed that their political prestige was at stake.

The generals and civilians in the Wroclaw siege camp were trying to survive despite the desperate situation, and they were hoping for this rescue operation. The distance between the Wroclaw siege and the defensive line where the main force of the WTO army was deployed was about 60 kilometers, the same distance as two months ago. If they concentrated their forces, it was not a distance they couldn't break through.

"It's true that the situation is hopeless, but we can't give up until the time comes. Besides..."

Just as Irena said this, the roar of jets echoed from the runway. The familiar sound made everyone turn their heads.

In the midst of the blizzard, more than ten TSFs were landing on the runway one after another, blending in with the snow. All of them were carrying large supply containers on their backs instead of gun mounts.

The reason the Wrocław siege was still holding is because TSFs and transport helicopters were breaking through the BETA encirclement and delivering supplies to the Gądów base day after day like this.

The breakthrough was made in the midst of reduced mobility due to carried supplies, so the damage was not small. Moreover, the amount of supplies that could be delivered was less than half of what was needed due to the limitations of the payload, ⁽¹⁹⁾ but with the airspace controlled by the laser class, there was no other way to deliver supplies to Wrocław. Without this supply operation, the siege would have collapsed much earlier. As soon as the supply stopped, the siege was doomed. For this reason, the operation was carried out as if they were continuously stoking an endless pot of firewood.

"And the supply is still going like that. Don't worry, I'm sure our friends (friendly forces) won't abandon us."

"Hey, Irena, ...?"

Kaja's voice was frightened — several children were approaching us from behind the fence.

The children silently pushed one hand out from the fence from the blanket that covered them and spread their palms — their hands emaciated to only bone and skin. They were probably orphans.

Something was welling up in my chest — I knew at a glance what the children desired.

I couldn't even quiver. I did not have any food, and even if I did, it was strictly forbidden to give food to the citizens.

Irena was the first to move. In the freezing cold, she took off her own gloves and wrapped them around the children's scrawny fingertips, which looked like spider legs.

"I am sorry, we don't have anything. Even though we are surface pilots. Forgive us"

The eyes of Irena, staring into the empty gaze of the children and muttering as if in penitence, seemed to contain an unwavering resolve.

"So at least No, I'll always protect you."



"Bleh another synthetic meat paste soup today as well."

Kaja let out a sigh as she stared at the contents of the lid of the mess kit ⁽²⁰⁾ in her hand, while sitting on a chair in the living quarters. The dining hall had a small capacity, so we always brought our meals back to our living quarters. And since the living quarters and the dining hall were adjacent to each other, we were not exposed to snowstorms.

"I don't like it. I know it's a luxury, but it's hard to keep eating the same menu for three weeks...."

"If you know it's a luxury, shut up and eat it. Even this is something we can eat because we are surface pilots, so don't complain."

Irena reprimanded her with a serious face. I thought that she must have been thinking of those children.

"I know, but bad food still tastes bad. Aaah, I can't wait to get out of here and eat my fill of pirozhki ⁽²¹⁾ and cutlets. Even if they have synthetic ingredients."

"Kaja gets all chipper when we talk about food."

I laughed carefreely. Kaja has often shown a gloomy expression recently, but only at meals does she regain her original innocence.

I felt the same. Even after seeing how much hell the general public was going through a short while ago, a warm meal in front of me made me happy before I was stricken with feelings of uneasiness and guilt.

(I'm sure I'm warped..... to be able to look forward to a meal after seeing those kids like that..... but it's still nice to be able to eat dinner together like this.....)

As I took a mouthful of the synthetic meat paste soup - just synthetic high-fat meat paste dissolved in a watery consommé broth ⁽²²⁾ - I thought about my good fortune. As the warm liquid seeped into my stomach, my cheeks naturally relaxed.

"That's because, if people don't eat, they will die. It says so in the Bible. Man shall not live on bread alone!" ⁽²³⁾

"You really are a glutton if you put it that way. Won't that guy hate you for that?"

"I I don't care! It's him we are talking about. He says he loves me as I am..."

"Kaja's love story has started again...."

"Even you Sylwie! It ... It's fine! It's not like it makes my story any less important!"

Kaja's face was flushed, and although Sylwia had not heard the details of the story, it seemed that the "that guy" mentioned in the conversation was Kaja's boyfriend whom she had met at the surface pilot training academy. From Kaja's words, it seems that they were quite in love with each other.

"Aaah, I can't wait to get out of this city! You know, the TSF squadron he's in is being reorganized in Legnica. So, if we succeed in escaping, I can go see him right away~"

"Legnica is the town behind the WTO military defense line, right? About 80 km from here I think"

"Yes, that's why it's easy to stay in contact with him using letters."

Kaja nodded happily. TSFs and transport helicopters on supply missions were delivering supplies to the besieged locations and bringing back letters from the soldiers there, in addition to wounded and key personnel who needed to be evacuated and materials that could be reused. In this isolated city, letters were an important factor in maintaining the morale of soldiers, as they allow them to know what their family and close friends were up to.

".....Hey Irena, I heard a rumor. Is it true that a rescue mission will be launched before Christmas?"

At Kaja's question, Irena stopped eating. I also listened. Today was December 14, which meant there were only 10 days left until Christmas.

"Where did you hear those rumors?"

"I'm not sure where it started, but there seems to be a rumor like that going around among the ground troops."

"Unfortunately, I haven't heard anything about that. And if I had, I would have been kept in the dark until the last minute to avoid any confusion."

"Tsk Too bad."

"But it's not without basis. A successful rescue operation by Christmas would be the best gift for the Polish people as a whole. And it would be a great opportunity for the WTO forces to show the unity of their forces."

Irena kept her composure, but there was hope in her answer.

In Poland, where more than 90% of the population is Catholic, Christmas was the biggest event of the year, and this tradition was maintained even under the communist regime. Considering this, the rumor that a rescue operation would be launched before Christmas was very realistic.

"We three used to celebrate Christmas together every year."

As if remembering something important, I rubbed the lid of the mess kit with both hands.

"We would all gather at my house, decorate the fir Christmas tree, prepare gifts, write cards, go to church mass, and eat a feast prepared by our mothers. Somehow, when you are in place like this, it sounds like a faraway dream."

"Stop it, Sylwię~! Hearing you talk like that makes me even more hungry~!"

Kaja raised her voice. and covered her own ears with her hands.

"The cakes made by Sylwię's mother were all very delicious. Poppy fruit cake, cheesecake, chocolate cake ... Ugh, I haven't seen any of them in the last few years."

"Ahaha, Mother was a great cook indeed...."

"..... It's okay. Someday we'll celebrate Christmas the same way again, Sylwię."



While Kaja agonized over the thought of the many tempting cakes, Irena patted me on the shoulder as if to reassure me. The shared memories of the three of us lightened the mood only slightly.

"As per the rumors Kaja heard, the rescue operation may really be launched on Christmas. Until then, we must fight hard and protect everyone in this town..."

I nodded my head. I think Irena is right. If we died, we would not be able to celebrate Christmas.

"Hey, that's what I'm talking about, Irena"

Kaja hesitantly interrupted Irena, Her gaze wandering aimlessly.

"I think it's very important that you want to protect the citizens here in Wrocław, ... but can you stop saying that in front of everyone else?"

".....Why?"

Irena retorted. — Her expression has changed to that of a surface pilot who experienced many battles.

I looked at them both with clouded thoughts. Kaja was saying what I couldn't bring myself to say out loud.

"Why you say At this rate, the squadron will split up! You know, right? That no one really agrees with the way you do things?"

"I never said anything wrong."

"But that doesn't mean"

"It's okay. I will never let anyone put their hands on you two."

Kaja choked on her words. Irena had read what she really cared about.

"..... and in a situation like this, someone has to be hated to keep everyone's fighting spirit up."

"What do you mean by fighting spirit....?"

"The situation will not get better if you shift the blame to the civilians who failed to flee the city or to the ground troops who did not fight the BETA. If each of them starts acting on their own, thinking only they can save themselves, this siege will collapse instantly. If we can keep up the energy, through anger or otherwise, we can still fight.....Because if we wanted to escape, we could."

We could escape — I dropped my gaze to my hand.

"So I have no intention of changing my ways in the future. Understood, Kaja?"

Kaja was silent. She looked as if she wanted to say something. It was clear that she was not convinced by Irena's words.

"Well, that's all I'm going to say about this. Sylwię, you are okay with that, right?"

"Um, yeah. Because I believe in you, Irena."

I answered in a faltering voice. Unspoken anxiety was swirling in my heart, but I hesitated to put it into words. Besides, I knew why Irena insisted on protecting the citizens.

(Irena's family was also missing in Warsaw)

More than one million civilians were massacred in Warsaw not only because they could not be evacuated in time, but also because the Polish Army, which was the main force of the WTO Army at the time, was subjected to an avalanche of losses after being annihilated by a massive BETA offensive. Thus, Warsaw was besieged by the BETA without the strength to even temporarily hold off the BETA's attacks, or the time to relocate government functions — and disappeared from the face of the earth after only one week.

I don't know what the end was like for my family and Irena's family in Warsaw, which has become a hell even worse than the Wrocław of today. But no, that is why...

"Well, that's not the only reason."

"What.....?"

Kaja and I both looked at Irena. Irena then shyly told us with a hint of embarrassment

"Actually, you know, there is someone I like. He is a junior member of my former TSF squadron and he cares about me a lot."

We both were appalled at what we had never heard before, but Irena told us in her most sincere voice.

"That's why, I want to fight a worthy battle as a surface pilot, so that after I escape this siege camp and reunite with him, I can be proud of myself — that's what I want to do. Is that no good?"

Irena stuck out her tongue in a cute way, like she was apologizing for not telling us.

"Are you serious....."

Kaja pulled her chin and muttered, her shoulders shaking.

"She was really hiding something that important from us ~ ! "

"Hey, Kaja, ...!"

Kaja pounced on Irena, laughing and raking her hands through Irena's chestnut hair.

"St...Stop it, Kaja! My hair hurts.!"

"I don't care! I won't stop until you tell me everything~!"

"I told you, he is just a junior!"

"I already heard that! So, did you do it? or you didn't?"

"What are you talking about!?"

"You've got to figure that out for yourself!"

"What about you, Kaja? I haven't heard you talk about it once!"

"W....We are talking about you right now, not me!"

"Haha, Kaja, you are also blushing."

"Ugh, shut up~!"

I smiled from the bottom of my heart as I watched my two childhood friends scuffle. I happily wept as I have been blessed with friends who would draw a smile on my face in the midst of this hellish winter.

**December 17, 9:00 a.m. Polish People's Republic
Wroclaw South District, Śląsk Region, Poland**

The direction and scale of the BETA waves that were rushing toward the Wroclaw siege did not remain constant from day to day. There were days when the destroyer class took the lead, turning the city into a pile of rubble as they attacked from all sides of the siege line, while on other days they made no move at all.

On this day, nine MiG-21s (Balalaika) of the 303rd TSF Squadron were positioned on the eastern edge of the Wroclaw siege position. The compartment, about two kilometers from the Gądów base, used to be a newly developed residential area with numerous apartment buildings, with the Oder River tributary and plains stretching out in front and bordering the BETA-controlled territory. However, most of the condominiums had been destroyed in previous battles and there were ruins now in place of defensive walls. The Polish 10th Tank Division was in charge of the defense of this compartment of the city due to its proximity to the Gądów base.

In the ruins, I was staring at the war situation window restlessly. The other surface pilots were also seemingly nervous.

『—Hey, how much longer until we get there』

Kaja was asking Irena, as if unable to contain her rising expectations.

『—It's only 60 kilometers from here to the main WTO military camp, so TSFs can get there probably in the blink of an eye, right? And with a tank unit, if all goes well, maybe three hours?』

『Don't worry, we will arrive sooner or later.』

Irena tried to hold back a giggle and then answered with conviction.

『—All we can do now is wait like this.....』

『—But I'm still curious. Is the data link to the breakthrough unit's vanguard still not connecting?』

『—Not until the heavy metal cloud that has developed on the front lines clears... Kaja, are you sortieing out here just to listen to my lectures?』

『— I know that, but』

No one interrupted their exchange. Even the second flight commander, who was constantly clashing with Irena, left their light talk alone and remained silent.

『— Because if all goes well, we might get out of here before Christmas, you know?』

It was only yesterday that the 303rd TSF Squadron and other TSF units were ordered to launch a sortie. The objective was to support the WTO East German and South Polish Army Groups, which began their assault on Wroclaw at dawn — the breakthrough offensive to rescue Wroclaw had finally begun. The East Germans gave this operation the name "Operation Winter Habelschwerdt". ⁽²⁴⁾

According to the briefing just before the sortie, the number of BETA groups deployed on the offensive front had suddenly decreased for unknown reasons, and the success of the operation was almost assured. Fortunately, BETA movements around the siege have also ceased. However, once the offensive begins, artillery fire and heavy metal clouds will be deployed over a wide area, making communication with the outside impossible.

『—Hey Irena, why don't we break through the BETA siege at the same time as the East Germans breakthrough? That way, we could be sure to join them.』

『—The ground troops don't have that kind of power left.』

Irena's expression seemed prepared for the new hardships that were to come.

『—We surface pilots have Tactical Surface Fighters, but there is no way that soldiers, debilitated by cold and hunger, can march through a blizzard with weapons and ammunition on their backs while fighting BETA, especially if they are civilians among them. First, we must break through the siege and form a corridor. ⁽²⁵⁾ Then, we need to restore the strength of the entire exhausted camp so that we can march through the snow. Even if the supply line is secured, the laser class won't be eliminated, so we can only escape by land. And since transport vehicles are in short supply, most of the exodus will be on foot.』

『—Does that mean that even if we succeed in breaking through, we have to remain in Wroclaw city?』

『— Maybe. Besides, we don't know how the BETA will react to this counterattack, but we absolutely must defend the siege position and the corridor to the death until the total exodus is complete.....』

Irena's last words lingered in my ears, and the misery of the civilians came back to my mind. We have no idea how much food and time they would need before their strength is restored to the point where they can walk through the snow.

(I wonder if there will be an order for troops reorganization that will make them issue a withdrawal command ...?)

I knew it was an abject wish, but I was not willing to die. We fought as best we could. If someone else reached out to rescue us, we would be able to save civilians. We didn't have to be sacrificed.

With a sense of self-loathing, I bit my lip.

(I'm disqualified as a pilot, even at a time like this..... I'm the only one.....)

『—it's okay, Kaja, Sylwię.』

Irena smiled gently — she seems to have noticed that not only Kaja, but even me, has a downcast expression on her face at the prospect she has described.

『—If we succeed in breaking through, reinforcements will rush to the city of Wroclaw. If that happens, it will be possible to recapture the BETA-controlled territory and take charge of the depth of the battlefield. Supply would also be much better. If all goes well, this could all be over by Christmas.』

Irena seemed convinced of the success of the rescue operation. I expected that the fact that the oncoming BETA movement was unusually sluggish reinforced this perception.

『—Yes, I know, right! Aaah, to think I would be finally free of the synthetic meat paste soup. If I can get out of this town by Christmas, I'm definitely going to get my cake.!』

「Haha, Kaja, you are still talking about all that stuff even at a time like this

『—if you say that, I won't share it with you Sylwię!』

「Heh, heh ~ ! 」

『—That might not be a bad idea.』

Irena relaxed her shoulders and muttered a few words.

『—It's not too late to get a Christmas tree and decorate it like when we were kids, and if there was a suitable place, we'll get it done. In a siege camp, as you'd expect, you can't have any cake.』

『—I love this! But Irena, is it okay for the commander of a TSF squadron to talk to her subordinates about such things while they are on standby for combat?』

『—I'm not letting my guard down and I'm sure today will be a joyous day for all of us, so don't worry. We are doing what we have to do as surface pilots.』

Irena let out a sigh of relief as she said this, and then let out what seemed to be her true feelings.

『—Finally, everyone's sacrifice and hard work will pay off.』



Ten hours later. The 303rd Tactical Plane Squadron stood in the darkness of the blizzard, and a quiet despair spread.

『—Hey, what do you mean?』

Kaja muttered in disbelief. Her face was pale, whether from fatigue from the long wait or from the anxiety that surged through her.

『—We've been waiting here for half a day. Why hasn't the vanguard shown up? Why are there no orders? Irena!』

『—Continue standby. I haven't heard from Command about any change in orders.』

Irena also expressed her bewilderment. It was a completely unexpected development, even for her.

I, too, felt an unfathomable fear. Given the current situation, only one possibility came to mind.

『..... ! 』

It was then that Irena let out a breath of surprise. I also realized why — my retina was displaying a dialog indicating that the data link had been restored. The heavy metal cloud had faded, and the data link connected with the outside of the siege.

Then everyone let out a cry of despair.

『—What, is this?』

Kaja's strangely stiff voice echoed.

『—Friendly defensive lines are collapsing.?』

The WTO defensive line formed 60 kilometers west of the Wroclaw Siege, which was to be the starting point for the breakthrough operation, was being crushed by the BETA offensive. The BETA group was close to reaching Legnica, while entrapping East German units in various locations.

『—What is this, what this, what does this mean?』

Kaja asked, while letting out a dry laugh. Her vacant expression seemed to reject reality.

『—What does this mean Irena!?!』

『—The BETA launched an offensive not on Wroclaw but on the main camp of the WTO forces?』

Irena, too, shook her head in disbelief.

『—The time we spent preparing for the operation backfired』

『—So what happens now?』

Kaja looked at the battle situation window with tears in her eyes. The collapse of the defensive line was still expanding, and several markers were disappearing in a chain reaction.

『—If this keeps up, there will be no TSFs or transport helicopters coming to the city to resupply, won't they? At this rate, we'll never be able to coordinate with our allies. Weapons and ammunition? Propellant? Where's the food? How are we supposed to survive.....!?』

『.....』

『—Answer me, Irena! You said we'd get out of this, you said we'd be fine.!』

『—We have to get out of here now!』

An abrupt angry roar. — it was the 2nd flight commander.

『—We can still catch up with the retreating group! We just have to get through between the BETA waves!"

(It's not too late now.....?)

I stared at the war situation window in disbelief. Indeed, the BETA group were advancing toward the west, surrounding the siege position. The number of BETA was temporarily reduced — now we can escape from this city.

『—If you do that without orders from your superiors, you'll be fleeing before the enemy!』

Irena was unable to hide her bewilderment, but she firmly refuted the idea.

『—And we don't even know if we're really going to be able to meet up with our friends. If we don't, we'll run out of propellant, and at that point, ...』

『—Better than having a double suicide with this city! We're surface pilots! Our lives are priced differently than the rest! We can't be punished for running off on our own accord! Instead, we should be

commended for bringing back a valuable TSF! There were plenty of situations like this before! The maintenance crew can follow us in the transport helicopter!』

『——Irena, let's do it! It's not too late! I don't want to be killed by BETA, but I don't want to starve to death either!』

Kaja's trembling voice made my heart discomposed. I wanted to run away... Yes, I too have undergone painful training to become a surface pilot. I couldn't stop thinking that I was supposed to be different from ordinary citizens.

(But that's! I became a surface pilot to protect the vulnerable, so I followed Irena and Kaja to become a surface pilot.....)

But how many of these "vulnerable" people are worth protecting? Is it worth dying for them?

Irena closed her eyes tightly and concluded with a look of determination in her eyes.

『——I have received your advice., but I reject it.』

『——Irena, stop!』

『—— You bitch. Are you going to get us killed?』

『——Our mission to protect the citizens of this city has not been accomplished.!』

Irena's voice sounded as if she was clinging to something.

『——What about the people left in this city? There are still over 400,000 people left! Many of them are children who are not even old enough to believe in us! We can't abandon them!』

I could see the starving children from the other day in front of me. If we ran away here, we would be no better than if we had directly dealt with those children ourselves at that time. But...

『——How are we supposed to fight without supplies!?!』

『——The fortress command center must have left reserves in anticipation of such an eventuality. We can still fight:! Once the war settles down, we should have a chance to recover.』

『——Where's your guarantee? Why do we have to go along with your preferences and play the role of a stupid softy?!』

『——This is the duty of the surface pilot! If we run away here, we can't protect that justice.!』

The next moment, a roar of jets came from somewhere — four TSFs were rushing westward through the blizzard. It was the F-4 (Phantom) flight of the Czechoslovakian Army, which was waiting in the next battle zone. In the darkness, bluish-white jet flames stretched westward..... It seemed that a unit had started to flee on its own initiative — The moment I thought that, the muzzle of the assault gun of Irena's TSF was positioned horizontally. It was a sign of Irena's intention to dispose of them if they fled.

『——Irena! Please!』

Irena remained silent as she listened to Kaja's murderous cries.

**December 21, 11:00 a.m. Polish People's Republic
Wroclaw South District, Śląsk Region, Poland**

It has been four days since the East German and South Polish military groups engaged in the rescue operation were crushed. BETA attacks on the besieged Wroclaw have resumed with increasing intensity. It was as if they had recognized the city of Wroclaw as their next prey now that the large deployed forces had disappeared.

「You bastards!」

The grappler classes rushed forward, weaving their way through the streets between buildings paved with debris. Along with my shout, the roaring sound of the assault gun bursting open entire bodies of the Grappler classes had continued. The type of ammunition was a 36mm armor-piercing shell (HVAP) — as the stockpile of all types of 120mm shells had been depleted. [\(26\)](#)

The southern district, where the squadron was fighting, was the most modernized business district in Wroclaw, lined with skyscrapers that were much taller than the full length of the TSF, but most of them have collapsed halfway down after being hit by a direct hit from a beam of laser class irradiation. Nearby was a railroad maintenance plant, with underground passageways connecting the lines.

My MiG-21 (Balalaika) was the only one on the street; the BETA offensive front was too wide — and there were too few TSF that it was no longer even possible to form elements. The blizzard was still blowing, and the temperature was dropping below 40 degrees below zero.

A moment later, a heartbreaking cry reached my eardrums as I realized that all approaching Grappler classes had been destroyed and the BETA waves had stopped entering the city streets.

『——Dieeeeeeeeeeeeeee! BETA!』

Kaja was firing similar shells while screaming, and her cheeks slightly furrowed from lack of nourishment.

I was watching the war situation window — Kaja was fighting on the street next to me, and surrounding her were numerous tank classes and their remains, but she was less efficient at destroying them than me. It was obvious that she was being controlled by her passion and lacked concentration.

『——Because of you, because of you, all of youuuuuu!』

Amidst the screams and gunfire, a new group of tank classes approaches from Kaja's side — from behind the wall of a high-rise building.

『—— You're annoying!』

The next moment, I heard a series of explosions from the street where Kaja's TSF was deployed — Kaja had detonated a mine that the Volunteer Engineering Battalion had planted on the wall of the building by remote command. Normally, this kind of work was the role of the Air Force ground regiment "Wroclaw" that protected this section of the city - formed of mechanics from the Air Force who were out of work after the airbase was destroyed and local residents who were forcibly recruited - but since communication with the command center had been cut off over the past few days, It was assumed that they had been wiped out in a wave of BETA attacks.

『—What the...? Shit!』

A moment later, Kaja moaned — the tank classes had been eliminated, but the sensors had temporarily lost their functions due to the dust and snow plume created by the more-than-expected power. [\(27\)](#)

「Kaja!」

While confirming that the BETA's approach has been temporarily halted, I made a short boost from the intersection to the next street, rushed toward the Grappler class, which was about to attack Kaja right now, and shelled it.

「Kaja, are you okay!?!」

I stopped next to her TSF that was holding an assault cannon.

「You need to fight more calmly! Besides, you need to attract more enemies to land mines before you detonate them that's not effective」

『—I didn't ask for your help!』

Kaja's eyes were filled with hatred as she responded to my voice.

『—You should be fighting with Irena! She doesn't care about our lives anyway.!』

「Kaja, stop saying that Irena is listening too」

『—It's only natural since she's the commander. She doesn't listen to anything I say. She doesn't care what I have to say.』

「That's not true」

I could only mutter in sadness. I could not look at Kaja's exhausted face.

◇ ◇ ◇

As Kaja had predicted, the situation in the Wroclaw siege was rapidly deteriorating after the failed rescue operation. The distance between the siege positions and the main force of the WTO forces had increased from 60 kilometers to around 100 kilometers. It was no longer possible for TSFs with containers full of supplies to penetrate the BETA gap. The supply lines that had barely supported the siege forces were cut off, leaving us with no choice but to fight our way out of the current affairs.

In response to this situation, the Wroclaw Fortress command decided to further cut back on food supplies within the besieged camp. Although this was an unavoidable decision, it was a death sentence for the civilian population. Even before the failure of the operation, the food supply to the civilian population was far below minimum levels, and now it was even less. It was not known how many more people died of starvation as a result of this decision.

The same was true for the surface pilots. The stockpiles of propellants, as well as weapons and ammunition, were beginning to run out, and rumors were spreading among the surface pilots that they would be unable to launch any more sorties before the new year. The same was true for the other branches of the military: they had no way to escape on their own or even to escape by taking advantage of the supply convoys, and they had no choice but to fight desperately to the death in order to postpone the end of the war.

As a result, morale in the besieged camps was devastated, and there was a wave of looting by soldiers against civilians. They looted not only food, but also clothing, bedding, and even household goods that could be used as firewood. The field Milicja Obywatelska no longer tried to stop them.

The WTO military issued a statement praising the efforts of the Wroclaw besiegers but did not announce any further measures. The WTO forces had abandoned the Wroclaw besiegers, or so many of the soldiers understood.

The relationship between the three of us had grown colder after the events of the previous day, and Kaja's heart was growing weaker as she was consumed by the hopeless atmosphere in the besieged camp.

『—I don't even know where he is now that Legnica has fallen.』

Kaja muttered, tears welling under her now darkened eyes, which were sunken with fatigue.

『—This damned situation! If only I'd gotten out then, this wouldn't have happened.!』

I can't say anything — I knew that Kaja was hoping to get out of here to be reunited with her lover. She also believed in Irena's encouragement that "we will absolutely get out someday."

(But then again, Irena was the same.....)

『—I don't want to die like this in this city, in this meaningless battle! If we die in a place like this, we'll never know what we've been fighting for.!』

I felt sad that I could not say anything to them... For me, Kaja and Irena were still my best friends and respected seniors. The two of them were at discord for reasons beyond my control...

『—Of course, we can't help the citizens anymore.! There are still hundreds of thousands of people left! Why, why do we have to die together with them?』

It was then that an eerie rumbling of the earth was heard. The ground shook like an earthquake, trembling the city of rubble.

「Wh What.....!？」

We checked the war situation window, and then we both froze. The hostile blip was moving fast.

『—A Destroyer class group is approaching.!』

The window showed that a group of Destroyer-classes was advancing from one of the national roads leading to the siege positions.

There were about 30 of them — a number that could be handled by a squadron's strength if all was well, but under the current circumstances, they were a formidable opponent. There were no 120mm cannon shells left for the TSF units.

(At this rate, they'll break into the city!)

『—Attention all squadrons!』

It was an order from Irena. — Kaja glared at her with hatred. The other surface pilots' reactions were pretty much the same.

『—The defense of this sector will be taken care of by the East German 14th Mechanized Infantry Division! The squadron will now advance to the southern edge of the siege camp and hold the Destroyer class at the front edge!』

The 14th Mechanized Infantry Division was well trained and equipped and still had one tank battalion in operating condition.

『—As long as we're fighting on the front edge of the siege camp, we can't expect support from other units... we'll charge into the BETA wave, hunting only the Destroyer class!』

『—Wait! Why would you do that!?"』

「Kaja.....!？」

I interrupted her — but Kaja continued her desperate plea in a hushed voice.

『—If it's a Destroyer class, why don't you just pull it into the city center? In the city, the impact force of the Destroyer class can be reduced. If they want to destroy the city, let them! If only we could get behind them, they'd!』

『—Yes, that's right, enough of this shit, you bitch!』

The second flight commander's angry voice rang out. There was a strange tension in his voice.

『—The only reason we're fighting is because we don't want to die! Why should I die for a city like this!』

Irena stared at Kaja as she listened to the 2nd flight leader and his men ranting and raving. Kaja, exhausted physically and mentally, was breathing heavily, and so was Irena. The surface pilots were no exception in cutting down on food.

After a few moments of silence, Irena murmured a prayer for forgiveness.

『—Kaja, you would understand, wouldn't you?』

『—I don't understand! I shouldn't understand.! Do Do you want us to die in place of the citizens?』

The next moment, a different tremor from the previous one reached us from the surface of the earth. The control unit shook repeatedly, as if the TSF itself was suffering from a fever.

『—Destroyer class? But they're not that close yet.』

『—No! Kaja, local link!』

『—What is this?』

Kaja's pale face turned even paler as the blood drained from her face — markers were swarming around us, indicating the presence of tank classes.

I looked around, but all that was projected on my retina was the ruined city.

『—No way, there are no tank classes anywhere... sensor failure...?』

『—Kaja, Sylwię, get away from there right now! Under your feet is...』

Irena screamed — she was concerned for both of us, as if there was no previous rift between the three of us.

『—The railroad maintenance garage is』

The next moment, the footing of our two MiG-21s (balalaika) collapsed — and dozens of tank classes appeared and pounced on us one after another.

「Kaja!？」

『—No way!？」』

I reflexively ignited my rocket motor to avoid contact with the tank class — but Kaja's MiG-21 (Balalaika) was in the center of the collapse and was attached to many tank classes, before it could gain altitude.

『—Aaaaaaaah! Get away from me, get away from me!』

「Kaja, calm down! If we don't do something...」

The distracted Kaja's MiG-21 (Balalaika), with its accelerated jump unit, came into contact with a skyscraper from the side, and plunged into it, gouging its own jump unit with the thrust of its jets and toppling over. The collision with the building knocked off or crushed a large number of tank classes, but the rest were firmly attached to the TSF, and began to eat away at it.

『—No! I don't want to die, I don't want to die!』

『—Kaja, stop at least! There aren't that many of them! I'll eliminate them with my close combat dagger.!』

I approached while holding a dagger in my left main arm after clearing the other tank classes with gunfire — in addition to Kaja's screams, the eerie sound of the tank classes eating the TSF could be heard from my headset. The impact of Kaja's TSF crashing into the building has wrecked both of its jumping units, and the main arms and legs were currently being gouged by tank classes.

『—Sylwię, eliminate them with the 36 mm! Kaja, cut the propellant!』

Irena gave her orders, along with a series of gunshot sounds. — she herself seemed to be fighting a battle elsewhere.

『—As long as the cockpit block is intact, we can get her out!』

「That would make Kaja's TSF.....」

『—I don't care about the TSF! Do you want to kill Kaja!?!』

「.....!? Ahhhhhhhhhh!」

I shouted and fired the 36 mm at the tank classes that were attached to Kaja's TSF.

With a cracking sound, the tank class burst like Pomegranates, followed by the shattering of various parts of Kaja's TSF. Even though I was aiming only at the tank classes, at this distance, one wrong move could have been fatal.



After the dust from the bombardment cleared, I saw Kaja's MiG-21 (Balalaika) lying in front of me in a semi-destroyed state, as if it had been plunged into a building. The reddish-black bodily fluids of the crushed tank classes were sticking to it like blood flowing from the fuselage.

『—Ah, ah』

「Kaja!」

As if to cover Sylwia's desperate call, Irena ordered in a voice devoid of emotion.

『—The remaining TSFs will now proceed to intercept the Destroyer class! Second Lieutenant Kaja Zając will standby in her TSF and will soon be assisted by the vanguard of the 14th Mechanized Infantry Division! Instead of leaving the TSF, Power out and enter friendly protection!』

『—Huh, w....hy ?』

Kaja sounded as if she couldn't believe her ears — and I could not believe it either.

「Wait a minute! If I can get Kaja to the base, then...」

『—The more TSFs we have to intercept, the better! If they rush into the city, there will be casualties in the tens of thousands!』

「But...」

『—Sylwię! Kaja will be rescued by friendlies! But the citizens they have no one but us!"

「...! I'm sorry, Kaja!」

『—Huh, Wait a minute, Sylwię.....?』

I jumped toward the front line while being followed by Kaja's heartbroken voice from behind.

『—You will leave me in a place like this! I don't know if I'll make it out of there in one piece.』

I once again checked the surroundings with my sensor — there were no BETA in the vicinity of Kaja's TSF.

However, ahead of us, a battalion-sized BETA were penetrating into the city center. Even if reinforcements were deployed in time, it was clear that Kaja would be caught up in the battle. For Kaja, whose TSF had been destroyed, it would be tantamount to standing on an execution table.

『—Wait, please don't leave me! Sylwię, Irena! Did I do anything wrong!? Why are you Why are you doing thiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiis!!!!』

Kaja screamed as if she had lost her mind — I ignored her and continued my jumping. I feared that I might have abandoned my comrade-in-arms. Doubts about Irena's stubborn attitude ate away at my spirit — but even so, I tried to cling to Irena's righteousness.

(It's ok, Kaja will be fine.! Irena's decision is surely not wrong either! We are the shield of the weak, the surface pilots. (The guards))

**Same day, 1:00 p.m. Polish People's Republic
Gądów Base, Wrocław, Śląsk Region**

The scene on the runway at the Gądów base was even rougher than a week earlier. The runway was barely clean, but the taxiways were littered with the wreckage of many pieces of equipment. On the apron, a transport helicopter was left in a frozen condition, with no hope of returning.

Near the fence surrounding the base, civilians and wounded soldiers, dressed like beggars, stood in the blizzard, either hoping to escape by air or to stay warm in the huge hangar. Some were clinging to the fences and screaming for help, others had given up and were sitting down — some were frozen to death as they stood there.

(We'll eventually)

I involuntarily looked away — in about a week, the TSF unit will lose its strength due to the depletion of propellant and will be wiped out. If that happened, I would no longer be a surface pilot. No, before that, my TSF might be destroyed by BETA like Kaja's.

(Please, stay alive, Kaja)

The interception of the Destroyer class group by the 303rd TSF Squadron was a success.

Irena, with her precise command, led her squadron behind the Destroyer class while slipping through other BETA waves, and challenged the Destroyer class, which had been slowed down by the support bombardment from the city, to a firefight at close range, destroying all of them.

(But, in return...)

With a gloomy mood, I looked at the faces of the surface pilots reflected on my retina — their numbers had been reduced to half of what they were before the sortie. The damage was concentrated on the 3rd flight, which was in charge of the rear guard.

(How can we fight in the future with such a force?)

◇ ◇ ◇

Back in the TSF hangar, my mind was not at rest.

It was predictable that Irena's policy of prioritizing the protection of civilians over the squadron would have antagonized not only her fellow surface pilots, but also the maintenance team, which was dealing with the maintenance of TSF while cutting down on their stamina, and I was considered to be Irena's accomplice.

As soon as we moved from the control unit to the maintenance pallet, we were met with contemptuous stares from those around us. I tried to leave the place as quickly as possible with a feeling of impatience, but I was unable to do so. There was a crowd in one corner of the hangar, and Irena was in the center of it.

"You bitch, how the hell are you going to take responsibility for making your squadron like this!"

The second flight commander pressed Irena for an answer, with several of his men and maintenance crew members surrounding her.

"If you had pulled the Destroyer class into the city, as your comrade whom you left for dead said, we wouldn't have had to endure these losses.....!"

Irena, however, did not step back and stared at the second flight leader with a deeply fatigued expression.

"We were able to protect our citizens. If they had stormed into the city center, that would have increased the loss of friendly troops as well as civilians, and the limits of the siege would have been pushed even further. It is unfortunate that the casualties were so high, but there was nothing else we could do."

With these words, the atmosphere among the surface pilots and maintenance personnel around her became even more risky — Irena's words were sound, but for those who were dissatisfied with her command, they were like pouring oil on the fire.

(Irena, stop)

There was no point in pushing others into a corner with righteous arguments. But even so, Irena showed no sign of fear. Rather, she spun her words as if she was trying to hold back her anger.

"You should be more concerned about your own position."

"Huh? What do you mean....."

"Why does your complexion look so good?"

The 2nd flight commander, his men, and a few maintenance workers were slightly frightened.

"It's strange, isn't it? Even though both Sylwię and I are fighting malnutrition, and even though we both eat the same amount of the same food, so why do we look better than us? Food is strictly controlled, so any illegal diversion shouldn't be possible Then where are you getting your food from?"

There was no retort. — Irena has determined that the members of the second flight looted food from civilians. To the speechless 2nd flight commander, Irena took a step forward and continued in a sharp tone of voice.

"If you don't want to be pursued any further, Stop meddling in my policy."

"Are you blackmailing me, ...?"

"I don't mind if you take it that way. Honestly, I would turn you in to the Military Police Corps right now, but we cannot afford to lose a valuable surface pilot at the moment."

".....Ha! You care about the civilians, and your fellow surface pilots will fight for you, no matter how many die, even if you threaten them. You're the best CO ever!"

He stared at Irena with eyes like a rabid dog and stuck his index finger in the air.

"The only reason we're following you is because it's no use trying to crush you! You're not going to be able to escape even if you're gone, and the more surface pilots you have, the longer we can delay our death. Otherwise, you'd be the first one I'd crush! We'll make you regret it sooner or later.! Same goes for that flunky over there!"

I went pale. The surface pilots and maintenance workers in front of her only saw me that way.

Irena, too, was momentarily lost for words, and then quickly shouted back.

"I don't care about myself, but if something happens to Sylwie, then...!"

And then, I heard the sound of staggering footsteps behind me — everyone turned their attention in that direction.

"Kaja!"

I ran up to Kaja, who emerged from the main gate, dressed in her fortified suit.

She was covered in snow, as if she had walked through a snowstorm, but she had no external injuries and her fortified suit was working — the exception is that her complexion has turned ashen and her eyes have lost their vigor.

"Thank God you're safe!"

"....."

"If we don't get you to the changing room quickly and wipe your hair, you're going to catch a cold. Let's go, Kaja?"

I tried to grab Kaja's hand to at least reassure her momentarily.

".....You, what are you talking about?"

"Huh"

Kaja's voice, as if rejecting everything, froze me. — She stared at me with clouded eyes and continued as if chanting a curse.

"You abandoned me. What are you talking about now? Stop fucking around!"

"Ka....Kaja?"

"You are just like that bitch. You are a hypocrite who cares only about your own pride and ideals and is willing to involve your friends to achieve them! What is the use of trying to protect what is already lost!"

"I didn't mean"

Kaja backed away in dismay — even she no longer considered Irena and I to be friends.

(But even I wouldn't want Irena and Kaja to leave me on the battlefield like that))

Guilt filled my heart. It was true that we had hurt Kaja badly. Being told that help was on the way would have been of no comfort to her.

Kaja stared at Irena with murderous intent in her gaze. The surface pilots surrounding Irena were also consumed by Kaja's vindictive look.

"Let's go, Sylwię."

Irena ignored them all and walked away. She made no eye contact with anyone.

"..... We shouldn't be here right now."

I nodded hesitantly and followed behind Irena. Kaja stood there, looking down — her expression was hidden by her bangs.

While walking down the hallway that led to the changing rooms, I was on the verge of tears. We were now completely isolated in the squadron. Even Kaja, who should have trusted us more than anyone else, has turned against us.

On the other hand, death was before our very eyes. No matter how hard we fought, we couldn't stop the fall of Wrocław. We had no choice but to die along with hundreds of thousands of civilians.

(So what was I supposed to do?)

"I'm sorry, Sylwię."

"Irena.....?"

Irena's face was distorted with sadness, and she was trying not to burst into tears.

This was the first time I had seen Irena's tears or heard her whine. Irena had also reached her limit

"I'm unfit to be a squadron commander.....I can't unite everyone's heart in such a difficult situation.....I feel sorry for my seniors who died in battle.....If I wasn't here, I would have been sent to another unit a long time ago....."

"Oh no, Irena, you are not that bad you are doing well"

"I'm not. Besides, Kaja hates me and you are having a hard time because of me forgive me"

"Irena"

The one that has protected me since childhood was crumbling before my eyes. I felt that my footing has suddenly become unstable.

"And there's one thing I've been hiding from everyone even you, Sylwię....."

"Hiding....?"

"We still have a chance to escape."

My whole body stiffened. The whole squadron knew that the chance of escape was already gone. However, Irena was trying to disprove that.

"Only Squadron commanders and above have been informed of this, but the Wroclaw Fortress Command has decided that if the fall of the besieged positions is deemed inevitable, all TSFs and transport helicopters in operation at that time will be mobilized to evacuate the surface pilots and maintenance personnel."

"Bu...But we're 100 kilometers away from our friends, right? In TSF flying range....."

"A TSF unit of the WTO military was supposed to rush in to assist and relay the information somewhere. I don't know if that's really possible though"

I had no answer. I knew why Irena felt guilty about hiding that fact from me.

"But even so, Irena, you still to the end....."

Irena nodded in agreement, like she was resigned to her fate.

"I still want to protect this city,..... even if I know we will be wiped out, even if I can't unite the will of the squadron, I still can't give up my ideals,..... this city is our hometown (Warsaw). We can't allow it to just end up the same way as!"

"Irena"

"Besides, the longer we attract even one more BETA, even one more day, the more we can reorganize our forces. The more we can reorganize the military, the more we can save civilians in other cities....."

".....!"

"We must do our best for what has not yet been lost, because we have lost what we had to protect. I would never tell Kaja and the others to put everything on the line, though."

A fresh surprise. Certainly, as she said, the Wroclaw siege was holding a large number of BETA groups that should have been heading west. The more the siege attracted BETA, the more the WTO forces would be given more room to maneuver. And only a TSF unit, the strongest force in Wroclaw, could do that.

(Irena was not going to continue to fight based solely on her emotions. The battles that have been fought and the battles that will be fought were not meaningless.)

I felt neither resigned nor satisfied, but it was enough for me. Above all, I was glad that Irena had told me the truth.

" Even so, I am still fine with it, Irena."

"Sylwię....."

"Because I, too, think it's disgraceful for a surface pilot to run away from this city after all this time."

I forced a smile on my fatigued, darkened face. Let us at least die as martyrs for our ideals. No one may understand us, but that virtue must be what God demands from us. I thought that Irena's words were like a divine revelation.

"So, no matter how much they hate me, I will stay with you until the end. I am sure that even Kaja will understand someday."

".....Thank you, Sylwię."

Irena's eyes were downcast in embarrassment, then she smiled a smile free from worry, as if to cheer herself up.

"We still have a long way to go, so we have to do our best, right?"

December 23, 7:00 a.m. Polish People's Republic
Gądów Base, Wrocław, Śląsk Region

When I stepped into the work wing dedicated to the 303rd TSF Squadron in the hangar to make adjustments to the TSF in preparation for the day's sortie, there was a distinctly strange atmosphere.

The surface pilots, who should have been adjusting the TSFs, were nowhere to be seen, and all the maintenance crews in the squadron were avoiding eye contact with me. It was as if they had decided to turn a blind eye to whatever was happening.

"There is an unpleasant mood in the air."

Irena said in a stout tone and glared at her surroundings warily.

"Do you have something you want to say to us?"

"Haha~ It's not like that."

Suddenly, out of the shadows of the gantry, Kaja appeared, dressed in her BDU. She was smiling her usual innocent smile, as if she had forgotten the events of the past few days.

"It's just, yesterday, a lot of things happened...."

"A lot of things...?"

"Yes. Well, anyway, I was waiting here to apologize to you both."

"Apologize?"

"Hmm. I've said a lot of terrible things to both of you over the past few days, so I have reflected on that."

"Kaja"

I patted my chest in relief. Kaja did not sincerely hate us. I was glad to know that.

(Let's apologize first.... Then take our time and tell her what happened. Then she will understand. after that, we can start again.)

It's not that hard when the three of us are together, and I'm sure we can get out of here alive... — My eyes were burning from the tears that were about to well, and so I tilted my head and smiled to cover it up.

Irena, however, revealed emotions that were the exact opposite of me. She glared at Kaja, her shoulders shaking, as if directing her anger even more fiercely than the other day.

"So let's talk in the dressing room together. No one is going to see us there..."

"Kaja."

Irena interrupted Kaja, and her cold expression froze.

"Why do you look so good?"

"Eh..... kyaa!"

A moment later, I felt a sharp pain in the back of my head and fell to the ground.

Just before I lost consciousness, I saw Kaja smiling sinisterly and Irena collapsing just like me.



I woke up to the sound of Irena and someone arguing. When my vision returned, I found myself lying on the dusty floor.

Irena and I were taken into a room in the warehouse building, a short distance away from the TSF hangar. All the walls were covered with thick concrete — once the door was closed, no sound could leak outside.

As soon as we woke up and realized their plight, we were confronted by the 2nd flight commander and his men, several maintenance workers — and Kaja.

"What are you going to do!"

Irena, who was tied behind her back along with me, shouted with anger and frustration.

"Do they know what you are doing! If the Milicja Obywatelska finds us, ... and without us, the squadron's strength will be!"

"Shut up! You guys are already in our way!"

The second flight leader answered, breathing hard. There was something akin to madness in his eyes.

"Once the fall of the besieged camp is confirmed, permission to escape will be given from above. But as long as you're in command, we'll be forced to fight in this city even if we're on the verge of running out of fuel..... Right?"

I went pale. The strategy was known only to the squadron commander class, and the resolve that Irena had confided to herself alone. The surface pilots in front of us knew it all.!

"Why Do you know this..."

"Some guy in the East German Army told me... I know it's right, isn't it!?"

The second flight leader forcefully pulled Kaja, who had been silently staring at them until then. Kaja's lips trembled with a complicated expression of mixed feelings of anger and guilt.

"When we were rescued yesterday, an East German chief accountant secretly told her..... that the East Germans were also charged with defending their stockpile of propellant, so it's information that I can't just lie about."

"Oh god"

Irena muttered in dismay — more shocked that Kaja leaked it to the squadron's surface pilots than the fact that operational information had been leaked.

"By the look on your face, it sounds true, doesn't it?"

The second flight leader lifted the corner of his mouth — It seemed that he didn't believe the story just by talking to Kaja, or maybe he didn't care about the facts.

"..... That means you're in cahoots with these guys, Kaja"

Irena exclaimed as she looked up from the floor.

"I know you got a share of the looted food, but do you know where the food came from!?"

"You're the one that's wrong.! YOU, YOU don't think anything of me.!"

As if frightened of herself, Kaja weaved her words.

"I, and everyone here, wanted to get the hell out of this hell, and I just didn't want to die in vain, and yet and yet"

"I wasn't in vain! If we fight here, that alone is enough"

"I've had enough of all that whitewashing! What have civilians done for us? Why should I die for them? Pride and justice as a surface pilot is worth nothing in this city! I don't want to die because of your selfishness!"

"Kaja...."

I muttered, crushed by despair — Kaja was no longer in a place where she could hear our voices...

"That's why I want you to stay here and be quiet."

The second flight leader grabbed Irena by the jaw with a face like a rabid dog.

"Don't worry, you'll have to survive until we get permission to leave. In the meantime, you guys are missing I'll report you as having abandoned your mission and ran away. Actually, you're never getting out of here again. Same thing, right?"

"So you want the BETA to handle it:!?"

Irena asks in frustration. The second flight commander didn't answer anything, but only smiled cruelly. Kaja was pale and said nothing.

"Let go of Sylwie now! You need her strength! This girl has done nothing!"

"Heh! I thought I could hear those lines, which is why I got this guy along with me. Besides, the two of us have more than enough people to deal with."

"What are you saying....."

Irena's face paled, but her expression seemed to indicate that she was aware of what was about to happen to us. Hopelessness gripped my heart.

"Stop it. Even more so, you should only take me...."

"Who the hell listens to you now! Well, then, we still have some time before the sortie, and I'm going to have some fun, okay? I'm going to make you regret being born a woman — starting with that flunky over there!"

"No. No! Somebody help me, help meeeeeee!"

I could only let out a scream that never reached anyone as the men, who were literally hungry beasts, grabbed my whole body as they approached.



December 24, 9:00 a.m. Polish People's Republic
Gądów Base, Wrocław, Śląsk Region

"Ugh....."

I slowly opened my eyelids with a small moan. The moment I awoke, I was hit by a biting cold. I remembered that I had lost consciousness on the cold concrete. Was it fortunate or unfortunate that I had not frozen to death?

Stomach juices tangled in my throat and I coughed involuntarily — I didn't know how much I threw up yesterday. Every part of my body ached, and it was not easy to even stand up.

(It wasn't a dream, it wasn't)

With more tears on my swollen face, I remembered yesterday — just remembering it made me nauseous and I coughed again. The ribbon tying my hair back had somehow come undone.

"Ugh ugh!"

I turned my head to look at the voice behind me, and a sense of unbearable pain.

Irena was crying. She was in the same shape as me, with her body lying on the ground, and her shoulders shaking. The only thing I was sure of was that she no longer had a body that she could show to the one she had feelings for.

The surface pilots concentrated their pent-up resentment on Irena, not me. Irena, who had initially resisted the pilots violently, had her will gradually crushed by their relentless actions, and in the end, she feebly begged for forgiveness.

"Irena"

I called out in a sad voice, but Irena didn't look at me. She continued to cry as if rejecting everything. I couldn't imagine how much despair and humiliation Irena's heart was now stained with.

I looked down at the dirty floor surface, and I feel like I was in an abyss when I thought of both of our fates from now on.

(We can't get away from here anymore)

I stared at the sturdy, locked door, my expression contorted. Unless that door was opened by a well-meaning third party, Irena and I would eventually be killed.

Not only sorrow, but anger and hatred welled up in me. Towards the 2nd flight leaders who defiled us, and towards Kaja who betrayed us. We loved each other, we were all friends. She must have known that Irena also had someone she wished to see again, just like her, and yet....

(Unforgivable Absolutely unforgivable)

The thoughts were all overflowing, but there was nothing that could be done in reality. Escape was impossible — the door was locked from the outside. There was no way to call out for help. There was a small amount of ammunition in the warehouse, but without weapons, there was nothing we can do. A few hours ago there was a guard, but now he has disappeared.

I bit my lip so hard I could taste my blood at my own helplessness.

(We would rather die here than continue to be their playthings)

Tears, which I thought had dried up, ran down my cheeks again. The taunts of the men who had taken away what was precious to me reverberated in my skull. I wanted to kill them - I wanted to die - The taste of iron spread in my mouth. If I bite off my tongue like this, I might die.

The next moment, the earth rumbled with a huge impact. A series of gunfire shots roared through the air.

"Wh....What the?"

I got up, my whole body bathed in the dust that fell from the ceiling — and the next moment, a roar reached me as several TSF flew past the vicinity, blasting their Jumping units. The rumblings and gunfire have only increased in intensity.

(No way BETA.....)

Suddenly, with the sound of a lock being unfastened, the door to the warehouse was opened with great force. One of the maintenance workers who had tortured us yesterday appeared. He was holding a pistol.

"Stay where you are! We're just here to get ammo! Don't move!"

I felt fear before anger — I could only think of one situation where the maintenance team would need ammunition.

"BETA are approaching here"

"Just now, the 10th Tank Division's frontline has been breached - or worse, raided! Other battle zones are being breached one by one!"

Ignoring each other's position, he replied with his mind greatly distributed. His attention was completely focused on me.

"..... What about the TSF!?"

"Of course they're out there! It's none of your business! Anyways, here..."

It was then that Irena, who was supposed to be lying on the ground behind him, moved.

She threw the blanket she was wearing at the maintenance worker, and while she did so, she rushed forward, yelling like an animal, tackling him, and knocking him down. Before I could react, she snatched a pistol and thrust it at him while leaning over to show him what he had done to her.

"No, stop! Don't shoot! I was just invited by them to!"

"And what if you were?"

Irena's voice was filled with hatred — immediately after, a gunshot rang out, and the maintenance man was shot through the head and died.

I remained speechless, staring at the events unfolding before me.

"Irena?"

"Go quickly, Sylwię."

While dripping blood from all over her body, Irena muttered something as if she was trying to hold something in.

"Maybe either you or I still have some MiG-21s (Balalaika) left If we take hostages, we can make it to the TSF..... at least you can make it to the TSF....."

At least you... A bad premonition was taking over my brain.

"No. let's run away together. If you live, ..."

"I'm sorry, Sylwię,..... I told you I would protect you and then this happened,..... I can't do it anymore,..... I can't fight as a surface pilot,..... I've been betrayed, I can't even protect this city, and now that I'm in this body, there's no meaning to my life."

She then put the pistol he had taken to her temple — and turned her grief-stricken face to me.

"So, I'm sorry."

The sound of gunfire echoed once again. Irena crumbled down to the floor in front of me, blood and gray things spraying from her head. The tepid pieces stuck to my cheek.

"I rena....."

I muttered in an empty voice, not understanding the meaning of what had happened before my eyes. Irena rolled on the floor powerless with her eyes open, looking like a doll. However, a red pool of blood spread rapidly from her head. The things sticking to my cheek also fell to the floor, drawing red blood.

"Oh no, it's a lie..... why hey, wake up, Irena"

I ran up to Irena and shook her shoulder. Of course, there was no response. For a long time, the friend I had lived with did not respond to my call.

"Wake up, Irena. You said we shouldn't make this city like our home. You said it was the role of the surface pilots to protect everyone until the end."

With colorless eyes, I continued to shake her shoulders pointlessly. Irena remained staring somewhere that was not here.

"I've come this far with you, so why"

Unable to comprehend the reality — no, in the back of my mind, I fully understood, and screamed.

"Why, why, whyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!"

Same day, 10:00 a.m. Polish People's Republic
Gądów Base, Wrocław, Śląsk Region

With the beginning of the BETA offensive, the area around the Gądów base became a battlefield of chaos and madness. One flight of TSFs attempted to escape from the siege with insufficient propellant and without permission from their superiors, while another flight raided a propellant stockpile and met up with another flight with the same objective and began to engage them.

The 303rd TSF Squadron was one of the luckier ones. Thanks to Kaja's advance information, the maintenance team had secured several supply vehicles equipped with propellant ahead of the rest of the squadron, and had succeeded in launching the operational TSFs with a full supply of propellant. The commander and his comrades looked us and took the chance to escape, and he had promised not to abandon the maintenance team when they escaped. It was the result of their unity through that earlier sense of complicity.

The BETA hordes had reached the city, where an unmistakable hell had emerged.

Kaja's ears, seated in the control unit, heard the voice of the second flight commander, who has been the new commander since yesterday, losing his composure.

『—Each TSF, fall back to the city center! We've been fighting on the runway to keep our distance, but we've reached our limit! We'll meet up with the maintenance team and get the hell out of here...!』

『I, what about Irena? What about Sylwii?』

『—We were going to abandon them at the time of the escape anyways. We just did it a little earlier than intended! You are the same as any of us, so why are you playing nice now!?!』

The second flight leader ranted about the fact that Kaja chose to do this. With these words, Kaja deployed the Jump units to the left and right. Following the leader's TSF, the flight started to retreat with short boosts. The other TSFs followed suit.

Ahead of them, huge numbers of Grappler and Tank classes were approaching, climbing over the piles of debris. Although they had shot down a considerable number of them in the battle so far, they were nothing but a drop in the ocean in the face of their overwhelming numbers never before seen in the past. The force that had been once a squadron has now been reduced to only four TSFs, including Kaja.

The TSF driven by Kaja was the MiG-21 (Balalaika) used by Sylwia until the day before yesterday. She could not get into Irena's TSF — because she realized what she had done. While frantically shaking her head, she tried to dispel the guilt that was welling up in her.

(I was just trying to survive)

Kaja recalled yesterday's horrific scene — all she could do was watch as the two of them were helplessly preyed upon. She chose to sell them, her best friends, and survive on her own.

(No, no, no! I didn't! I didn't do anything wrong)

It would have been better if Irena had yielded before the situation got to this point.

(But Irena didn't do that. So it wasn't me who was at fault)

They continue to move rapidly and retreat through the streets of the ruined city, where an endless avalanche of small species was pouring in from the broken battle lines. People hiding in the city center would soon be swallowed up, and the citizens gathered in the park by the base airstrip would be the perfect hunting ground for the BETA. The command center had ceased to issue orders, and the siege of Wroclaw was about to reach its final moment.

The battle situation window that was open in one corner of the retina made Kaja feel uncomfortable — A marker indicating a MiG-21 (Balalaika) was seen approaching them while avoiding the BETA swarms that filled the area around the runway. According to the incoming IFF signal, it was... [\(28\)](#)

(Belonging to the 303rd TSF Squadron — Irena's TSF!)

A chill of fear runs down Kaja's spine — She could only assume that it was either Irena or Sylwia, or both, had succeeded in escaping. Why were they coming toward them? — She didn't even need to think about it. The wingman surface pilot sensed the same thing and exclaimed in appalled disbelief,

『—Sir, we have a local link... and that woman is getting closer!』

『—How the hell did she get out of? What about communications with the maintenance team!?』

『—It does not connect! Perhaps the BETA attack was too much for them... and that woman must have taken advantage of that opportunity to take the TSF!』

『—Damn it! This is not the time or place for that...』

The next moment, the 2nd flight leader's TSF was pierced by a flash of light, and after a moment, it exploded — proving with his own death that the laser class was within range of the siege position.

『—Hey, flight leader, hey... ahhh!』

The MiG-21s (Balalaika) were destroyed one after another.

With confused thoughts, Kaja hid her TSF in the shadows of the rubble that used to be the city, but even there, tank classes were biting at her like ants at a sugar cane.

「Don't come! Don't come clooooooser!」



With no time to worry about remaining ammunition, Kaja simply pounded the 36 mm bullets into the approaching BETA. She realized that she was the only survivor.

(No! I don't want to die here! I have no choice but to survive.!)

It was then that her mind slightly drew a blank. — 36 mm shells struck the Grappler class that she was about to strike, transforming it into a piece of meat.

The silhouette of Irena's TSF was projected on Kaja's retina.

「I, Irena, is it? Sylwię, ...!」

Kaja called out with bewilderment, fear, and anticipation to the approaching MiG-21 (Balalaika). She then suddenly remembered to operate the console — and the status of the surface pilot on board Irena's TSF was displayed.

「Sylwię, you're alive! I...」

The 36mm cannon responded to Kaja's call — Immediately after, the jump unit on the right side of Kaja's MiG-21 (Balalaika) was blown away. The impact shook the control unit, and a warning sound indicated the leakage of propellant.

Unaware of what was happening, Kaja screamed.

「Stop, Sylwię, what the hell are you!」

Sylwia's TSF slammed Kaja's TSF from its right shoulder in an even more violent impact. The TSF was buried in rubble, and Kaja was hit by an impact that exceeded the buffer function of her fortified suit.

『——Ahhhhhhhhh!』

Sylwia's TSF held still the head of the Kaja's TSF buried in a pile of rubble with its arms, and continuously fired shells at the joints of both legs and arms.

「No, no, Sylwię, ...! Please! Stop it!」

Kaja screamed, as she figured out Sylwia's intentions. Alerts were sounding in the cockpit, and warning windows danced on her retina to indicate that both the main legs and arms were badly damaged.

But Sylwia's attack was not over. 36 mm cannon shells were also slammed into the drive unit of the jump unit on the left side, and Kaja's TSF was blocked from any action. And then...

『——! Just like that!』

Sylwia then grabbed a handful of concrete debris and continuously slammed it into the chest of Kaja's TSF. With the sound of the blows, the armor was gradually distorting — this made emergency bailout by ejection of the control unit impossible. The only means of escape that remained was to use the reinforced exoskeleton to destroy the control unit and the armor and power out, but as long as BETA were nearby, there was no possibility of escape in time.

After destroying the chest armor, Sylwia's MiG-21 (Balalaika) tossed the concrete, pulled the assault gun off of Kaja's destroyed right arm, and mounted it on her own gun mount. There was no hesitation in her fluid movement.

「Why Why are you doing this.....!？」

Kaja asked, desperately seeking relief.

「If you do this to me, I'm going to die here I will die!」

『—— So what?』

Staring at Kaja with an expression of burning carnage, Sylwia gave a short answer. There was not a shred of her from the days when she believed in the ideals shown by Irena and how she was willing to protect anyone. Her dirty silver hair shimmered like a curse.

『——But this is the answer you wanted.』

「Sylwię.....? Please help me! I'm sorry about yesterday! Hey, Irena, what's wrong with Irena! I'll apologize, I promise, okay!」

『——Irena is dead. Isn't that Good? You got your wish.』

「.....」

『——This time it is my turn to get what I want. Goodbye Kaja, and Good luck.』

Sylwia looked at Kaja contemptuously and, without saying a word, blew the jump unit and left the scene.

As if to take her place, a large number of tank classes appeared from the surrounding area and were seen gathering toward the TSF as if they had found a good prey.

「No way I don't want to end like that」

The horror of three days ago came back to her.

「No, Nooooooooooooo.....!」

It was only a few seconds later that a swarm of tank classes pounced on her all at once.

◇ ◇ ◇

I was gripping the control stick with tears streaming down my face. In my headset, Kaja's screams for help and the eerie sound of tank classes gnawing away at the TSF reached me.

My eyelids were overflowing with tears, but I still kept listening to my best friend's dying voice without turning off the radio.

(I'm the one who decided to do this - so I'll listen to Kaja until the end)

Kaja's curses eventually became pleas, then madness. The creaking cacophony of metal grew louder as the remorseful and scathing words were repeated over and over again.

「Irena.....、 Kaja.....」

I detested myself as I murmured these names.

(Irena clung to her ideals and was crushed by them in the end Kaja was swallowed by reality and threw Irena into hell)

I realized that my own mind was going haywire. I could not save my friends, I left many civilians to die, and I could not take into account the ideals of my friend. I even took my friend's life by my own hands. What was the meaning of my life?

(I'm not a decent person anymore surely I shouldn't be happy)

My heart writhed in agony with a huge sense of guilt but that did not seem to allow me to continue to believe in the ideals that Irena had set forth, or to forgive Kaja and the others for their betrayal.

In the face of the harsh reality of BETA, no matter what ideal you have, you will be crushed by their weight, and trusting your friends leads to betrayal. Because I did not know this, my mind and body were stained, and I lost and killed my best friends who had supported me since I was a child.

(If I had thought and acted more on my own, if I hadn't been so half-prepared, maybe none of this would have happened. Maybe I could have laughed with Kaja and Irena and with them until the end. I can no longer trust not only my ideals and my friends, but even myself. What I did should never be forgiven either! But I can't die now!)

A Flashback appeared before me, to the cruel end of Irena's life. — surely suicide would be a relief. However, it was nothing more than an escape from the sins one has borne.

Murderers should continue to suffer in the depths of hell — they should continue to fight on the battlefield and kill until they die.

(So at least I will fight alone I will survive as long as possible and kill as many BETA as possible!)



I am no longer a human being, but only a remnant of the regret of those who died in Poland. Therefore, I must become stronger. Otherwise, I will never be able to make up for the regret of the people I have abandoned. I cannot go back to being the pure and innocent girl who had no doubts about believing in something.

While breaking through the urban area, I slipped through the BETA swarm, and reached the outer edge of the city. A large number of BETA hordes were swarming in front of me, but now that most of them were heading toward the city center, there was still a possibility of escape.

Kaja's final scream — a horrible scream that cannot be believed to be uttered by a human being, ruptured my eardrums. Hearing this, I abandoned the citizens and drove my TSF toward a friendly base in the rear. I shot only the BETA that have been obstacles to my TSF, and never wasted a bullet. In my field of vision, I saw the white earth and reddish-black bodily fluids — The contrast triggered my memories and reminded me of today's date.

December 24, Christmas Eve. That important day a week before the end began, when Irena, Kaja, and I promised to celebrate it as we did when we were children.

But now everything was lost. The promise of that day, the friendship between the three of us, our trust in our friends, our pride as surface pilots, the city of Wroclaw, and the hundreds of thousands of innocent people we had decided to protect.

「——..... ! Aaaaaaaaaah!」

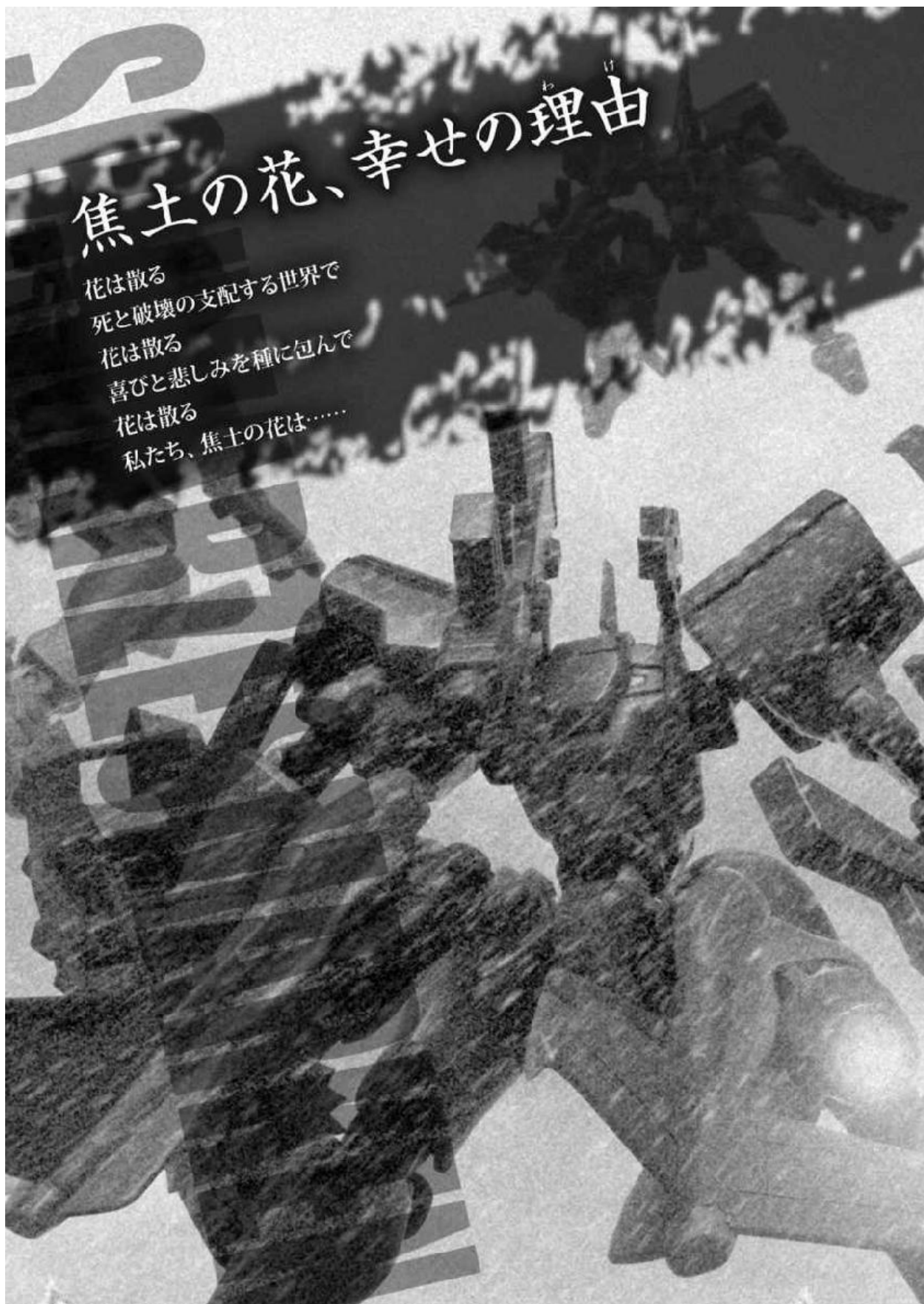
I was sobbing and screaming but my voice never came out, and overwhelmed by unbearable emotions, I continued my rush through the white, closed world, relying solely on my electronic equipment.

To the west, where a future tinged with despair awaits — to a land of red carnage yet to be seen...

Episode End.

焦土の花、幸せの理由

花は散る
死と破壊の支配する世界で
花は散る
喜びと悲しみを種に包んで
花は散る
私たち、焦土の花は……



1982年の東ヨーロッパ

1982年現在、欧州最大の激戦場は東ドイツである。東方から迫るBETAの攻勢を阻止するべく、東ドイツはオーデル川、ナイセ川の西岸に強固な防衛ラインを構築、本土の死守を図っている。

第666戦術機中隊をはじめとする東ドイツ軍の戦術機部隊は、BETAの攻勢方向に併せて基地を移動しながら光線級殲滅のための攻撃機動(光線級呐喊)を繰り返すという、文字どおり戦場を駆け巡る日々を送っている。人員の損耗も激しく、戦場で共に戦う衛士たちの顔ぶれもその都度変わっていく。

10月以降、BETAの攻勢はオーデル川中流域周辺をターゲットとしており、東ドイツ軍は同地周辺に戦術機部隊を集中、防衛に当たっている。



Scorched Earth Flowers - Reason for Happiness

The flowers scatter

In a world where death and destruction reign

The flowers spread

Wrapping joy and sorrow in seeds

The flowers fall

We, The Scorched Earth flowers

1982 Eastern Europe

As of 1982, the largest battleground in Europe was East Germany. In order to stop the BETA offensive approaching from the East, East Germany has built a strong defensive line on the west bank of the Oder and Neisse rivers to defend the mainland.

The 666th TSF squadron and other East German TSF units were literally running around the battlefield, moving from base to base in accordance with the direction of the BETA offensive and repeating Laserjagds to destroy laser class targets. The personnel were heavily depleted, and the faces of the surface pilots who fought with them on the battlefield changed each time.

Since October, the BETA offensive has targeted the area around the middle reaches of the Oder River, and East German forces have concentrated TSF units in the area for defense.

**October 4, 1982, 11:30 a.m. German Democratic Republic
West bank of the Neisse River (Eisenhüttenstadt fortified position).**

In the control unit of the MiG-21 (Balalaika), only my small breathing echoed.

I was trying to brush off of all the thoughts that kept coming up one after another, but I was too nervous to do that. I might die here... I was trapped in the illusion that the connect seat didn't fit me, and I kept flinching as I took my seat.

『—Would you please stop showing off your half-assed breasts on the monitor before a battle, Anett? I can't help but be distracted.』

I guessed her intention and immediately cut her off while she was blurting out some nonsensical remarks.

「Frederica..... I hope you also grow up as fast as I did. I highly recommend synthetic skimmed milk powder by the way.」

『—What the hell?』

『—YOU BOTH! You are slacking in the face of battle! You want to be accused of being defeatists!?!』
(29)

The Political commissar, First Lt. Gretel Jeckeln yelled angrily. Good grief, even though I was just trying to make the juniors relaxed.

『—All hands, Achtung! (30) Ready your TSFs! It's hunting time!』

The CO... Captain Irisdina Bernhard's order, echoed. Our Squadron was at a rallying point behind the "Eisenhüttenstadt Fortified Position" which was well-known as one of the fiercest battlegrounds. (31)

『— From here on, The 666th TSF Squadron will now break into the BETA swarm and sweep the laser class. The quota is 3 groups, about 100 units, and the time limit is 1200 seconds! As always, It's a tough job, but if we give it our all, all 12 TSFs should make it out alive!』

I took a moment to catch my breath. My palm that was gripping the control stick was filled with energy.

『— All TSFs, follow my rear! 666th Tactical Surface Fighter Squadron "Schwarzesmarken", move in for the assault!』

「Roger...! Woooooooooah!」

I pressed down on the foot pedal and shouted with all my might as I heard the responses of the other surface pilots. The yell distracted me from the fear of death. Before I knew it, somewhere along the line,

it became a habit I thought to myself. Even though I've been on many sorties in the past, I couldn't stand the fear of death. I didn't know what would happen even today, and yet I still fight. — In the corner of my view, a colleague TSF flying in NOE entered my field of vision.

「Inghild, I am counting on you today as well!」

『——I know, Anett!』

My partner, Inghild Bronikowski, responded immediately.

『——I'll have your back Anett ... so go all out, and fight to your heart's content.』

I looked at Inghild's face — just like mine, it was stiffened with fear and nervousness, but I forced a smile and we smiled at each other. Of course, it was a bluff, but this was our way of doing things.

The squadron was split into a vanguard and a rearguard, and was charging in two wedge formations (arrowheads). Inghild and I were in the rearguard. The squadron was entering under the influence of a heavy metal cloud as I confirmed from the battle area map. In the distance were numerous red blips indicating a BETA swarm. Good. If we keep going like this....

The next moment, a cluster of red light spots (blips) on the battle area map split to the left and right.

「.....!!」

A window indicating initial irradiation detection was displayed with a warning sound, and Captain Bernhard's shout echoed immediately after.

『——All TSFs, Random Number Avoidance! Hurry uppppp!!』 [\(32\)](#)

A moment later, the sounds of huge explosions reverberated, and several white beams of light pierced the left and right sides of my TSF.

Thirty minutes later, eight MiG-21s (Balalaikas) were dripping reddish-black bodily fluids while flying at low altitude over the fortified position where the battle with the BETA was still raging. All of the TSFs had discarded their Schürzen during the battle, and no TSF was unscathed. My TSF's fuselage and also the right shoulder armor were badly damaged. The operation was hardly a success. I managed to fulfill my quota, but with this much damage, I would not be able to launch any sorties for a few days. It was possible that the BETA might invade again tomorrow as well.

The cause was obvious. It was the irradiation of the laser class received during the initial response to their attacks. One of the squadron's TSFs was destroyed and two were damaged, forcing the squadron to send away one of its TSFs to cover the retreat. As a result, the battle against the laser class was carried out by eight TSFs,.....We had no way of knowing the exact location of the laser classes before we entered the area, and no way of preventing the unexpected exposure of the lasers.

「.....」

The feeling of nausea was added to the exhaustion that was overpowering my entire body — the man who died in the irradiation was a young surface pilot who had just been assigned to the squadron, a 16-year-old boy who I had only spoken a few words with at the briefing. I didn't even remember his name yet.

This was the third time in the past two months that a 12th surface pilot has lost his life as soon as he was assigned to the squadron. It was no surprise that on the battlefield, the younger guys were flopping dead before the veterans, but that didn't mean that

『——Anett, are you okay?』

It was the worried voice of my partner. Whenever I was feeling down, Inghild always called out to me — even though she was having a hard time as well.

「Of course! I was just a little distracted.」

I smiled with all the energy I could muster. To reassure Inghild and the young juniors, I had to be always in good spirits.

「What about you? I guess I pushed you too hard because I cut in too deep back there.」

『——It's nothing really. It's as you see, thanks to you Anett, I had no trouble.』

I smiled and shook my head — That was an obvious lie. She had less than 10% of ammunition left, and her face was clearly tired.

My strong point was close quarters combat, and Inghild supported me with artillery fire — that's how our roles were assigned, I knew that much, but it was still hard to see Inghild's exhausted face. But if I told her that, she would be burdened even more. So I said the best I could.

「Thanks for everything as always, Inghild.」

『——Fufu, you are always welcome.』

Inghild smiled prettily as she shook her slicked-back blonde hair around her shoulders.

Her smile was beautiful, like a flower.

Theodore, who was looking at our exchange across the communication window, had a clearly displeased expression on his face, but I pretended not to notice. He has always been like this, despising others.

Ever since the three of us first met.

**October 4, 1982, 4:00 p.m., German Democratic Republic
Herzberg Base, Frankfurt**

It was three years ago, when I was in the TSF Military Academy for Gifted Children, undergoing a fast-track education to become a surface pilot.

In a classroom at the TSF academy, Inghild stood pale and tearful as she looked at the desk where a number of abusive words had been scribbled with a red magic marker.

"Capitalist stooges."

"You are the child of a Nazi officer, why are you still alive?"

"Dirty Blood"

"Whore."

When I saw it, I remember that the blood in my whole body was about to regurgitate. She was harassed simply because she had the blood of a landowning aristocrat (Junker). I couldn't accept the idea of my classmates tormenting her for such a reason, and I was furious at those who had joined in the bullying.

It's not very girly of me to say, but I was physically strong and hated to bend to anyone's will, so there was no way I would turn a blind eye to a classmate being unreasonably bullied. However, it was an unbelievable incident for Inghild, who had been tormented for the same reason ever since she was a child.

The people who had been harassing her were not very friendly, but after the incident, she soon became friends with the other children in her class. And for me and Inghild, we became more than just friends. I loved the kind and good-natured Inghild, and Inghild loved me more than anyone else.

After graduating from the Gifted Children Academy, we were assigned to different units and separated from each other, but it was a year later that we were reunited in the 666th TSF Squadron.



Even if you returned home safely, your work as a surface pilot was not over. There were debriefings, meetings with maintenance personnel to discuss adjustments to the TSF, and a short memorial service for the dead. In some cases, we had to be on standby for another sortie.

Fortunately, we had only one sortie that day, and we were released two hours after our return.

Our daily life would resume.

"Aaah~My body is on fire!"

I raised my voice as the white dense steam began to envelop the sauna room.

This was the sauna at the Herzberg base where we were stationed. It was recommended for the surface pilots to take a sauna bath to recover from fatigue.

"Hmm~, it's great to be able to stretch out in a place like this"

I raised my arms and straightened my back. It was very pleasant to feel my muscles that have been stiffened by fatigue relaxing.

The sauna was co-ed. We were wrapped in towels, but many people didn't care about that.

"But I don't like it when I have to go out on many sorties in a row, because it makes my skin rough....."

I muttered in frustration as I spread the palms of my hands.

"Hey, Inghild, ..., wait a minute, Again!"

With that, I let go of my partner, who was huddling her body next to me intimately.

"Kya! Anett, what are you doing!"

"You're here to relax your body, to relive your fatigue, so what are YOU doing!"

"Be....Because everybody else's eyes are fixed on me."

I hesitantly returned back to my original posture.

"It's odd that we all go in the sauna together. when there are showers in the private rooms."

Inghild turned her head around with a frightened look. The way she looked at me was like a cat afraid of the bathtub, and it was very cute. It seemed that Inghild was embarrassed to show her naked body in public, especially in front of a bunch of guys. Until she joined the army, she had few opportunities to do so. That's why, when she would come here with me, she was always like this.

That's not to say that I was not embarrassed but in Inghild's case, it was too extreme. I didn't have anything to be ashamed of, and I had a rather enviable body, so why not be proud of it?

"Anett, you are too cute for your own good....."

..... Wait a minute. If that's the case, then what's with that skin that was a lot whiter than mine? What were these huge bosoms, swaying in the towel, and looking like they were 50% larger than mine?

"With a body more toned than mine"

No, when we walk together, all the guys gather to look at you, and I am not going to lie, it's a subtle comfort. however.....

"I have nothing going for me except my big breasts....."

.....o

"That's why I'm so jealous of you, Anett."

"No! That's complete bullshit!"

"Kyaaaah!"

I stood up, ignoring Inghild's shriek. Damn it, even though that girl has been blessed with a piece from heaven.....

"Okay? You are definitely more girly than I am! Have a little confidence!"

I was not being modest. I really thought so. I thought so so much that I could shed tears of blood.

"But, I mean, the likes of me"

"I don't give a shit! What are you talking about with those huge breasts dangling like that!?"

"I...I am not letting them dangle anywhere, and I can't help it anyway!"

"Stand up! And find a sweetheart! Even if it seems impossible!"

"Even if you tell me that ...!"

"Yeaah.... an irresolute girl like you won't cut it....."

I grabbed Inghild by the hand and made her stand up on the spot, then at that moment

"Senpai, thanks for your hard work!"

"Gah!"

Suddenly, I felt a cold, intense pain in my lower back.

"As expected of my battle-worn senpai, I found you going to relieve your fatigue without delay. I too, as Janka, think that's the duty of a surface pilot, and that's why I followed along."

Something that hugged me around the waist kept talking on without pause. I wanted to complain, but the pain was too great to speak.

"Hey, senior, what's going on?"

"Mo...."

"Mo?"

"Move away!!!!"

I did my best to shake loose the thing that was wrapped around my waist My junior Janka Koum. [\(33\)](#) — and blew her off. I was rough you say? It's okay. This girl's athleticism was extraordinary.

Just as I thought, Janka flipped her supple limbs and side ponytails and landed with aplomb, as one would expect from a former rhythmic gymnast, but I didn't think it was a good idea to expose her pose completely naked and without a shred of shame.

"However, to not notice my boost jump from behind, you still have a long way to go, senpai!"

"Hey, you"

I involuntarily pressed my hand against my forehead. Even though she adored me, I wished she would not give me this strong skinship.

"Oh! Was Inghild-Senpai with you! Then, let's give senpai a big hug..... I missed youuuuu..... aaah!"

Janka squatted down while holding the back of her head, and behind her was another junior with a very boyish look, raising her right fist.

"Cut it out this instant, Janka! Our seniors are troubled."

"Aaah, go easy on me, Izochi."

"It's Isolde Friesner! Don't say Izochi! I am sorry, my seniors!"

Isolde, Janka's peer, bowed her head. Her very serious face and short bob of black hair kept going up and down.

"And Janka, get off your ass and apologize! God, after all, today you were so obsessed with the tank class. It's a good thing there were only so few of them."

"I could have managed that much on my own! Even you, Izochi, were swinging around that long sword too much, you should stop using it!"

"I...It's ok! I have remarkably improved you know And stop saying Izochi!"

"Okay, Okay. I get it. I get it."

I held them both down with my both hands. I couldn't keep up with these quarrelsome juniors.

Janka and Isolde were one year younger than us. Six months ago, we were both inducted into this Squadron, and we have managed to survive ever since. Janka, who had the athleticism and intuition of a wild child, and Isolde, who was overly serious, seemed to make a noisy but well-balanced pair.

While holding the two of them who were screaming like cats in a fight, I asked them what was bothering them.

"Hey, Janka, if you're here, that means Frederica is here, too, right?"

"Of course not! She left the changing room before me!"

"Before you?"

"Speak of the devil and you shall see it, isn't that right, Anett Hosenfeld?"

That's the third time a new figure has emerged from beyond the steam — everyone loved to make some noise.

Frederika Müncheberg approached, brushing her shiny blue-black hair back. Her demeanor was more refined than Inghild's and her breasts, which were even shabbier than Janka's, were hidden by a towel, creating an incredible gap.

"This is a social gathering place for ladies and gentlemen, and you're all being very loud. I wonder whose educational policy is responsible for this."

"....It's not yours?"

"What did you say!?"

If it weren't for her hotheadedness, she would have been very charming.

Frederica was a surface pilot who graduated from the TSF Academy for Gifted Children in the same year as us. However, because she took the entrance examination six months late, she entered the academy as a student one term below us.

There is a funny story about this. In fact, Frederica's parents were officers of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), and she was the youngest of her four sisters. She should have attended a regular Military

Academy, not a TSF Gifted Children Academy, which only offered a curriculum for the rapid training of surface pilots.

The reason why she didn't go on to a normal academy was simply because she failed the regular officer's exam. She was supposed to be smarter than us, but she was so nervous that she got a fever on the day of the exam and was in bed for about a month afterwards. So he had no choice but to go to a children's academy. She was a very unfortunate elite.

Though, I really am not holding all of that against her in any way. Frederica didn't flaunt her authority, impose her ideology, or snitch on her friends to political commissars or the Stasi, like the other elites do. Besides, Frederica could have used her parents' connections to get a rear area assignment if she wanted to, but she volunteered to be assigned to a high loss ratio unit like the 666th TSF Squadron. She is always picking fights with me, but she was the one who was really trying to protect this country.

"Speaking of which, Frederica."

I asked with a serious face. Yes, I had something I really wanted to inquire about from her.

"What is it? Even if you apologize now, ..."

"Are you okay?"

Her expression hardens — Bingo. We were in an element together, and she was supposed to be taking care of someone from now on. The new guy who died right in front of her. She couldn't have been in her right mind.

"..... Huh, so it's not obvious. Who do you think I am? I am Frederika Müncheberg. I don't have a soft heart like you guys, okay?"

She inhaled in laughter and brushed her hair up. I decided to ignore the fact that her voice was trembling.

"What about what you were saying earlier? I think you were talking about how to make Inghild fall in love with someone."

"You've been listening to me this whole time!"

"My bad! You girls were babbling so much that I didn't have time to interrupt!"

You are not being honest with your feelings, aren't you?..... Inghild looked at us dumbfounded. She didn't expect the conversation to come back to that.

"So, what kind of man do you prefer, Inghild Bronikowski?"

"My, my taste.....?"

"If I don't know that, I can't introduce you."

She responded as if that was natural for a friend. The good thing about Frederica was that she never discriminated, even against someone born like Inghild.

"I never thought about that."

Her thin body shrank as she muttered shyly - or rather, somewhat sadly – as she lowered her gaze.

"Fighting for everyone has been my long-cherished ambition ... Someone can't possibly be happy if they fall in love with the likes of me"

Frederica and I looked at each other reflexively — it was only at times like this that I could be in perfect harmony with that girl. Funny, isn't it?

"Hey, Frederica. Don't you think Inghild still needs to be spanked?"

"What a coincidence. I was just thinking the same thing."

"What? What on earth are you"

I pointed my index finger at Inghild.

"All hands, Achtung! Let's pull the towel off Inghild! Let that nice body Frederica is so envious of be exposed to the public! I'm going to fix that loser gut of hers!"

"Schwarz 11, copy!"

"Schwarz 10, copy!"

"What? What? Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

All of them made a boost jump toward the attack target.

Of course, all five of us were severely scolded by the bathhouse manager that day.



The weight of the noble blood that flew through Inghild bound her.

The landowning aristocracy (Junkers) controlled the German military and land until the end of World War II. After the war, the Soviet Union, which occupied East Germany, not only liberated the land of the Junkers, but also stripped them of their titles as "Symbols of Corrupt Capitalism," "Agents of Nazi

Germany," and "Enemies of Socialism" in order to win popular support, and subjected them to discrimination. As a result, many Junkers became impoverished and fell into poverty.

Inghild Bronikowski's family was no exception. Her parents were unable to find decent jobs due to state pressure and depended on what little land they had left to make a living. Inghild was proud of her parents, but suffered under the weight of her own blood growing up. In order to help her parents and to give herself a reason to live in East Germany, she decided to become a surface pilot.

That's why Inghild was always saying this. "The likes of me." She said that she fights as a surface pilot not for herself, but for everyone else.

We are surface pilots. We drive TSFs for the sake of humanity, our fatherland, and our comrades, fight BETA, and one day we will die eventually. Everyone was already prepared for that.

Of course, I was afraid of dying too, and I didn't want to die. But even though tomorrow may never come, I might not be able to accept her way of life, but I could understand her.

However, I felt like I shouldn't admit that Inghild's life would end up like this.

It is absolutely wrong that your misfortune was determined by the blood that flows through you, even if it was because of the BETA or war.

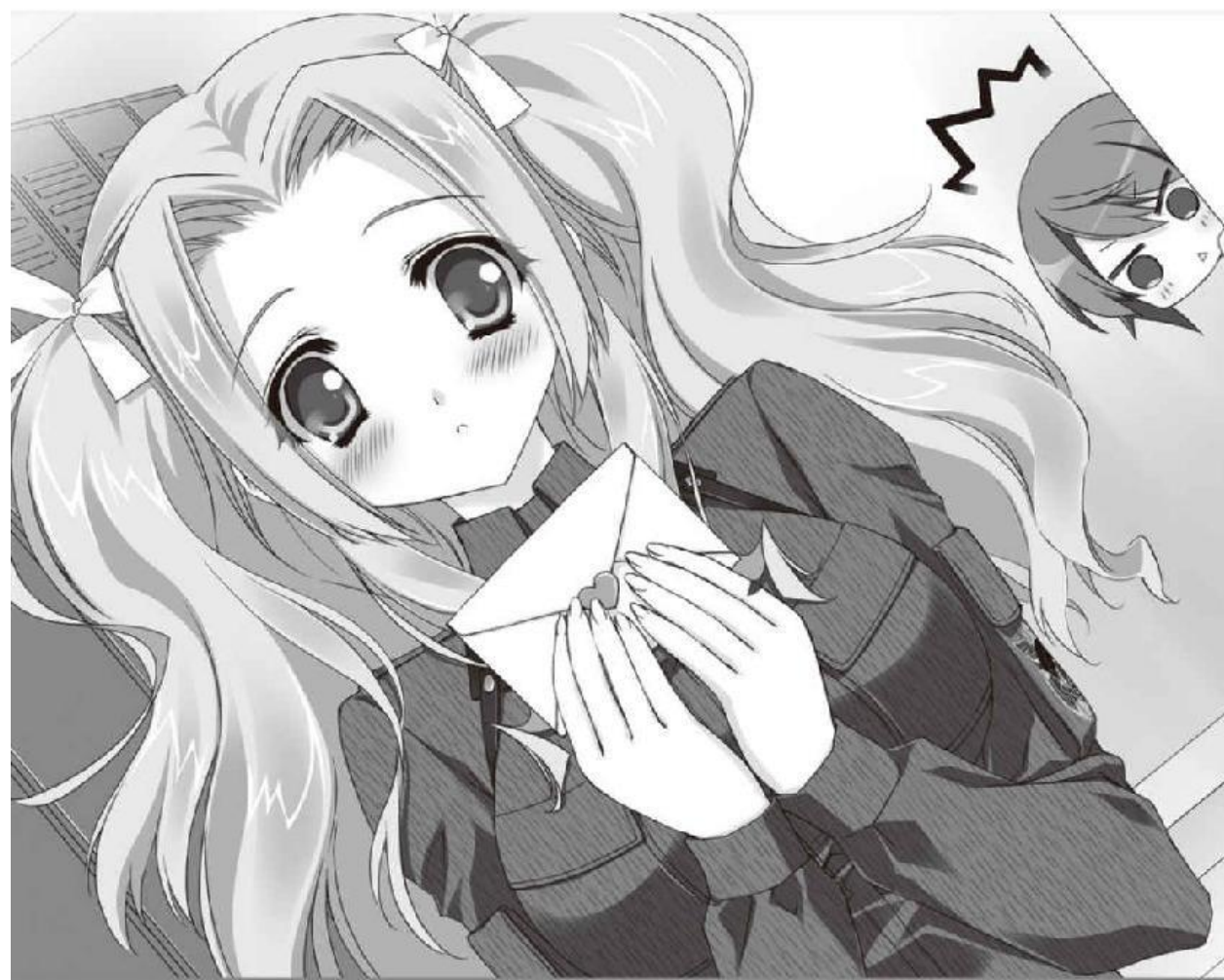
That's why I wanted Inghild to be happy, and have lots of happy memories.

**October 5, 1882, 9:00 a.m., German Democratic Republic
Herzberg Base, Frankfurt**

The next morning, as I headed to the changing room to prepare for simulator training, I found Inghild waiting for me, standing and cowering in front of her locker.

"Inghild what's wrong?"

Just as I thought she was being harassed in some way, I saw what she was holding in her hand.



"An Envelope? Is that from your parents?"

"Anett!? That, that, this is"

She was completely upset. However, from the look on her face, it seemed that it was not some kind of family misfortune.

"I think I've been given something serious."

"Something serious? Is it a cursed letter?"

"Oh, God! It's not like that! It's much more serious and troublesome!"

"An invitation to a duel perhaps?"

"You think we are living in the middle ages!?"

She then thrust the envelope at me with a tearful look on her face — the words "Dear Ms. Inghild Bronikowski" were inscribed on the prettily bound envelope.

The next moment I gasped, because I felt someone peering at me from the entrance, so I reflexively dashed toward them.

"Anett!?"

"Wait! Stop sneaking around!"

They tried to run away with lightning speed — but their legs became entangled and they plunged with their face first into the floor with a mighty thud.

"Aaaah!"

".....! Damn it!"

I pinned him down. He was a boy a year younger than me, and his rank insignia color hinted that he was in the TSF department. He didn't smell too oily, so he was probably a surface pilot. He was a little shorter than me.

"Fu ... Fuck! Get off me!"

"Not until we discuss your strange behavior first."

"Anett! What in the world is going on eh!?"

Inghild rushed to the scene, but was shocked when she saw the face of the surface pilot I have seized. The boy, too, turned away, his face bright red.

"I can't believe it Marco-Kun?"

"What? You know each other?"

Now it was my turn to be appalled.



An awkward atmosphere enveloped the corner of the cafeteria.

"....."

"....."

Inghild and Second lieutenant Marco Furner, the person who sent her the love letter, have been sitting face to face for the past few minutes, not saying a word. Inghild's eyes were wavering with a troubled expression, and Marco's face was bright red. His shoulders were also shaking.

"Well, if you get caught right after sending out a love letter, that's what happens."

Frederica muttered in exasperation. We were seated away from both of them with enough distance to listen to their conversation. Janka and Isolde were also there.

"What, you think it's my fault?"

I replied as I sipped the black liquid in my cup. Today's coffee substitute was unusually bitter

"It's not manly to send out a love letter and then sneak a peek at the response. Why didn't he just tell her in person?"

"He didn't have the courage to do that, so he sent a love letter. Isn't it obvious in these circumstances?"

"Ahem....."

"It's as if he was going to take on a tank class in his first battle and suddenly he found himself facing a fort class. Poor guy. Janka, Isolde, when you hand out love letters, be careful that no one disregards the rules of etiquette."

"Okay....."

"Yes, sir!"

"I ...I thought he meant bad. I didn't think he prepared the setting for that!"

The love letter, by the way, contained a standard wooing phrase and a bright yellow pressed flower. I thought it was fancy, but I wondered what kind of flower it was?

"It's been a while....."

Marco opened his mouth suddenly — his face was stained in vermillion and he could not look directly at Inghild.

"About 10 years."

"Th....That's right. Really, it's been a long time."

The faltered Inghild answered — 10 years? It seemed like a long time ago.

"I remember you playing with me a lot for about three years until I moved away, but"

"Ye...Yes"

"We had fun back then playing in the park together, exploring the woods"

I see, so for Inghild, he was a childhood friend who has been separated from her.

".....Have you been well?"

Inghild asked with a relaxed expression — Marco nodded emphatically.

"Yes, but when the BETA attacked, I thought it would be better to be a surface pilot than to be drafted into the infantry, so my friends and I joined the TSF Children Academy. They were already killed in action."

"....."

".....My squadron, the 634th TSF Squadron, just deployed to this base last week, and I saw you walking around the base shortly thereafter, and I thought, no way, so I looked you up and"

He looked at Inghild with a respectful gaze.

"I used to hear the name of the 666th TSF Squadron on TV and radio, but I never thought you would be one of them You've become an amazing surface pilot."

"I just got lucky."

Inghild smiled back at Marco for the first time. The usual calmness has returned to her voice.

"And our squadron, as you can tell from our nickname, is not well received by the other surface pilots."

"But I'm glad I'm here. I never thought I'd see you again like this. To be honest, I thought you might be dead already."

"That goes for me too, Marco-Kun."

"Miracles do happen even in a world like this. Or maybe it's because we live in a world like this."

They made eye contact with each other and laughed, and the overall mood was nice for a second. Perhaps, we were interrupting something?

"I can read you, Anett Hosenfeld."

Frederica muttered as she put her hand on her chin.

"Marco has always had a faint crush on Inghild, 『The pretty older sister who played with him when he was little.』 And when they ran into each other again at this base, it unintentionally flared up. Something like that. It's pretty cute."

"I've heard that boys at that age yearn for older sisters."

Isolde nodded with a serious expression. Hmmm, I wondered if that's how it was. I didn't really know.

But I could tell that the two of them were comfortable talking with each other. Inghild's sincere and peaceful expression was the best proof of this.

"But it's going to be rough at this point, isn't it?"

Isolde said in a calm voice — Frederica nodded.

"Well, I guess so."

"Why? They seem to be in a good mood, these two"

"That's right, senpai! It's going to work!"

"Hah, that's why you virgins are"

"Don't you dare say virgins! Just tell us the reason! Only that!"

"What would you think if the person you were in love with saw you as nothing more than a childhood friend or a little brother?"

"Oh, ..."

Despite our concerns, the conversation between Inghild and Marco proceeded.

"It's very reassuring to know that I'll be able to participate in the operation with my childhood friend."

Inghild brought a cup of synthetic milk tea to her mouth and reassured him.

"What? No, yeah."

Marco went awkwardly silent. Ah, the way this was going, just as Frederica said...

"So, good luck to you too, Marco-kun."

".....Don't try to evade the subject!"

Marco stood up, slamming his hands vigorously on the desk — the contents of each of their teacups spilled out and the cafeteria's attention turned to the two of them.

"Even though I have finally met you again.... Even though I have always loved you..... All you say is this!"

Inghild's face was distorted with sadness. Apparently, her lack of action was intentional.

"I'm not the kid you used to play with anymore! Now I'm ready to face any challenge to protect the people I love!"

".....! No, that line of thought is no good. If you are also a surface pilot, you have to fight for your homeland and your people."

"Of course, I will fight! But, That's not what this is about!"

Oh, no. I sensed that the boy had stepped on Inghild's landmine.

"No good! Please stop this. I..."

"All hands, Achtung! Will you two please stop your lover's quarrels here?"

Frederica stood between them, clapping her hands. We've already discussed what we were going to do after this. Inghild's face turned red and she exclaimed.

"Frederica! This is not a lovers' quarrel..."

"First, Marco Furner."

Frederica did not listen to Inghild's protests and flicked a quick glance at Marco.

"You are a little out of touch with your manners, aren't you? If you really have feelings for someone, why don't you ask for an immediate response to your love letter? Aren't you being a little too pushy?"

"I....."

"And Inghild. You're not being very considerate either. Since the boy has gone so far as to say so, you can't deny his feelings without explaining yourself."

"But I'm! Anett! You too say something to Frederica!"

Inghild, who had been patronized by Frederica, asked me for help.

She looked at me as if she was clinging to me — I still stared back at her, unafraid. If I backed down here, Inghild would always be

"..... Oh~, I also think it's a great opportunity to fix Inghild's self-hatred!"

"Anett!"

"Why don't you spend a little time together — maybe a week or so? If that doesn't work, I'll ask you to give up once and for all. How about that, Lieutenant Furner?"

"Of, of course, ...! It's much better than not being seen as a man.!"

"..... Also, according to yesterday's briefing, there will be no BETA offensive for the time being."

BETA easily betray such expectations — I quietly added in my mind.

"But if I were to do that, it might cause trouble for the squadron."

"As long as you're solid in training and in the field, there won't be any problems. And if there is any trouble, Frederica and I will take care of it. You are like an older sister and her younger brother, aren't you? I think you should come to a mutually satisfactory conclusion."

"That's true, but"

Inghild nodded reluctantly. However, she was not convinced. — I pressed her for an answer.

"Anyway! For the rest of the week, you two should spend as much time as possible together, and get to know each other better!"

Marco fell silent, and carefully thought about the proposal, then took Inghild's hand after making up his mind.

"Lieu....Lieutenant Inghild."

"What? Ah, yes!?"

"In the next vacation, please go on a date with me! All you have to do is go out to the town and talk with me in a café!"

"Da date.....?"

"As I recall, the day after tomorrow is supposed to be a National Day and it's ought to be a holiday over there!" [\(34\)](#)

Oh, you've suddenly taken the rails. — I grinned with Frederica as I looked at the bewildered Inghild.

Compared to ground troops who were busy not only fighting BETA and training on a daily basis, but also cleaning up the battlefield and repairing positions, surface pilots living in rear bases had relatively more time to spare (if only by comparison), as their schedules were strictly managed, including leave time, to ensure maximum performance on the battlefield. Rather, the military expects us to use our vacation time to refresh ourselves and boost morale.

"And then you can tell me how you've survived so far, and how can I keep up the fight against the BETA to the bitter end....."

"You can ask your superiors about that"

"As a surface pilot fighting in the most powerful TSF squadron in East Germany, I want to ask you, Second Lieutenant Inghild!"

I was sure that was just an excuse, but there was no doubt that it had some meaning to it. The experience Inghild had gained in real combat was worth a fortune to the young surface pilot.

"But, can you get permission to leave? You're new, right?"

Janka asked without reading the air. — We could enjoy our vacations because we were so skilled, but as for the newcomers like Janka and Isolde, they should have had a lot of work to do. It was difficult to get permission to go out.

"I will get it somehow! I don't care how many of my upcoming vacations I have to waste.....!"

"Oh~, what a great resolve!"

Inghild's gaze wandered aimlessly. — Then she muttered as if she had no choice.

"I don't mind this much, and I might be able to increase the chances of your survival, Marco, by sharing my experience."

"Yes! Thank you, Lieutenant Inghild!"

"But on one condition."

Inghild told him, while holding up her index finger.

"For me, Marco-kun, for now, is my "sweet childhood friend." So please call me "Oneechan" like in the old days!"

"That's...."

"I feel more comfortable having people call me that."

Marco looked unconvinced, but he nodded regardless.

"..... Okay, I get it. At any rate, I'll be able to call you "Lieutenant Inghild" in a week."

Marco declared emphatically.

◇ ◇ ◇

"What the hell were you thinking? Both of you, Anett and Frederica are!"

After parting from Marco in the dining hall, Inghild protested with a tearful look on her face as we walked toward the residential building.

"Don't go and decide things on your own! If you do that, I would have no choice but to consent! Are you enjoying the situation!?"

"I'm reaaaaaalllly enjoying it."

I replied with a white grin — Inghild stared at me with a scowl.

"But the reason is the same as I said before. I want Inghild to be happy. I think that boy Marco is not so bad. It's hard to find someone who adores you that much."

"He still doesn't know what kind of person I am! Isn't that why he wrote me a love letter...?"

"Then why didn't you tell him?"

"That's"

Inghild was silent — of course, she was. My words have provoked a trauma in Inghild. Teaching a childhood friend who adored you how much your blood weighs — was not an easy thing to do. I was aware that I was saying terrible things.

But if she doesn't, Inghild will continue to hate herself, ... and will never be happy. There was no solace in that whatsoever.....

"If I tell him the truth, it will hurt him. If that's the case, it's better to say nothing....."

"Well... why don't you give him a week to make sure of that?"

Frederica interrupted the conversation to chide.

"If he really adores you, I don't think his feelings will be shaken when he finds out about it. If he doesn't like you, then that's the extent of his childish love..... Or am I wrong?"

"That's true, but"

"Then find out for yourself. How he feels about you and the value of the miracle of your reunion today."

Inghild kept silent. — I grinned and poked Frederica in the back with my fingertips.

"As expected of you Frederica! Even I was too embarrassed to say these cheesy lines....."

"Do...Don't jest! I just thought that would work better, that's all"

"Sure, sure but about the date the day after tomorrow, just having tea would be boring, wouldn't it? For Inghild, it will be the first date in her life."

"Anett! You are deciding on your own again!?"

"Not really. I just want it to be a good memory. Frederica, any ideas?"

"I agree with you Inghild would be very really shy, but how about this?"

"I don't want that suggestion!"

Frederica ignored Inghild's protests and presented her idea.

**October 7, 1882, 1:00 P.M. German Democratic Republic
Beeskow, Frankfurt.**

It was common knowledge that the word "town" at Herzberg Base refers to the city of Beeskow. [\(35\)](#)

Beeskow was a city center about 10 km east of the Herzberg base. In addition to the old medieval streets, walls, and cathedral, there was a small downtown area that was bustling with locals and military personnel who have come to stretch their wings on vacation. This was the only place in the vicinity of the Eisenhüttenstadt fortress where decent entertainment was available. The logistics for the fortress also originate from here.

I sometimes felt a sense of dread that there was such a town not far from the fortified position, even though it was on the west bank of the Spree River, but there was nothing we could do about it. We concentrated our forces on the Oder-Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line to hold off the BETA and to defend the rear of the line to the last. If we kept doing that, we would not even have to think about what would happen after the breakthrough — that was the East German stance.

"By the way, do you really think Inghild will come here?"

Frederica asked. In her line of sight was the café where Inghild and Marco had agreed to meet, and Marco was there in his uniform.

We were seated by the window of the restaurant across the street, and we were waiting for them to enter the cafe. The time was ... 1:10 PM. Ten minutes have passed since the appointed time.

"In case you were wondering, that was your idea. If Inghild shrugs this off, it's not my fault, okay?"

"Yes, I think it's probably fine."

I replied while looking at my watch. I didn't think Inghild would go back on her word.

"That said, is that really fine?"

Isolde muttered uncomfortably as she poked at the mashed potatoes left on her plate (They were not synthetic, as expected, but the real thing, apparently).

"I can't believe you are trying to observe the two of them from afar like this"

"Not observation, but support. You never know what will happen with just the two of them. I'm just worried."

"That's true, but"

Incidentally, we were also wearing uniforms provided by the military. According to military regulations, we were allowed to go out in plain clothes only during vacations, but only a minority of people did that. For surface pilots who often moved from one base to another, having personal uniforms only added to their luggage.

"Ah, here comes senpai!"

Janka gave a little shout and pointed her finger — I let out a gasp of admiration. She looked better than I thought she would.

Inghild wore a white short-sleeved one-piece dress and a maple-colored vest. The dress suited Inghild's neat appearance, and the modest frills around the skirt were a nice accent. ⁽³⁶⁾ The dress was impeccable in every way, but she seemed quite embarrassed. It was probably the first time for her to wear a cute civilian outfit since she was assigned to the unit.

Marco noticed the figure and stiffened — he seemed captivated.

"The clothes fit her so well, don't you agree, Fredrica?"

I muttered to Frederica — the dress and vest worn by Inghild were Frederica's personal clothes. She was indeed the daughter of a party leader

"..... I just couldn't bring myself to throw them away. My parents gave them to me."

"The chest looks pretty tight though."

"That's all you have got to say to her benefactor?"

"But, thank God you gave them to her and that Inghild wore them and came here."

I muttered to myself in relief.

"There may not be a second time."

My casual line caused the three of them to fall silent. I couldn't continue with my next words either.

In East Germany, we were no longer "girls" as soon as we joined the army. We stopped wearing makeup and stopped caring about our appearance. There were many girls who died without ever having known love. On the battlefield, there was no point in being a "girl."

But we still wanted to be "girls." We wanted to look pretty and fall in love. Even if we died, we wanted to die with a beautiful body. We didn't want to rot in the mud or the scorched earth, or be minced to pieces by tank classes.

At least for today, we wanted to make Inghild a "girl" — that was our wish.

"Oh, the two entered the cafe!"

Inghild was shy and concerned about her surroundings — but Marco grabbed her hand firmly and led her into the store. Marco's face was bright red, but he looked very happy. It seemed that Inghild was happy as well.

"From the looks of it, it seems like it's going to be fine."

Frederica smiled reassuringly as she put her hand on her chin.

"Now we just need to see if he can handle the rest of this well."

For Marco, today's date was supposed to be the real deal. Since he had succeeded in taking Inghild out, I wanted him at least to get her to see the sights of the city and do some shopping.

"I'd love to have that kind of love someday, too."

Isolde sighed as she looked into the distance — Janka then said to her in a raised disgruntled voice.

"What?! Izochi got love letters from a number of girls at the TSF Children Academy. I haven't even had anyone confess their love to me yet!"

"Th....These ones don't count! Also, don't say Izochi!"

"Oh, that's news to me. Isolde certainly looks like she swings that way."

"E...Even you Frederica-senpai! Ugh, I am still a girl you know"

"What about you Frederica-senpai?"

"I am engaged to a fiancée by parental arrangement."

"As expected of the daughter of a senior party official....."

"You have nerves of steel"

"Anett's love situation is more interesting than mine. After all, there was someone who weighed on her mind for a while now."

"Re...Really, senpai!?"

"He...Hey, what are you talking about, Frederica!?"

I almost stood up involuntarily. I was so bewildered that my tongue almost got tangled.

"Who the hell do you think I care about in the first place!"

"You're always concerned about him. Well, you've known each other a long time, so there's nothing to hide, right?"

"Wha....."

I was lost for words. — There was no one but Theodore she could be referring to!

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"Is that for real, Senpai!?"

"I, too, didn't think it was possible, but"

"D....Don't be silly! Who would even pay attention to Theodore"

"I've never mentioned the name "Theodore," have I, Anett Hosenfeld?"

"Ugh....."

"Am I wrong? I was told that you and that surface pilot have known each other since the TSF Children Academy days?"

Frederica grinned — I replied with a sigh.

"I really don't have any feelings for that guy."

".....Is that so?"

"I mean.... he is...."

Theodore's face came to mind. — Like Inghild, he was a classmate of mine at the Military Academy, and was one of the close-ranged raiders in the 666th TSF Squadron. His actual combat experience and surface piloting skills were definitely superior to mine and Inghild's, and he was no less of a match for any of the squadron's old-timers.

But I hardly knew him. We haven't even made small talk. He always seemed to reject everything, and was unapproachable. All I knew about him is that he was a lifelong solitary and that he has been in some kind of trouble in the past. I would be lying if I said I didn't care about him. But no matter what I said to him, it didn't seem to reach him... Just as Inghild's character was half determined by the weight of the blood that flowed through her veins.

Come to think of it, Inghild also once had sympathetic words to say about Theodore. She said that Theodor was seemingly twisted at first glance, but in truthy, he was a kind man. She said that she was sad because he had probably lived through much worse circumstances than she had and there was nothing she could do about it.....

What the hell was the weight that guy was carrying on his back?

"See, you're still concerned."

As if reading my thoughts, Frederica gave me a nasty smile.

"I don't think anything of him! I mean, he's my classmate, so it would be weird not to care!"

"Well, I'll leave it at that."

"I didn't like how you worded that then Frederica, what do you think about him?"

"To put it bluntly, I don't like him."

Frederica said indignantly.

"I hate those twisted kids. I don't know what happened to him, but so what? It's arrogant of him to think he can live on his own."

It was typical of Frederica, who does not evaluate others based on their position or origins.

"Misfortune is not determined by fate, but by the heart. I believe that."

"....."

"Otherwise, what are we supposed to believe in, in a world like this?"

That may have been the last honest thing Frederica said to me.



Marco and Inghild left the cafe about two hours later. Maybe they were having a good time at the café. The two of them headed downtown, and we followed them in the crowd.

I put on my military cap and sunglasses, which I had prepared in advance, and walked up behind them to listen carefully.

".....Look, Marco-kun, there is one thing that everyone tends to forget in combat. It is not to be overconfident in your TSF and in yourself."

Inghild slowly told him, swaying her white dress as she walked — apparently, the conversation about the battle was not over.

Marco asked back in a slightly stilted voice.

"Overconfident?"

"Yes. TSFs are powerful, but they also have their limitations. If you engage in intense maneuvers, the load on the joints will accumulate and you will not be able to exert your full strength. Young people tend to rely on the high mobility of the MiG-21 (Balalaika) and handle it roughly, but this will eventually cost them their lives"

"But if you get into a melee with the BETA, you won't be able to say that, will you?"

"That's right. That's why, with the exception of close-quarter battles, we need to minimize attrition as much as possible."

"....."

"To survive, it is important to do the obvious things, such as minimizing wear and tear on the TSF and extending the time it can engage in combat."

Inghild was talking about it with her index finger raised — ugh, I don't know if it sounded like a correct opinion or a reprimand to me for wielding a halberd.

"Well, Onnechan, isn't it about time we put that to rest? We're in town now."

"No. As long as we don't know how long the 666th TSF Squadron will remain here, we need to talk about these things as much as possible. It is very important that I share my experience with you, Marco.

I retreated slyly, feeling a headache.

"How did it go?"

"I think it kind of backfired on him. She completely switched to the "Diligent Teaching Onnechan" Mode."

"Aaah". Isolde looked up to the sky as she muttered. So Marco had been thoroughly trained by Inghild for the previous two hours. How very Inghild-like

"We can only hope he holds his ground."

Marco shouted loudly with determination to cut off Inghild's training course.

"Hey, um, Oneechan! Is there someone you, you know, like right now?"

Inghild rolled her eyes.

"Someone I like....?"

Inghild was appalled. He asked a completely unexpected question.

"Why would you ask that?"

"I wondered if that's the reason you are trying to dodge my confession."

".....There isn't."

Inghild smiled at Marco reassuringly, but somewhat forlornly.

"There is no such person."

"Well, have you fallen in love with anyone so far?"

"Not a single one."

"Has anyone ever confessed to you?"

"No. Never."

"I see."

Marco muttered in relief, but his expression quickly darkened.

"After all, to my Oneechan, I'm just a childhood friend for now."

"....."

"How can I get my Onnechan to see me properly"

"Huh...."

"I was going to try my best to get my Oneechan's approval, but looking at her, I kind of feel like I'm never going to get it."

"That is...."

"If there's something, anything, that you care about, let me know."

Marco was silent for the rest of the day. Inghild, too, looked away from Marco, unable to answer anything.

I, too, was involuntarily silent. Inghild's determination was firm. I thought that If she went on a fun date with him, he might be able to move her heart... I was disgusted by my naivete.

"Wh....What do we do? Can we help with anything?"

Isolde muttered in dismay — but was interrupted by Frederica.

"No, it's better if nothing is done about it."

"But...."

"We may have lit the fire, but as long as she doesn't change her mind, there's nothing we can do about it..."

It was then that I heard Inghild's faint scream — before I knew it, she was surrounded by a group of battle veterans. They were all infantry lieutenants and second lieutenants. All of them were red-faced — drunk in broad daylight.

"What is it with you guys!"

Inghild backed away with trepidation — the surrounding crowd passed by to avoid involvement.

"You're a surface pilot of the 666th TSF Squadron I've seen your face in the newspapers. To find a surface pilot of the "Todesgott" ⁽³⁷⁾ squadron dressed like that on a date in a place like this."

"You've abandoned us soldiers so many times on the battlefield, why don't you have a little humility, huh?"

"It must be great to be a surface pilot. You get to eat a nice meal in the back and feel like a hero!"

".....tsk!"

I clicked my tongue. I'm not proud of it, but the 666th TSF Squadron's reputation on the battlefield was pretty bad. There were many reasons for this, but the main reason was that they ignored every request for help from the ground forces during the Laserjagds. Other squadrons would ignore the requests for help and rush into the BETA swarms, but thanks to our nickname, "The Strongest in East Germany," we were always the ones who were singled out for criticism.

I am sure that the people who were involved with Inghild were ones you could find around every corner — soldiers on the front lines who were letting off steam by cursing at us like this.

"You idiots! Can't you see that you are the ones who are putting yourselves on the spot like this!"

The 666th TSF Squadron was a unit whose name was intentionally spread for the sake of war — and for the sake of military propaganda. If its surface pilots were ever wounded by ordinary soldiers....

"Li...Lieutenant Inghild, don't do anything rash!"

Marco stood between them as a shield, and Inghild's expression froze. We, too, stopped dead in our tracks.

"Marco-kun, you?"

"Second Lieutenant Inghild is a surface pilot of the 666th TSF Squadron, the most powerful in East Germany! Do you know how many times they have saved the front lines?"

"Ha! Why is a little surface pilot like you, without even hair on his balls, barking like you are some kind of prince?"

The soldiers turned their sneers to Marco.

"Stay out of it. Otherwise, you are in for a world of pain."

"If you can do it, be my guest."

One of the soldiers struck Marco in the face without a second thought. Marco was knocked to the ground, and Inghild's inaudible screams rose.

"Stop your childish banter! We had half of our people killed in the last battle! What do you surface pilots know!"

"Aaaagh....."

The soldiers looked at Marco with contempt as he tried to stand up.

"We're here for the little girl from the "Todesgott" Squadron. We just want to give her a little loving care."

"Aaaaah!"

Marco rushed forward with a yell, tackled one of the soldiers, and punched him — but he was kicked by another soldier and blown away again.

That was the signal, and the soldiers began to beat Marco in unison — Inghild stood there, her face pale.

Marco's cries mingled with the soldiers' abuse.

"I'm going to protect you, Oneechan.! No matter what, no matter what the circumstances:!

Otherwise, I'm, I'm, aaaaah!"

Inghild's expression was distorted with grief.

I nodded to Frederica and the others. If it came down to this, we had to save them...!

"Some big words for a little kid Gaah!"

A moment after we rushed out, this time one of the soldiers was blown off his back — even we did not know what happened. The only person who was there was...

"Theodore!?"

".....You are making noise all over the town, you scum."

He looked around at all of them with eyes that rejected everything.

"If you're looking for a fight or a pick-up, look elsewhere."

"You're a member of the Tod Squadron, ...!"

The soldier who was hit from behind grunted as he stared at the unit insignia sewn into Theodore's uniform.

"Don't underestimate me!!!!!"

Theodore easily dodged the soldier who was about to strike him with a clenched fist, and then drove a body blow into his solar plexus. It was a move we were all too familiar with. Come to think of it, there was a rumor that this guy had studied knife self-defense in order to hone his close combat quarters fighting skills against BETA...

Within a few dozen seconds, Theodore had all of the soldiers who had been entangled with Inghild crawling on the ground. It was so fast that even we were speechless.

"Damn you for making me go through all that trouble."

Theodore spit at his legs in disgust. He approached Marco and Inghild — neither of them was able to keep up with the rapid turn of events.

He looked at the two of them – or rather, only at Inghild - with his eyes as ever, and told her annoyingly.

"You are a fool, you know that? If you cause trouble, I might get into trouble too. I can't have the military police and political officers on my case."

"I...I'm sorry."

"....., oh, and you..."

He turned to Marco and grabbed him forcefully by the chest.

".....In a case like that, you should just run away with her. If you really want to protect her, don't make the wrong decision."

".....!"

"I went out to the town just to kill some time, and this is what I find. Good grief Playing friends is what got you into trouble with these guys....."

With that, Theodore turned his back on us and left. The soldiers that Theodore had beaten up — were gone before we knew it.

Inghild was the first to move. She approached Marco, who was trying to stand up, and hugged him tightly with both arms.

"Oneechan.....?"

"I'm sorry, it's my fault!"

"Oh, no! Oneechan didn't do anything wrong What happened now was just because I was weak!"

"No, it isn't. But, I was very happy that you tried to protect someone like me."

"What?"

"Thank you, Marco."

Marco was speechless and Inghild was in tears — Isolde and Janka smiled in relief as they realized what their conversation was about.

But I noticed a sad determination in Inghild's expression.

**October 10, 1882 11:30 a.m. German Democratic Republic
Herzberg Base, Frankfurt**

『—The CIWS-1A, ⁽³⁸⁾ a close-proximity melee weapon equipped on the MiG-21 (Balalaika), is a weapon to eliminate tank classes attached to the TSF. But unfortunately, we can't afford to be so leisurely in the war against BETA.』

First Lt. Walter Krüger's bold voice echoes through the proving ground ⁽³⁹⁾ at the Herzberg base.

On this day, the 666th TSF Squadron was conducting training using actual equipment. More specifically, it was training in close combat against BETA using melee daggers. However, the daggers used were imitation daggers with weights adjusted for the safety of the TSF.

『—As everyone is already aware from actual combat, close combat with enemy BETA swarms is indispensable in order to achieve the goal of the Laserjagd, which is the destruction of the Laser class.』

As I was aware, this was training for young people like Janka and Isolde, so they needed to start with the basics. At the children's academy, they didn't teach specific tactical maneuvers using daggers due to the length of the education period.

『—In close combat, the Schürzen is used so frequently that there is a high probability of total loss. If that happens, you will be left with only two daggers for close combat.』

Lt. Krüger's MiG-21 (Balalaika) held a dagger in the opposite hand, as if ready to cut off the main arm of a Grappler class.

『—However, the MiG-21 (Balalaika) is not helpless as long as the dagger remains. For example, in a battle with the Grappler class, if a momentary gap can be exploited, it is possible to slow the enemy's movement by severing the main arm or leg, and then break away.』

The response was a series of 「Roger」

『—Seeing is believing. First, you will see me and Lieutenant Eberbach in melee combat using daggers. Second Lieutenant Eberbach, ready your dagger. I'm sorry if it's abrupt, but I need you to be my opponent.』

『—Roger』



Theodore replied in a murderous voice — that guy often had this attitude when he talked to Lieutenant Krüger and Captain Bernhard. Maybe he believed the rumors. I didn't mind, though, because I respect the Captain as a commander.

Incidentally, I checked Inghild's expression on my retina — She had the same calm demeanor as usual. To the casual observer, it seemed as if nothing was upsetting her.

Since that date, the distance between Inghild and Marco seemed to have grown much closer.

Inghild allowed Marco to call him "Lieutenant Inghild," and she herself stopped using honorifics when talking to him. Whenever time permitted, I spent time with Marco and told him about my combat experience. We just had lunch together. When they were together, Inghild seemed to be very happy. Thanks to this, we have been able to follow them around on dates unnoticed.

But I could not believe that these were Inghild's true feelings.

The look of sad determination on his face at that moment. What was that?

『—Come on, bōzu!』 [\(40\)](#)

『—Woooooooooah!』

Close quarter combat began — Theodore's handling of the dagger was superb, but Lieutenant Krüger was better in other respects.

As I visually followed their movements, I suppressed my inner hesitation.

◇ ◇ ◇

"Comrade Second Lieutenant, may I have a word?"

After the training, I was stopped by Lieutenant Gretel Jeckeln, a political commissar.

I responded in a manner that showed no signs of agitation — but actually, I hated this political commissar. She hated Inghild simply because she was an ex-Junker. I also didn't like the fact that she intervened in the command, even though she didn't have much skill.

Lieutenant Jeckeln asked me with a mocking smile, in disregard of my true feelings.

"I heard you guys had a little trouble in town the other day, didn't you? The military police have been notified."

I clicked my tongue — well, considering her position, it couldn't be helped that she would know.

"I am very sorry. But that was..."

"Second Lieutenant Bronikowski and Second Lieutenant Eberbach have given me the details. No explanation is needed from you. Besides, it is quite common for the 666th TSF Squadron to pay the price for their fame. It is not worth it to be surprised now."

Then you should do something about it, you're a political commissar! I swallowed that line.

"But I just want to make sure of one thing. Second Lieutenant Bronikowski explained that she and the surface pilot from another squadron who was with her at the time were just childhood friends, is that correct?"

"Eh"

"I had heard rumors that it was a private relationship, but she denied it — oh, the purpose was, of course, to maintain confidentiality. If it was a private relationship, it would have to be monitored. It is also bad news that an ex-Junker surface pilot is indulging in her love life."

I gulped — but now that I was asked, I had to answer.

"If Bronikowski answered that, then yes, I think so. I have not heard any further details on that matter."

"Lies will not do you any good."

"..... It's true."

"I see. Ok."

"Oh, uh, ...!"

I asked Lt. Jeckeln, who was about to turn her back on me.

"Did she say anything at the time?"

"Nothing of note... well, there was one thing."

"Just one thing"

"When I advised her as she was leaving, I told her not to forget what it meant to have the blood of a Junker. She simply said, 'I understand'."



Inghild stared at a letter while sitting on a couch in the changing room,

She stared at the contents of the letter, then had an emotional breakdown, and her tears spontaneously overflowed.

"Because that's the only way I can..."

"Even though you are looking at the love letter like that, you intended to turn him down from the beginning."

Inghild glanced at the entrance and saw me there, with my back against the wall, looking mortified and with my arms crossed.

"Anett! When did you..."

"Because I am right, aren't I? Otherwise, you wouldn't have befriended Marco after the date, and you wouldn't have said those things to Lt. Jaeckeln..."

Inghild's expression became tense and she looked puzzled, but I kept my posture and continued to speak.

"I will keep expectations up until the appointed date and then shake them badly at the end. That way Marco will come to hate me."

"Anett, you are"

She stood up as if she couldn't stand it and stared at me — I didn't make eye contact.

"It's very like you Inghild, isn't it? You try to protect others by hurting yourself, but is that really what you want?"

I moved my back away from the wall and met Inghild's gaze head-on.

"Why do you always run away? We said we would protect you if anything ever happened! Are we not that reliable!?"

"Don't get involved with us any further."

"You realized then that you liked Marco, didn't you? That's all right! We don't know when we're going to die! I'm sure he would accept Inghild as she is! So why...?"

"Of course it's because I don't want to make him unhappy!"

A sad cry echoed through the locker room — that might have been the first time I've ever seen Inghild like this.

"I have unclean blood in my veins. In this country, I deserve to be discriminated against! If I accept him, Marco will be trapped by that karma.... Just as we are the surface pilots of the "Todesgott" Squadron!" Inghild's face contorted as she clutched the love letter to her chest.

"Indeed, until that date, I was afraid of hurting him no, I was afraid that he would hate me. But the moment I saw that boy who bled to protect me, I was afraid that he would be unhappy because of my blood..... Then I'd better be separated from him here! That way we don't have to talk about my lineage...!"

"But that's not going to change anytime soon..."

"What do you know about me, Anett! The more I love someone, the more I have to be distant from them, and the more I have to bear the sorrow of a chain of misfortunes! I can resist BETA, but this blood won't even allow me to resist"

She sat there, sobbing hard.

"I don't want to be happy. I want to die with and for everyone, fighting with and for everyone, without hurting anyone else or myself anymore."

Inghild sniffled and held back her tears. I couldn't say anything at that sight.

I felt a pang of guilt — perhaps I was projecting my own desires onto Inghild. I thought that even on a battlefield like this, we could leave behind happy memories. If we join hands with our friends, it is not impossible.

I couldn't find the right words to say next - I understood that my feelings were one-sided and that Inghild suffered as a result. It was my fault. I wanted to apologize, but....

I was reminded of Frederica's line — misfortune was not determined by fate, but by the heart. Otherwise, what were we to believe in?

"Inghild."

I approached Inghild - her eyes were filled with a somber light.

"I'm sorry, I just lost my temper. I thought I knew how you felt."

"..... No, Anett, you are not to blame."

Inghild shook her head slightly.

"I know you are concerned about me, but I have no choice but to"

"..... Then let me say something about that. Even so, I would like you to live more for yourself. Of course, it is important to fight for everyone. But that by itself is just too lonely. You only live once. Everyone has the right to be happy!"

Inghild looked down, her hands slowly tightened.

"So try to be a little more positive. You are not alone. You have me. Frederica is there. Isolde and Janka are there — we will protect you."

".....!"

"I want you to reconsider Marco, too... Don't worry, He won't make you unhappy. I'm sure Marco feels the same way, because you are mutually in love. It's a miracle that you can have that kind of relationship on a battlefield like this."

Inghild did not answer — but there seems to be a different light in her eyes than before.

"Just remember, no matter what answer you come up with, we're all on your side, You can be sure of that!"

After a few dozen seconds, Inghild muttered in a fading voice, "Let me think about it for a minute".

It was that evening that all TSF squadrons deployed at the Herzberg base shifted to a state of readiness following the detection of a new BETA offensive.

October 12, 1882, 11:30 a.m., German Democratic Republic
"Eisenhüttenstadt Fortified Position", Frankfurt

「You bastaaaaaaaaaards!」

I shouted from the bottom of my lungs, then I slammed my halberd into the Destroyer class that has slipped past my side — a moment later, I felt a peculiar sensation in both my arms, and my vision turned reddish-black from the splashing bodily fluids.

Of course, I couldn't afford to worry about that. The next Destroyer class loomed from the front. No, from the right, there was also a group of tank classes...

「Inghild! Please!」

『——Roger that, Anett!』

Inghild's MiG-21 (Balalaika) reacted immediately and blasted the tank class with its assault cannon— I leapt to the left side of the Destroyer class, avoiding the assault, and deployed the back gun mount in front, crushing it's main legs with assault gun fire, and causing it to fall over.

Next, a small number of tank classes, which Inghild had missed, were thinned out and cleaved with my halberd.



In the next five minutes, we crushed 10 Destroyer classes and over 100 Tank classes. The only reason we did not have more success was because the BETA swarms had temporarily stopped attacking us. However, the wide-area battle window showed a blip of a new group of what appeared to be Destroyer-classes approaching our position.

Without a pause, Captain Bernhard's order reached us.

『—All hands, Achtung! Walter, status report!』

『—All TSFs of the 666th TSF Squadron are alive and well! Both propellant and ammunition levels are over 70%!』

『—Good! The squadron will now reorganize up in front of the Destroyer class taxiway to await the new Destroyer class group! Let's go!』

「Roger!」

11 MiG-21s (Balalaika) began NOE flight and moved forward, avoiding the Destroyer class carcasses scattered on the ground.

On this day, we were in the taxiway between the Eisenhüttenstadt and Seelow fortress positions, also known as "Destroyer class taxiway". ⁽⁴¹⁾ We were assigned to support the "Frankfurt" Gate. In a nutshell, the mission was to hunt down the Destroyer-classes that were entering the taxiway before they could breakthrough. The reason why the "Laserjagd" was not carried out was that no "Laser" classes were confirmed in the BETA group that attacked. It seems that even the BETA, with their overwhelming volume, were not always able to deploy their laser class. As for the other BETA, it was planned to blow them all up with artillery bombardment.

But that did not mean it was an easy job. The opponent was, after all, a "Destroyer" class, and a fast blow from a critical angel could be immediately fatal.

I checked again on the squadron's surface pilots through my retina. All were alive and well, as Lt. Krueger reported earlier. Janka and Isolde, for whom this was their first battle on the Destroyer class taxiway, were also fighting hard, though their breathing was erratic.

『—Janka, Isolde, I wonder how well you both are?』

Frederica asked cheerfully — thank goodness she was a natural at making such calls. In fact, thanks to Frederica, the atmosphere in the squadron has become much brighter than before.

『—I can do it!』

『—I'll be fine!』

While hearing Janka and Isolde's energetic replies, I looked at Inghild — her expression was the same as before, calm and collected. However, a shadow had clearly fallen around her eyes. The sharpness of the TSF's movements was also not very good.

After the incident in the changing room, Inghild and Marco have not spoken to each other once. This was because they have been busy preparing for the sortie since the start of the war preparation and have not had much time to talk. Marco's TSF squadron was supposed to be on ground support, but I didn't know its exact whereabouts.

「Inghild, are you okay?」

『——Yes, of course!』

Inghild responded immediately — I decided to take this chance.

「Your concentration is in disarray. What are you talking about? If you don't calm down, you'll die, okay?」

『——.....』

Inghild gasped as if she was confronted with something she didn't want to admit.

『——I'm sorry, I've made you worry.』

「It's ok. We are both in this together. We are partners and comrades after all.」

Inghild agreed and continued, as if reflecting on herself.

『——Thank you for a lot of things, Anett.』

I nodded my head, knowing what the words meant. yeah. Because before we went out, Inghild had said this to me.

『—— I realized one thing — I'm glad I met that boy again. I'm glad I could tell you about my experience because thanks to you, I made it in time for this fight.』

Inghild was accepting her reunion with Marco in a positive way, and I was honestly happy about that. Perhaps this could have been the beginning of something.

The next moment, a new window was deployed. It was Captain Bernhard.

『—All hands, Achtung! The squadron is now ordered by battalion headquarters to break off from here and head to the support of the Hetzendorf Gate! We're going to charge through the air over the fortified positions! A reserve tank battalion will be deployed at our rear.』

「Roger!」

The roar of the jets shook our eardrums as we began our leap into the sky. The "Hetzendorf Gate" was a Destroyer-class taxiway formed between the Eisenhüttenstadt and Jaenschwalde fortified positions in the south.

『—One squadron of TSFs was attached to the Hetzendorf Gate, but lost half of its strength due to an unexpected attack. The squadron commander was also killed in action. We will join them. The war situation there is tougher than ours, so be careful!』

I wondered what they were doing without the laser class — I deployed the battle situation window and stared at the situation at the "Steinsdorf Gate". There, four MiG-21s (Balalaika) were engaged in battle, and I confirmed that they belonged to the 634th TSF Squadron.

『—Marco?』

I heard Inghild's emotionless muttering.

『—All TSFs, begin bombardment! Reduce their numbers while you still can! Put a hot one in their asses!』

「Roger! Eat thiiiiiiiss!」

The squadron opened fire as soon as it dropped. The location was at the rear of the Hetzendorf Gate. The rest of the 634th TSF Squadron was fighting right in front of us.

Eleven MiG-21s (Balalaika) slammed countless HVAP rounds into the backs of the Destroyer class on the taxiway.

In the midst of the violent shock, I saw Inghild moving. She seemed to be only momentarily upset because among the four surviving TSFs was one controlled by Marco. However, the situation was quite critical considering the continued infiltration of BETA swarms into the taxiway.

Inghild's expression was calm as usual — but I knew it was only on the surface, and that's why I couldn't say anything.

「So you guys are in my way!」

We landed on the ground, turning the swarm of tank classes in front of us into a puddle of blood, and swept up the BETA around the landing zone. One after another, tanks and grapplers were being crushed...but a new group of Destroyer class was approaching from the other side.

At the same time, the faces of four surface pilots of the 634th TSF Squadron were projected one after another on the retina.

Inghild and Marco's gazes crossed — Inghild relaxed her cheeks as if she was relieved from the bottom of her heart, but Marco seemed to be unable to control his emotions and had a tearful smile on his face.

Marko's MiG-21 (Balalaika) was almost unscathed. It had the most ammunition and propellant remaining of the four TSF. The TSF's movement was also smooth. Inghild's advice was bearing fruit — of course, Inghild was aware of it.

For a moment, just a moment, the two look at each other with their hearts. Ah, as I thought, they were a perfect match...

But there was no time for leisurely conversation. We immediately resumed the battle, and the BETA hordes were approaching.

『——Yooooo bastardsssss!』

We planned to close in and thin out the Destroyer class group. There were more than 50 of them — The two squadrons opened up a barrage of assault cannon fire at their legs.

Immediately after, the temporary commander of the 634th TSF Squadron shouted.

『——Captain! Ten more Destroyer class from the rear! And a lot of tank classes! They're the ones who broke through earlier!』

『——Intercept them! We will deal with the BETA from the front! You take care of the rear!』

『——Copy that! Gerda, Marco, Hoa, follow me! We can't hold them off from here! After we close in, we'll fire in retreat to thin them out!』

The four MiG-21s (Balalaika) leaped into the air with short boosts — we had no choice but to watch them go. But from how they looked, I was sure they would be fine... — I shared this thought with Inghild as we locked eyes.

『——All TSFs, we're moving forward, too! Start Jumping! Strike from overhead!』

「Roger!」

All squadrons leaped simultaneously — at the same time as they got behind the Destroyer class vanguard, reversed their posture, and stopped in mid-air while blowing their jumping units. Then they fired 120 mm one after another behind the Destroyer class below them, and slammed them into the ground. Although the propellant consumption was not worth it, and it could only be used in the absence of the laser class, this was the best tactic for unilaterally destroying the Destroyer class, a type of BETA that does not turn around.

「DieDiediediediiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!」

The lower halves of the Destroyer class bodies that were passing below us were blown away in an ugly explosion, along with their colorful entrails. If we missed them, Marco and the others would be in danger. Both Inghild and I focused our attention on shooting.



We sacrificed 20% of our propellant and cleared out most of the Destroyer class. While destroying the following tank classes with the 36mm, we once again descended to the surface.

『——634th TSF Squadron! Situation report!』

Captain Bernhard immediately shouted. We were distracted by the tank classes that kept approaching.

『——We are almost done here.....』

It was then that Captain Bernhard's voice stopped as if it was cut off. I thought it was strange, and suddenly looked at the battle situation window.

At that moment, I suddenly noticed —— I had realized.

The markers indicating the four TSFs of the 634th TSF Squadron have somehow disappeared. Communication with Marco and the others has also been cut off.

Instead, I saw a group of Destroyer classes and Tank classes approaching from behind, which had been reduced to a few numbers.

The first to react was not me, Frederica, or Captain Bernhard, but Inghild.

Inghild gulped for a moment — and reported in her usual voice.

『——Schwarz 01!』

".....!?"

『——The Destroyer class is approaching from behind! The 634th TSF Squadron appears to have been wiped out!』

Captain Bernhard answered immediately, not giving Inghild time to think.

『——Roger that! Second flight, hit the enemy in the rear! The 1st and 3rd flights will hit the newly approaching ones!』

In the chain of responses, Captain Bernhard's MiG-21PF (Balalaika) led the charge. I leapt forward as if propelled by it, with my thoughts suspended.

「Inghild!」

I screamed in confusion. If I didn't call out to her — if I didn't at least notice her...!

『—Anett! I'll back you up with an assault cannon! Please cut in!』

Inghild's answer echoed. I didn't know what to say.

「Inghild, what, why?」

『—Anett, please calm down! The enemy is at hand!』

「I know, I know...!」

I was upset. Inghild rebuked me. I was the one acting funny. Inghild was acting as usual, killing her feelings.

I know, I know, but... damn it!

「You monsters, don't you dare stand in front of me!」

With all the anger I could muster, I grabbed my halberd and charged forward.

**October 12, 1882, 2:00 P.M. German Democratic Republic
Herzberg Base, Frankfurt**

The 666th TSF Squadron had finished the day's fighting largely unscathed. No TSF was damaged. Ammunition and propellant losses were less than 40%. Considering that the 634th TSF Squadron was literally wiped out, and that other squadrons also had a small number of unreturned TSFs, this was definitely a result to be proud of.

A second sortie was not ordered. We were released two hours later.

I didn't go straight to the sauna as usual. There were people I have to look for.

".....I knew you were here."

I said to Inghild, who was sitting on a couch in the changing room.

There was no one else in sight — Janka and Isolde stayed away from the changing rooms, perhaps out of consideration, and Frederica quickly went to the sauna a typical attitude for her.

".....We were separated."

Inghild smiled as usual. Her voice sounded threadbare. In her right hand, she held that love letter.

".....I know. I'm your partner after all... can I see that?"

I pretended to be casual and pointed to the love letter. Inghild nodded and handed it to me nonchalantly.

My fingertips were somewhat trembling — but I ignored them.

"Yeah, I knew it. Just as I thought."

I exhaled in relief. It was so deliberate that even I didn't like it. I had absolute confidence in myself — there was no way that boy would do something like this for no reason at all.

"This yellow pressed flower is Anastasia."

"Anastasia?"

"Yes. I just looked it up in the reference room. It's a kind of Western Chrysanthemum, and it's characterized by its petals growing straight out, like a fireworks display that opens quickly. It looks sturdy, but if it receives a strong shock, the flower may collapse at once, so you should carry it with great care..."

"Delicate flowers, aren't they?"

"I heard it's a very famous kind of chrysanthemum. I think he probably got it from some flower shop. It would be very beautiful if these flowers bloomed all over the scorched earth."

Inghild seemed to sense what I was trying to say, and asked in a trembling voice.

"What is the language of this flower?"

I tried to look away — and then I summoned up the courage to look at her.

"Nobility and "truth."

The color disappeared from Inghild's eyes. I ignored it and tried to smile, but I couldn't smile very well.

"He was a fool. He should have told you earlier instead of doing all this. That he knew the weight of your blood and that he accepted it...."

Tears fall from Inghild's eyes....

"I'm not saying it's too late, I'm saying that I didn't notice it early enough, and neither did you"

Inghild jumps into my chest, crying. I hugged her gently — that's all I could do.

"I was..... I was the coward....!"

"Inghild."

"I was afraid..... that the weight of my blood would make someone else unhappy.....! Even though I knew it. I knew he would be fine with it"

In my arms, she cried like a child.

"I should have asked Anett to scold me earlier. I should have responded to his feelings sooner. I should have been positive about the weight of my blood. I should have done that, so I could have left him with happy memories.!"

Inghild buried her face in my chest and sobbed uncontrollably. Tears soak my BDU.



What should I do with those tears? — I thought for a moment and made up my mind.

"Inghild, you know what?"

We are "girls". We want to cry when we want to cry and laugh when we want to laugh. That's why...

"I can't say anything to you Inghild now. I can say that Marco has no regrets, or that Inghild is not to blame, or any number of other things, but I don't think that will comfort you now. You are so kind that I don't think you will ever forgive yourself....."

"....."

"But we can cry together, we can laugh together."

".....!"

"Inghild, you are not alone. You have me. Everyone is here. You have memories of Marco. I can fight because I have you, I have everyone, and I have memories of everyone. As long as that last memory remains, I believe I can fight even if I am alone. I am sure that you are the same way. So..."

I slowly embraced Inghild's back. My vision blurred with tears.

"You can cry as long as you want, and we both will never forget what happened today, or what happened to Marco."

".....!"

"So we can get back on our feet together, one more time....."

"Ugh Uaaaaaaaaa! Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah"

◇ ◇ ◇

We are not fighting for our country, for humanity, or for any other worthy cause. We don't want to die, we are afraid of being stared at by state power, and we don't know if we can win this war. I don't think I have any special power just because I am a surface pilot.

But I can say this. I can say it again and again.

We can fight because we are not alone.

No matter how miserable things are, we can live because we share them with everyone. We can endure because we have a precious everyday life with everyone.

And with those memories in my heart, We will continue to fight even when we are alone. We will live.
Endure. And we will make happy memories with others again.

Even in this hell, We will be happy.

**January 15, 1983, 9:00 a.m. German Democratic Republic
Cottbus Base, Cottbus City**

At the same time as Captain Bernhard's order, I press down hard on the foot pedal. The jets of the jumping unit produced a powerful sound, and my body was pressed against the seat by the Gs.

I stared at the faces of the surface pilots projected on my retina — seven of them. I think we lost a lot of people. Moreover, one of them was a former West German surface pilot named Katia Waldheim, whom Theodore had protected just the other day. We were now going to launch a desperate, large-scale raid to stop a BETA ladder approaching the Neisse River, just in front of a fortified position that was on the verge of collapse.

Just two weeks ago, the company had Frederica, Isolde, Janka — and Inghild. The atmosphere in the company was cheerful. My mind and body had not gone crazy like this.

Everyone's final days were miserable. All I could do was watch. We were such good friends, and we had decided to live through it together. Guilt and anger seeped into my body...and just as if to stop myself, the sight of Inghild's final moments flashed through my mind like a crazy flashback.

I shook my head slightly. No. Not if I let myself get caught up in that emotion as I have in the past. I had just asked Captain Bernhard for permission to go out. If I don't recover now, I will be sent back to the rear and will never be able to fight as a surface pilot again.

Yesterday, while sorting through Inghild's belongings, I found the love letter from Marco that she had always treasured. Thanks to finding it, I was able to remember my words to Inghild. I was also able to realize how foolish I was.

Inghild fought for me to the end, even after I lost Marco, and even as Frederica and the others were being lost. I carry with me the few memories I have of Marco and the daily life I spun with everyone else. Inghild, as I said, fought honorably until the end with the happy memories in her heart. I had noticed that after Marco's death, Inghild stopped repeating "I don't care about myself" and "for the sake of everyone".

But I couldn't give anything back to Inghild. I couldn't even carry out the words I had spoken. I just fought with anger and sadness, and as a result, I lost Inghild.

I'm sure Inghild will forgive me, because she was the kindest of them all. But if I die like this, I am sure she will not be pleased. To die without accomplishing anything would be the greatest betrayal to Inghild, who had protected me so desperately.

Therefore, I would like to use my life for a weak surface pilot like Inghild — for Katia's sake at least. And I want to give her what I could not give back to Inghild. I want to help Katia to leave behind happy memories in this squadron. And for that, I want as many of my friends as possible to survive.

I really don't want to leave it to Theodore. He abandoned Inghild, but the only thing I can do now is to take an active part in the battle and reduce her burden as much as possible.

Unlike back then, I have no one to cry with now. No matter what happens, I have to live alone.

But still, I...

"Inghild, watch me."

I sternly gaze at the white scorched earth beyond the blizzard.

"I will move forward..."

Episode End.



鋼鉄の墓標 シュルトヴェンベルク 一九八一

英雄になどなれないまま、僕らは戦い死んでいく
痛みに涙を流しながら。生きていたいと叫びながら
でも、大丈夫。僕はきっと、最後まで戦える
君の思いが、君への思いが、胸の中にあるから

オーデル川中流域 1981

オーデル川中流は東ドイツの激戦場のひとつである。これは、西岸の60キロ先に首都ベルリンがあること、BETAの攻勢頻度が高い戦区であることが理由となっている。東ドイツ軍はこの戦区に“シュルトヴェンベルク要塞陣地”をはじめとする幾つもの要塞陣地を構築、防衛に当たっている。

要塞陣地の防衛を担うのは、戦車や歩兵を主力とする地上部隊である。地上部隊は巧みな陣地構築でBETAをキルゾーンに誘引、火力を集中して殲滅するという戦術を採用している。また、その中でも戦車部隊は、大型種に対する砲撃戦、陣地が突破された際の機動防御、急場の面制圧、制空権確保後の反撃の要として活躍、対BETA戦に不可欠な存在となっている。

Schulenberg Fortified Area Map



Steel Grave Schulenberg 1981

We fight and die without being heroes.

With tears of pain. Screaming to stay alive.

But, it's fine. I'm sure I can fight to the end.

Because your feelings for me, and my feelings for you, are both in my heart.

Middle Oder River Valley 1981

The Middle Oder River Valley is one of the fiercest battlegrounds in East Germany. This was due to the fact that the capital Berlin was located 60 kilometers away on the west bank and that it was a battle zone where the frequency of BETA offensives was high. The East German army had established several fortified positions in this battle zone, including the "Schulenberg fortified Position," and set them up for defense.

The defense of the fortified positions was handled by ground troops, mainly tanks and infantry. The ground forces employed the tactic of luring BETA into the kill zones by skillfully constructing a position and then concentrating their firepower to destroy the remaining BETA. Among them, tank units played a key role in artillery fire against large species, maneuver defense when positions were breached, surface control at short notice, and counterattacks after securing air superiority, making them indispensable in the fight against BETA.

August 10, 1981, 10:00 a.m. German Democratic Republic
West bank of the Oder River, near Colony Blitz

A convoy of trucks drove down a tree-lined road that led to a dazzling flat land.

Deserted farmlands stretched to the horizon all around them. A tractor abandoned on the side of the road looked strangely lonely. The weather was clear. However, the temperature was low and even chilly.

"At any rate, you're in luck then, young lady."

A junior officer with a battle-hardened face, who seemed to be an old soldier, spoke to the girl who was sitting in the passenger seat, while gripping the driver's steering wheel.

"The plight of our Vaterland ⁽⁴²⁾ must have reached its peak if a bus ran out of gas on the road. If I hadn't picked you up, it would have taken you all day to get here."

"Uh, um, ... thank you very much..."

The girl replied timidly. Her pronunciation was close to the standard German, but it sounded strangely stilted.

She had a quiet demeanor and simple eyes. Her short bob swayed on her shoulders with the shaking of the truck. However, her body was toned in a way that didn't suit her face.

"But then again, to be assigned to the 11th Tank Regiment (Willy Bebel)....."

"Huh....?"

"I belong to an infantry regiment in the next battle zone, but it's pretty tough there, you know? As I recall, it was a mobile reserve of the 9th Tank Division. Do you know what that means?"

"Umm, If something on the front line is about to collapse, they rush in and plug the hole...?"

"Roughly speaking. Well, actually that's true. Well from here on out, it's not my place to say anything."

"Ye, yes...."

"But remember. It's people like you, young lady, that make us hold on until the end. If things get troublesome, these guys will definitely come to the rescue. Even if the Grappler class dug up the trenches and got back up, and even if the platoon's position was surrounded and isolated by a swarm of tank classes. Well, when there is really nothing to be done, thinking about how to die is all that's left for them."

"....."

"That being the case, it's about time we got there, sweetie."

The view out the window had somehow turned into an old-fashioned townscape. However, the only people walking down the street were military personnel, and the air was tense.

Colony Blitz was located 24 kilometers west of the Oder River in the center of Brandenburg, East Germany. It was the closest town to the garrison of the 3rd Squadron of the 2nd Battalion of the 11th Tank Regiment (Willy Bebel), to which she was assigned.

After thanking the driver and seeing him off, the girl - Private Anna Tarkovsky - took a deep breath.

Several scents stimulated her nostrils. The smell of coniferous trees from the forest. The smell of water from a lake. The smell of people regrouping in the city. The smell of dust on the streets. And The overly dense smells of iron, rust, and gunpowder smoke.

The National People's Army (NVA) — The Army of East Germany was completing the most solidly fortified area in the history of mankind, the Oder-Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line. ⁽⁴³⁾ It was the "Shield of the East (Ost Shield)" ⁽⁴⁴⁾ that had prevented the westward advance of the BETA for more than a year since the crushing defeat of Operation Palaiologos.

The Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), which was in power in East Germany, advertised (as propaganda) that with this line of defense, the BETA invasion could be held up here.

(This is my new assignment, my first battlefield, the place where I might die...)

Anna looked to the east — in the direction of the Oder River, where the BETA would be nesting.

(But I'm here, and I'm going to do the best I can. I'm not going to let that happen again.....)

And so Anna took her first steps onto the battlefield.

Same day, 2:00 p.m. German Democratic Republic
Standby position near Colony Blitz

For Private Kurt Griebel, a tanker who would turn 16 this year, his current assignment - a driver of the 3rd squadron commander's tank of the 2nd Battalion, 11th Tank Regiment (Willi Bebel), 9th Tank Division - was not a bad one.

First, he had three dependable companions.

The company and vehicle commander, Lieutenant Herbert Krentz, who appeared to be just a cheerful heavy smoker, but he was actually a hardcore Panzer Leader ⁽⁴⁵⁾ and a survivor of the disastrous "Palaiologos" operation, that ended badly. The gunner, Sergeant Hugo Finke, who was an assistant professor of law at the University of Berlin before the war. He was an intelligent and kind senior. Lastly, Private Jan Norbert, a loader and a comrade in arms, who was also a kindred spirit. ⁽⁴⁶⁾

The mood in the unit was also not bad. Political commissars dispatched from the military's political headquarters were only found in battalion headquarters, probably because of a shortage of personnel, and the Stasi - the secret police - probably had informants (spies) in the army, but Kurt had heard that he wouldn't be noticed as long as he did not make political statements such as criticizing the party or praising West Germany unnecessarily.

And the T-62 tanks that the regiment was equipped with - and that they would be riding in - were also dependable.

The T-62 was an improved version of the T-55 developed at the beginning of the Cold War era, and other than an enhanced main gun, it was basically unchanged. Therefore, its performance was undeniably lower than that of the T-64, which was developed in the 1960s as the "Favorite main battle tank (MBT)" ⁽⁴⁷⁾, the T-80, an evolution of the T-64, and the T-72, an improved version of the T-62. However, its age meant that it was produced in larger cumulative numbers, and spare parts were readily available, making it less prone to breakdowns.

In addition, the 11th Tank Regiment (Willy Bebel) was a reserve unit of the division — a unit that was routinely placed in the rear for counterattacks. In other words, it was in a far more survivable position than the front-line units, which would not be given a real job until the front line collapsed.

However, Kurt himself was assigned to the unit just after the first major BETA offensive against the west bank of the Oder River was over, and although he had intercepted a few small BETA groups, he had yet to experience a battle that could be called a battlefield. He had never suffered a wound or lost a comrade.

Somewhere inside, Kurt admitted that he was such an inexperienced person, but he also thought that if he could only gain experience, he could one day become a brave and fearless commander like Krentz.

(But that doesn't mean I want to experience something like that.)

He was now in a standby position near Neue Hütte, with a new comrade who had reported to company headquarters five hours later than scheduled.

"Well then, let me introduce you again."

Krentz said. He had his favorite brand of cigarettes in his stubbled mouth.

"Private Anna Tarkovsky, who will be joining us today. Anna, please introduce yourself."

"Ye, yes....!"

She stepped forward with a gesture full of awkwardness.

"I am Private Anna Tarkovsky. I'm 16 years old and I'm from the Magdeburg Tank School. Um, I'm looking forward to working with you.....!"



Anna's voice was strained. Kurt sighed.

"As you can see, she is a chick who just graduated from tank school, but if she refines her skills, I think she can fill Jan's shoes."

(Really, I hope so.)

Kurt let out another sigh. Welcoming a new crew member meant that they had to be trained in actual combat — and that meant more work for the other crew members, directly leading to a decrease in everyone's survival rate.

The reason Anna was here was because Jan, who had been a loader, was sent to the hospital after an accident during training. In other words, Anna was sent in on short notice to take Jan's place.

A tank could only operate properly when the captain, gunner, loader, and driver work together. Jan and I had been fighting together for three months and had come to trust each other. If a newcomer joined the team, the ability to coordinate was reduced, and the risk of death was increased.

"As I told you this morning, a Type II alert was issued for all troops on the Oder River at midnight last night. A BETA offensive may be launched somewhere on the Oder River as early as tomorrow. We're not likely to be able to train properly before then, so please follow up with them closely."

If their prediction is correct, they would find themselves involved in a full-scale battle tomorrow.

(Why, at a time like this:)

"But Herbert, can she really fill in for Jan under such circumstances?"

Hugo asked in a tone that showed no sense of rank difference.

Krentz allowed only Hugo to call him by name. He trusted Hugo, a junior officer, that much.

"Yeah. That's why Anna is going to be the driver. Kurt, you're the loader."

"I...I will be the dr.. driver?"

"Fi...First Lieutenant? What does that mean?"

Anna and Kurt's voices overlapped. Afterwards, they unintentionally made eye contact.

Tank soldiers usually moved up in the order of their position from loader to driver and then gunner. The reason for the lowest rank for the loader was — purely physical work. It was hard work to continuously load heavy armor-piercing ammunition in a violently shaking vehicle. This was also the reason Jan was injured.

If Krentz was to be believed, Kurt would lose his driver position to a newcomer.

(I don't want to go back to being a loader after all this time, and it's absurd to suddenly put a rookie in charge of driving!)

Kurt appealed with a sense of impatience.

"Private Tarkovsky does not have sufficient skills as a driver! We could be facing a BETA offensive tomorrow, and with this rookie..."

"Wait. From what I've seen, this is the best arrangement. Anna, give these guys your T-62 driving time."

"Ye, yes. About 2,000 hours, sir..."

"Tw....Two thousand hours?"

Even Kurt had about 500 hours of driving time. To put it bluntly, both were in a completely different league.

"This girl, you know, she spent three years doing her labor service at a local tank factory, checking the operation of the control system before she was drafted. She volunteered to become a tanker. Being in a place like that, even if you don't want to, you'll get good at handling a T-62. was that right, Anna?"

"Y..., yes, well, I still don't have experience in driving on the front, but..."

(In other words, if you put Anna as the driver and me as the loader, we can immediately improve our capabilities.)

It was certainly reasonable, but there was no easy way to convince him.

Anna understood this and apologetically looked at Kurt's face.

(..... not that it's your fault, but come on, ...)

With mixed feelings, Kurt asked his superior, as a last resistance.

"I understand your policy, Lieutenant. But just to be sure, I would like to see her maneuver."

"And that's exactly what I intended to do."

Krentz nodded reassuringly, then he added.

"When you're done, show her around the main defense position. A tank soldier needs to know the terrain. I want to show her the site in preparation for tomorrow."

Same day, 4:00 p.m. German Democratic Republic
Main defense position

The standby position of the 2nd Battalion, 11th Tank Regiment (Willy Bebel) was connected to the main defense position by several trenches (Hall Gunks), deep enough to fit a T-62 chassis.

These trenches were to be used in case the normal roads were blocked by the BETA groups.

This allowed them to fight even if they encountered a swarm of tank classes while keeping their bodies concealed and moving. They were only for emergencies.

".....So, we call this trench the 'Hell-Burn Road'."

Kurt informed Anna, who followed behind him. They were advancing through one of the hall gunks in the forest.

"I, I see..."

Anna replied. Her tone was somewhat thoughtless.

"We certainly can't call it an Autobahn..." [\(48\)](#)

"Because we can't bypass the speed of 20km/h using it. The reason was that it's slightly angled to get the tank class in the crossfire."

"If it breaks down at a place like this, the lorries following us will be stuck..."

Kurt continued without looking back. He had to finish guiding her around the main defense position before the sun went down. There was not much time left.

— Anna did an excellent job of driving the T-62 during the drive they just had. Kurt's tongue was wagging. Now all that was left was for the four of them to coordinate their skills and they would be ready for battle.

Kurt had to admit Anna's ability. She might have been able to increase their survival rate better than if he, with his half-assed skills, was the driver.

However, his emotions were not following his reasoning.

Perhaps this was why, somehow, Kurt could not see Anna's face clearly. It was not that he disliked Anna or did not trust her skill. But...

(That doesn't mean I'll be convinced anytime soon, with all this

Then, he felt a heavy presence on his back.

He looked behind him and saw Anna staring at him with a look that seemed to have wanted to say something, yet couldn't say anything, but couldn't hide her anxiety. Her silence was eloquent.

(..... I'm the one who's to blame, right?)

Kurt thought, feeling guilty.

(I don't care if I'm a loader. It's tough but, if Anna can be a driver and if we can survive....)

".....mmm, hey"

"Y....Yes!"

Anna was startled. Kurt almost stopped himself from speaking, but then he continued.

"Don't worry about the position. I know I'm not half as good as you are."

"Bu...But"

"I say it's ok! So please don't be nervous like that. I won't mind from now on either."

"I understand, well, Griebel-san....."

There was still anxiety in Anna's eyes. She believed Kurt's words, but she didn't know how to treat him from now on.

"..... Then, how about we start with the formalities. You and I are the same age and the same rank, so we don't have to use honorifics."

"Y, Yes...."

"So I want you to talk to me normally, like you would talk to a friend. Only when it's just the two of us, like now."

"Are you sure that it's ok...?"

With a face that was a mixture of joy, surprise, and relief, Anna smiled faintly. The tension that had been building up until a few minutes before disappeared in an instant.

Kurt felt as if something in his chest was on fire. It was an unknown sensation.

In the six months since he was drafted, Kurt did not recall ever talking to a girl his age as an equal in this way. Even when he was a student, it didn't happen that often. Anna was trying to treat him like a normal person. **He**, who until a moment ago had been so blatantly distant from her.

(She looks plain, but when she smiles, she's surprisingly cute.)

"So, then, I can call you Kurt-kun from now on?"

"Oh, yeah. I told you you don't have to use honorifics."

"Mm, that sounds difficult"

"Just get used to it. I'll call you Anna too."

"That's right I mean, you betcha, ahahahahaha"

Anna smiled bashfully. The same feeling as before tickled Kurt.

He mumbled in confusion, trying to cover it up.

"Let's hurry. We're almost at the main defense position."

◇ ◇ ◇

"So this is the main defense position..."

Anna muttered and was speechless for the rest of the day. She was completely overwhelmed by the sight before her.

They were standing in the corner of the "Schulenberg Fortified Position", one of the main defensive positions of the Oder-Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line, which was built 8 km east of Colony Blitz, 15 km west of the Oder River. The name was taken from an abandoned village nearby.

In a nutshell, the "Schulenberg Fortified Position" was a huge position on a single hill with a diameter of six kilometers.

The hillsides were covered with countless base (circular) positions covering the surface of the ground - as if forming islands - with infantry, mortars, howitzers, anti-tank guns, and anti-tank missiles placed here and there. In the rear were self-propelled howitzers, anti-aircraft tanks, and tank companies/battalions of tanks and tank destroyers, all of which were positioned in ducted positions to support other units by retracting to reduce their projected frontal area within the position. Each position was reinforced as much as possible with concrete and wood and connected by trenches.

The advantages of such a structure were obvious. Because the positions were laid out like islands, even if one position was destroyed, the firepower of the other positions would remain the same - in other words, unless all the positions were destroyed, the BETA advance would be blocked. Also, by luring the BETA into the gaps between each position, it would be possible to lay down a dense crossfire there.

Currently, the 15th Mechanized Infantry Division and part of the 9th Tank Division, to which Kurt and his team belonged, were defending the "Schulenberg Fortified Position".

Furthermore, the "Schulenberg Fortified Position" was not an independent base.

About 4 km to the north across the plain was the "Angermünde Fortress Position", which was also located on a hillside, and about 5 km to the south was the "Falkenberg Fortress Position". In the vicinity of the Oder River, a small outpost, the "Neuenhagen Fortress," was located.

The Oder-Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line, in reality, was an unprecedented group of fortresses, a series of such huge positions spaced several kilometers apart.

The East German Army deployed its main forces in this group of fortresses, and at the same time, deserted a plain about 20 km west of the Oder River, which was its "front yard," to make it an assault crushing area with the intentions of gradually reducing the BETA groups crossing the Oder River with artillery fire.

(Tomorrow, this could be a battlefield.....)

In other words, he might die here. Kurt gulped.

"It's a bit more brutal than I thought it would be..."

Anna gave her honest opinion.

Most of the hills in the fortress area were covered with grasslands and bare ground. It is said that the area was originally a forest, but it was all burned down in past battles.

Position building continued even now, with the BETA offensive set to begin tomorrow. Around Kurt and Anna, soldiers were digging trenches with shovels. They were trying to increase their own survival rate until the very last minute.

"I thought for these so called fortresses, lots and lots of concrete ghosts would be lined up. You know, like those huge anti-aircraft turrets in Berlin."

An anti-aircraft turret was a huge anti-aircraft gun mounting facility built by Nazi Germany in World War II.

"Maybe they didn't have enough materials to build something like that. They are also an easy target for the laser class."

"So what about the ruins over there...?"

The city - or what used to be a city - could be seen in the corridor of the plain between the neighboring "Falkenberg fortified position" and where they were standing.

"That's an abandoned town called Eberswalde, ⁽⁴⁹⁾ I think. I guess it was abandoned because it got in the way of the defensive battle."

"I wonder if the Destroyer class will break through from that plain over there. As I recall, BETA like to go through plains..."

"Heeh, you've got a lot on your mind..."

The Oder-Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line was infused with all of the anti-BETA tactics that mankind has developed to date. If this line of defense was easily breached, they would lose no matter where they defended.

"Hey, Kurt-kun. If we can't protect this place tomorrow, what will happen to this country?"

"Uh...."

"I was just wondering"

Such a thought has never occurred to him. It was a story for a time after he died.

"..... maybe that alone won't destroy East Germany. I'm told that there is a counterattack force like ours waiting further back....."

"But when that happens, the people in the base here..."

"....It's unfortunate, but I think they're going to kill us all."

The most fearsome thing for infantrymen defending a position was the tank class — or so Kurt had heard.

The Grappler, Destroyer, and Fort classes were certainly fearsome, but these were opponents that infantry could not manage. If push comes to shove, they could abandon their positions and flee.

But the tank class was different. They struck as a red tsunami that covered the surface of the earth and laid waste to entire base areas.

And those who were swallowed up by it will surely meet their end, devoured while still alive, in the worst possible way a human being could be killed.

Kurt had to admit that the thought of being caught up in it scared the crap out of him.

In a BETA-occupied position, there were supposed to be a large number of tank classes that a counterattack force such as themselves would face.

"One division, ...more than 20,000 people here..."

Looking around at the entire fortified base in the distance, Anna muttered with a thoughtful expression on her face.

"We have to do our best for everyone..."

"Anna?"

Kurt felt like he was on to what Anna wanted to say, but at that moment....

"Hey, look...!"

"What the hell are they doing here?"

"Damn it, get away from here! Go somewhere else!"

The soldiers around them were shouting in hushed tones. It was as if they had found a hideous monster. They all pointed to the eastern sky.

A dozen TSFs were approaching, flying directly over the gentle ridgeline that bordered the Falkenberg Fortified Position.

(Tactical Surface Fighter!? A MiG-21 (Balalaika).....!?)

The profound upper body and the elegant lower body were interwoven together to create a superb silhouette. There was no mistaking it. It was the Mikoyan Gulyevich's MiG-21 (Balalaika), the main TSF of the East German Army. The entire body was painted black.

The altitude was less than 10 meters. It was a complete NOE — a very low altitude flight. Even for a TSF, which could fly like an aircraft, such a precise flight was extremely difficult and depended entirely on the skill of the surface pilots. The hot air from the jets shook the trees on the ground.

The squadron approached Kurt and his team rapidly with a roaring sound, and passed in front of them one after another. What was thought to be black paint was coagulated BETA bodily fluids, which painted the

TSFs reddish-black, like they were descendants from hell. On the shoulder was a marking in the shape of the letter "666". The "Number of the Beast" in "John's Revelation". A symbol of bad luck. [\(50\)](#)

Twelve MiG-21s (Balalaika) went west without pause as if they were crawling on the surface of the earth. They had apparently engaged in a battle with BETA on the eastern bank of the Oder River.

Despite the disturbance to their work, the soldiers silently saw the MiG-21s (Balalaika) off. Everyone had a bitter look on their faces, as if they had just had a nightmare. Kurt was in the same mood.

"Hey, Kurt, that was..."

Anna noticed the sudden change in the air and muttered in confusion.

"The Schwarzesmarken Squadron."

"Schwarzesmarken?"

"The 666th Tactical Surface Fighter Squadron 'Black Declaration/Sentence (Schwarzesmarken)' — I think it was a term coined by the Soviet brass. It's a famous TSF unit on the front."

"I had never seen a TSF in person before. I knew it would be cool and strong like that..."

"Hey, young girl, don't misunderstand. They are our 'Todesgott', you know? Don't let your guard down."

One of the soldiers standing nearby muttered annoyingly. Starting with that, his comrades opened their mouths in unison.

"The fact that they're here means tomorrow will be bad news."

"Damn it, the position isn't even finished yet."

"This is the end of us."

"Why not go to Seelow or Frankfurt an der Oder anyway?"

"What, uh, what on earth are you all talking..."

"Anna, it's time to get back to the company."

Kurt urged Anna to hurry. Anna was puzzled.

"What...?"

"Just shut up and go!"

"Uh, yeah..."

The two left the place inconspicuously to the soldiers. Anna, too, saw the look on Kurt's face and silently followed.

Kurt distanced himself from the soldiers and then opened his mouth.

"That TSF Squadron is also known as the "Sortierung" squadron."

"Sortierung....?" [\(61\)](#)

"You see, one of the identification tags that combat medics use to identify the wounded is a black identification tag. It's meant to streamline the work by sorting out the wounded who can't be saved, or those who can't be saved in time, or the ones where there is no meaning in saving them." [\(62\)](#)

"What does that have to do with the TSFs you just..."

"The 666th TSF Squadron is said to be the strongest TSF squadron in the East German Army. Rumor has it that it even has survivors of the Palaiologos operation."

"So, are they not supposed to be a reliable, experienced unit...?"

"Yes, and that is exactly why they will surely show up on the future battlefields. So their return here means that this will be the main axis of attack for the BETA tomorrow. that we were chosen."

"Oh..."

"In other words, the battlefields where they show up are always overrun by BETA. In reality, this has already been proven many times."

"But, I'm sure such a TSF unit would help us out if we were all in danger..."

"The role of the TSF squadron is to sweep the laser class, so they won't help us until that's done. Besides, even if they were ordered to support their allies, they will sort out which units they can help and which they cannot. If they don't think you are good enough to be protected, they will never help you."

"Then those who are not selected in such a way..."

"Yeah. At that point, there is no chance of survival — the BETA will kill us all. They will not hesitate to abandon their allies for the sake of the overall war situation."

"Such a thing...."

Anna was crestfallen. It certainly was not a story he could tell in front of the soldiers. It was too graphic and too ominous.

"And I've heard nothing but bad things about their commander."

Kurt continued as if to conclude.

"Captain Irisdina Bernhard. She is a female surface pilot who made a name for herself during the retreat from Poland, but I hear that she is very much hated even among the surface pilots because she is a commander who only plays an active role in losing battles."

"Active in nothing but losing battles....?"

"In other words, she's a nasty commander who can't demonstrate her abilities without a lot of deaths. I've heard that she once wiped out an entire unit in exchange for a great victory."

That may be one form of being "competent". But for Kurt, he did not want to fight under such a commander, nor did he want to be near her. The other soldiers would probably agree.

"It seems that they will stop at nothing to achieve their goals, and in the field, they will single-handedly bring other units under their command and use them as their own shields, or use their connections and bribes to get priority for materials and skilled surface pilots. There are even stories of people who sold their comrades-in-arms and siblings to the stasi to get to where they are today."

"....."

"That's why we also call that unit the "Todesgott" company, because they are the ones who bring about disaster to us or choose whether we live or die. At least they showed up, which means the BETA will surely come here."

What awaited them at the waiting position was an order from battalion headquarters to shift to Type 1 Alert, a full interception posture against BETA.

Kurt was not able to easily come to terms with the fact that the "Todesgott" was real, as he stared at Anna's stiffened body after receiving the order.

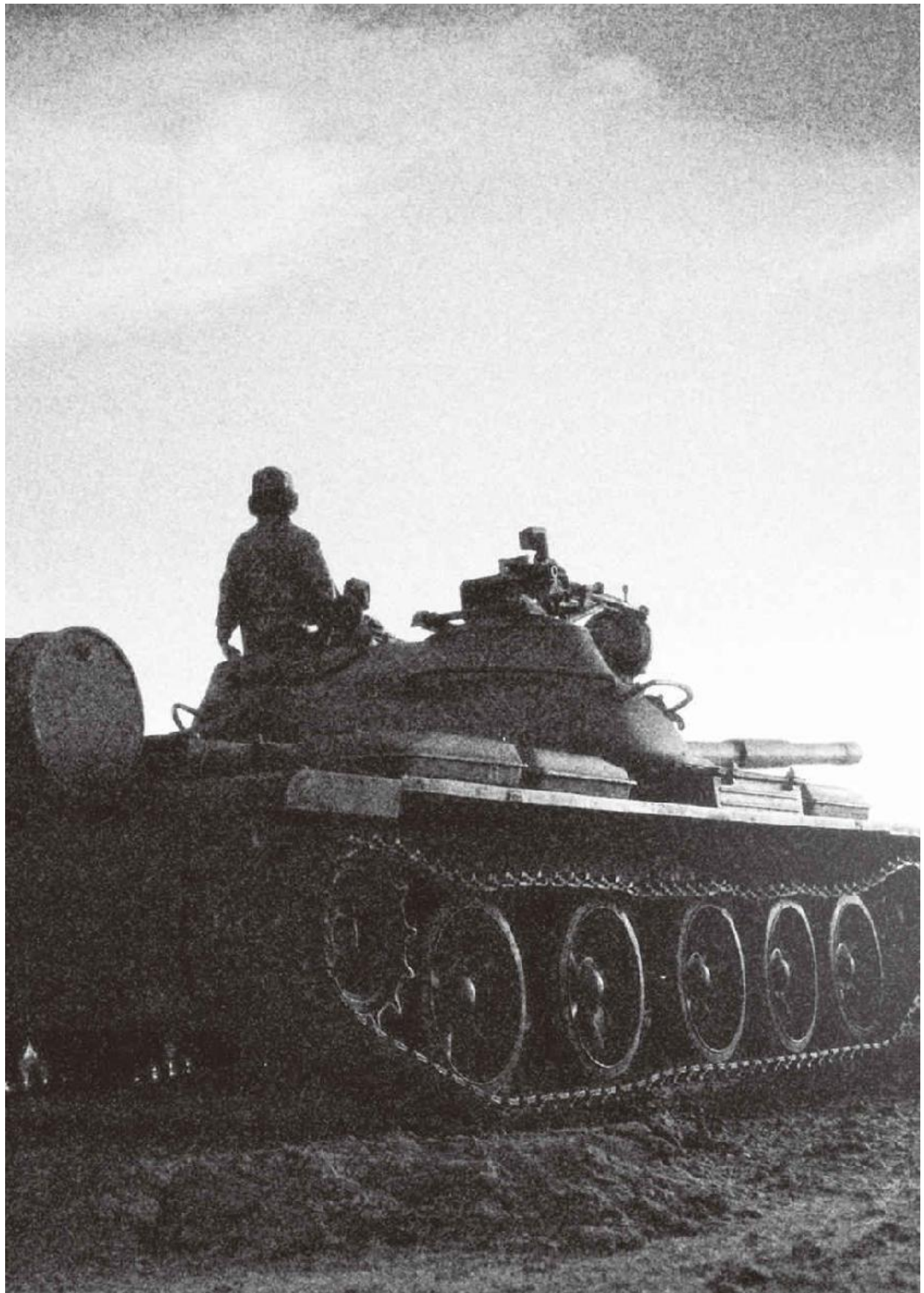
August 11, 6:00 a.m. German Democratic Republic
On National Highway No. 23 near Colony Blitz

Silence dominated the field. The 2nd Battalion of the 11th Tank Regiment (Willy Bebel) had been ordered to stand by since 4:00 a.m. Each vehicle, company by company, was lined up in long lines on the road.

"....."

Currently, Kurt had no work to do. Now that the loading of fuel and ammunition had been completed, Kurt and his team were ordered to literally "stand by".

The 11th Tank Regiment (Willy Bebel) was a counterattack reserve unit. Its job was to wait and wait until it was their time to appear. Moreover, if they didn't go out until the end, ... it meant that the front line had withstood the BETA attack. There was nothing wrong with that.



Nevertheless, it was a stressful situation to wait without being given any information, and not knowing when the order to go out would be given. The old T-62 was not equipped with the advanced data link system that the state-of-the-art T-80 had, and if they wanted to know what was going on at the front, they had to listen to the radio communications and gunfire of the other units.

Kurt looked at his watch. 6:32 a.m. It had only been about two and a half hours since the start of the standby.

"Hey, Kurt-kun."

"Whoa!"

Kurt looked overhead in surprise to see Anna peeking out of the hatch for the loader.

"Here, coffee to keep yourself awake."

She then offered him a cup of coffee.

"It's a coffee substitute, though. I made a pot this morning. I've already given ones to Lieutenant Krentz and Sergeant Hugo..."

It was no exaggeration to say that during operational activities, the cramped tank was the tank soldiers's residence. Naturally, soldiers brought with them daily necessities to spend long hours there. A pot for making coffee or tea was a typical example.

"Oh, thanks for that"

Kurt accepted the cup of coffee with a nod. For a moment, their fingertips touched each other and he got just a little nervous.

"Don't mention it. I'll collect the cups later, so please leave it at your feet."

Anna smiled and then disappeared to return to the driver's seat.

Kurt sighed and sipped at his coffee cup. The aroma was fragrant. The taste was not so bad either. Kurt had heard that East and West Germany were the largest coffee-consuming countries in Europe.

Looking across from him, he saw Krentz and Hugo, sitting in the gunner's and captain's seats, grinning and looking at him.

(What? We're the same age and rank, so we can at least talk with each other that much, ah!)

Suddenly, Kurt realized.

(Oh, that idiot! I told you that you can only call me by my name when it's just the two of us.!)

Kurt turned bright red as he realized the significance of the expressions on Krentz and Hugo's faces.

"By the way, Kurt-kun..."

Anna, back in the cockpit, asked to catch up.

"Wh-What? Tarkovsky."

"You know, kurt-kun.... I'd like to continue what we talked about yesterday..."

Krentz and Hugo were happily jittering their feet.

"What we talked about yesterday?"

Kurt deliberately coughed roughly and asked in a serious tone. Unlike earlier, Anna's tone was somewhat heavy.

"Yeah. I'm talking about the "Sortierung" squadron. Or formally speaking, the 666th TSF Squadron, the 'Schwarzesmarken', ..."

"The title 'Schwarzesmarken (Black Marks)' seems to have also been named after the significance of the nickname "Sortierung" What about it?"

"I was wondering if that unit was the real 'Todesgott' as everyone said..."

"The real 'Todesgott'?"

"Yeah because that squadron is also from the same East German army, you know? So I was just wondering why everyone is talking like that."

"....."

Kurt couldn't help but fall silent. It was a question he had never thought about before.

The 666th TSF Squadron was a "Todesgott," a group of "reapers" who attached black identification tags to their allies and whom they would prefer not to face if possible — such a story was already circulating around when Kurt arrived here. Kurt just took it to heart. He had also heard many stories of units that had actually been "abandoned" by these people.

But there were also stories of units that were "not abandoned" - rescued - by the 666th TSF Squadron.

They all talked about how strong and heroic the 666th TSF Squadron was when it rushed to their aid, and this was met with a great deal of hostility from those around them.

Kurt also did not dislike TSFs themselves, let alone the 666th TSF Squadron. Just before he was drafted, Kurt wanted to become a surface pilot — an officer in the TSF department. Unfortunately, that path was closed as a result of failing the aptitude test at the TSF Junior Academy.

"Maybe 'Todesgott' is a little wrong, but"

Kurt replied, choosing his words carefully.

"I also think they are people I wouldn't want to meet if I could. I don't want to be on the same battlefield as them, and I don't want to be abandoned."

"I, I see..."

"But why are you asking me that?"

"From my point of view, just the fact that you can think like that makes me envious..."

"Envious?"

"I was actually born in Ukraine. I was evacuated to East Germany when I was a child and changed my nationality there. That's why my accent is a little strange..."

(Ukraine? It was a part of the Soviet Union and now its under the complete control of the BETA, I think)

"That's why I..."

The next moment, they heard a hair-raising heavy bass sound like a thunderclap. It was the sound of explosions or gunfire — or both.

(It's started, huh!?)

"They've finally come!"

Krentz, whose mood was changed, said in a sprightly voice. He orders all the vehicles of the company.

"All hands, remain calm. It's just that the battle has started. Soon, the battalion will report..."

"Ba...Battalion headquarters has sent a transmission...!"

With the receiver to her ear, Anna reported. In the case of the T-62, the driver was also the radio operator.

"BETA groups are crossing Oder River! It appears that they have entered the Destroyer Class taxiway. Currently, artillery fire with AL (anti-laser) warheads and Destroyer class luring are underway! The estimated number of BETA hordes, 120% more than expected, still growing. Companies, stand by for counterattack!"

(20% more than expected!? Can the base withstand it?)

"Tell them 3rd Company copy. Hmm, it's been a while since we've had a BETA war like this."

Krentz then lit a cigarette he had taken out and exhaled purple smoke with a smile on his face. The inside of the turret became a white haze.

(This is the style of a Panzer Leader who survived Palaiologos.)

Krentz's dependable demeanor softened the sense of fear Kurt had just felt a little.

(With him, we may not die.)

Krentz, still blowing purple smoke from his mouth and nose, muttered a declaration to all BETA on earth.

"Let's give the aliens a good education on **whose blood we are descended from.**"

11:00 a.m. same day, German Democratic Republic
Main defense position

It was 10:30 a.m. when the 2nd Battalion received new orders from the regimental headquarters.

"Meet up with the support unit on Route 23 and support the first line of defense, sector A-6, of the "Schulenberg fortress position" with Hall gunks."

In accordance with this order, the battalion had joined up with the supporting units by 11:00 a.m. Its strength consisted of one anti-aircraft company equipped with ZSU-23-4 (Shilka) ⁽⁶³⁾ self-propelled anti-aircraft machine guns, and one mechanized infantry company equipped with BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles. It was a complete Combined Arms ⁽⁶⁴⁾ - Kampfgruppe ⁽⁶⁵⁾ formation.

Now, Kurt and his company had finished meeting with their companies and were waiting for the order to go out from the battalion commander.

"Why is an anti-aircraft squadron supporting a battalion.....?"

Anna asked curiously as she leaned out of the cockpit hatch.

"The enemy is BETA, not an aircraft...."

Around Kurt and his team, the ZSU-23-4 (Shilka), an anti-aircraft flight linked to the company, was conducting test firing. The ZSU-23-4 (Shilka) was equipped with four of these guns per vehicle, and their rate of fire was four guns per minute. The number of rounds fired exceeded 1,000.

"It's a tank class countermeasure."

Kurt also had his upper body out of the turret hatch.

"The tank's biggest enemy is the tank class, just like the infantry. To block their approach, we have anti-aircraft vehicles."

"So, the mechanized infantry that will be aboard the BMP..." ⁽⁶⁶⁾

"The position cannot be secured until the infantry eventually raids into the trenches. That's what mechanized infantry does." ⁽⁶⁷⁾

"So, tanks are not enough to fight the BETA.....?"

"Yeah, I think that's the case."

"Combined arms is the basis of operations. This is the domain of commanders like me, but it's worth remembering."

"Lieutenant?"

Krentz, who was also in the turret looking around, told them.

"Whether it's tanks, anti-aircraft tanks, or mechanized infantry, every unit has its weaknesses. We complement each other by forming battle groups (Kampfgruppe) to make the most of our capabilities. That's what makes us different from TSFs, which can do everything on their own."

"I see..."

"So, if we form a battle group (Kampfgruppe), we can be as effective as TSFs. Conversely, when it falls apart, that's when we're in the most trouble. Did you learn your lesson?"

"Ye, Yes.....!"

『—Attention, Achtung! Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Barkmann. From now on, you are in command of this battle group (Kampfgruppe)!』

「.....!!」

It was an order from the battalion commander. Leaving Krentz aboard the vehicle, the two hurried back inside.

『—As is well known, the fortified position is in a critical situation, and section A-6 is the flank of the Destroyer class taxiway. If we do not recapture it, we will allow the BETA to infiltrate from there.』

This meant that a failed counterattack risked leading to the collapse of the front lines.

『—The game is speed. Destroy the enemy from a distance and retake the position before the next wave comes pouring in. Each company must form a wedge (Arrowhead) formation!』

The battalion commander swung his hands down twice.

『—Panzer Vor!』 [\(68\)](#)

Krentz also released an order with a small microphone in hand.

「Third company, copy! All platoons, begin advancing!」

『—First platoon, copy!』

『—Second platoon, copy!』

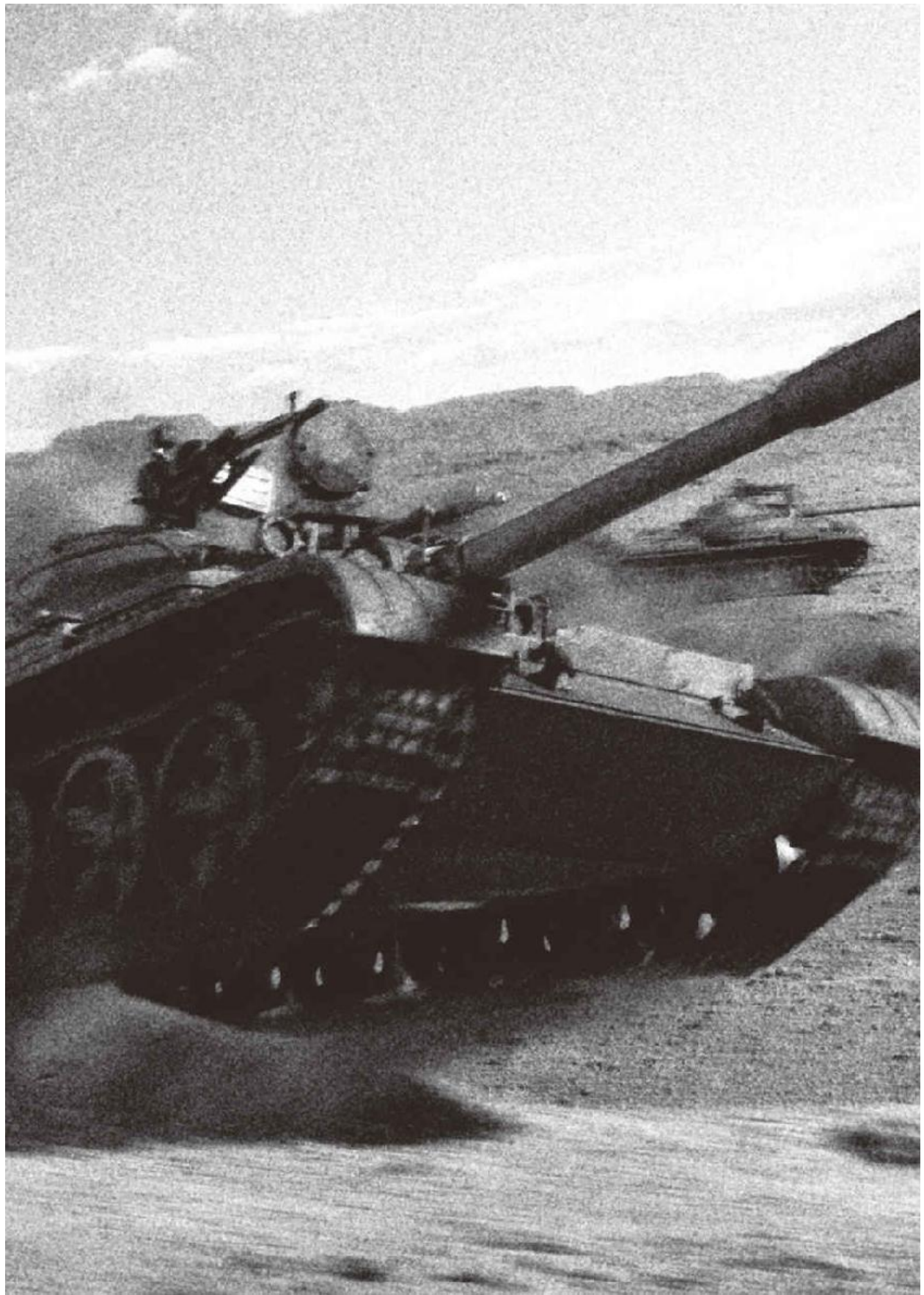
『—Third platoon, copy!』

『—Fourth platoon, copy!』

Following Krentz's order, the ten T-62s started up simultaneously and moved out onto the road, scattering dust and spreading noise.

「Copy that, moving forward!」

Anna manipulated several control rods to move the T-62 forward. Her movements were fluid, as if she were an experienced driver.



The battle group (Kampfgruppe), consisting of 42 T-62s, 14 ZSU-23-4s (Shilka), and 20 BMPs, began to advance like a torrent of steel, while raising a cloud of dust. The scene clearly showed that the relics of the Cold War, created by mankind, had not yet lost their fangs.

The Kampfgruppe arrived at the main defense position in less than 30 minutes. The battle had already begun, for a small number of tank classes had penetrated to the rear and were now in sight. These enemies were shredded one by one by the fire of the ZSU-23-4 (Shilka).

The battalion encountered a large BETA group in the A-6 area, the recapture target.

(This is...!)

Kurt was forced to feel his eyes swimming before the sight. Anna, too, let out a small moan.

Hundreds of thousands of faceless monsters stirred up beyond the soaring dust, about three kilometers out of sight. The majority of them were tank classes, but there were also more than a hundred Grappler class monsters, filling the area to the brim.

Even more astonishing was the array of more carcasses spread out at the feet of the BETA. Like a carpet of flesh, it covered the entire camp. All of them had been made by the troops who had been fighting in the camp. Because there were so many carcasses, no matter how Kurt looked at it, the bloodshed had turned the ground surface into a red quagmire of BETA bodily fluids.

(We can't abandon a unit that has done so much in the war to!)

『—First we have to get their attention! Squadrons, Feuer Frei! ⁽⁶⁹⁾ Target the small species!』

The Battalion commander's order echoed. Krentz also received it and gave the order in a loud voice.

「flight s, Feuer Frei! HE grenades! ⁽⁷⁰⁾ Target is the tank class! Take advantage of the leapfrog effect to take out the largest possible number!」

「Copy that! HE grenades!」

Kurt took a yellow-headed shell from the ammunition magazine at his feet and vigorously loaded it into the gun tail with his right clenched fist. Each high explosive grenade (HE) or armor-piercing shell (AP) weighted 10 kilograms. The loader had to do this constantly.

Immediately after, the gunner, Hugo, completed the alignment of the sights.

「Feuer!」

With an eardrum-shattering explosion, the T-62 released its main gun. A violent tremor shook the vehicle, and a shockwave spread out from the body in an arc, spraying the reddish-black liquid at their feet.

The shells were not aimed in a straight line at the tank class. They headed at an angle, as if plunging into the surface of the earth.

The shell hit the ground surface, ... and immediately afterwards, it leapt and struck the BETA group overhead. This was the leaping effect. A shot that was fired with the aim of rebounding from the surface of the earth at an angle.

The shell exploded over the heads of the tank classes — and the tank classes below were torn to shreds by the shell fragments. Rather than detonating the shell in the middle of the tank classes, detonating it overhead expanded the damage radius and could injure a greater number of targets.

In the minutes that followed, the battalion had unilaterally destroyed more than 500 tank class units. Most were only wounded and not destroyed — but it was enough for the battalion. On the front lines, "neutralizing" the BETA was the top priority.

「Th....That's amazing!」

Anna muttered in astonishment, but Kurt knew that the real work was just beginning. The current attack was aimed at drawing the enemy's attention to them as well as reducing the number of tank classes.

Sure enough, the BETA group stopped attacking the position and began approaching the battalion.

A swarm of tanks rushed in like a muddy stream — and mingled with them were a number of Grappler classes. Each one was stained reddish-black with the bodily fluids of its comrades.

「Wh...What are we going to do....!?!」

Anna's voice was tinged with fear. It couldn't be helped if it were her first battle. Krentz answered loudly.

「It's easy. All vehicles fall back and continue firing! Target remains tank class! Anna, apply the backward movement!」

「What? Are we going to run away?」

「That's not what I'm saying! Backfire! Hurry up! 」

「I...I get it now. Roger.」

Anna hastily put the gear in reverse and stepped on the accelerator pedal. The T-62 began to retreat, but the distance between it and the BETA did not widen.

But that was Krentz's goal.

Ten T-62s slaughtered tank classes one after another from the front while retreating. The tank classes were advancing while overcoming the corpses of their comrades, but the T-62s continued to retreat, unable to close the distance between them. Meanwhile, the T-62s continued to pound the tank classes unilaterally.

(So we don't have to naively approach the BETA, huh... ..)

Kurt thought. Backfiring was a basic tank tactic in anti-BETA warfare, but this was the first time he had experienced it in the field. No wonder Anna, a newcomer, was so distraught.

(But if we don't, they will haunt us before we can wipe them out!)

Sure enough, within a few minutes or so, the distance between the tank classes was less than two kilometers. The tank class was relentlessly closing in over the corpses of the other tank classes that had been reaped by the shooting. However.....

『—Anti-aircraft platoon, Feuer Frei! Give them a rain of lead!』

『—Copy that! All vehicles, Feuer Frei! Shoot, shoot, shoot!』

Along with the expected command, an anti-aircraft platoon equipped with ZSU-23-4 (Shilka) began firing.

The fire from the ZSU-23-4 (Shilka) was overwhelming. Four thousand rounds per minute — Armor-piercing shells (AP) were fired from four cannons at a speed imperceptible to the human eye toward a tank-class swarm. A roaring sound that was as good as the shooting sound of a tank dominated the surrounding area.

The tank classes ate countless bullets and flew away like pomegranate pieces. The ZSU-23-4 (Shilka) swiveled its turret laterally and mechanically magnified its carnage.

Following the anti-aircraft platoon, the BMP of the mechanized infantry platoon also opened fire. The BMP's armament consisted of a 73 mm low-pressure smoothbore gun and a machine gun. Two guns, inconvenient for mopping up a swarm of tank classes, but just right for pounding the ones that the T-62s and ZSU-23-4 (Shilka) had missed.

The wave of tank class attacks was stopped by three different types of vehicle fire. It was truly an effect of Combined Arms. Only the tank units could have swallowed up the tank class wave in such a short time.

While the tank class was being decimated, the grappler classes were now trying to make their move. They rushed forward like a heaping bull, trampling the carcasses of the tank classes with their four legs.

Krentz started to get angry. Even he seemed to get drunk on the bloodshed.

「Grappler class at 3 o'clock! Range 1,800! Hugo, quick! Aim fast! Kurt, AP! Anna, stop!」

「 「 「Roger ! 」 」 」 」

With the help of the four tankers, the T-62 completed its preparations for attack with movements as lean as a single living creature.

A depleted uranium penetrating core type 115mm armor-piercing round (AP) was ejected from the T-62's main gun, accompanied by a variety of flames and impactful shockwaves.

An armor-piercing shell (AP) rushed toward the Grappler class, trailing an orange tail..... it hit! A direct hit was made to the front of the grappler class, and their flesh was blown away with an explosion in pieces.

「Hugo, keep going, three shots in a row!」

「Roger!」

The T-62 opened fire in rapid succession.

Unlike tanks, or even humans, BETA did not retreat because of damage. Unless they chose to return to the hive on some basis, they would either advance or be unable to advance, one of two things. In this case, the most effective way to stop them from moving forward was to repeatedly hit them.

After being hit by four 115 mm armor-piercing (AP) rounds in a matter of tens of seconds, the Grappler class was reduced to rags and came to a halt, spraying a large amount of reddish-black droplets.

Other Grappler classes approaching the area also suffered the same fate, one after another, under the concentrated fire of the T-62 battalion. Some of them were blown limb from limb by the artful fire of ZSU-23-4 (Shilka), and some of them just lay there on the ground, writhing and struggling.

By this time, the number of BETA on the position had been drastically reduced, and the remaining BETA were damaged to a greater or lesser extent. There was no sign that subsequent groups were approaching.

『——Battalion commander to all companies! Halt your retreat and resume your advance! We will now retake the position!』

Immediately, Krentz's orders echoed.

「Anna, move forward!」

「Copy that! I'm going forward!」

The T-62 resumed its advance. The tank tread started to rotate in the opposite direction from before, sending up a cloud of dust.

The smell of BETA's bodily fluids, a mixture of sulfur and iron, and the strange, indescribable smell of its flesh burning filled the tank and made Kurt nauseous.

「Anna, are you okay?」

「I...I'm fine! I feel a little sick, but...」

They couldn't afford to have her sick, but her voice was firm. Perhaps the relatively safe progress of the battle so far has given Anna, a newcomer, some leeway to get used to the actual battle.

The battalion Kampfgruppe moved forward, trampling over BETA carcasses in order to get the infantry aboard the BMP into the trenches — and they did so.

In the end, Kurt and his battalion Kampfgruppe participated in a total of three counterattacks that day, all of which were successful in regaining their positions.

The damage was more than 20% of the total, which was not insignificant. However, Kurt and his company fought through three counterattacks without sustaining a single vehicle loss — and survived until the BETA offensive was over.

Above the main defense position dyed in the evening darkness, tens of thousands of BETA meat chunks and bony pieces of the flesh of countless people were silent, while giving off a strange and slimy smell.

9:00 p.m. same day, German Democratic Republic
Main defense position

Even after the sun had set and the BETA had stopped their offensive, the soldiers in the main fortified position still had work to do — the bloody task of recovering the dead and the BETA carcasses.

Kurt and his T-62 company had also joined the effort, under orders from battalion command. With the exception of TSFs, the BETA carcasses lying on the positions could only be cleared by tanks and specialized recovery vehicles such as the T-62s.

BETA carcasses were originally supposed to be sent back for disposal, but under the current circumstances, there was no room for that, and the best they could do was to collect carcasses that might interfere with the battle at a designated location.

In addition, soldiers wanted to look for the remains of their comrades, not the carcasses of BETA. If even one piece of flesh or a recognition slip of a comrade-in-arms fell out, it becomes a record, a memento, and is sent back to the family.

Under the brought-in lights, blood and mud-stained bodies were laid out on the roadside. It would have been good if they kept their human form, but most of them became something else, or only a part of them remained. Many of the bodies were so clinging to the ground that they could not be peeled away — as they had been crushed by the Grappler class. There were countless other bodies that were enough to shred the human spirit and dignity, and more than half of them were young boys and girls.

Soldiers on the front lines were going about their work in a variety of attitudes. Some were silent, some cried, some shed tears with few words, some repeatedly vomited, and some became half-crazy. It was a hell different from the battlefield.

"....."

Anna and Kurt watched the inferno as the Grappler-class carcasses were strung together on the T-62's tow wire. Both were already at a loss for words, and now even their emotions were numbing.

People who should have been alive just yesterday were being killed, crushed, and mutilated by BETA, and countless non-human figures were lying around, and yet, it was almost becoming "normal". It was so unrealistic that their emotions could not keep up.

Instead, a painful sense of helplessness and guilt was consuming both of them.

"We've recaptured positions three times today in one day's fighting....."

Anna muttered in a shaky voice.

"Three times. Each time I was scared and felt like I might die, but I still gathered up my courage. However..."

Anna hung her head, while gritting her teeth.

"Why is it like this? Why is everyone dying, even though we worked so hard? Why, why...!"

"....."

"One-third of the dead bodies lined up over there were girls just like me. I didn't want them to die so gruesomely like that, I wanted them to die in a beautiful human form....., at least."

With a trembling voice, Anna barely manages to form words. A body with a crushed and strangely deformed head, with what appeared to be an ankle, and a tuft of bloodied hair. The gruesome scene was burned into Kurt's mind.

"I'm sorry I couldn't save them..."

Kurt could not think of anything, as if his mind had been worn out. It was hard to do anything but watch Anna sobbing sadly. At the very least, he wanted to stop her tears.

It was a solid fact that both him and Anna fought today to the best of their ability.

"But, I'm sure our fight wasn't in vain."

Kurt muttered that to Anna, while knowing they were just words for temporary peace of mind.

"Our counterattack should have saved the soldiers who survived in that base. No, we have to think so."

"Yes, I know. I know that, I believe that..."

Anna nodded repeatedly as if to convince herself, then wiped her tears with her right hand and lifted her chin.

"Thank you, Kurt-kun. Even though you're having a hard time too. I'm sorry for worrying you..."

"That's not"

"I know that. I know I did everything I could for everyone. But it still hurts, and I don't know what to do with this feeling..."

Then she made a smile to shake it off and looked at Kurt.

"But thanks to you, Kurt-kun, I feel a little better. I think I would have cried more if you hadn't been next to me."

(Maybe I'm also able to endure it because Anna is by my side.)

Friends who had the same feelings could share them together through touch, not just words. Having the same sentiments made them close enough to be able to do that.

Kurt felt his creaking heart soften just a little, Just thinking about it.

"Hey, that's!"

Suddenly, one of the soldiers working on the recovery operation shouted, pointing to the western sky.

A number of orange blips floated in the darkness, just above the surface of the earth. The high-pitched sound of jets. Twelve TSFs — the size of a regular squadron, with no losses.

"TSFs? MiG-21s (Balalaika)!?"

"You're just showing up now Some squadron you are!"

"It's the middle of the night and they're doing the NOE."

"No way, they're!"

Kurt gulped. He couldn't think of any other TSF unit that could handle flying very low in the dark of night.

"Schwarzesmarken....!"

Twelve MiG-21s (Balalaika) appeared and disappeared quickly in front of Kurt and his men

They didn't even bank. ⁽⁷¹⁾ It was as if they had no interest in the devastation on the ground.

"What a bunch of assholes."

Someone grunted and muttered.

"You walked right past us without even a greeting! We are fighting on the ground with nowhere to run, and even now we are preparing for tomorrow, and you just take it easy and fly!"

"They passed right over my company when we were being attacked by a tank class."

Another soldier said. The tip of his right elbow was missing.

"You had an assault cannon in each hand, and you could have saved us if you wanted to! We were fighting tank classes with guns and shovels!"

His voice trembled with a hint of passion.

"If you'd at least fired some shots, we might have been able to regain our bearings. Thanks to you, my entire company was wiped out! I can still hear the decimations of my friends stuck in my ears Damn it!"

"The fact that those guys are still here means that tomorrow, this place is still in trouble."

Yet another soldier muttered. He looked around at the devastation in the camp.

"How are we supposed to fight tomorrow with the way things are going? Why don't they help us? What are we? So we just buy ourselves some time by getting eaten by BETA while they hunt for the laser class?.....Damn it!"

"Bu.....But....!"

Suddenly, Anna raised her voice.

"TSFs have their own missions, and even the people of the "Sortierung" squadron..."

"So what!"

The one-armed soldier stared at her with wild eyes. Anna reflexively shrank back.

"You know what? They abandoned us! If they had covered us back then, we might have been saved! Would you be able to accept that if the same thing happened to you!?"

"But..."

"They don't care what happens to us. As long as they accomplish their mission, that is."

One of the soldiers said as if to spill his heart out.

"But we can't just let them sort us out and die. We want to kill lots of BETA, too, and we want to defend our homeland. But we can't stand to die abandoned by our allies."

Then he gazed at the countless bodies laid out on the side of the road with a mournful expression on his face.

"If our precious comrades-in-arms, women, and children would turn into garbage like this, then abandoning us like that would be too cruel, wouldn't it?"

August 11, 11:00 p.m. German Democratic Republic
Standby position

Kurt and his team were returning to their rear standby positions.

It was not because the BETA recovery operation had been completed. They were ordered to sleep — to rest. According to reports, the BETA group was expected to invade tomorrow morning on the same scale as today. In order to fight again tomorrow, they had to take a rest by all means.

In addition, the battalion's T-62s were also in need of temporary maintenance. In addition to the battle damage, more than 20 T-62s were out of action due to malfunctions and broken parts.

At 11:00 p.m., the battalion's standby trenches were filled with soldiers taking turns taking naps.

Everyone was wrapped in blankets and sleeping bags, sleeping like logs. This might have been due to the sudden drop in temperature at midnight. However, the night sky was clear and cloudless, and the sky was filled with countless stars thanks to the absence of city lights.

Kurt and Anna were ordered to take a nap by Krentz. Krentz and Hugo were out to pick up a T-62 that they left with the maintenance squadron.

(We're done tomorrow, I guess.)

Kurt thought, feeling more emptiness than fear.

A few hours ago, he saw countless bodies laid out on the side of the road. Perhaps he would be one of them, he thought. And that too, was a result of being abandoned by their allies...

(I'm not going to let that happen!)

Even the tank soldiers were doing their best. It was a joke to think that life and death could be decided at other people's convenience.

However, he had no idea what to do to avoid it.

(I wonder how Anna feels about that)

Kurt looked at Anna, who was wrapped in a blanket right next to him.

"

"Are you awake, Kurt-kun?"

Kurt was flabbergasted. He answered in a nervous voice.

"Ahh, yeah"

"Thank God. I thought you'd gone to bed..."

Her voice contained unbridled relief.

"I knew you couldn't sleep right away, isn't that so? You are still thinking about everything that happened..."

"..... yeah."

"I feel like there were so many things going on today, it's kind of weird. I don't know how to put it into words at all..."

Anna continued to chuckle.

"But I'm glad I survived, I guess. Me and you, Kurt-kun."

"....."

"It would be beyond sad if someone you had just made friends with died the day after you met them. Besides, it is very painful to have no one close to you at a time like this..."

Anna poked her head out of the blanket and smiled kindly.

"So, I'm glad I survived, I think. And of course, Hugo and Krentz, too. My driving kept us all alive"

Kurt had no answer. Because after all this time, Kurt was just remembering.

Today's battle was Anna's first.

Anna passed it with flying colors and survived. As a driver, she fulfilled her role admirably.

Perhaps that was a great thing. Perhaps it was the fruit of her efforts, having trained voluntarily to become a tank soldier.

(But, why)

"Hey, Anna."

Kurt asked in a whisper to clear his inner doubts.

"What? Kurt-kun."

"How can you stay so positive? Even though you are not German, but Ukrainian."

"....."

"The same goes for the 666th TSF Squadron. Why are you protecting those guys or envying us for their presence.....? They're our allies, but they're "Todesgott" who abandon their friends. So how can you accept their existence in a positive way"

Maybe tomorrow, they would be the ones to be abandoned by them.

Maybe tomorrow, they would be dead because of them.

"....., this is going to be a continuation of this morning's story, okay...?"

Her voice was hesitant, but kurt nodded firmly.

"I'll cut straight to the point. I'm going to stay here and do my best..."

"Here ... in East Germany?"

"Yes. But it's not for humanity, or for East Germany, or for any other great purpose, but just for myself..."

Anna continued, somehow apologetically.

"I was born and raised in a town called Kharkov ⁽⁷²⁾ in Eastern Ukraine, one of the largest cities in the country. But if you go a little bit out of the city, you can see sunflower fields all the way to the horizon. In the summer, the scenery was really wonderful. If I could, I would show it to you, Kurt-kun. This hometown, with its beautiful sunflower fields, I loved it so much."

Anna's expression looked as if she was searching for memories. She must have been thinking back to the scenery of her hometown. Under the summer sun and blue sky, countless sunflowers filled the ground — it was certainly a scene befitting the vastness of Ukraine.

"Five years ago, however, BETA invaded from the east... One day, soldiers suddenly broke into my apartment and told me to pack my belongings by morning and to get on an evacuation train that was leaving... I didn't understand what they were saying, but I followed their instructions and found myself in this country."

Kurt's mind raced with memories: five years ago. Just as the BETA began their invasion of Ukraine.

As a result, many of Ukraine's people were forced to evacuate halfway to Eastern European countries. They were known as "Eastern Refugees (Ost-Flüchtlinge)" together with the evacuees from Poland and the Baltic States.

Anna was one of those Ost-Flüchtlinge.

"When I left Ukraine, I was very frustrated and sad, but I also knew there was nothing I could do. But it was also hard, and I felt sorry for myself because there was nothing I could do..."

Anna continued her words quietly.

"So I thought to myself at the time. I never want to feel like this again. This time, I don't want to just run away, I want to do something to protect everyone....."

"....."

"My first thought was to get on a TSF. At the time of my evacuation, there were almost no TSFs in Ukraine. Just before I left, I saw a report on the TV news that Soviet MiG-21s (Balalaika) were active somewhere, and I felt very sad. I thought, if they are so strong, they should come here to help us and protect our homeland..."

It was an unimaginable sentiment in today's East Germany, where TSFs are recognized as the "main weapon in the war against BETA". Ukraine, especially its eastern part, was forced to become a battleground during that transitional period.

"But in East Germany at that time, only a very small number of Germans could become surface pilots, and it seemed difficult for me, a native of Ukraine. So I decided to become a tanker instead. In Ukraine, where there were no TSFs, tanks were the trump card against BETA..."

(Similar to me, yet different)

Kurt thought. He gave up on the path of becoming a surface pilot and became a tank driver, but only because he couldn't think of anything else to do. Anna, however, had a clear goal in mind from the beginning and decided to become a tank soldier.

"So, as soon as I entered high school, I started doing labor service at a tank factory near where I had been evacuated to, and I studied. Of course, I needed money. We refugees couldn't get decent jobs, so..."

She exhaled loudly and again uttered her conclusion.

"That's why I'm thinking of doing my best to protect everyone. To avoid feeling like how it was five years ago"

Then she chuckles apologetically again.

"Haha, this is kind of a selfish reason, isn't it? It's not that I love East Germany or that I believe that one day I will be able to return home..."

"That's not what"

Kurt could not say for sure.

East Germany, which was under surveillance by the Stasi, was by no means a paradise on earth. However, the people were living their daily lives to the fullest. It was the role of the military to protect these lives.

"So for me, I'm kind of jealous, of the people in East Germany today."

As if feeling guilty, Anna continues heavily.

"We haven't lost our homeland yet, and we have plenty of tanks and TSFs. There is even a unit called the 666th TSF Squadron "Schwarzesmarken", which is probably doing its best even though it is hated by everyone. From my point of view, I think, Oh, this place is still good..."

Kurt looked away from Anna. Suddenly, he felt sorry for himself. Anna, who had lost her hometown without being able to do anything about it, probably saw the feelings of the soldiers who hated the 666th TSF Squadron, which was supposed to be very strong, as nothing more than selfishness.

"So I don't feel bad for that squadron. Even the surface pilots operating those MiG-21s (Balalaikas) are not abandoning their allies because they want to. I think they are doing so because they have no other choice, just like us who abandoned our hometowns without being able to do anything about it..."

Then she smiled. A smile that had no place to go.

"But, that said, I don't know if I would be able to die with satisfaction if I were abandoned, either. You might say it's extravagant,....., but if I'm going to die, I'd at least like to die beautifully in my human form..."

The bodies they just saw, which no longer seem to be human, and Anna's words there. Kurt couldn't really feel it, but perhaps the desire to "die beautifully" was a normal wish for a woman like Anna.

"Here is my answer. Sorry if I kept talking for too long. Kurt-kun might despise such a different way of thinking from the East Germans..."

Kurt could not answer immediately. A lot of thoughts were mixed up in his mind, and he couldn't put them together right.

But one thing could be said. That much was a certain fact for Kurt.

"I think Anna is fine just the way she is."

Anna looked at Kurt in surprise. It was an unexpected comment for her.

"Anna's way of thinking is not strange. I think we are twisted. Everyone is so desperate to survive that they have lost their composure. The same is true of the 666th TSF Squadron. They are the strongest

squadron in East Germany. There is no way they are not helping everyone. But I don't think people want to admit that."

"But, why...?"

"It would be an admission that there is no other reason for their misfortune than BETA."

(That was probably the main reason for all of this.)

Kurt mentioned a thought he had noticed in his conversation with Anna.

Yes, at least, as long as that squadron was visible on the battlefield, the soldiers could find reasons for their unhappiness other than the BETA — an entity that was beyond their personal power to control.

The squadron was here to mark this as the main battleground, and they were getting killed because the reapers were abandoning them With that in mind, they could justify and give reasons for their own and their friends' misfortunes. They could think that they were not so bad. It made them feel better.

Maybe that's just the way it was, and there's nothing they could do about it. That was how people came to terms with reality.

But Anna has already passed that stage long ago.

So, Anna just had to keep going and stay positive. Just like before. Just like today.

There was no need for Anna to wallow in self-deprecation. Rather, Kurt wanted her to live her life with pride.

"Anna fights for Anna and I fight for me. I think that's fine. Besides, it is because of Anna's way of life that you and I met here and were able to talk like this on good terms."

Kurt said, embarrassed. Anna, too, blushed and looked away.

"And anyway, that's what I think, so I don't think you need to worry about it. I'm sure you would be fine even without me telling you all that."

Anna shook her head, smiling.

"I'm glad I told you, Kurt-kun. You are the first East German friend who listened to me seriously. When I told my instructor at the tank school about what I just said, he beat me up..."

"Well, that's extremely likely to happen, yeah...."

"I'm such a reclusive person that I haven't really made friends since I came to East Germany. being Ukrainian, I didn't really have anyone to talk to about my true feelings..."

Kurt dropped his gaze. He couldn't say anything.

"So, thank you, Kurt-kun. For listening to me. And It made me feel a little better. I had a lot on my mind earlier."

Kurt realized. Talking to Anna had somehow calmed his emotions. He even remembered feeling positive.

Anna was working hard, so he had to work hard, too — that's how he felt now.

In the end, everyone had to fight for themselves. No matter what awaited them tomorrow. The only thing left was to have the right mindset.

And then, Anna murmured, with difficulty - and somewhat embarrassment - in her faltering voice.

"Um, hopefully."

".....?"

"I want to sleep with my hands tied behind my back with you, Kurt-kun."

"What?"

"It's kind of cold today, and this might be my last night..."

"Don't say it's the last, that's a bad omen! We are"

"It's okay...."

Anna's eyes had a certain longing in them.

"It's okay. Just because we connect our hands doesn't change our destiny. I will always do my best. But I'm still afraid that tomorrow will come. I'm so pathetic, aren't I, even though I worked so hard to become a tank soldier."

"....."

"But please, just for now, together..."

After a slight hesitation, Kurt slowly reached out his right hand and laid it on Anna's left hand.

Anna's palm was much smaller and colder than Kurt's.

Anna, too, mutters in amazement.

"Kurt-kun, your palms are so big and warm..."

"....."

"I hope I can hold your hand again tomorrow."

Anna muttered in a fading voice and began to sleep as she did.

Kurt felt his heart throb as he gently held Anna's palm, warming it with his own body heat.

He was beginning to feel that he must protect this innocent girl from being crushed by sadness so that she would not be frustrated by reality as he was.

Together forever. Preferably until death.

"..... No, I can't die yet."

Kurt muttered willfully.

"I don't want to die yet. Neither I nor Anna."



The next morning, the soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, who woke up in the standby position, felt even more despair.

A dense white fog covered the entire area of the "Schulenberg fortified position".

The low temperatures at the time and the radiative cooling ⁽⁷³⁾ at night made the air colder, and when it came into contact with the warm Oder River, it apparently created a fog. Visibility was less than 200 meters.

Worst of all, BETA identified humans regardless of fog, but humans couldn't display proper firepower when the fog was present, and it was the same for tanks like the T-62.

Kurt and Anna could do nothing but stare dumbfounded at the white veil spreading before them.

August 12, 11:00 a.m. German Democratic Republic
Standby position

The damage to the "Schulenberg fortified position" had increased faster than the previous day after the battle began.

The East German army had restored 70% of its damaged positions thanks to the all-night efforts of the engineering units — but there was a limit to what they could do with their exhausted forces. The first Destroyer-class assault was crushed, but from then on, the BETA were crushing the position. The main reason was that the fog made it difficult to stop them from a long distance.

Within two hours of the start of the battle, the fortress command post at "Schulenberg fortified position" had decided to abandon the main defensive position and ordered all troops to retreat to a reserve position. The reserve position was incomplete and probably not even half as durable as the main defensive position.

Then, at 11:14 a.m.

A battalion battle group (Kampfgruppe) was ordered to counterattack to retake the position. The location was in sector B-12. It was located in the center of the reserve position, directly in front of the Oder River.



Just like yesterday, Kurt and his T-62 team arrived at the battlefield, sweeping away the tank classes that had infiltrated the rear.

In the foreground was the usual scene — countless living BETA and immobile BETA. There should have been a destroyed position, but the fog made it impossible to see that as well. Kurt and the others could barely see the other T-62s commanded by Krentz, and they could not see the other companies at all. And considering the possibility of an accident, it was difficult to retreat as a tactical maneuver like yesterday.

Krentz gave his command in a voice that was far from composed.

「Anna, watch your step! Don't get stuck in a shell hole!」

「Co, copy!」

「Hugo, Kurt, stay alert! In this fog, you never know where the next attack is going to come from!」

「 「Copy!」 」

Kurt replied firmly, but on the inside, he was frustrated by the reality of the situation, which was so unreasonable.

(I can't believe it's foggy at a time like this. Damn!)

Suddenly, multiple gunshots were heard. They were the sounds of the ZSU-23-4 (Shilka) fire of the anti-aircraft company. The company was deployed wide to the flank of the battalion to block the approach of the tank class.

「Wh...What the!?!」

「Groups of tank classes are approaching from both wings! Hugo, Kurt, use the on-board machine guns! This fog makes main gunfire impossible!」

「 「Copy!」 」

Kurt opened the hatch and attached the 12.7 mm anti-aircraft machine gun to the turret. Next to him, Krentz did the same and attached to the 12.7mm to the turret as well.

In addition to the main gun, the T-62 was armed with two 12.7 mm anti-aircraft machine guns on the turret for the commander and loader, and two 7.62 mm machine guns on the turret and body for the gunner and driver. Both were close-in firearms that served as anti-tank class guns. For tanks, these weapons were their lifeline, as a swarm of tank class could be the end of them.

(It's just too much to engage a tank class in close combat...!)

「Lieutenant, the anti-aircraft platoon is the ZSU-23-4 (Shilka) is...!?!」

Anna reported as if she was screaming. Krentz replied.

「Report clearly!」

「Our anti-aircraft squadron is being haunted by a swarm of tank class! Everyone radioed desperately for help...!」

Kurt lifted his chin in a huff and listened carefully. After a few seconds, his expression froze.

Countless tank-class footsteps and soldiers' screams were faintly heard mixed with the shooting sounds of ZSU-23-4 (Shilka). The shooting sounds of the Shilka were also getting smaller and smaller. In the fog, the Shilkas were being reduced one by one due to the tank-class attacks.

The battalion commander gave no new orders. Relief would no longer be available in time. Besides, the battalion's strength could not be dispersed under the current circumstances.

Anna was breathing as if she was desperately enduring something. From the radio transmissions she was intercepting, she could probably hear the desperate cries of the soldiers in the anti-aircraft platoon.

Immediately after, Krentz's raging voice was heard.

「Here they come! Two o'clock, tank class!」

Kurt stared in that direction. The silhouettes of hundreds of tank classes were floating in the fog. The distance was about 300 meters.

「Feuer Frei! Don't let them get too close!」

「Co, copy!」

Kurt pulled the trigger of the 12.7 mm. With a shock, a large number of bullets were ejected from the muzzle.

At the same time, fire rose from the coaxial machine gun in the turret. Hugo was pulling the trigger. Anna however, was the only one not firing, in case of any sudden movement.

The 3rd Company began machine gun fire. Numerous lines of fire extended through the fog, blowing away what appeared to be tank classes one after another.

However, the approach of the tank class was not over. Without regard for the damage, they came rushing in from the fog like a never-ending tsunami.

(If you miss even one of them, they'll kill you!)

「Whooooooooooooa!」

Kurt reflexively shouted. He shot and killed the approaching tank classes at random.

「Kurt, tank class at 11 o'clock! It's close!」

Anna shouted. Kurt turned his posture in that direction.

「.....!!!」

Several tank classes were approaching. The distance was 10 meters. They were approaching without anyone noticing. Without Anna's voice, they would have been in danger.

「Don't come over here!」

Kurt resumed shooting. He aimed at the torso, which had the largest exposure area. After a series of crashes, bangs and booms, the tank classes that were close to the vehicle were all crushed.

Krentz, who was firing with him, gave the order.

「Kurt, now behind you! You do it!」

「Got it!」

Putting all his energy he could muster in both his hands, he flipped each machine gun, and as soon as he found a group of tank class, he cleaved them off.

「Take This, and you, and you!」

This time, a gunshot came from the body of the tank. The 7.62mm gun in Anna's cockpit began firing.

「Anna, why did you shoot! Your job is

「Tank class on the front! They are not even 30 meters away...!」

「I'll handle it!」

Kurt further reversed his posture and shot the new flock in a few seconds.

The area around the company was filled with tank class carcasses at some point without them realizing it. There were so many that the ground surface was obscured.

However, the momentum of the tank classes did not stop. They were surging in like a tidal wave. They still had ammunition, but eventually, it would run out.

「Lieutenant, we can't go on like this!」

「Don't even think about it! Now we just have to sweep them off their feet!」

「But

At that moment, a huge shock struck from under their feet.

「Whoa!」

Kurt almost lost his posture — but he held on.

(Wh...What the hell

The impact was continuous. It was as if a giant was trampling the earth's surface with its many legs.

Anna's fear-tainted report reached their ears.

「Battalion commander to you lieutenant! New target approaching from the front! The target is a fort-class...!」

Immediately after, a huge shadow appeared in the fog, looking like a fetus, a caterpillar, and a spider combined.

The largest of the BETA, the fort class, had appeared. Although only one in number, its majesty surpassed that of any living creature.

「Ah, ah」

Kurt muttered in dismay. For the huge fort class, the T-62 was no bigger than a pebble underfoot. At this rate, they would end up being trampled.

(What the hell am I supposed to do)

Kurt's company did not have proper combat training against the fort class. According to the military's assumption, the Fort class was to be killed by artillery fire and airstrikes after the TSF units swept the laser class.

The fort class was apparently recognized by all vehicles in the battalion, and some of them began firing.

But to no avail. The angle was not enough, and the T-62's main gun had a low maximum elevation angle — the limit angle at which the gun's barrel could be raised. Unless a shell with a straight trajectory was used, it was difficult to hit the huge fort class directly at close range. All of the shells slipped past the feet of the Fort class.

This time, another group of tanks began to rush toward the fort class. At least, they were trying to concentrate their fire on the armored legs on both sides.

「Stop! Stay away from it! It has」

Before Krentz could finish his words, a tragedy appeared.

Suddenly, a whip-like tentacle extended from the abdomen of the Fort-class..... The tip of that tentacle cleaved the T-62s at its feet.

The T-62s bounced and rolled like toys, and as soon as they hit the ground, they exploded. Black smoke and flames billowed.

And then, the Fort class moved forward through it all with ease.



(If something like this comes, it's the end of us and this fortified position.!)

「Battalion Commander's orders! All vehicles, prepare to fire on the spot! We will now commence weak point fire on the fort class! Anti-tank missiles!」

「.....!!!」

(Are you going to fight against a fort class, the battalion is!)

「Kurt, load it up now! The 9M117 (Sheksna)!」 [\(74\)](#)

「Co, copy!」

Kurt went back inside the turret and lifted a red-headed shell from the ammunition magazine at his feet. Compared to the other shells, it was much more rounded in shape.

9M117 (Sheksna) was an anti-tank guided missile. This anti-tank missile was developed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War to outrange Western tanks, and was currently being used as a modified version for anti-BETA warfare. Its tandem-shaped explosive warhead allowed it to penetrate targets at long range with greater penetration than conventional armor-piercing (AP) rounds. On the other hand, these missiles were expensive and produced in small numbers, with only three or four rounds delivered per tank.

「Target, right nodule of the fort class! Companies, Feuer Frei!」

「Third company, Feuer Frei!」

「Feuer!」

Twenty T-62s fired 9M117 (Sheksna) from their main guns. Guidance and control were provided by a laser sighting device inside the tanks.

The 9M117 (Sheksna), while drawing an arc-shaped trajectory, thrust toward the Fort class — hitting the Fort class's "right shoulder" one after the other, causing multiple explosions.

「Keep firing! Show them that tanks are not helpless even against fort classes!」

The T-62s continuously fired all the 9M117s (Sheksna) they had on board, over 30 missiles, trailing white smoke as they headed for the Fort class.

For both Kurt and Anna, it was an unimaginable sight. Never before had they heard of a T-62 going head-to-head with a Fort class.

In less than a minute, the battalion had shot out all 9M117s (Sheksna). In the fog beyond, huge black plumes of smoke created by the impact floated in the air.

Soon, the silhouette of the fort class appeared.

「…………… ! 」

The battalion's concentrated fire had cut off the right nodule of the three-body structure, and the Fort class was stranded on the spot. The Fort-class, which had lost one-third of its main body, was still struggling on the ground, trying to move forward.

Inaudible cheers echoed from the radios of the various tanks. Krentz and Hugo, too, exhaled loudly.

「Ha, ha ……!」

Kurt let out a dry laugh as the T-62s, with practically less than a company of tanks, slaughtered a fort class that even TSFs could not hold at bay.

Kurt clenched his fists, and a certainty settled in his chest.

(I almost gave up earlier, but I'm still okay. ……)

Even the fort class has fallen. The Battalion Combat Team (Kampfgruppe) will definitely get through the fight ……!

Immediately after Kurt had such positive thoughts....

The T-62, with four people aboard, was hit with the most powerful side-blow it had ever tasted, and was blown away.

◇ ◇ ◇

At the moment of the blow, Kurt was struck from the right shoulder by the gun breech. [\(75\)](#)

「Gaaaaahhhh——!」

He released an inaudible scream of extreme pain.

But it didn't end there. Without understanding why, he was swung back and forth inside the turret from side to side. A heavy shock hit his entire body. All he could do was hold his head down with his left hand,

which was still in one piece. And then, a terrible roar echoed from beneath his feet — with each bounce of the tank's body, the tank treads were torn off, creating an eerie sound that scraped the ground surface.

「Kyaaaaaahhhh——!」

Mixed in with Anna's screams were the moans of Krentz and Hugo, but there was nothing Kurt could do. He could only hold his head up to protect himself.

A few dozen seconds later, the tank finally came to a stop. However, the aftermath of the impact remained in the tank as a hard echo.

「Ga ah——!」

Kurt grunted and opened his eyes fearfully. The inside of the turret was filled with smoke from the dust that had been raised. The smell of rust. A headache. Dizziness. A seeping pain in his right shoulder. He had no idea what happened. The unnatural slanting of the tank's body indicated that the tread's cables have come off.

「I....Is everyone all right, ...?」

Krentz asked. He was able to get away with it thanks to the fact that he was holding onto the periscope in front of him.

「I...I am fine.」

Kurt answered as he stood up unsteadily. At the same time, Anna and Hugo's responses could be heard.

「Anna, are you okay?」

Kurt called out to Anna to make sure she was okay.

The cockpit of the T-62 was even more cramped than the gunner's and loader's seats in the turret. The impact there was therefore even more direct.

「I'm fine! I hurt my shoulder a little bit, and you Kurt-kun...?」

「I got hit in the shoulder, too, but I'm still alive.」

「Thank God...」

Anna breathed a sigh of relief. Hearing that, Kurt was also relieved.

Hugo muttered through gritted teeth.

「But still, what in the world...?」

「I'll check!」

Kurt leaned forward over the tank body while covering his aching right shoulder.

「.....!!」

A horrifying sight was there.

The other T-62s in the squadron were being attacked by more than a dozen grappler classes and numerous tank classes that were slipping under their feet.

The T-62s were desperately resisting with their main guns and machine guns, but they were outnumbered and silenced one by one in exchange for killing the grappler class with zero range fire.

The ZSU-23-4 (Shilka) and BMPs, which were in the vicinity to provide support, have been swallowed by a wave of tank classes and grappler classes and were now isolated. At this rate, they would be destroyed in the not-too-distant future.

「Oh my god.....」

Kurt was speechless, but he guessed what had happened to them.

The battalion was struck by the BETA in the split second when it was concentrating on destroying the Fort class. The only reason they were still alive was probably because they had been blown away by the strike of the grappler class.

And for them, the threat was looming closer.

A red tsunami, a muddy stream with the color of blood, approached rapidly with the sound of countless footsteps and eerie chewing noises.

They were on the road to death. They would definitely die. When a tank class grabs you, while still alive, your limbs would be torn off, your internal organs would be ripped out, and as if it weren't already enough, your dignity as a human being would be trampled on. Kurt, Krentz, Hugo, and Anna. All the life they had accumulated up to that point would be reduced to nothing.

「Ah Aaaaaahhhhhhh!」

Kurt exclaimed as he got hold of the machine gun and squeezed the trigger. He fired a shot at several tank classes that were the closest to him — and blew them up.

「Don't come, don't come, don't come closssser!」

Kurt shot and killed every tank class he saw with an unspoken cry. The fog covering the battlefield was becoming somewhat thinner than before, but at present, it only served to show the terror of the number of tank classes that were approaching.

The tank was filled with voices confirming the situation.

「No! The engine won't start! The impact earlier may have damaged the engine system...!」

「So we can't even use the main gun, huh Herbert, what about the rest of the company?」

「It's no use. They are fighting over there too. The radio is live, but no orders from the battalion commander!」

Kurt huffed as he took a shot at the tank class. The radio was live? If that's the case...

「Lieutenant? If the radio is live, can't we call for help?」

「We're already doing it! But no one responds!」

「Oh no how can we then」

Kurt muttered, his despair evident. If they couldn't expect rescue, then they had no choice but to abandon the tanks and flee, or fight here until the end.

The former would be the best way to escape, but with the tank class encircling the T-62, there was a high possibility that they would eventually be captured. In that case, it might have been better to stay in the T-62 until the end and kill the tank classes until the machine gun runs out of ammunition.

(.....!)

A familiar sound reached Kurt's eardrums, which were becoming numb from the sound of machine gunfire.

A heavy, deep, and high-pitched sound, like the roar of a wild beast.

Anna seemed to feel the same thing, then she leaned out of the hatch and looked up into the sky.

「Kurt-kun! On the western horizon, an orange glow!」

「What the!?!」

Anna was right. Several lights were dimly visible in the light fog beyond. Their altitude was as if they were crawling on the ground. It was hard to believe that they were a formation of aircraft. That meant....

「A TSF Squadron! And that low flying, you don't think its」

「Schwarzesmarken.....」

Same day, 00:00 p.m. German Democratic Republic
Main defense position

「Lieutenant! TSF unit approaching! It's the 666th TSF Squadron "Schwarzesmarken"!」

Kurt shouted. Of course, his hands were still on the machine gun and his eyes were directed at the countless tank classes that were getting closer.

「..... Really?」

Krentz asked in a strangely calm tone. Kurt replied impatiently.

「No doubt about it! I have seen them fly twice. Anyway, please send your rescue request to!」

「.....」

「I don't believe there are any troops left in the vicinity that would accept a request for help! Lieutenant!」

「I understand. Let's do it.」

Krentz began operating the radio in his hand. As a company commander, he knew the radio frequencies of each TSF Squadron/Battalion that ran around the battlefield.

「Take This, and this, and this!」

Kurt again turned his attention to shooting at the tank classes. Relief might be coming, and that possibility alone gave him the courage to stay where he was.

(Yes, Anna is right, they would never be "Todesgott" for real. That's why!)

「Kurt-kun, I'll help you!」

Anna shouted as she grabbed the machine gun in the cockpit.

「I'm in front, Kurt-kun, you're in the rear! We need to buy ourselves some time at least!」

「All right!」

Two lines of fire extended from the front and rear of the stopped T-62.

(Yes, We will survive! Me and Anna too!)

The tank class's head, arms, legs, mouth, and torso were all blown off and turned into pieces of meat.

(We will fight to the death, no matter what!)

The formation of the 666th TSF Squadron continued to approach them, while roaring the sound of their jets.

It was then that they heard a woman's voice mixed with static over the radio.

『—This is Captain Irisdina Bernhard, commander of the 666th TSF Squadron. We have received a distress signal from your company.』

(..... It's connected!)

Kurt felt like clenching his fists in joy. At least the first step to the rescue call had been made.

(Now I'm hearing their commander's voice:)

The tone was more gentle, beautiful, polite - yet interesting - than he had expected. It did not sound like the arrogant and ruthless commander he had heard rumors about.

Krentz began to speak, much to Kurt's consternation.

『—This is Lieutenant Herbert Krentz of the 3rd Company, 2nd Battalion, 11th Tank Regiment (Willy Bebel), requesting immediate assistance.』

No response. Krentz radioed in the situation as if to press her for an answer.

『—Our battalion is completely surrounded by BETA swarms. We are right under your path of advance. A few minutes are fine. Please give us cover.!』

A moment later, the answer came back to cut off Krentz's words.

『—I can't accept that request. We have other duties to perform.』

(.....!!!)

Kurt lost his composure in an instant. He interrupted, following his emotions.

「Don't screw around! You are still one of us! East Germans like us!」

「Kurt! I don't remember giving you permission to speak!」

「Lieutenant, let me tell you something!」

Kurt shouted in a voice that wasn't any less loud than the sound of the machine gun fire he used to mow down the tank class.

「You can't just come up here and say that! You are the best TSF unit! Then help us! Are you telling me that no matter how hard we try, in the end, we will have to be "sorted out" (Sortierung)?」

Suddenly, Kurt's own words pierced his inner mind — everyone hated them because they wanted a reason other than BETA for their misfortune.

(I know, Dammit. That it's not true! But I can't be convinced!)

He couldn't live only positively like Anna. He was not as pure as Anna.

So, he wanted to fight to the death and live. To protect the people he loved.

「I know, you guys don't like it either! But still, those who you are abandoning are human beings, don't you agree?」

Bernhard remained tight-lipped.

「Or are you really 'Todesgott'? Are you willing to let any of your friends die in order to achieve your goal?」

『—We are selective. We select the more lives (**Wir Sortieren Leben**).』 [\(76\)](#)

Kurt came back to his senses. At the same time, he gulped.

It was definitely a response to him. The tone was harsh, the voice was somehow sad, but with determination. Like an entirely different person spoke that line.

『—The answer is as I just gave it, Lieutenant Krentz.』

Bernhard's other voice returned as if nothing happened.

Krentz responded in a similar manner. They sounded as if they understood something about each other.

『—I understand. Captain Bernhard. That's all from here. I wish you good luck with your unit. Well, I guess we'll never see each other again.』

『—I wish you good luck in your military endeavors. We will be over your head in about 90 seconds.』

『—You mean, we have until then?』

Receiving a silence that amounted to an affirmation, Krentz continued in a hard voice after a slight pause.

『—I thank you for your consideration. Over and out.』

「Lieutenant? that's!」

Krentz finished the radio communication without any concern. Then he gave an order.

「All hands, prepare to eject! We'll break through the tank class encirclement and get out of here!」

「How on earth.....」

「They abandoned us without hesitation. No, the way they were talking, maybe they had already made up their minds. Do you know what this means? We're talking about artillery fire that could come down on us.」

「Are they even on our side!?!」

「It means we're already supposed to be wiped out. They can't use artillery fire to suppress the front while we're in the mix」

「..... ! 」

「That's why we have to get out of here right away. At least by the time they pass overhead. Anna, Hugo, hurry! Kurt, cover with your gunfire!」

「Co, copy!」

Kurt resumed shooting, blasting away the nearest tank classes.

(What are these other duties, and artillery fire my ass, after all, they are just treating us as pawns to be discarded, aren't they? You could do something about it.!)

Kurt's gaze slid to the side, feeling a mixture of frustration and sadness. No matter which direction he looked in, countless tank classes were stirring in the fog that had narrowed his field of vision. The sound of gunfire from other companies, which had been audible until a few moments ago, was gone.

It was insane to escape on foot from such a place. But if they didn't do it, they would surely die from friendly artillery fire.

Under Kurt's cover fire, Krentz and Hugo jumped off the vehicle and ran out, shooting with Kalashnikovs (AK-47s). Anna, too, fully emerged from the hatch.

「Kurt-kun!」

Perhaps relieved to see his face, Anna called out happily.

Kurt was filled with guilt and shame. After all his heated arguments, he couldn't pull the 666th TSF Squadron to the rescue. He was literally subjected to the black sentence (death), just like the one-armed soldier last night.

「I'm sorry, Anna. I'm...」

「No, thank you, Kurt-kun.」

With a small shake of her head, Anna forced herself to smile.

「It can't be helped. Because everyone is doing their best, for everyone. Besides, I can still do my best. Because I have you by my side, Kurt-kun.」

Kurt felt a tightness in his chest. He didn't know how much Anna liked him. But for now, just saying that was enough....

Anna extended her hand with a carefree smile, typical of her.

「Let's go, Kurt-kun. We're still alive...」

At that moment, Kurt couldn't reach out to take Anna's hand as he should have. He had to cover her with gunfire until she left the tank. — That's what he was about to do.

But that opportunity was lost forever.

Suddenly, Anna was dragged from the tank with great force.

「Kyaaaaaaaah!」

「Anna!？」

With repeated screams, a tank class lurking in the blind spot on the T-62's body grabbed both of Anna's legs, pulled her off the tank, and threw her down.

Anna was slammed on the ground, and the tank class approached as if chasing after her.

「Damn, damnnnnn it!」

Kurt opened fire as quickly as he could. With a few shots, the tank class fell to the ground, falling to pieces behind her.

However, half of the tank classes approaching the T-62s set Anna as a new target and began to close in.

Anna, on the other hand, after choking painfully, wobbled and tried to get up and fell down again on her face.

「Anna! Get over here, quick! If we run, we can still make it!」

「K....Kurt-kun? Ah, about that, I'm sorry...」

The voice was strangely devoid of tension. Kurt asked, not understanding why.

「What the hell, why are you apologizing!?!」

「My right leg is now useless...」

「..... !」

Anna's right leg was crushed and broken from the knee down by the arm of the tank class, and it was hanging by a single piece of skin. She seems to have been so mentally shocked that she didn't feel any pain.

「Hold on, I'm coming to you:!」

「No! You can't come over here...!」

Anna put out her hand to stop him. Kurt was dumbfounded.

「I can't anymore. With my legs like this...」

Anna let out a dry laugh. The expression on her face was one of resignation and despair — She has already accepted her death.

A fitful rage boiled over inside Kurt.

「Idiot! What am I going to do if you give up? I can carry you alone!」

「I am just going to slow us down. Besides...」

Anna looked around. The number of approaching tank classes was increasing. Even if he went to rescue her, it was obvious that they would be captured.

「Kurt, give it up already!」

From behind him, he heard Krentz's shout as he ejected from the tank.

「We have got tank classes over here too! If you keep this up, you'll be isolated too!」

For now, Krentz and Hugo were holding them off with Kalashnikovs (AK-47s), but a swarm of tank classes was moving to split them and Kurt.

「Are you telling me to abandon Anna?」

「Yes! Unfortunately, it's the only way!」

「Anna is one of us! Then we are just like them! I don't, such a thing.....」

「And when that happens, you'll die! If you die, you will leave me and Hugo exposed! You will be abandoning us all!」

「.....!」

「Kurt-kun, hurry up! At this rate, everyone will die!」

Anna also shouted to make the decision immediate.

But Kurt couldn't make a decision. Unable to decide, he continued to fire at the tank classes — and within a few dozen seconds, the machine gun's magazine was empty.

「You bastards! Why....Whyyyy!?!」

He continued to pull the trigger. Of course, nothing happened.

「Damn it! At this rate!」

Kurt grabbed the gun in his hand and tried to lean forward. But...

To Kurt, Anna gave a small shake of her head and a fake smile, as if rejecting everything.

「....It's going to be okay. Kurt-kun, you will survive. You are strong.」

「Anna, what are you talking about!」

「Because, like me, you haven't given up on everything from the start..」

Anna said penitently. A high-pitched jet sound was coming from somewhere, but neither of them could hear it.

「I told you, didn't I? I don't love this country, nor do I believe that one day I will return home. Haha, I don't even believe that humans can beat BETA. So I was just trying to do my best for myself:」

「What does it matter right now!?!」

「I think it has to be people like you, Kurt, who will defend this country. The kind of person who can properly be angry that he is being abandoned by his own people.」

Anna lifted her pistol with her right hand. The swarm of tank classes was already right in front of them. The jet sounds from beyond were getting louder.

「So, thank you, Kurt-kun. I'm really glad I met you. It was only for three days, but even though I was like this, you cared for me...」

「What are you...」

「I'm sure you'll have to choose someday, Kurt, but for now, I...」

Anna pressed the pistol in her hand against her head. Despite her kind words, she looked sad and weepy, still trying to force a smile.

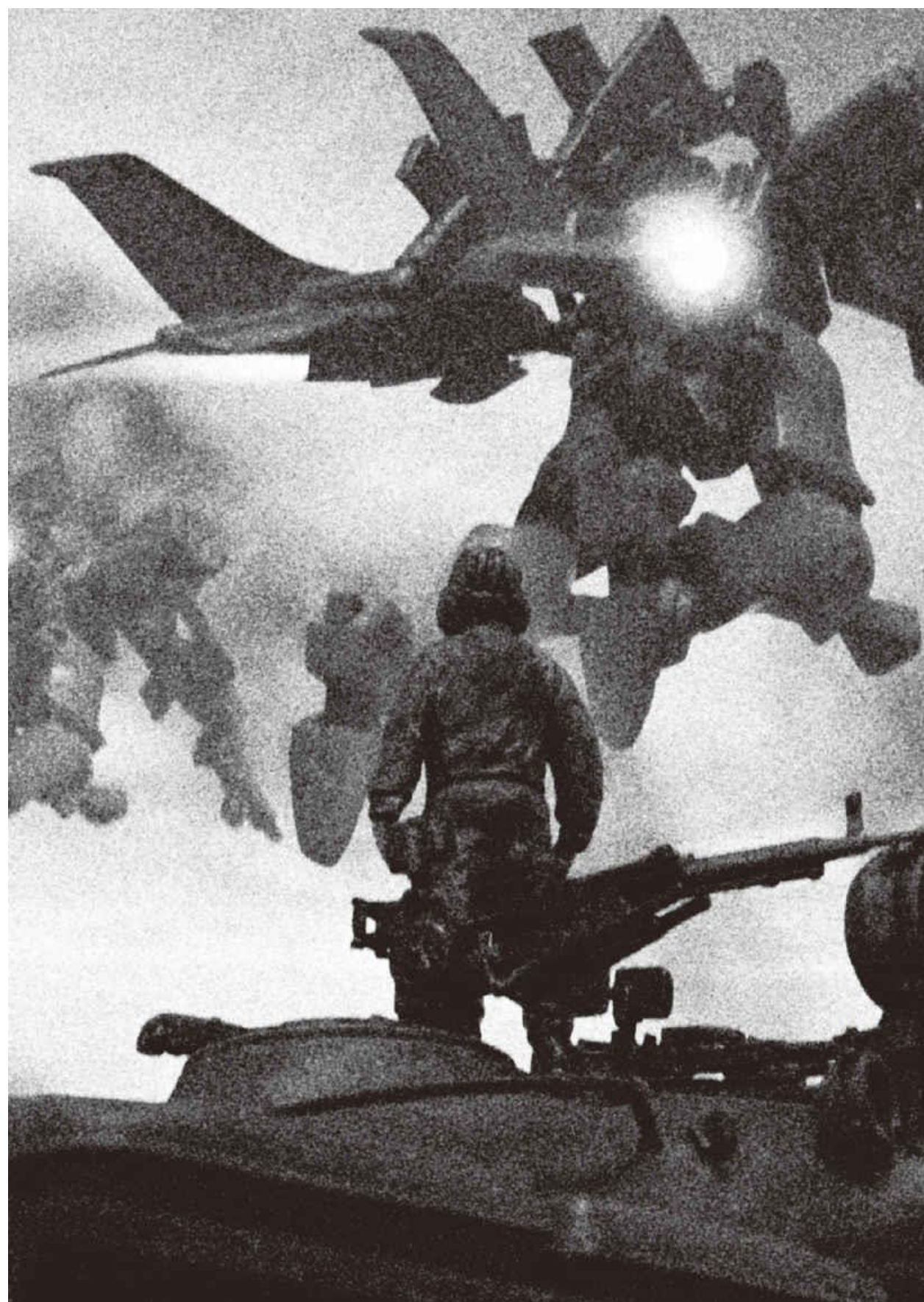
「Hey, don't...」

「I wish you could have seen that sunflower field, Kurt-kun...」

Kurt would never forget the sight he saw at that moment for the rest of his life.

Anna blew her own head off with a pained smile on her face. Above their heads, the figures of the 12 black MiG-21s (Balalaika) - the 666th TSF Squadron "Schwarzesmarken" - could be seen passing over.

Immediately after, countless tank classes devoured Anna, who had fallen silent.



From somewhere, a distant thunderous sound echoed through the air.

「Oh, no! Hugo, cover the rear! I'll drag him out!」

「Ro...Roger!」

Krentz threw all the grenades he had at the tank classes approaching the T-62. Several were blown away at once.

Krentz took advantage of the opportunity and yanked Kurt out of the turret. Kurt was so shocked that he could no longer think or speak. Krentz took one look at the tank classes swarming around Anna, and with a look of suppressed anger on his face, he jumped off the vehicle with Kurt in his arms.

「Damn those artillery guys, they really shot at us! If I survive, I swear I will complain!」

「Herbert! Now that we have come this far, we're going to have to do that thing!」

「That's the only way it's going to work. Damn, it's been a while since I've had a BETA in my bed!」

「Is Kurt okay?」

「He is not okay. But I'll make sure he survives.」

Krentz poked the stunned Kurt in the head.

「She has entrusted us with him after all.」



The 2nd Battalion of the 11th Tank Regiment (Willy Bebel) was decimated in this battle. In return, however, they stopped the advance of BETA in the B-12 area for a certain period of time, and also bought valuable time for reinforcements rushing in from the rear to deploy.

At 8:30 p.m., the East German Luftwaffe's strategic bomber force, which was able to be deployed after the Laser class were destroyed by a TSF unit raid, conducted a carpet bombing [\(77\)](#) attack, destroying the majority of the BETA groups. The few remaining BETA also withdrew to the east bank of the Oder River, bringing the offensive to an end.

The next day, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) and the Ministry of Defense ended the BETA's limited offensive on the Oder River Declaration. The number of casualties in this defensive battle was announced as approximately 30,000.

The majority of East German generals knew that the death toll was deceptive. It was well known that in order to maintain its appearance as the strongest socialist state in Eastern Europe, East Germany had been under-reporting its losses since the beginning of the BETA war. But no one was willing to question the true figures.

The truth was only for those who were there.

August 15, 11:00 a.m. German Democratic Republic Colony Blitz

In the pouring rain, the mourning was proceeding down the main street of the Colony Blitz.

On that day, the East German army was holding a memorial service for the soldiers who were lost in the recent limited offensive by BETA in front of war memorials in Berlin and other parts of East Germany.

The military column was on its way to the war memorial erected for the dead at the 'Schulenberg Fortified Position' on the outskirts of Colony Blitz. According to the schedule, the East German national anthem "Auferstanden aus Ruinen" ⁽⁷⁸⁾ and the funeral hymn "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden" ⁽⁷⁹⁾ would be sung there, followed by a floral tribute and a speech by the governor of the prefecture.

Under cloudy skies, the column moved slowly but surely down the main street, dripping drops of water as they walked.

Along the rows of trees on both sides, soldiers who had come to observe the ceremony and citizens of the Colony Blitz, though few in number, gazed at it with mixed expressions. For them, the memorial ceremony at this location was no longer so unusual.



"It's like I killed Anna."

Even as the ceremony progressed, visitors continued to arrive at the military cemetery set up near the war memorial. There, a great number of grave markers made of white crosses were neatly lined up.

Private Kurt Griebel and Lieutenant Herbert Krentz were also there.

A gravestone marked Anna Tarkovsky was placed in front of them.

There was no body under the grave marker. Kurt could not even find her belongings. The coldness of Anna's palm, which he felt that night, was all that was left for him.

Kurt continued his monologue as he crouched without an umbrella in front of the gravestone.

"If I had reached out to her at that moment, if she was in a different position, even for a moment, her legs might not have gotten caught by the tank class. Then, together..."

"Couldn't she have gotten past the artillery fire by hiding among the BETA carcasses? Just like we did."

Kurt nodded feebly at Krentz's words.

Just before the artillery fire, Krentz and Hugo made a breakthrough, dragging Kurt, who was like a living corpse, and jumped into the pile of BETA carcasses formed by several Grappler classes and many tank classes — and passed through the artillery fire.

The two had overcome a crisis in the same way before. Of course, a direct hit from an artillery shell would have reduced them to dust, along with the BETA carcass, but the same would have been true if they had remained in the trench.

However, Kurt had lost his memory of that time. All he remembered was that moment.

Even now, Anna's final moments were burned into Kurt's mind.

To prevent Kurt from coming to her rescue. To keep Kurt and the others alive. Anna died "clean to the end" — as a human being, with a heart for her friends.

(And that really convinced you, Anna?)

Feeling unbearably guilty, Kurt thought.

(You had no hope, but you tried your best for everyone until the end, and in the end, you chose us over yourself and were you really happy with that? Can you say you had no regrets? I'm sure you did. So why)

"..... if you feel that way, Kurt, that's your business."

Krentz said in a dismissive tone.

"Are you going to be so willing to bear all the responsibility for the deaths of those who are about to die before your eyes?"

He couldn't say yes. He knew that that path was too painful.

As long as he lived and as long as the fight against BETA continued, his friends would surely die. There was nothing he could do about it.

"But that doesn't mean I have to get used to it."

"....."

"They abandoned us like that, and now we're supposed to abandon Anna. That's impossible, such a thing. I might have liked Anna, and I let something like that happen!"

Kurt clenched his fists in his lap. He cursed himself for what he had done a few days ago.

He thought he was immature because he didn't have enough real-world experience. But he couldn't believe that he had to overcome this kind of experience to survive.

"I'm not telling you to get used to it, and I won't tell you to forget it. But somewhere along the way, find a reason to be convinced with this reality."

Krentz continued admonishingly.

"Failure to do so will continue to poison your spirit. And that poison will surely kill you."

"....."

"We have to live like that, making ourselves dirty beasts. To survive, to carry on the will of those who have died. Maybe someday you, too, will have to pass that will on to someone else."

"....."

"Maybe that's why they're carrying that name..... for us."

With that, Krentz looked in the direction of the city where the ceremony was being held. Kurt stood up and followed suit.

Then, he wiped away the overflowing tears that he wasn't aware of.

(Anna, I still can't forget you. Or accept your death. But)

Kurt quietly made up his mind as the rain pelted his entire body.

(Someday, I will become such a strong person. And after this war is over, I will go to your homeland, Ukraine. I will believe in the hope that Anna could not believe in. So watch over me. I will protect everyone for you. I will survive.)

"I hope our next fourth member will also be a good one who will listen to your wishes and dreams."

"..... yes!"

They looked ahead and saw several titans standing at the Colony Blitz.



On the streets of Colony Blitz, the 666th TSF Squadron "Schwarzesmarken", led by Captain Irisdina Bernhard, was lined up. Her squadron had been asked to participate in this memorial service.

The surface pilots stared at it silently in the control unit. The two new recruits - Second Lieutenant Theodor Eberbach and Second Lieutenant Inghild Bronikowski - followed suit. Theodore, however, was looking at the solemn ceremony in front of him with an unsympathetic gaze, while Inghild was looking at it with a heartbroken gaze. The two were supposed to be classmates at the TSF Junior Academy, but they had never tried to converse with each other outside of their duties.

As the squad march proceeded, Iridina suddenly looked east through her retinal projection.

The "Schulenberg Fortified Position". The hillside forming the fortification itself was stained reddish-black by BETA bodily fluids that had seeped in, like a grave marker.

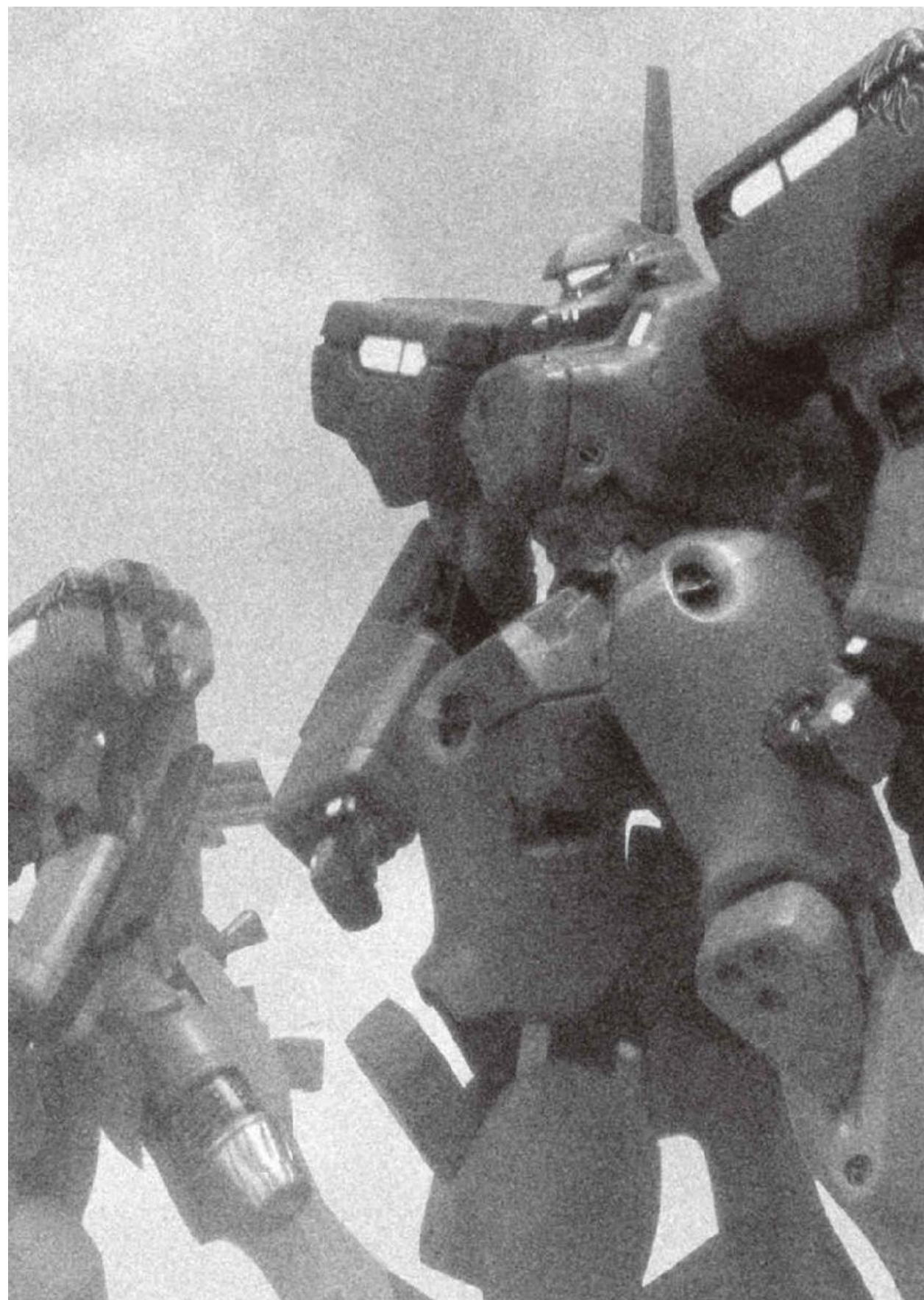
A Tombstone. A steel tombstone that continued to swallow many lives, weapons, and BETA. East Germany continued to fight this war, relying on, clinging to, and consuming an enormous amount of lives on that line of tombstones. There may have been another way to wage war, but that possibility has already been lost through their own mistakes.

"....."

Iridina returned her gaze silently to the ground. The squad march proceeded to the military cemetery where the war memorial is placed — to another row of grave markers.

Between the two grave markers, 12 MiG-21s (Balalaika) stood there quietly, battered by the light rain.

Episode End.





アネットの憂鬱

あいつとは、どういうわけか、あんなっちゃうんだよね
あいつを襲めてやろうと思って来たのに……

Anett's Melancholy

I don't know why he is like this
Even though I was going to praise him.

**March 11, 1983, 10:40 a.m. Former Polish Territory
Gdańsk Bay Gdańsk Base**

When Theodore came to, a white ceiling was spreading in his sight. The morning sun was shining in through the windows, and he could hear the exhaust sound of a TSF's jump unit in the distance.

(What is his place.....?)

From the sound of the TSF, Theodore could predict that it was a base somewhere, but it was not a base he knew. With his thoughts still in a daze, he leaned forward to check the situation....

"Theodore-san!"

A familiar voice jumped into his ears.

"Katia? Why, and where am I?"

"Oh, don't move yet!"

Theodore tried to raise his body, but Katia held him back.

"Theodore-san, don't you remember anything?"

Katia's eyes were overcome with emotion and surprise.

"You were brought to the treatment room immediately upon your return from the **Laserjagd** battle. Fortunately, there were no life-threatening injuries, but you were given three days of complete bed rest because you may have hit your head."

As Theodore listened to Katia's story, the memories came back to him — their cooperation with the 103rd Tactical Surface Fighter Squadron "Jolly Rogers" (VF-103) and the 51st Tactical Armored Battalion, the majesty of the Fort Class — and the feelings that were entrusted to him.

"What about Irisdina? How is Irisdina?"

A flashback crossed his mind. It was the image of a MiG-21PF (Balalaika) that had its parts scattered and was blown away after being hit by the fort class whip while protecting him.

"..... Captain Bernhard is fine. She has undergone a full medical examination and has been reinstated to the unit."

Katia told him reassuringly, with her voice hardening slightly.

"After all that damage to her TSF"

"I was surprised too."

It was beyond comprehension, but with Irisdina's piloting skills, it was quite possible that she calculated beforehand to minimize the impact on the cockpit.

Theodore breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed that everyone in the 666th TSF Squadron, including himself, had survived the fierce battle.

"But why are you here"

"Oh, yes, that's..."

The next moment, the door to the private room was opened enthusiastically.

"Oniichan! Did you wake up?"

Lise, who had been standing behind the door, rushed into the room, as if she had been already aware of what happened.

"Oh yeah, just a moment ago argh!"

Lise jumped toward Theodore with a rugby-like tackle, and he grunted as he took her headbutt to his solar plexus, but Lise did not care and buried her face in his chest.

"I'm so glad! I was really, really worried about what I would do if you didn't wake up"

Lise tearfully rubbed her cheek repeatedly against his chest. Theodore smiled and gently stroked her hair to reassure her. He was painfully aware that Lise was genuinely concerned for his well being.

"..... Well, I guess you could say it's really a miracle that he made it out alive after such reckless behavior."

A new, familiar voice — Anett, who had entered the room at some point, muttered in dismay beside Katia.

"So you should be thankful to everyone, Theodore. You survived because of the support of Captain Bernhard and the rest of the squadron, and, of course, me, who took a risk to draw the BETA away from you."

Theodore's eyebrows frowned slightly. Reckless behavior. — Anett's words were true and he understood them, but when she said them again head-on, it hurt.

"Well, I'm sure you're the only one who would risk it all and do such an idiotic maneuver to avoid a beam of laser class irradiation by sticking a long sword into the earth. Either way, I appreciate what you have done."

Theodore said sarcastically, as if to hide his embarrassment.

".....! You! Even after I went this far for you!"

"Hey, hey, Anett-san, let's leave it at that"

Katia laughed and held her hands out to Anett who had raised her fist..

"So why are you guys here? Aren't you supposed to be on a regular mission?"

Theodore asked Katia, ignoring the irate Anett. Katia straightened her posture and answered.

"Ah, yes! That's true, but our squadron has been ordered to take a rest. All of our TSFs are damaged except mine and Sylwia-san's MiG-21 (Balalaika), and I don't know how we will be able to replenish them."

"What's the situation on the front lines?"

"According to this morning's briefing, there has been no movement of inland BETA since yesterday's offensive. I'm told that this information is certain since they have deployed a TSF unit to be in charge of reconnaissance based on the lessons learned yesterday."

Theodore nodded. In yesterday's battle, the BETA had invaded the bridgehead ⁽⁸⁰⁾ on a scale far beyond human expectations. Considering this, the UN forces' response was appropriate.

"So, after discussing it with Lise-san, we decided that we would take care of you, Theodore-san for the rest of the day. I thought it would be boring to spend the day in a hospital room with nothing to do."

"..... I see, thank you. But it would be a waste considering you finally got a vacation, right?"

Theodore actually wanted to be alone for once in a while. While he thought that, he smiled and stroked Katia's head. Katia responded with a shy shrug of her shoulders.

"No, no! I also owe a lot to you, Theodore-san after the battle of Neuenhagen Fortified Position, and I don't mind"

"Oh, that's not fair Katia-chan! Pet me some more too!"

Lise stood up, her fists clenched in frustration.

"I'm the one who proposed this plan in the first place! That's why you should be petting me, Oniichan!"

"Even if you were the one who started it, you screwed it up by openly saying it....."

"I don't mind being scorned as long as Oniichan pets me!"

"Then I will scorn but not pet you."

"Oniichan is a cheapskate! I'm going to tell the whole world that you used to shower with me!"

"Stupid.....! This is from when we were kids.!"

"So you don't mind if I spread the word? I'll tell the whole squadron!"

He looked around in dismay. Katia was smiling and looking stunned and frozen.

"I...I don't think it's a big deal. Even though you are brother and sister, you are in-laws, and if you have lived together since childhood, you must have done **all sorts of things**...."

Anett followed up with an agitated look to sweep aside Katia's confusion.

"Wa, wait! What do you mean, "All sorts of things"? You've definitely misunderstood something!"

"I think people should know about the **inappropriate relationship** between Oniichan and me so that there are no misunderstandings!"

"No! It's an **appropriate relationship**!"

"That's terrible of you, Oniichan! That was all just for fun. waaaahh!"

Lise rushed out of the room, but after a moment's pause, only her face peeked out from the corner of the door, then she stuck out her tongue as if nothing had happened, and announced with a smile.

"I'll be back, Oniichan! Lunch will be ready in a little while, and I'll feed you!"

"I don't want it! Don't come back!"

"Hahaha, see you again.～"

Lise closed the door with a wave of her hand, and the calm finally returned to the hospital room.

"Good grief, I don't know how she can act in this high tension after what happened yesterday."

Theodore sighed in dismay.

"I am sure it's because of what happened yesterday that Lise-san is happy like that."

Katia, who seemed to have regained her composure, quietly said in consideration of Lise's inner feelings.

"Isn't it because she can't contain her happiness after Theodore-san and everyone returned safely from that fierce battle?"

It's the same for me, too, Katia added.

"...Yeah, I guess so."

If you think about it, Katia has spent the last two months of her exile in East Germany under threat from the Stasi, and she has been fighting all this time, and witnessing many sacrifices and losses along the way.

However, in this "Neptune" operation, both the East and West camps were able to cooperate and achieve the goal of demonstrating the significance of the unit's existence to a wide audience. This was part of Katia's ideal world and what Irisdina was striving for.

(This should make it more difficult for the Stasi to openly interfere with us ... We beat the BETA and achieved our goal in this operation.)

Theodore clenched his fists as if to confirm the feeling of victory that has finally come over him.

"And you think so too, don't you, Anett-san?"

"Yes. That's right..."

Anett crossed her arms and stared at the ceiling as if lost in thought, then gave Theodore a thin smile.

"I think you will be under the spotlight from now on, whether you like it or not. Isn't it about time you finally learned some social skills, Theodore～?"

He told Anett with a thin smile on his face as well.

"Well, it's not everyday you find a deviant surface pilot who busts BETA with an ecstatic expression on her face, so I don't doubt it will get a lot of attention as well."

"I don't want to be told that from you, stupid dagger lover."

"It's better than being just plain stupid, right?"

Theodore got up from the bed and faced Anett. The blanket that had been clinging to his body fell to his feet.

"Ahhhh, you should at least dress up!"

Anett and Katia subtly averted their gaze from Theodore, who was in his underwear.

"It's not like you care now, or do you?"

"It depends! You are really insensitive in so many ways! Idiot!"

"Heey, Anett-san and Theodore-san, why are you always like that?"

Katia then rushed in to stop the both of them with a flustered look on her face.

11:10 a.m. Former Polish territory
Gdańsk Bay Gdańsk Base

Lise, Katia, and Anett were walking along the pathway that led from the medical area to the TSF hangar.

"Aahh, I never thought they'd kick us all out."

Lise sighed in a sad voice.

"I thought it would be easier for me to come back if Katia-chan and Anett-chan were taking care of Oniichan"

"Ahaha, well, I'm sorry"

Katia bowed her head with an affectionate smile — after what happened, they were both kicked out of the hospital room by Theodore, who told them to be quiet for a while.

"I couldn't tell Oniichan, but he has to attend our victory party this afternoon, so we have to make the most of these times Katia-chan, at this rate, you're just going to end up being an Omorashi little girl and nothing more, aren't you?"

"Don't say Omorashi! ⁽⁸¹⁾ That's not how it works."

"Anett-chan, too. You are always butting heads with Oniichan, and I don't even know if you are getting along or not...."

"Yeah, somehow, when I meet him, we always end up like this. ~"

Anett chuckled and scratched the back of her head. However, she also had another thought on the inside.

(I didn't want to say those things either.)

Since they rescued Katia together in the battle for the Neuenhagen fortified position, the rift caused by the loss of Inghild has been bridged.

It was certain that Theodore was partly responsible for the loss of Inghild, but Anett also felt that her own weakness of heart was the biggest cause of that incident, and there was nothing to gain by holding it against him now. Since they were originally classmates at the TSF Academy for Gifted Children, they could now naturally exchange light banter like before.

Theodore has also become surprisingly "Human". Theodore probably had this kind of personality from the start. It was easy to see now that his distrust of people, instilled in him by the Stasi, must have been distorted by his separation from Lise and the subsequent surveillance system.

(Inghild was right Theodore had been through a lot more than she had.)

And now Theodore was forced into a situation where he had to suspect his sister-in-law, Lise, of being a dog of the Stasi. Anett was aware of this as she was talking to Lise,

Theodore, however, behaved stout-heartedly to the end. Not only that, but he participated in yesterday's Laserjagd — and led the final charge against the laser class, thus accomplishing a major role in saving the bridgehead. But his TSF was destroyed in the process and he became bed ridden.

(I came here to praise that guy..... But when he finally opened his mouth, he said all sorts of things to piss me off However, it's not like it's anything new after all this time)

Then, - with an unspoken concern - Anett gazed at Lise and Katia, who were walking forward in front of her.

Anett also admitted that there was a kind of jealousy in her heart toward both of them. Theodore did not seem to have any special feelings for these two, but she couldn't deny that his attitude toward her was rather crude compared to them.

(And of course! I don't love him like Lise and Katia does, or anything like that, but! Well, you know, a little more **delicacy** would be nice)

The peaceful life that they were living now was a life that their friends who were lost in the past battles could not experience. It was not that she did not feel guilty, but that was why she wanted to cherish this everyday life and live it without regrets.

Anett, shouldn't you be a little more honest about your feelings, too? The words that Pham had said to her one day came back. With a sigh, Anett looked away and noticed a large paper bag in Lise's right hand.

"..... Hey Lise, what's in that paper bag, BDUs or something?"

"Oh, that? How nice of you to notice! Eheh~, would you like to hear about it?"

She lifted the paper bag happily. Anett had a bad premonition, but since she had brought up the subject she couldn't afford to overlook it now.

"Um... I would like to hear about it too."

"Right!? You know you want to! Well, Katia-chan, please stop!"

"Ehh, okay.."

Katia stopped walking with a puzzled look on her face. Lise immediately put her hands into the paper bag.

"For Katia, I've got this!"

".....! Lise-san, that's....!"

Katia was surprised — Lise was pushing one of her apron dresses at Katia. Not only there were folk embroidery and ribbons sewn in places, but the design also emphasized the bust.

"This is the national dress of southern Germany, isn't it? Like waitresses wear in beer halls " [\(82\)](#)

Bewildered, Katia looked at her apron dress. After shifting her gaze to her bosom, she continued with a wry smile.

"It seems to have been made in a way that's more than a little?"

"That much is ok! Even this was a real pain in the ass to get! It took a lot of work!"

"Um, Second Lieutenant Lise Hohenstein? How did this get here? What are you going to do?"

Anett asked with a cold sweat on her forehead. There were still quite a few clothes in the paper bag.

"Oh, my God, you're so dense, Anett-chan. It's for Oniichan's sake! A feast for his e-y-e-s, so to speak!"

With a single wink, Lise responded with a smile. Anett and Katia were appalled and waited for her next words.

"Taking care of my Oniichan in such a girly outfit will surely earn you some points, don't you think! Fortunately, my brother is in a private room, so I don't have to worry about anyone else bothering him!"

"We don't have to worry yeah.....Heck no! Rather, here did you get all these strange items!"

"Oh, they are from the maintenance team of the 666th TSF Squadron. I had heard that Katia had received a swimsuit from the maintenance team, which I thought was imported, so I asked them to get them for me. So, while Anett-chan and Katia-chan were talking with Oniichan, I went and received them."

Lise puffed up her chest with pride.

(Is our maintenance team ok?)

Anett was dismayed. Katia could only smile faintly. Apparently, the squadron's maintenance team had its own distribution channels to obtain maniacal outfits. No matter how tough their shifts were and how hungry everyone was for entertainment.

"There's so much more! Here, I think Oniichan will like this one!"

Lise happily showed off things such as a school blazer, An Áo dài, ⁽⁸³⁾ and even a UN military uniform that she seems to have made herself.

"Um, you know, Lise, no matter how much you want Theodore to like you, this is indeed"

"Oh, Anett-chan, you'll love this! I had it ready just in case!"

Just as Anett was about to exclaim, "**What in the world?**" Lise pushed his outfit into Anett for her to hold on to. It was a neatly designed apron dress with little ornamentation and a blue and white base color. However, no matter how you look at it.....

"A nu... nurse's uniform"

"Correct! As expected of Anett-chan. You are really sharp."

Lise gave an excited thumbs up.

"I think that even Katia-chan and I could wear it, but in my opinion, this kind of outfit would look better on Anett-chan!"

"M,Me.....! I mean, why"

"Just my two marks on it, but I don't think Anett-chan has ever worn such cute clothes."

Anett was struck by the obvious and was at a loss for words... It was true that she had not been good at dressing like a girl since she was a student. She didn't think it was appropriate for her character either.

"But it's okay! I'm sure Oniichan will notice your new charm, Anett-chan! Even though he doesn't look like it, Oniichan is quite kind to girls."

As if the devil himself was whispering in her ear, Lise lured her in.

"Come on, let's go all out and put them on! This is a medical block, so if they do find out, we can handle it! In fact, this is one of the uniforms for military nurses adopted by the WTO military!"

For a moment, the image of herself in a nurse's uniform, giving it her all to take care of Theodore, flashed through Anett's mind, and she stiffened.

"Stupid...! D-Doing this would be impossible for me!."

Anett shook her head, her face bright red, then she grabbed Lise' paper bag as fast as she could.

"Oh, Anett-chan! Why are you taking it? That's a lot of clothes for one girl to wear."

"All confiscated! Do you think you can get away with this? We need to rest our bodies for the battles tomorrow and beyond! Confiscated I tell you, confiscated!"

"How, terrible! I even had other things in mind for Anett-chan, like a sweater with a very thin fabric, and a Cheongsam ⁽⁸⁴⁾ with a Type 77 close combat Halberd attached to it."

"Enough! Anyway! I'll dispose of these myself so no one will ever find it!"

"But, but...."

Leaving behind Lise, who was saddened by the situation, and Katia who abandoned thinking about the affair entirely, Anett turned around and indignantly began to walk back where she came from.



"Ahaha, I wore it."

Anett muttered dryly to herself in front of the mirror in dismay. — The mirror showed her wearing the nurse's apron dress and pinching the shoulders of the apron with both arms.

The place was the women's restroom in the medical section. Taking advantage of the fact that it was not very popular, Anett had chosen this place to change her clothes.

"It certainly is pretty."

She stared at the mirror seriously, as if in disbelief.

At the very least, she was sure that she looked more girly than she did in her BDUs. The fine check pattern on her blouse, the pure white apron and cap, and the Red Cross symbol discreetly marked on her chest all seemed to enhance her girlish charm.

Indeed, this was a good example of how even her, who was far from "girly," could be beautiful Anett could understand why nurses were called "Angels in White."

If she appeared in front of Theodore in this outfit, he might see her as a girl, not just as a comrade in battle....

.".....! T-Theodore has nothing to do with it! I was just wondering if it would look good on me.!"

Anett started making excuses to no one in particular.

"Besides, these things should really be worn by a neat-looking girl like Inghild"

Anett had mixed feelings when she superimposed her own nurse's uniform on Inghild's image of a bygone era.

If Inghild was alive today, this nurse's uniform would also be worn by her.

"..... hah, I knew someone like me shouldn't be wearing something like this."

Anett muttered to herself in self-mockery. On the inside, her opinion that she should quickly change into her BDUs and get out of here was at odds with the devil's whisper that she wanted to wear this dress a little longer and see herself as a girl.

"I mean....I have the opportunity to do this"

"Hey, you"

Anett heard a sudden voice from behind. She turned around, horrified, to see a nurse in the same nurse's uniform as herself approaching with an urgent expression on her face.

"I've been looking for you! You're the new nurse who was just assigned today, aren't you? Don't abandon your workplace without notice! I know it's hard with all this new stuff, but get back to work!"

"What? No, you see, I'm"

Without question, she pulled her by the arm and took her out of the restroom. Near its entrance, a tray cart was placed to carry lunch.

"In the meantime, I want you to distribute these to every private room in this block! Just call me if you need anything! Bye!"

"Oh, hey"! I'm not! Look, I don't even have a name tag.!"

The nurse walked away without question, perhaps burdened with urgent matters — Anett could only look in appalled disbelief.

All that was left was Anett in her nurse uniform and her tray cart. The trays had meals lined up for at least 50 people.

"Wh...What to do now but now that I have been left with this, it'll be a hassle if I don't do it and it's just about lunch time"

It wasn't hard for her to imagine the option of hurrying to the bathroom to change into BDUs and escape, but her conscience was guilty when she thought of the number of trays.

"Besides, this ward is...."

With stiffened lips, she looked beyond the corridor to the right.

There was the door to the room she had just barged into with Katia and Lise — Theodore's private room.

11:40 a.m. Former Polish territory
Gdańsk Bay Gdańsk Base

"Haah, I finally finished handing them all out....."

Anett let out a deep sigh as she pushed her lightened tray cart. There was only one tray left — Theodore's.

Eventually, Anett had finished serving food to everyone but Theodore, based on the list of room numbers that was hanging on the tray cart, while dressed as a nurse. Fortunately, no one from the patients spoke to her, so she didn't get found out.

"What should I do It's not like I can just leave the tray at the entrance and run away, and if I stay in the hallway like this, someone might see me"

If Lise and Katia found out, Anett would always be the butt of a joke, and if Irisdina and Walter found out, it wouldn't definitely end as just a joke.

"Isn't it just better to just get it over with and let Theodore laugh at me.?"

When Anett peeked into the hospital room through the window of the door, she found Theodore peacefully sleeping on the bed with a blanket covering him up to his waist. Perhaps he was still exhausted from the battle of the previous day.

"Huh. if he is like this then it's not a problem."

Anett let out a sigh of relief. She would finish serving the food now and put the tray cart back, and then she would be done with her part of the job. All that was left was to hurry up, change, and get out of here.

"I ...I am going in"

Anett opened the door, whispering. There was no sign of Theodore waking up. She approached him, trying not to make any footsteps, and placed the tray on the desk beside the bed, then she turned her back to him.

(I now should leave the room without being noticed.)

"Uh-uh."

A moment later, a low moan reached her ears — Anett turned around in a panic.

"Te, Theodore"

She stared at Theodore — his chiseled face was filled with anguish, and his breathing was rough. In a whisper, he was muttering curses to the BETA and the names of his squad members.

Anett felt her chest tighten. It was obvious what a surface pilot dreamed about after a battle with BETA. It was impossible not to look into Theodore's face.

(Just like me, ...)

Memories of two months ago come back to her. She had been suffering from War Neurosis (Shell Shock) ⁽⁸⁵⁾ due to the loss of Inghild and the others, and nightmares tormented her every night. She was able to recover after Katia's incorporation, but she has not been completely liberated. She would never forget the last moments of her comrades.

(But he, like me, is fighting for his friends, pushing past regrets and pain away.)

"Theodore"

Anett slowly moved her face closer to Theodore. She wanted to see his face more closely. But the next moment...

Suddenly, Theodore's two eyelids widened. Perhaps he sensed Anett's presence.

Both of their faces were stained with astonishment. Anett was shocked that Theodore could see her, and Theodore was shocked by Anett's very appearance.

"....."

"....."

The two stare at each other in breathless silence. Theodore was looking in disbelief at Anett, who was frozen in her nurse's uniform.

".....You're Anett, right?"

"Uh, aren't you mistaking me for someone else?"

"You had that fetish in you"

Theodore backed away, wary. His face was not only bewildered but also terrified.

"It's not a... it's not a fetish, it just happened."

"How did this happen? Why were you looking at me so closely in the first place! You didn't come in here to attack me in my sleep, did you?"

"Of course that's not true! Don't joke around!"

"You are the one that needs to stop joking around!"

"Um..... in this case, no matter how you look at it."

"Don't admit it so easily! And don't look away!"

"I didn't have a choice! It just happened the way it did! Besides, it was your fault to begin with!"

"How can it be my fault! At least I don't want to see you dressed like that! That kind of clothing should be worn by someone a little more feminine!"

"Wh...What the heeeeeeell!"

Just as Anett was about to raise her voice, the familiar voices of the two other girls came from the hallway, accompanied by the sound of footsteps.

"Are you sure it's okay, Lise-san? We just got kicked out of here"

"It's okay, it's okay! Because Oniichan doesn't let me spoil him unless it's a time like this. Katia-chan, you want to be pampered too, don't you?"

"How did you get that idea! For me, Theodore-san is a senior, a friend..... and that's why"

"Yes, yes, ... but we should also thank the WTO military surface pilots for giving us sweets to visit Oniichan like this! Thanks to that, I now have a reason to go to Oniichan's hospital room."

"It wasn't just the West that was saved by the success of yesterday's Laserjagd, wasn't it"

"Katia-chan is talking like it's someone else's business again..."

"Hehehe but to be honest, I really didn't feel it. Besides, I think Theodore-san, who destroyed the laser class at the time, deserves to be a hero more than I do!"

"As expected of our Oniichan!"

"Yes! As expected of Theodore-san!"

Anett and Theodore couldn't help but look at each other. From the conversation, Lise and Katia would come into this room with a gift of visitation. There was almost no time to spare.

"Anett! You get the hell out of here and hide somewhere! Katia is one thing, but if Lise sees you like this, you're in big trouble!"

"I know, I know!.....Uh, somewhere to hide, somewhere to hide"

With frustration, she looked around the small room — the space under the bed was not high enough for a person to enter.

"What should I do.....?"

Anett stared at Theodore in dismay — a moment later, she suddenly realized.

(If there's one place to hide, it's there.....!)

"Theodore, move the blanket and open your legs now!"

"Woah, I knew you had a fetish for that kind of"

"Not some strange misunderstanding like Lise! The only place to hide in this dreary room is under your blankets! You make space with your knees to make room for me to hide! It may be a little sudden, but it's the only way!"

"Huh!? Are you insane? I'm now ..."

"You've seen me naked in my training gear, so don't get upset over something like this!"

In order to dull the sense of shame, the fortified suits for training used a colorless translucent membrane for the special protective coating that covered the chest area. Therefore, to say that Theodore was seeing a lot of things when he was in training school was an understatement.

"So you are getting naked now....?"

"I...idiot! Don't be imagining weird things now!"

As Anett cried out, their voices and footsteps were getting closer and closer...

"Anyway, you have to listen to me! **You don't care about me either, do you?**"

".....! Oh, geez, I get it already.!"

Anett was half desperate, Theodore rolled up the blanket in his lap, and Anett jumped into it with all the momentum she could muster.

Anett felt like she was going to cry as she made sure the blanket was draped over her back.

If Lise and her friends had found out that she was hugging Theodore in this outfit, it would have been natural for them to misunderstand her. In any case, her chest was pressed against Theodore's lower body, and when you add in the outfit, it was not something that could pass as a joke by any means.

Moreover, from Theodore's point of view, her chest was exposed through the collar.

(If Lise finds out, she will say, "What kind of **nursing** is that.....!? Anyway, I'm begging you, Theodore!)

"Oniichan, I'm coming in!"

"E... excuse me, Theodore-san."

Lise opened the door without knocking and Katia followed, but Anett, who was wrapped in a blanket, heard only their voices and footsteps.

"Oh shit, here we go again"

Theodore greeted the two with a flustered look on his face, but his voice was the same as usual.

(Yes, keep it up, Theodore!)

"Oh, Oniichan, you're awake? I was just about to give you a cuddle!"

"I don't want any of that!"

"You don't have to deny it so clearly wait, why are you sitting on your bed with your knees up, Oniichan? Isn't that posture painful?"

(.....!)

Anett had anticipated this question, and so she quickly put her arms around Theodore.

"No-Nothing much. I'm just changing my posture a bit because my body has gotten stiff from sleeping too much."

"Hmm."

Lise's voice sounded both convinced and unconvinced.

"Well, anyway, what do you two want with me?"

"Oh, yes! This is from the WTO military surface pilots, saying that they wish you a speedy recovery."

Katia responded with a pleasant, if not airy, tone. She was happy just to be able to talk to Theodore.

"Chocolates and candy They are all sweets, aren't they? How did you get so many?"

"As much as we wanted. It seems that they have been diverting supplies from the UN military in secret. They said it's a sign of gratitude for our heroism They also said that the UN forces are willing to turn a blind eye to it."

"..... heroes, huh? Honestly, it doesn't suit me, but I don't feel bad about it."

"Yes!"

Katia replied happily. Even Anett, whose vision was blocked, could imagine her innocent smile. It seemed that Katia was really happy to be able to talk with Theodore in a friendly manner. Anett thought that this complacency was probably the reason she tolerated Lise's pressure.

(A, anyway, ..., so far, things seem to be going well.)

Anett gulped down a mouthful of spit as she felt a cold sweat trickle down her back. Lise and Katia's attention was drawn to her conversation with Theodore and they did not notice her. Theodore continued to respond in his usual tone of voice.

(If we keep this up, we might be able to work it out!)

"Oh, we have separate portions for us, the other pilots, and the maintenance team, so feel free to eat as much as you want after you are discharged."

"Eeeeh. Let's eat together now Katia-chan. Oniichan can't probably eat this much all on his own."

"No, it's no good! Theodore-san is in the hospital. You see, and we have our lunch."

"These pretzel sticks would be perfect for Oniichan and us right now!"

"What do you mean by perfect?"

"Fufufu, let me tell you"

"Aaaah, Lise-san, as I was saying, ..."

Liz opened the paper box in her hand without listening to Katia's arguments, and everyone heard the sound of it being opened.

(Hey, what are you doing?)

Anett had a bad feeling about Lise's usual vigor.

"Take the end of this pretzel stick and hold it in your mouth like this Aaaah!"

"Aaaah. Here I ate it. It's easy when you hold it in front of my mouth after all."

"Hmph, Oniichan, you have guessed wrong! It's the pretzel game, the pretzel game! It was popular at our school for a while! Katia-chan, you know what I'm talking about, don't you?"

"Yeah, ..., I know, but"

"You are indeed from West Germany! Explain it to him!"

"Um, the rules are as follows: Lise-san and Theodore-san both hold the ends of the pretzel stick in their mouths while eating at the same time. The one who takes his or her mouth off first loses. However, if they go all the way to the end, instead of someone yielding....., it's a draw. It's a kind of a chicken game."

"A kind of a chicken game you say? This is definitely a chicken game"

"Don't worry, I won't go that far in front of Katia-chan! I'll forgive you just in time!"

"So you would do it if it wasn't in front of me."

"I ...I refuse! And Katia, don't get the wrong idea!"

When Anett lifted her chin in her current position, which is hugging Theodore's waist, She could see his face right there....

"I told you it was a game! Or, Oniichan, can't you believe me? Even though I worked so hard for you in the fight yesterday."

Lise's words were muddled with sadness.

"You aren't even allowed to play with me? I thought it would be a good memory."

"That's"

Theodore was tight-lipped. Anett didn't know what Lise intended to say, but for Theodore, it was a heavy word. From her point of view, Theodore had been trying to find out the true identity of Lise by watching her movements during the "Neptune" operation.

Perhaps Theodore was convinced that Lise was not a dog of the Stasi after yesterday's Laserjagd. That was why Theodore revealed his confusion.

(That said, **it's not the same as now.....!!**)

Anett tried to convey her intentions by putting strength into both her arms which were around Theodore's back.

(It's Lise Theodore, Lise! If you were to do that, how enviable I would be....I mean how shameless that would be! Katia, you have to stop them too!)

"Oh, um, Lise-san? That is indeed"

Katia called out in dismay, but Lise replied in a cheerful voice.

"You too, Katia-chan. get in the zone! This is the perfect skinship opportunity with your adored Theodore! And if it's you Katia-chan, I don't care if you end up doing it!"

"I care!"

"Besides, this may be the last time I get to play with Oniichan like this, okay?"

"Well, if you say it like that...."

"This is just a game! Let's take it easy!"

"W....Well, if you say so."

(Hey, what are you agreeing to, Katia! I know you adore Theodore, but that doesn't mean!)

Anett's frantic pleas ended in vain, and Lise steadily took control of the conversation.

"Well then, Oniichan, once again! The total number of games is 10 for both of us!"

"But, but, I, I mean...."

"No use arguing about it anymore ~!"

Lise put her hands on the bed and pressed a pretzel in her mouth against Theodore. Theodore, who was hiding Anett under a blanket, couldn't avoid it and took it straight into his mouth.

"Oh, and by the way, I forgot to mention..."

"W, what's?"

"If you lose, we'll take care of you for the **rest of the day**! Think twice about losing on purpose! In return, if you win, I'll let you off the hook for now."

(Today!? Of course they'll find out if that happens.!)

Anett looked up at Theodore with a pale face — Theodore, also pale, nodded his head to indicate his approval.

"Well then, Katia-chan, on your sign!"

"Oh, yes! Ready, start!"

The two began eating pretzel sticks at the same time Katia called out to them. Theodore, however, did not move from the bed, and inevitably, Lise came up to Theodore and got on his lap.

And right below her was Anett, wrapped in a blanket. If she moved even a little, she might be noticed by Lise.

(Hi, hiiiiiiiiiiii.....!)

In her fear, nervousness, and shame, Anett could only hope that the game would end in victory for Theodore as soon as possible.

00.30 p.m. Former Polish territory
Gdańsk Bay Gdańsk Base

After Lise and Katia left the room and no footsteps could be heard from the hallway, Theodore and Anett let out a spirited sigh.

"Hah managed to get through!"

"Hah they didn't find out!"

Anett sat up, flipping off the blanket. The nurse's uniform was wrinkled from being hugged around Theodore's waist for so long.

They both sighed together again — then they looked at each other and laughed.

Fortunately, the pretzel game with Lise was won by Theodore.

Against Katia it was a complete victory because Katia herself was embarrassed. As for Lise, Theodore also won three and lost two after a last-minute attack. The draw, which had been feared, did not occur once because Lise kept her behavior in moderation to the end. Thanks to this, the two were now free from extreme tension.

"Aaah I'm so glad it worked out. I wondered what was going to happen at one point, but"

While exhaling a third sigh, Anett looked sideways at Theodore.

"I had no idea that Lise and Katia would be that carried away..... Theodore, you're really adored by both of them!"

"Katia is one thing, but Lise has been like that since the last time we have been together three years ago. Good grief, she's gone off the rails without thinking of the trouble she's causing the people around her. Katia must have been in a lot of trouble for having to go along with her. I'll have to make an apology later on....."

"..... you really mean that?"

" Hmm? Yes, but..."

Theodore replied with a puzzled expression. Anett almost let out a fourth sigh. At least Theodore was completely unaware of Katia's feelings — or at least he didn't try to be.

So, what about me? — Anett wondered. Various emotions that she had almost forgotten about welled up in her chest.

"Hey"

Anett asked discreetly, peering into Theodore's expression.

"Don't you want to hear it? Why did I come here, dressed like this?"

Theodore rolled his eyes for a moment, then replied dismissively.

"Yeah, it was Lise's fault anyway, wasn't it? I thought about asking her about it earlier, but decided not to because it would have complicated things."

"Ahahaha so that's how you see it."

Anett smiled forcibly. Come to think of it, there was no way that Theodore, who had a keen intuition when it came to anything other than love affairs, would not have detected this. With these words, a silence fell between the two of them.

(But that's what this is all about)

In the midst of her ruminating thoughts, Anett became aware.

(Alone with Theodore.....Maybe it's now or never for me to be honest.....)

Embarrassment set in, but Anett still tried to open her mouth.

"Hey, hey, Theodore. You know, I'm"

"Thank you, Anett."

Theodore told Anett clearly, covering the words she was about to say.

"The whole reason you dressed like that was to keep me occupied with Lies and Katya, wasn't it?"

"That's"

"Besides, ... I have other things to thank you for. Like the fight yesterday and Katia's rescue, and I have to apologize for Inghild. You swallowed it and fought with me, and I know an apology won't help, but still. The only reason I'm alive this way is because you have been there for me..."

Theodore looked straight at Anett.

"Anyway, you're an important comrade to me now. So, you know, ... It's not like I don't care about you."

"Oh, me too!"

Anett said without thinking. Theodore had just honestly confessed to her that he had been feeling guilty for a long time.

(Theodore was just like me, ... troubled and suffering in the past.)

It was like sunlight shining through a gap in the clouds.

(Then I, too, must be honest about how I feel now. I might not get another chance later, and I may regret it for the rest of my life.)

"I also wanted to thank you too. Thank you for saving us from total annihilation yesterday. And also for Inghild. I said a lot of terrible things at the time,..... and the main reason Inghild was killed in action was because of my war neurosis (Shell Shock),....."

"That's not right."

"No, let me think so. Otherwise, I might repeat the same thing again. I am grateful to you. You saved Katia and brought her to me, and that's the only reason I got back on my feet. Well, I'd be lying if I said I didn't hold grudges, but saying that now won't make anyone happy."

"....."

"So from now on, I hope that we can be more than just comrades, and that we can get to know each other a little better. You know, we are always fighting. I think that's a little sad. haha, what am I talking about now"

In her muddled thoughts, Anett let out a dry laugh. However, she was certain that she had finally conveyed what seemed to be her true feelings to Theodore.

"...I think so too."

Theodore nodded quietly, as if admitting his mistake.

"I may have been stubborn, too. We have to continue to fight together. Yesterday's battle cleared my suspicions about Lise, but that doesn't mean the threat of the Stasi is gone."

(Ah, that's definitely true))

Anett could only smile awkwardly, and Theodore, as always, was a simpleton when it came to love affairs. — But it seemed like Theodore was just trying to get along with himself in a logical way.

"Then we'll get to know each other a little better from now on."

"Y...Yes....!"

Anett let out a forced answer, but her smile was genuine.

(At least maybe we've made progress?)

Perhaps sensing that the conversation was winding down, Theodore extended his arm in an exaggerated manner.

"Aaah. I'm so relieved that I'm starving. A little bit of pretzel doesn't make up for the hunger. Anett, can you give me the lunch tray you brought?"

"What? Oh, roger."

As she was about to hand over the tray as Theodore asked, an idea lit up in Anett's mind.

(It's just me and Theodore here now, and I'm dressed like this)

While enduring her embarrassment, she strengthened her resolve.

(Maybe Theodore will come to recognize me as a woman, too.)

"Hey, Theodore"

Anett asked, while gazing at Theodore with puppy eyes.

"I'll, uh, I'll give you a bite to eat, okay?"

"Huh? What are you talking like Lise!?"

"Well~, since I'm dressed like this, it might not be a bad idea to do something a little out of character."

"Out of character you say....It's just too sudden..."

".....! Oh, I don't like doing this either! I'm saying that as a fellow squadron member, I'm giving you a big pat on the back for your great job in yesterday's battle! Yes, this is a genuine recognition, recognition!"

(What the hell am I talking about.....!)

Anett was one step away from delirium, but Theodore nodded awkwardly, as if the words "fellow squadron member" had worked.

"Well, then, ..."

Anett grabbed the spoon on the tray with her right hand, scooped up a small amount of soup and tried to bring it to Theodore's mouth — She was so aware of what she was looking like and what she was about to do that she couldn't think about anything else.

(But if I do this, I, I, ...!)

Anett's heart was beating like a drum....

(I'm just a normal girl who wants to fall in love with someone, too.!)

The spoon slowly approached Theodore's lips — and then....

Then, as if out of the blue, the door to the hospital room opened and Lise and Katia jumped in, gasping for air.

"Theodore-san, it's serious! Now the UN and US military surface pilots are coming to visit you in person!"

"That's not all, Oniichan! Captain Bernhard and Lieutenant Krüger will be here soon! You'd better get it over with your lunch, if you haven't already, ..."

「 「.....!?」 」

Lise solidified on the spot, and the two who were on the bed couldn't even speak.

After several seconds of silence. — and as if to break the silence, Lise smiled in satisfaction while holding her mouth with both hands.

"I~saw ~it! I~ saw~ it! Actually, I was sure you would come, Anett-chan! Hey, Katia-chan!"

"Eh, eh, eh?"

Katia stood there stunned — too shocked to comprehend what had happened.

Anett and Theodore came to their senses at that one moment, then they jumped away from each other and shouted in desperation.

"Idi.....! What are you talking about, Lise! We were doing nothing! Don't get me wrong Katia, okay? Right, Anett?"

"Th...That's right, Theodore! There are a lot of circumstances to this. Yes! I was trying to feed him lunch like this because Theodore insisted"

"Huh!? Hey Anett, don't be so selfish! This is what you wanted to do"

"I don't know what you're talking about. You're really sick! Maybe you need a new CT scan of your head!"

".....! This is why deviant halberd users are barbarians like you, and why halberd users will remain an endangered species!"

"You're making fun of halberds again:! They are official equipment of the East German army, and if you make fun of them too much, you're putting yourself in danger! You're the one who's a dagger moron! Which one of us is freaky!"

"That's just nonsense, you bitch"

"Um, Theodore-san, you might want to leave it at that"

Katia, who seemed to have regained her composure, muttered in a pale voice.

"I mean, there are other eyes on us."

"Other? It's only you and Lise.?"

"No, there are.... Or rather, they are here now Captain Bernhard and Lieutenant Krüger."

"Ah, Iridina"

Theodore turned around with his face flushed with shame — Katia was right, Iridina and Walter were standing in front of the door.

As expected, Iridina's eyes were slightly wide, as if she couldn't hide her surprise, but Walter was staring at them with a blank expression — the face he had when he was furious.

Anett, on the other hand, was shocked by Theodore's reaction. She knew that Theodore occasionally called Iridina by name, but his distraught state was unusual. It was as if he had never wanted to be seen like this by her.

"This, this is"

"Explain later. I'm willing to overlook some things as a youthful indiscretion."

Iridina, with her usual cool expression and a hint of humor in her voice, told him.

"Lieutenant Hosenfeld, you're in big trouble if you keep wearing this outfit, aren't you?"

"You mean what Katia said"

"Hadn't these two told you that UN and U.S. military surface pilots were coming to visit? Word will soon spread, won't it?"

".....!"

A shiver ran down Anett's spine. If that happened, word of her could spread throughout this bridgehead.

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, I think that would be interesting, but I'm sure that the political commissar will chew you out."

The blood in Anett's face was gone. Irisdina told her admiringly, in a tone of voice that made it hard to tell if she was serious or not.

"You're going to get **all sorts of suspicious looks** with that kind of wrinkled attire."

"I...I'm so sorry!"

Anett's face was flushed and she ran out of the hospital room like a hare. Behind her, she could hear Theodore desperately pleading his case to Irisdina and Lise.

(Oh my God, even if I have gotten honest as Pham-nee said, I can't help it if things turned out like this.....!)

Theodore's shy expression at the end was one possibility that confronted Anett.

But even so, she couldn't seem to suppress her feelings. In other words, She intended to continue working hard for the sake of that brusque classmate and their comrades. At least, as long as this daily life continued next to ongoing fateful battles, and as long as the thoughts of the friends who loved it so much were still inside her heart.

Anett believed that these days will be so depressing, yet so enjoyable that she would be willing to put her life on the line.

Episode End.

List of First Appearances

In the City of Death

(MUV-LUV ALTERNATIVE TSF CROSS OPERATION)

(Included in "Total Eclipse" & "TSFIA" compilation Vol.4)

Scorched Earth Flowers - Reason for Happiness

(MUV-LUV ALTERNATIVE TSF CROSS OPERATION)

(Included in "Total Eclipse" & "TSFIA" compilation Vol.3)

Steel Grave Schulenberg 1981

(MUV-LUV ALTERNATIVE TSF CROSS OPERATION)

(Included in "Total Eclipse" & "TSFIA" compilation Vol.2)

Anett's Melancholy

(Newly written)

世界設定



BETA大戦に おける戦車部隊

冷戦時代、東西両陣営は競って主力戦車を開発することで、来るべき有事に備えようとしていた。こうした主力戦車の価値はBETA大戦の勃発と、戦車には不可能な三次元機動を可能とする戦術機の登場によって揺らぐかに見えた。だが、戦車の持つ長口径砲は戦術機の持つ突撃砲よりも高威力で、対空車輛や歩兵戦闘車などと戦闘団を組んだ上で集中投入すればBETAへの対抗は限定的に可能なため、一九八三年の段階でも、各国陸軍は戦術機と並行して主力戦車の配備を続けている。東ドイツ軍の戦車部隊は、主にT-62やT-72、T-64などのソ連製の主力戦車を装備し、基本的な編制や戦術もソ連から受け継いだものとなっている。

T-62



戦術機と連動して運用されている戦車。冷戦初期にソ連で開発されたT-55の発展型であり、115mm滑腔砲を装備している。

T-72



東ドイツ軍の主力戦車のひとつで、T-62の発展型。T-62よりも強力な125mm滑腔砲を主砲とする他、回転式自動装填装置を搭載、射撃速度を向上させている。

ZSU-23-4 シルカ



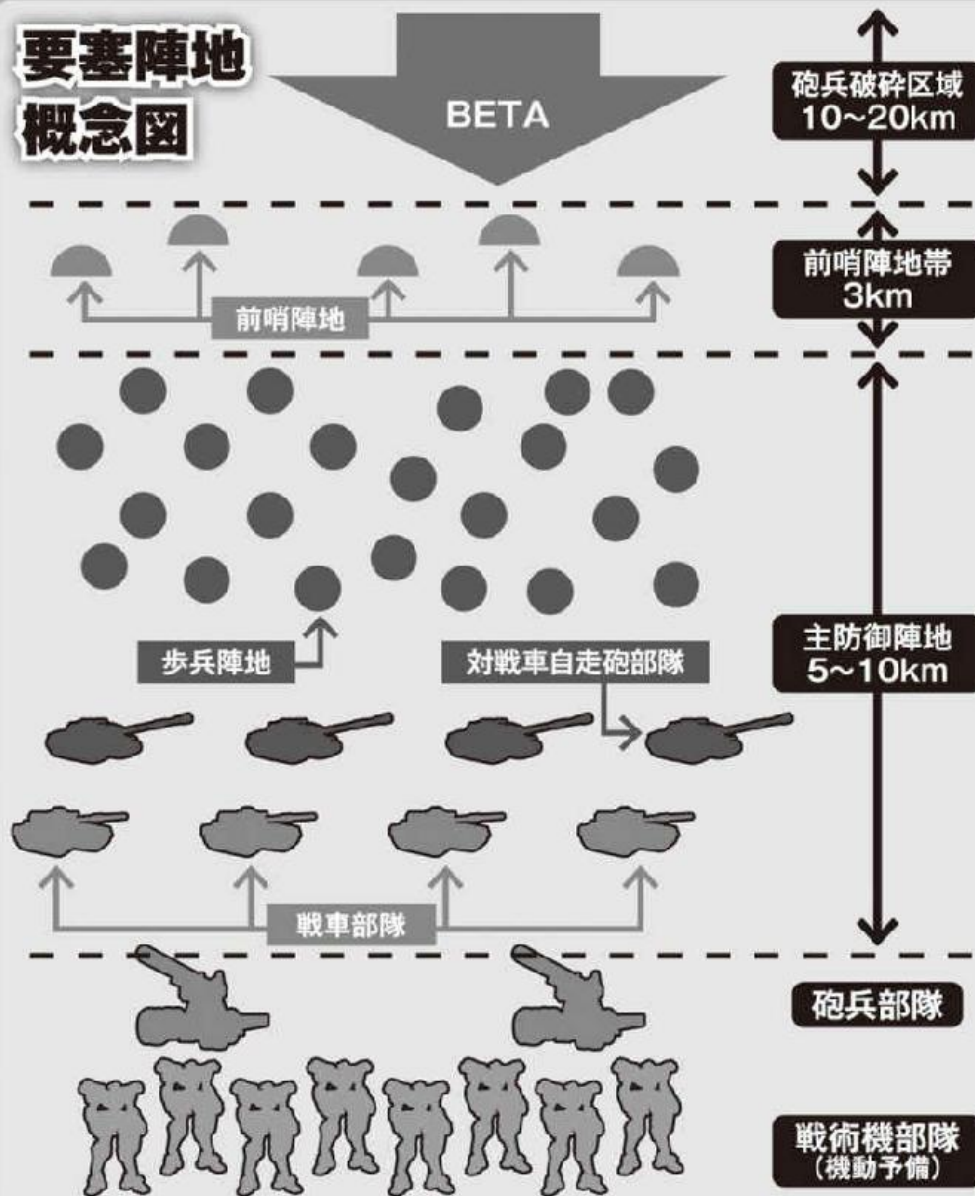
東ドイツ軍の自走対空車輛。23mm機関砲を4門装備し、毎分4000発の砲弾を発射することが可能である。対BETA戦では小型種相手の戦闘で威力を発揮している。

東ドイツ軍の 戦車部隊の運用

オーデル・ナイセ流域絶対防衛線に構築された要塞陣地群に布陣する東ドイツ軍にとって、戦車は戦術機に準じる価値の戦力となっている。なぜならば、戦車部隊は要塞陣地防衛の要であり、戦術機も要塞陣地がBETAの攻勢に耐久するからこそ、光線級呐喊に集中することが可能になるからである。

要塞陣地の防衛において、戦車部隊の主な戦術は、他の兵科（歩兵戦闘車、対空戦車、自走砲など）と戦闘団を組み、歩兵の島嶼型陣地を突破してきたBETAを迎え撃つ、というものである。戦闘団を形成することで、戦車部隊は小型種の相手を他の車輛に任せ、大型種相手に砲撃戦を挑むことを可能としている。

要塞陣地 概念図



World History

Tank Forces in the BETA Wars

During the Cold War, both the East and the West competed to develop main battle tanks (MBTs) in order to prepare for the coming contingency. The value of the main battle tank (MBT) seemed to be shaken by the outbreak of the BETA War and the appearance of TSFs capable of 3D maneuvers that were impossible for tanks. However, the long-caliber guns of tanks were more powerful than the assault guns of TSFs, and if they were deployed in concentrated groups (Kampfgruppe) with anti-aircraft tanks and infantry fighting tanks, they could be used against BETA to a limited extent. The deployment continued. East German tank units were mainly equipped with Soviet-made main battle tanks (MBTs) such as the T-62, T-72, and T-64, and their basic formation and tactics were also inherited from the Soviet Union.

T-62

A tank that is operated in conjunction with a TSF. It is an advanced version of the T-55 developed in the Soviet Union in the early Cold War, and is equipped with a 115mm smoothbore gun.

ZSU-23-4 "Shilka"

An East German self-propelled anti-aircraft vehicle, it is equipped with four 23mm machine guns and is capable of firing 4,000 shells per minute. In the battle against BETA, it has demonstrated its power in the fight against small species.

T-72

One of the MBTs of the East German Army, a development of the T-62. It has a 125mm smoothbore gun, more powerful than the T-62, as its main gun. It is also equipped with a rotary automatic loading device to improve the speed of fire.

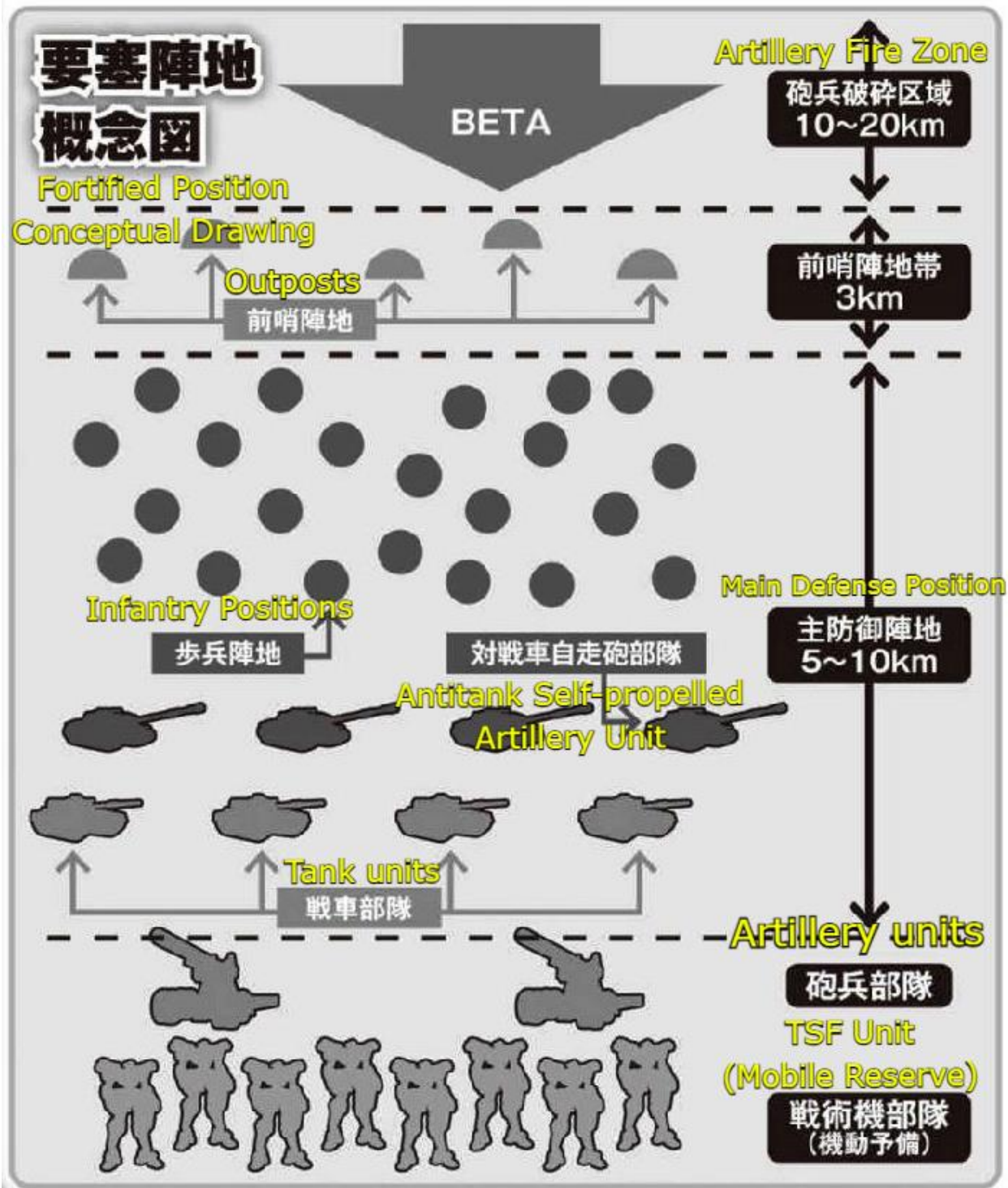
Single Tank Unit Operation of the East German Army

Otel Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line.

For East Germany, which is positioned in a key cold-weather position along a security line, tanks are as valuable as TSFs. The reason is that tanks are the key to the defense of fortified positions, and TSFs can be concentrated in Laserjagds only when fortified positions can withstand the BETA offensive. In the defense of key positions, the main tactic of the tank division is to use other military units (The Kampfgruppe formed with infantry fighting vehicles (BMPs), anti-aircraft tanks, self-propelled artillery, etc.) to intercept BETAs that have waded through the infantry island-type positions. By forming a Kampfgruppe, the infantry vehicle unit is to be used against small species, and then engage in artillery fire against large species. The new system allows them to take on that challenge.

要塞陣地 概念図

Fortified Position
Conceptual Drawing



Afterword

Nice to meet you if it's been a while.

I am Hiroki Uchida, in charge of the text for the "Schwarzesmarken" series.

Now for the customary explanation for first-timers.

"Schwarzesmarken" is a shared-world derivative work of the "Muv-Luv" series, a "super royal road school adventure game" and the "Muv-Luv Alternative" series, a "Fairy Tale of Love and Courage" developed by the game brand AGE.

However, even if you pick up "Schwarzesmarken" first, we hope you will take this opportunity to read it, as we intend to make it enjoyable enough for you.

This collection of short stories includes three short stories from the previously published "MUV-LUV ALTERNATIVE TSF CROSS OPERATION "Total Eclipse" & "TSFIA" Compilation" series and one newly written short story. The former is a story about the past of the characters in the main series, and Uchida has a strong emotional attachment to these stories as they delve deeper into the characters in the main series. The latter is an episode that takes place after the end of the third volume, so even those who have already read all of the former can enjoy the content.

Also, don't forget to watch the animated version of "Total Eclipse" ("TE")! At the time of writing this afterword, the start of airing is close, so please look forward to it.

Actually, a few days before I wrote this postscript, I received an invitation from a member of the Age staff to attend an advance screening of episodes 1 & 2 of "TE" in Tokyo just before it begins airing. I was prepared to do so, but unfortunately, I was busy with work at and had to cancel in tears. Ahhh, I wanted to share the excitement with all the fans.

At about the same time as the release of this collection, "MUV-LUV ALTERNATIVE TSF CROSS OPERATION "Schwarzesmarken" & "TSFIA" Compilation Vol. 5" will be published by Enterbrain. The work included in the compilation will be changed from "TE" to "Schwarzesmarken," and the cover will be Newly drawn by Mr. CARNELIAN and Mr. FUJIROU! The contents of the book are as follows.

As in the past, a short story from "Schwarzesmarken" is also included, this time starring Pham Thi Lan, the kind and refreshing second in command of the 666th TSF Squadron.

Please look forward to the publication of this series, which is expected to continue.

Thanks again to all of you for your assistance.

CARNELIAN, who is in charge of illustrations, and Hinata (Mr. Kyosuke Himukai) had a great time with the Sylwia story. We are grateful for the attractive drawings of characters such as Irena and Kaja, and

Inghild in the Anett story, who appeared rarely in the main story. We are very grateful to Mr. Hyuga for drawing Kurt and Anna, characters who in a sense symbolize the harsh setting of "Schwarzesmarken".

Mr. Kouki Yoshimune, the original author. Thank you very much for your supervision alongside the "TE" anime. As the main booster of "Alt" content, we look forward to your continued support!

I would also like to thank Mr. Hiki and Mr. Hatano of the TechGian editorial department, Mr. Kawazaki and Mr. Kato of the Famitsu Bunko editorial department, and all of the Age staff for their assistance.

And a special thanks to all the readers who picked up this novel. Without your support, we would not have been able to publish this story in the form of an external publication. Please support "TE" as well as "Schwarzesmarken"!

See you in the next volume!

A certain day in June, 2012 Hiroki Uchida

Original Story

Kouki Yoshimune (Age)

Representative of the PC game brand Age. He is in charge of the planning and drafting of the "Kimi ga Nozomu Eien" and the "Muv-Luv" series. He is also in charge of scenarios and TSF design for "Muv-Luv Alternative" and "Muv-Luv Alternative: Total Eclipse". He also designed the mecha for "Schwarzesmarken".

Text

Hiroki Uchida

He made his debut in 2004 with the virtual war story "Genshitsu no Eiko" (The Glory of Phantom Wings) published by Yuraku Publishing Co. Since then, he has written numerous virtual war stories, including "Battleship Yamato Eu Kekkō Roku: Koutetsu no Kakutsujin" (Ginga Shuppan) and "Tetsushishi no Roar: Manchuria 1945" (Gakushu Kenkyusha). He has also written a light novel, "Anabasis of Steel: The Girl Called Shinigami" (Ikaros Publishing Co., Ltd.).

Illustration

CARNELIAN

A popular illustrator who continues to be at the forefront of the industry. She has designed the image character for the Taiwanese coterie magazine event "Fancy Frontier" and the character for "VOCALOID3" (Yamaha Corporation).

Translator Notes

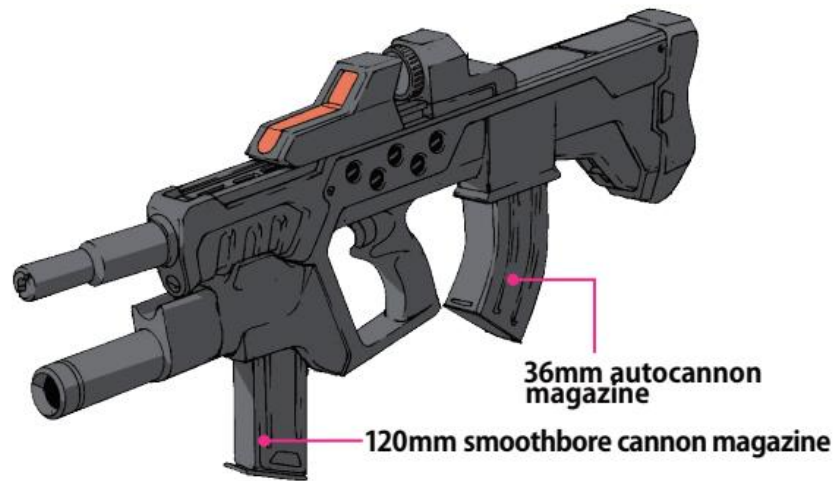
(1): **Depots** are government-owned, government-operated industrial installations that maintain, overhaul, and repair a multitude of complex military weapons systems and equipment for the Department of Defense. These depots are essential to maintaining readiness for DOD (Department of Defense), and they have a key role in sustaining weapon systems and equipment in both peacetime and during mobilization, contingency, or other emergencies.

(2): **Tributary** is a river or stream flowing into a larger river or lake.

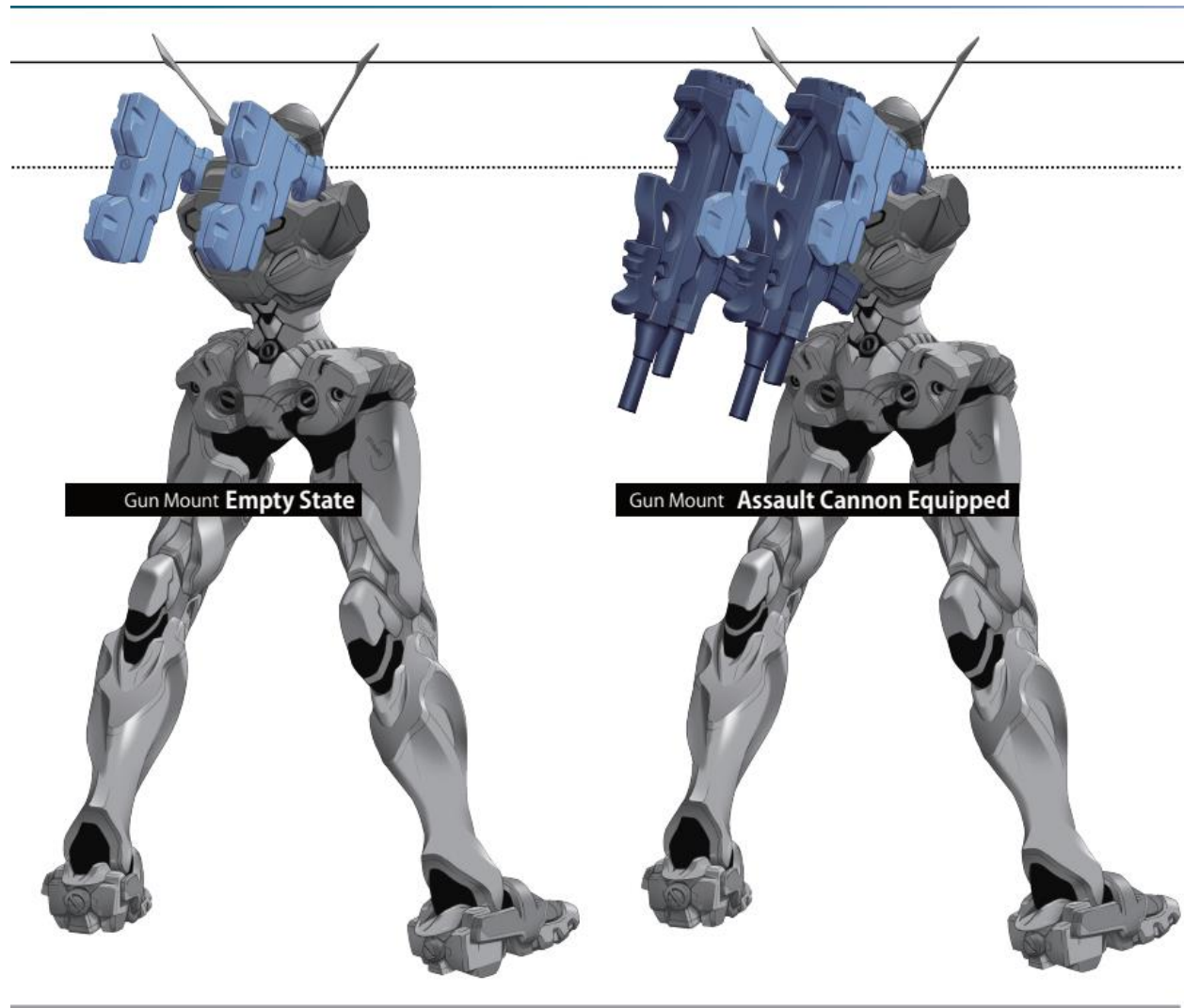
(3): **Jan Eugeniusz Ludwig Zumbach** (14 April 1915, Ursynów, Congress Poland, Russian Empire – 3 January 1986, France) was a Polish-Swiss fighter pilot who became an expert and squadron commander during the Second World War. During the Cold War, he became a mercenary in Africa and played a key role in forming the air forces of the breakaway states of Katanga and Biafra.

(4): **AMWS-21(Advanced Multiple Weapon System-21)**: The AMWS is the main weapon of US TSFs, consisting of a 36mm autocannon and a 120mm smoothbore cannon

The 36mm Autocannon Spare Magazine is loaded with armor piercing rounds made from depleted uranium, and 2000 rounds are loaded per magazine. The 120mm smoothbore Magazine is attached to the front of the assault cannon's grip, and Six rounds are loaded per magazine. As a module on its own, the 120mm smoothbore cannon can be detached and replaced with various options depending on the situation, such as Additional shell types, including the Armor Piercing Fin Stabilized Discarding Sabot (APFSDS) and canister rounds (Buckshot) in response to the situation. The Balalaika uses the **WS-16C Assault Cannon** which was the F-4 US armed forces standard.



(5): **Gun Mount** is A mount used when loading an assault cannon on the Type 74 system. While the mounts give assault cannons to the TSF's manipulators, they can also autonomously operate to fire the cannons on their own.



(6): TSFs are integrated with artificial muscles made of carbon fiber, called **carbonic actuators**, (Check Codex p245 Kouki's Interview on Fubuki) which undergo changes in volume when their molecular arrangement is changed by electric currents. The background concept for carbonic actuators is that they're placed across a TSF's body, and that their tension helps maintain balance, and can reduce the impact of sudden movement or firing of large caliber rounds

(7): The **fuselage** is an aircraft's main body section, or in Muv-Luv terms, the TSF's main body. The word fuselage comes from the Latin fusus, or "spindle," which describes the shape of the central tube-shaped part of an airplane. Wings, tails, engines — these are all extra parts of the plane that attach to the fuselage. Different kinds of airplanes have different types of fuselages, depending on how fast they need to travel and what they carry, but a fuselage is always hollow and always has a cockpit at the front.

(8): **Short Boost** is The act of making precise jump maneuvers using short bursts of the jump unit's propulsion.

(9): **Armor-piercing ammunition (AP)** is a type of projectile designed to penetrate either body armor or vehicle armor. From the 1860s to 1950s, a major application of armor-piercing projectiles was to defeat the thick armor carried on many warships and cause damage to the lightly-armored interior. From the 1920s onwards, armor-piercing weapons were required for anti-tank missions. AP shells containing an explosive filling were initially termed "shell" as opposed to "shot", distinguishing them from their non-HE counterparts. AP shells containing an **explosive** filling or a bursting charge were also sometimes distinguished by the suffix "HE"; **APHE** was common, in anti-tank shells of 75mm caliber and larger, due to the similarity with the much larger naval armor piercing shells already in common use. As the war progressed, ordnance design evolved so that the bursting charges in APHE became ever smaller to non-existent, especially in smaller caliber shells, e.g. Panzergranate 39 with only 0.2% HE filling.

(10): **Delayed defense** is simply put, stalling. The objective is to reduce the enemy's momentum by deploying the minimum amount of forces to prevent the loss of allies when the enemy attacks.

(11): **Epidemic typhus**, also called louse-borne typhus, is an uncommon disease caused by a bacteria called *Rickettsia prowazekii*. Epidemic typhus is spread to people through contact with infected body lice. Though epidemic typhus was responsible for millions of deaths in previous centuries, it is now considered a rare disease. Occasionally, cases continue to occur, in areas where extreme overcrowding is common and body lice (or fleas and mites) can travel from one person to another.

(12): This argument works better in Japanese context, because the surface pilots are named 衛士 **ejī** or **Guards**. Irena means that their original role, or their entire identity is guarding or protecting the people. This was also the case in the other novel May you be happy, when the surface pilot/guard Selma Bronikowski argued that they guards have a duty to protect and preserve the heritage and culture of East Germany. It's better to have both meanings in mind when a surface pilot talks about the original duty of their job.

(13): **Refugee** is a derived term of **refuge**. As nouns the difference between refuge and refugee is that refuge is a state of safety, protection or shelter while refugee is a person seeking refuge in a foreign country out of fear of political persecution or the prospect of such persecution in his home country, ie, a person seeking a political asylum.

(14): A **reception center** is a location with facilities for receiving, processing and attending to the immediate needs of refugees or asylum seekers as they arrive in a country of asylum. Poland currently has ten reception centers which altogether provide 1,962 places. At the end of 2020, 819 (compared to 1,295 in 2019) asylum seekers were residing in the centers. Another 2,225 (compared to 1,640 in 2019) asylum seekers were receiving assistance outside the centers.

(15): **Internment** is the imprisonment of people, commonly in large groups, without charges or intent to file charges. The term is especially used for the confinement "of enemy citizens in wartime or of terrorism

suspects". Thus, while it can simply mean imprisonment, it tends to refer to preventive confinement rather than confinement after having been convicted of some crime. Use of these terms is subject to debate and political sensitivities. Internment is also occasionally used to describe a neutral country's practice of detaining belligerent armed forces and equipment on its territory during times of war, under the Hague Convention of 1907. Interned persons may be held in prisons or in facilities known as internment camps, also known as concentration camps. The term **concentration camp** originates from the Spanish–Cuban Ten Years' War when Spanish forces detained Cuban civilians in camps in order to more easily combat guerrilla forces. Over the following decades the British during the Second Boer War and the Americans during the Philippine–American War also used concentration camps. The term "concentration camp" or "internment camp" is used to refer to a variety of systems that greatly differ in their severity, mortality rate, and architecture; their defining characteristic is that inmates are held outside the rule of law. Extermination camps or death camps, whose primary purpose is killing, are also imprecisely referred to as "concentration camps". Between 1933 and 1945, **Nazi Germany** and its allies established more than 44,000 concentration camps and other incarceration sites (including ghettos). The perpetrators used these sites for a range of purposes, including forced labor, detention of people thought to be enemies of the state, and for mass murder.

[\(16\)](#): The **Milicja Obywatelska** in English known as the Citizens' Militia and commonly abbreviated to MO, was the national police organization of the Polish People's Republic. It was established on 7 October 1944 by the Polish Committee of National Liberation, effectively replacing the pre-war police force. The Citizen's Militia would remain the predominant means of policing in Poland until 10 May 1990, when it was transformed back into Policja. The term *milicja* had been adapted from the cognate term, *militsiya*, used in several communist countries. The term is derived from militia, which derives its etymology from the concept of a military force composed of ordinary citizens. In most cases it represented a state-controlled force used to exert political repression, especially with its elite ZOMO squads. Under both communist and post-communist governments, the Polish police system has traditionally operated under the auspices of national authority. Starting at the end of World War II, Poland went under the influence of the Soviet Union. In 1948, the country's turn toward Stalinism brought the beginning of totalitarian rule, "in which one Party ruled autonomously over all sections of society". Training for the force was conducted in the town of Legionowo.

[\(17\)](#): **Centennial Hall (Wrocław)** The Centennial Hall (Polish: Hala Stulecia, German: Jahrhunderthalle), formerly named Hala Ludowa ("People's Hall"), is a historic building in Wrocław, Poland. It was constructed according to the plans of architect Max Berg in 1911–1913, when the city was part of the German Empire. Max Berg designed Centennial Hall to serve as a multifunctional structure to host "exhibitions, concerts, theatrical and opera performances, and sporting events". The hall continues to be used for sporting events, business summits, and concerts.

As an early landmark of reinforced concrete architecture, the building became one of Poland's official national Historic Monuments (Pomnik historii), as designated 20 April 2005, together with the Four Domes Pavilion, the Pergola, and the Iglica. Its listing is maintained by the National Heritage Board of Poland. It was also listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2006.

(18): **The Ministry of Public Security** (Poland) commonly known as UB or later SB, was the secret police, intelligence and counter-espionage agency operating in the Polish People's Republic From 1945 to 1990. The main goal of the Department of Security was the swift eradication of anti-communist structures and socio-political base of the Polish Underground State and resistance movements.

(19): **Payload** is the object or the entity which is being carried by an aircraft or launch vehicle. Sometimes payload also refers to the carrying capacity of an aircraft or launch vehicle, usually measured in terms of weight. Depending on the nature of the platoon or mission, the payload of a vehicle may include cargo, passengers, platoon crew, munitions, scientific instruments or experiments, or other equipment. Extra fuel, when optionally carried, is also considered part of the payload.

(20): A **mess kit** is a collection of silverware and cookware used during camping and backpacking, as well as extended military campaigns. There are many varieties of mess kits available to consumers, and militaries commonly provide them to their troops. Military mess kits are designed to be even more compact, using their space as efficiently as possible. Thus lids will almost always be used for preparing, cooking, and/or eating, and usually come in two or three pieces. As such, it may sacrifice certain features, or use other features to complement it.



(21): **Pirozhki** (Russian: пирожки́, tr. pirožkí, plural form of pirozhok; Ukrainian: пиріжки, pyrizhky) are Russian and Ukrainian baked or fried yeast-leavened boat-shaped buns with a variety of fillings. Pirozhki are a popular street food and comfort food in Russia.



(22): **Consommé** in cooking, is a type of clear soup made from richly flavored stock or broth that has been clarified, a process that uses egg whites to remove fat and sediment. The difference between Beef broth and Consommé for example is that beef broth is a simple liquid made by simmering beef and vegetables on low heat. Beef Consommé, on the other hand, is the purified version of beef broth. It is richer in texture and beef flavor, and most, importantly, free of any impurities.



(23): In Matthew 4:4 Jesus, and also Deuteronomy 8:3, while being tempted by the devil, rebukes him by saying "**Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**" it means, For man, to live, not only material satisfaction but also spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment are important, but Kaja misses the point by saying that bread alone isn't enough and she wants to eat more food in accordance with the bible verse.

(24): **Habelschwerdt** is the german name for Bystrzyca Kłodzka or Kladská Bystrice in Czech. It is a historic town in Kłodzko County, in Lower Silesian Voivodeship in southwestern Poland. It is the administrative seat of Gmina Bystrzyca Kłodzka. The old town of Bystrzyca is famous for its many historical buildings and is a popular tourist destination. During World War II Habelschwerdt was spared the fate of many other cities and did not suffer great damage. There were no important industrial centres in the area, and most of the Kłodzko Valley was not captured by the Red Army until after the capitulation of Germany. After the war the town once again became part of Poland due to the new borders dictated by the Potsdam Agreement. It was renamed to its historic Polish name Bystrzyca, and the adjective Kłodzka was added to distinguish it from other Polish settlements of the same name.



(25): **Mobility** in military terms refers to the ability of a weapon system, combat unit or armed force to move toward a military objective. Combat forces with a higher mobility are able to move more quickly, and/or across more hostile terrain, than forces with lower mobility. A **mobility corridor** is an area where a military force will be canalized (channeled) due to terrain restrictions. It allows forces to capitalize on the principles of mass and speed, and needs to be relatively free of obstacles.

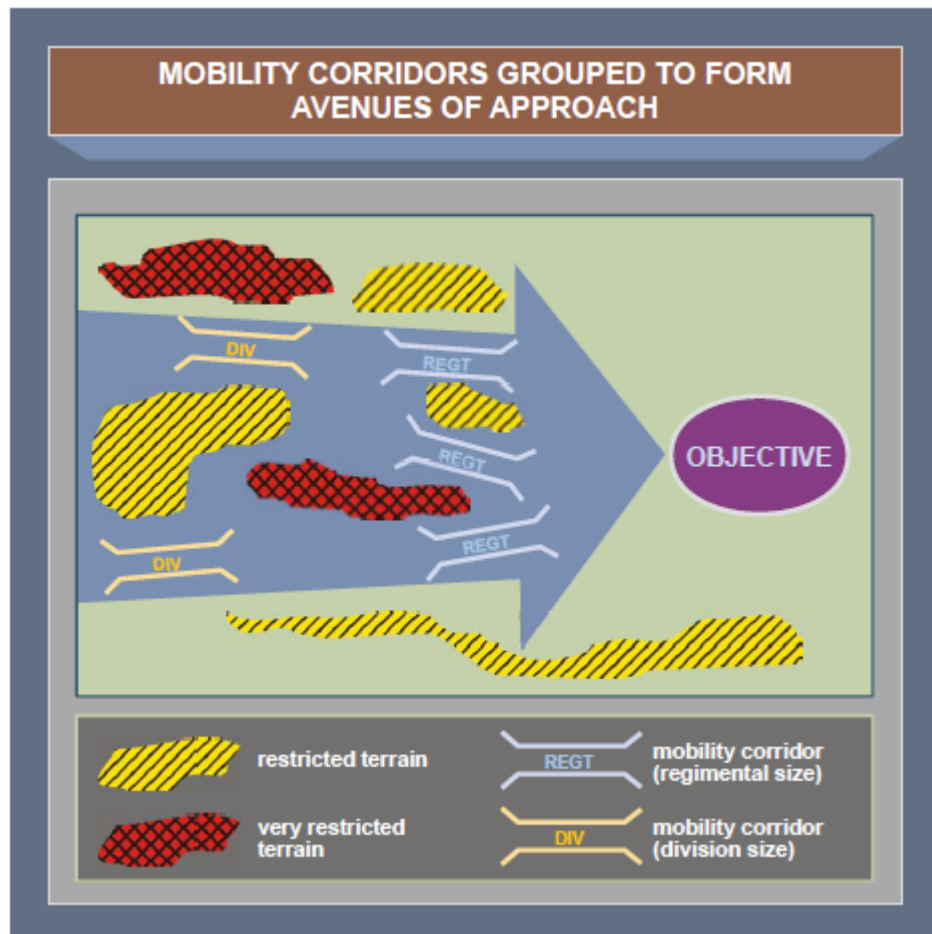
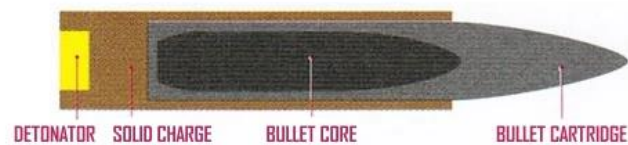


Figure II-5. Mobility Corridors Grouped to Form Avenues of Approach

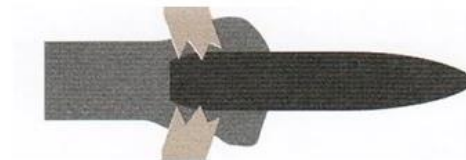
(26): **36mm high-velocity armor-piercing (HVAP)** is The standard 36mm round type, which is caseless. It is effective against most BETA types because of the usage of depleted uranium rounds, which gives it excellent anti-armor properties. Other types included 36mm tracer, a round that burns a pyrokinetic charge when fired, providing a light source for allied troops and as a guide for the firer to see where his/her aim is. An essential round type mixed with the standard 36mm HVAP, the 36mm tracer was used during the early years of the invasion to provide sight advantage for allied TSFs during night fighting; in modern times it is used more as a visual aid for ground troops. non-TSF

36mm AMMUNITION TYPE

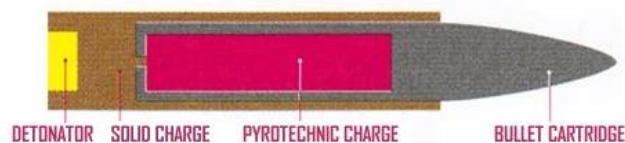
36mm HIGH VELOCITY ARMOR PIERCING



36mm HVAP upon target penetration



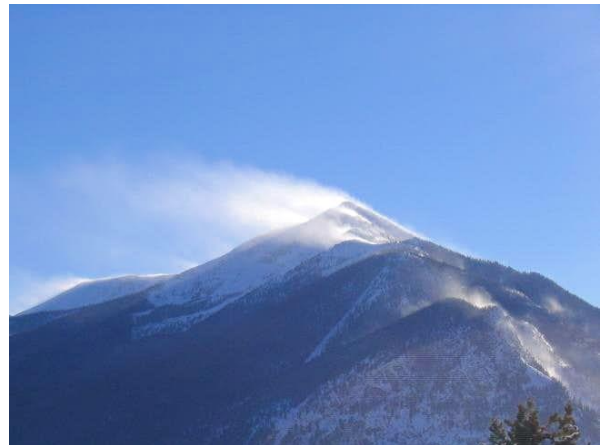
36mm TRACER



36mm tracer during firing



(27): When the wind blows the snow off of the top of a mountain, the snow forms a shape that may be



considered something like the **white plume** found on an old-fashioned hat.

(28): **Identification, friend or foe (IFF)** is an identification system designed for command and control. It uses a transponder that listens for an interrogation signal and then sends a response that identifies the broadcaster. IFF systems usually use radar frequencies, but other electromagnetic frequencies, radio or infrared, may be used. It enables military and civilian air traffic control interrogation systems to identify aircraft, vehicles or forces as friendly and to determine their bearing and range from the interrogator. IFF is used by both military and civilian aircraft. IFF was first developed during World War II, with the arrival of radar, and several friendly fire incidents.

(29): **Defeatism** is the acceptance of defeat without struggle, often with negative connotations. It can be linked to pessimism in psychology, and may sometimes be used synonymously with fatalism or determinism. The term defeatism is commonly used in politics as a descriptor for an ideological stance that considers co-operation with the opposition party. In the military context, in wartime, and especially at the front, defeatism is synonymous with treason. Under military law, a soldier can be accused of being defeatist if he refuses to fight by voicing **doubt of the ideological validity of national policy**; thus, existential questions such as "Is the war already lost?" and "Is the fight worth the effort?" are defeatism that connote advocacy of an alternative end-to-the war other than military victory.

"Defeatism" in Nazi Germany

Defeatism became a buzzword in Germany following its capitulation in 1918, particularly among the Nazi Party led by Adolf Hitler, who routinely blamed this loss on a "defeatist mentality". After seizing power, his obsession with denouncing opponents for "defeatism" grew more acute as time went on, and was widely noted. During World War II, Hitler unexpectedly dismissed many generals for defeatism. More prudent military commanders such as Field Marshal Albert Kesselring felt constrained to present the fuhrer a rosier account of the battlefield situation than was realistic, to avoid being labeled "defeatist". During the last year of war, the German people's court executed many people accused of defeatist talks or acts and their names were announced weekly in a pink colored poster pasted on billboards around the country. In March, 1945, as Red Army tanks were closing in on Berlin, Nazi officials worked feverishly to suppress "cowardice and defeatism" in their own ranks with summary death sentences.

(30): **Achtung** is a German word meaning "**attention**"

(31): **Eisenhüttenstadt** (literally "ironworks city" in German) is a town in the Oder-Spree district of the state of Brandenburg, Germany, on the border with Poland. East Germany founded the city in 1950. It was known as Stalinstadt (Stalinměsto) between 1953 and 1961. The municipal area is situated on a sandy terrace in the Berlin-Warsaw glacial valley (Urstromtal). It is bounded by the Oder river to the east, which since 1945 has formed the German–Polish border. Eisenhüttenstadt is the eastern terminus of the Oder–Spree Canal. The town centre is located about 25 kilometres (16 mi) south of Frankfurt (Oder) and 110 km (68 mi) southeast of Berlin. Eisenhüttenstadt is served by the Berlin–Wrocław railway line.

The present-day town was founded as a socialist model city in 1950 (initially named Stalinstadt after Joseph Stalin) following a decision by the East German Socialist Unity Party (SED), alongside a new steel mill **combine** (a term for industrial business groups, conglomerates or trusts in the former socialist countries.) located west of the historic town of Fürstenberg (Oder). A few years before the new town was established, a bridge over the Oder river had been constructed, the earlier one having been destroyed by retreating Wehrmacht forces in February 1945, near the end of World War II.

The population grew rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1961, during de-Stalinization, the town was renamed Eisenhüttenstadt. After German reunification in 1990, the state-owned steel works were privatized, and most of its 12,000 employees lost their jobs. Thereafter the factory employed around 2,500 workers. The town experienced a steep decline in population, from just over 50,000 to under 30,000.



(32): Once you are in the sight of the laser species, it never misses. Even if you take evasive action normally, they will keep their eyes on their target, that's why they don't miss. However, there is an exception to this rule: if there is an obstacle in the line of fire during the initial irradiation, or if another BETA is present, the irradiation will be aborted (although in the former case, the main irradiation may come at the obstacle).

Before Takeru's new OS was installed, there was a **random number avoidance** system, which allowed people to escape laser irradiation almost by chance (even if they could avoid it, there was a disadvantage that their consciousness level might drop because of the tremendous G-force).

(33): **Janka**, typically a given name or a surname, is a form of the originally Hebrew language name "Yohanan" (meaning "God is merciful"). Notable people with the name include:

(34): **Republic Day** (German: Tag der Republik) was an official holiday in East Germany, celebrated annually on 7 October from 1949 to 1989. Republic Day commemorates the anniversary of the establishment of the German Democratic Republic on 7 October 1949. On Republic Day, the Government of the GDR awarded many people the National Award of the GDR. The day commemorates 7 October 1949, when the German Democratic Republic was constituted on the territory of the Soviet Occupation Zone, almost half a year after the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany after the adoption of the Basic Law on 23 May 1949. It was immediately led by a government formed by the ruling communist party, known locally as the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) (formed in April 1946). This solidified the 1945 division of Germany and the two states' different political systems. The first major celebrations took place in 1959 on the GDR's 10th anniversary. It was replaced in 1990 by German Unity Day, which is today celebrated on 3 October, four days before the GDR's Republic Day.

(35): **Beeskow** is a town in Brandenburg, Germany, and capital of the Oder-Spree district. It is situated on the river Spree, 30 km southwest of Frankfurt an der Oder. **Herzberg** is a town in the Elbe-Elster district of the German federal state of Brandenburg.

Beeskow



Herzberg



(36): When speaking of **accents** in clothing, you are referring to wearable accessories. More often than not, these accessories are colored or textured in ways that accent the whole outfit and give it a specific character. When it comes to colors in fashion, a lot of variables come into play. Accent colors do more than just complement the outfit – they define it. The same suit can have a completely different appearance when combined with various contrasting pocket squares, neckties, shirts, or other accessories. According to the University of Nebraska, accessories, when used correctly, enhance the appearance of harmony of line, color, and texture. The same goes for accent colors, being an essential part of clothing accessories.

(37): **Todesgott** means **Deathgod** in German. The original written word is 死神(トッド). Shinigami, but pronounced as Todesgott with the accompanying furigana.

(38): The **CIWS-1A** is a Multi-purpose knife used by most TSFs, and is very similar to the Type-65 PB Knife. Initially equipped with the F-4 Phantom, the weapon has also seen use with other TSFs, including the MiG-21 Balalaika.

(39): A **Proving ground** is an installation or reservation in which technology such as weapons, military tactics and automobile prototypes are experimented with or tested. Proving grounds can be operated by government bodies or civilian industries. They are distinct from military training areas which are run by the military and intended for the routine training and exercising of troops across the terrain.

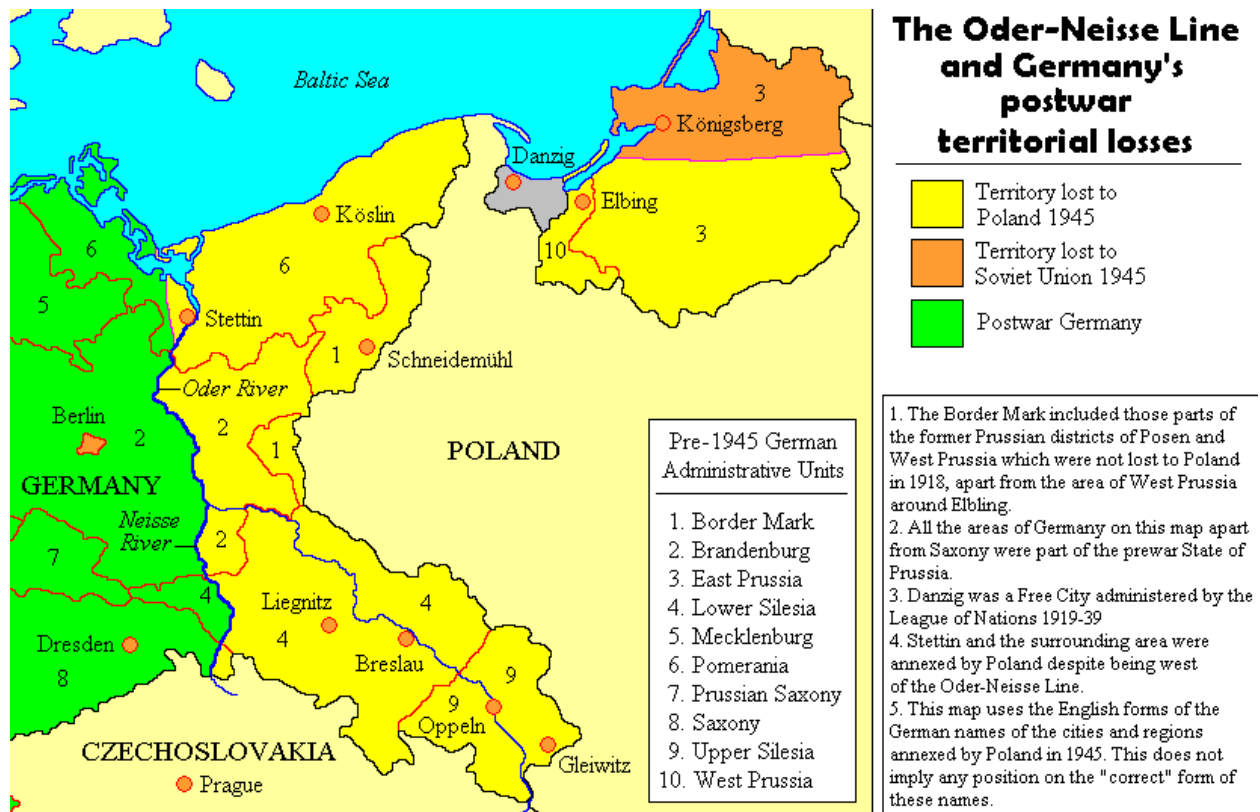
(40): **Bōzu**, means boy; sonny; lad.

(41): A **taxiway** is a path for aircraft at an airport connecting runways with aprons, hangars, terminals and other facilities. They mostly have a hard surface such as asphalt or concrete, although smaller general aviation airports sometimes use gravel or grass.



(42): **Vaterland** means '**Fatherland**' in German

(43): The **Oder–Neisse line** (German: Oder-Neiße-Grenze) is the basis of most of the international border between Germany and Poland. It runs mainly along the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers and meets the Baltic Sea in the north, just west of the ports of Szczecin and Świnoujście (German: Stettin and Swinemünde). The Oder–Neisse line marked the border between East Germany and Poland from 1950 to 1990. The two Communist governments agreed to the border in 1950, while West Germany, after a period of refusal, adhered to the border, with reservations, in 1970. After the revolutions of 1989, newly reunified Germany and Poland accepted the line as their border in the 1990 German–Polish Border Treaty.



(44): **Ost** means **East** in German

(45): **Panzer** is a German word that means "armor". It derives from the French word *pancier*, "breastplate", from Latin *pantex*, "belly". The word is used in English and some other languages as a loanword in the context of the German military. In particular, it is used in the proper names of military formations (Panzerdivision, 4th Panzer Army, etc.), and in the proper names of tanks, such as Panzer IV, etc. The dated German term is *Panzerkampfwagen*, "tank" or "armored combat vehicle". The modern commonly used synonym is *Kampfpanzer*, or "battle panzer". The first German tank, the A7V of 1918, was referred to as a *Sturmpanzerwagen* (roughly, "armored assault vehicle").

(46): A tank crew at the time consisted of four positions: 1) **tank commander**, 2) **gunner**, 3) **loader**, and 4) **driver**. The TOE (table of organization and equipment) determines the ranks held by each of those positions. The tank commander's rank changes depending on his position in the platoon as opposed to the position on the tank. One tank is commanded by the platoon leader, a First or Second Lieutenant; one by the platoon sergeant, a Sergeant First Class (E7); and the remaining three or now two tanks by a Staff Sergeant (E6). The gunner is normally a Sergeant (E5) and the loader and driver are a lower rank (E4 or E3).

(47): A **main battle tank** (MBT), also known as a battle tank or universal tank, is a tank that fills the armor-protected direct fire and maneuver role of many modern armies. Cold War-era development of

more powerful engines, better suspension systems and lighter weight composite armor allowed the design of a tank that had the firepower of a super-heavy tank, the armor protection of a heavy tank, and the mobility of a light tank, in a package with the weight of a medium tank. Through the 1960s, the MBT replaced almost all other types of tanks, leaving only some specialist roles to be filled by lighter designs or other types of armored fighting vehicles. Today, main battle tanks are considered a key component of modern armies. Modern MBTs seldom operate alone, as they are organized into armored units which involve the support of infantry, who may accompany the MBTs in infantry fighting vehicles. They are also often supported by surveillance or ground-attack aircraft. The average weight of MBTs varies from country to country. The average weight of Western MBTs is usually higher than that of Russian or Chinese MBTs.

(48): The **Autobahn** (IPA: (German plural Autobahnen) is the federal controlled-access highway system in Germany. The official German term is Bundesautobahn (abbreviated BAB), which translates as 'federal motorway'. The literal meaning of the word Bundesautobahn is 'Federal Auto(mobile) Track'. German Autobahnen are widely known for having no federally mandated speed limit for some classes of vehicles. However, limits are posted (and enforced) in areas that are urbanised, substandard, accident-prone, or under construction. On speed-unrestricted stretches, an advisory speed limit (Richtgeschwindigkeit) of 130 kilometres per hour (81 mph) applies.

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(49): **Eberswalde** is a major town and the administrative seat of the district Barnim in the German State (Bundesland / federated state) of Brandenburg, about 50 km northeast of Berlin. Population 42,144 (census in June 2005), geographical location 52°50'N 13°50'E. The town is often called Waldstadt (forest town), because of the large forests around it, including the Schorfheide-Chorin Biosphere Reserve. Despite this fact, Eberswalde was an important industrial center until the German Reunification.



(50): The **Book of**
called the
Revelation to John
Jesus Christ – is

New Testament and consequently is also the final book of the Christian Bible. Its title is derived from the first word of the Koine Greek text: apokalypsis, meaning "unveiling" or "revelation". The Book of Revelation is the only apocalyptic book in the New Testament canon. It occupies a central place in Christian eschatology. The author names himself as "John" in the text, but his precise identity remains a point of academic debate. Second-century Christian writers such as Papias of Hierapolis, Justin Martyr,

Revelation – also
Apocalypse of John,
or Revelation of
the final book of the

Irenaeus, Melito of Sardis, Clement of Alexandria, and the author of the Muratorian fragment identify John the Apostle as the "John" of Revelation. Modern scholarship generally takes a different view, with many considering that nothing can be known about the author except that he was a Christian prophet. Modern theological scholars characterize the Book of Revelation's author as "John of Patmos". The bulk of traditional sources date the book to the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (AD 81–96), which evidence tends to confirm. The book spans three literary genres: the epistolary, the apocalyptic, and the prophetic. It begins with John, on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, addressing a letter to the "Seven Churches of Asia". He then describes a series of prophetic visions, including figures such as the Seven-Headed Dragon, the Serpent, and the **Beast**, which culminate in the Second Coming of Jesus.

In the Textus Receptus manuscripts of the New Testament, the Book of Revelation (13:17–18) cryptically asserts **666** to be "man's number" or "the number of a man" (depending on how the text is translated) associated with the Beast, an antagonistic creature that appears briefly about two-thirds into the apocalyptic vision. Some manuscripts of the original Greek use the symbols χξϞ (chi xi stigma) (or χξϞ with a digamma), while other manuscripts spell out the number in words. In modern popular culture, 666 has become one of the most widely recognized symbols for the Antichrist or, alternatively, the devil. The number 666 is purportedly used to invoke Satan. Earnest references to the number occur both among apocalypticist Christian groups and in explicitly anti-Christian subcultures. References in contemporary Western art or literature are, more likely than not, intentional references to the Beast symbolism. Such popular references are therefore too numerous to list. It is common to see the symbolic role of the integer 666 transferred to the digit sequence 6-6-6. Some people take the Satanic associations of 666 so seriously that they actively avoid things related to 666 or the digits 6-6-6. This is known as hexakosioihexekontahexaphobia.

[\(61\)](#): **Sortierung** means sorting in german.

[\(62\)](#): Kurt is referring to **Triage Tags**. A triage tag is a tool first responders and medical personnel use during a mass casualty incident. With the aid of the triage tags, the first-arriving personnel are able to effectively and efficiently distribute the limited resources and provide the necessary immediate care for the victims until more help arrives. Triage tags were first introduced by Baron Dominique Jean Larrey, a French surgeon in Napoleon's army. **Simple triage and rapid treatment (START)** is a strategy that the first responders and medical personnel employ to evaluate the severity of injury of each victim as quickly as possible and tag the victims in about 30–60 seconds. The triage tags are placed near the head and are

used to better separate the victims so that when more help arrives, the patients are easily recognizable for the extra help to ascertain the most dire cases.

The term Triage comes from the French verb trier, meaning to separate, sort, shift or select.

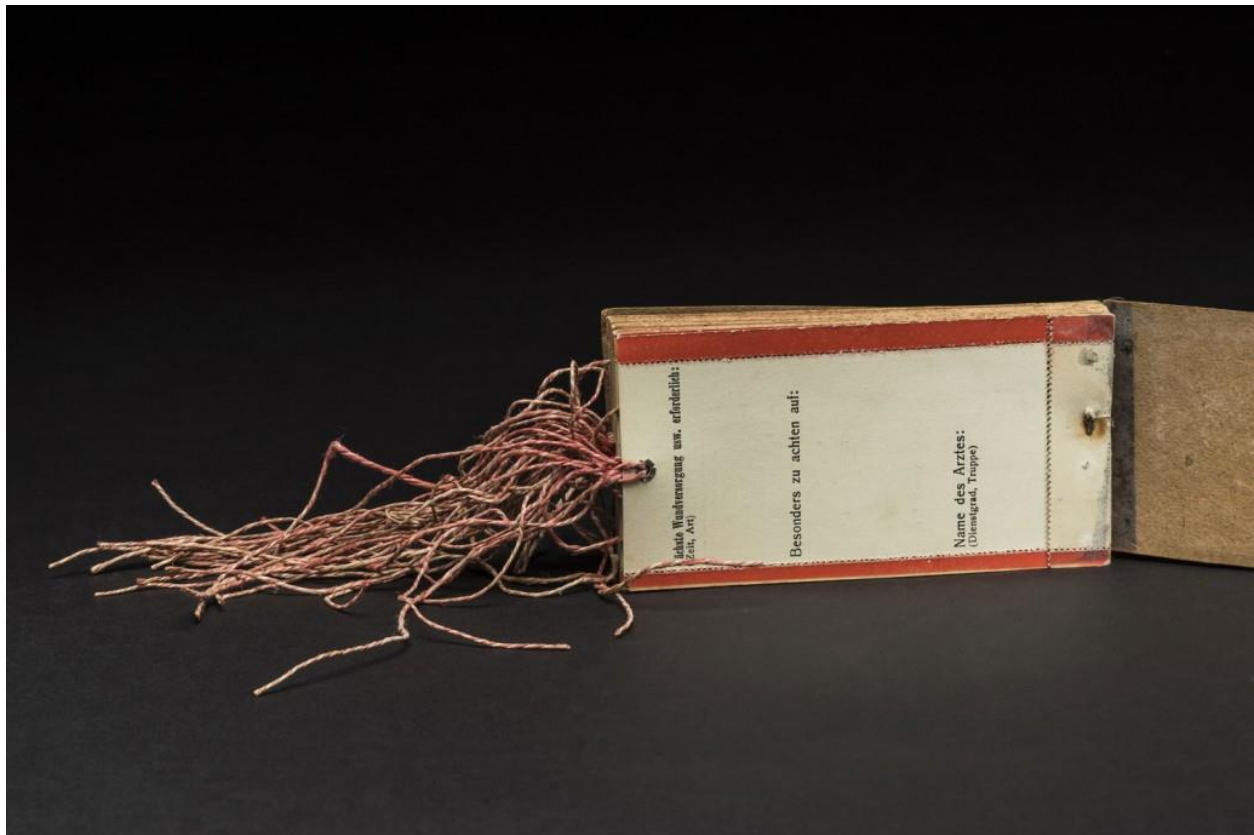
In **Germany**: Preliminary assessment of injuries is usually done by the first ambulance crew on scene, with this role being assumed by the first doctor arriving at the scene. As a rule, there will be no cardiopulmonary resuscitation, so patients who do not breathe on their own or develop circulation after their airways are cleared will be tagged "deceased". Also, not every major injury automatically qualifies for a red tag. A patient with a traumatic amputation of the forearm might just be tagged yellow, have the bleeding stopped, and then be sent to a hospital when possible. After the preliminary assessment, a more specific and definite triage will follow, as soon as

patients are brought to a field treatment facility. There, they will be disrobed and fully examined by an emergency physician. This will take approximately 90 seconds per patient. The German triage system also uses four, sometimes five colour codes to denote the urgency of treatment. Typically, every ambulance is equipped with a folder or bag with coloured ribbons or triage tags. The urgency is denoted as follows:

Category	Meaning	Consequences	Examples
T1 (I)	Acute danger for life	Immediate treatment, transport as soon as possible	Arterial lesions, internal haemorrhage, major amputations
T2 (II)	Severe injury	Constant observation and rapid treatment, transport as soon as practical	Minor amputations, flesh wounds, fractures and dislocations
T3 (III)	Minor injury or no injury	Treatment when practical, transport and/or discharge when possible	Minor lacerations, sprains, abrasions
T4 (IV)	No or small chance of survival	Observation and if possible administration of analgesics	Severe injuries, uncompensated blood loss, negative neurological assessment
	Deceased	Collection and guarding of bodies, identification when possible	Injuries not compatible with life, no spontaneous breathing after clearing of airway, downgraded from T1-4

The image shows a German Triage Tag form, which is a standardized document used in emergency medicine. It is divided into several sections:

- Personal Property Receipt* Evidence Tag**: Includes a barcode and the number *413730*.
- Destination**: A line for the destination hospital.
- Via**: A line for the mode of transport.
- TRIAGE TAG**: A section with checkboxes for various injuries: S (Salivation), L (Laceration), U (Urination), D (Defecation), G (G.I. Distress), and E (Emesis). It also includes a section for **AUTO INJECTOR** with checkboxes for 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.
- Yes No**: A section for **Gross Decon** and **Secondary Decon**.
- Solution**: A list of injuries: Blunt Trauma, Burn, C-Spine, Cardiac, Crushing, Fracture, Laceration, and Penetrating Injury.
- Age**: A line for the patient's age.
- Other:**: A line for additional information.
- VITAL SIGNS**: A table for recording vital signs: Time, B/P (Blood Pressure), Pulse, and Respiration.
- Time**: A line for the time of assessment.
- Drug Solution**: A line for the drug solution used.
- Dose**: A line for the dose of the drug solution.
- MORQUE**: A section for **Pulseless/Non-Breathing** patients.
- IMMEDIATE**: A section for **Life Threatening Injury**.
- DELAYED**: A section for **Serious, Non Life Threatening** injuries.
- MINOR**: A section for **Walking Wounded**.



This German triage tag shows how the medical corps was organised at the Front.

Tags were hooked onto the buttons of casualties' clothing at the first aid post. They varied in colour depending on whether the man was wounded (**Wundzettel**) or sick (**Krankenzettel**). They were partly filled in on the battlefield to indicate the patient's condition, the treatment already given and the need for evacuation. Any man leaving the battlefield without any obvious wound and without a triage tag on one of the buttons of his jacket could be accused of desertion. The tag then stayed with the soldier throughout the evacuation process. A series of triages separated those in need of immediate medical intervention from those who could be taken further away from the Front for treatment.

[\(63\)](#): The ZSU-23-4 "Shilka" is a lightly armored Soviet self-propelled, radar guided anti-aircraft weapon system (SPAAG). The acronym "ZSU" stands for Zenitnaya Samokhodnaya Ustanovka (Russian: Зенитная Самоходная Установка), meaning "anti-aircraft self-propelled system"; the "23" signifies the

bore diameter in millimeters; the "4" signifies the number of gun barrels. It is named after the Shilka River in Russia. Afghan soldiers nicknamed it the "sewing machine" due to the sound of firing guns. It is also referred to by its nickname of "Zeus", derived from the Russian acronym.



[\(64\)](#): **Combined arms** is an approach to warfare that seeks to integrate different combat arms of a military to achieve mutually-complementary effects (for example by using infantry and armor in an urban environment in which each supports the other) According to the strategist William S. Lind, combined arms can be distinguished from the concept of "supporting arms" as follows:

Combined arms hits the enemy with two or more arms simultaneously in such a manner that the actions he must take to defend himself from one make him more vulnerable to another. In contrast, supporting arms is hitting the enemy with two or more arms in sequence, or if simultaneously, then in such combination that the actions the enemy must take to defend himself from one also defends himself from the other(s).

Aircraft, infantry, and armored vehicles working together, Vietnam War



[\(65\)](#): In military history, the German term **Kampfgruppe** (pl. Kampfgruppen; abbrev. KG, or KGr in Luftwaffe

usage during World War II, literally "fight group" or "battle group") can refer to a combat formation of any kind, but most usually to that employed by the Wehrmacht of Nazi Germany and its allies during World War II and, to a lesser extent, of the German Empire in World War I.

The Kampfgruppe was an ad hoc combined arms formation, usually employing a combination of tanks, infantry, and artillery (including anti-tank) elements, generally organised for a particular task or operation.

A Kampfgruppe could range in size from a company to a corps , but the most common was an Abteilung (battalion)-sized formation. Kampfgruppen were generally referred to by either their commanding officer's name or the parent division.

Among examples, Kampfgruppe 1001 Nacht was a German Kampfgruppe formed on the **Oder** front during the final German offensive of the Second World War. The formation is most notable for its unusual title, referring to the medieval Persian book of 1001 Nights, a collection of tales and fables.



The Panzerjäger-Abteilung 39 (part of "**Kampfgruppe Gräf**", from the 21st Panzer Division) of the Afrika Korps on the move. The vehicles are a Sd.Kfz. 231 8-rad and motorcycle sidecar combination

(66): The **BMP-1** is a Soviet amphibious tracked infantry fighting vehicle. BMP stands for Boyevaya Mashina Pjehoty 1 (Russian: Боевая Машина Пехоты 1; БМП-1), meaning "infantry fighting vehicle, 1st serial model". The BMP-1 was the first mass-produced infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) of the Soviet Union. It was called the M-1967, BMP and BMP-76PB by NATO before its correct designation was known. The Soviet military leadership saw any future wars as being conducted with nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. A new design, like the BMP, combining the properties of an armored personnel carrier (APC) and a light tank would allow infantry to operate from the relative safety of its armoured, radiation-shielded interior in contaminated areas and to fight alongside it in uncontaminated areas. It would increase infantry squad mobility, provide fire support to them, and also be able to fight alongside main battle tanks.



[\(67\)](#): **Mechanized infantry** are infantry units equipped with armored personnel carriers (APCs) or infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) for transport and combat

As defined by the United States Army, mechanized infantry is distinguished from motorized infantry in that its vehicles provide a degree of armor protection and armament for use in combat, whereas motorized infantry are provided with "soft-skinned" wheeled vehicles for transportation only. Compared with "light" truck-mobile infantry, mechanized infantry can maintain rapid tactical movement and, if mounted in IFVs, have more integral firepower. It requires more combat supplies (ammunition and especially fuel) and ordnance supplies (spare vehicle components), and a comparatively larger proportion of manpower is required to crew and maintain the vehicles. For example, most APCs mount a section of seven or eight infantrymen but have a crew of two. Most IFVs carry only six or seven infantry but require a crew of three. To be effective in the field, mechanized units also require many mechanics, with specialized maintenance and recovery vehicles and equipment.

In **Combined Arms**, It is generally accepted that single weapons system types are much less effective without the support of the full combined arms team; the pre-World War II notion of "tank fleets" has proven to be as unsound as the World War I idea of unsupported infantry attacks. Though many nations' armored formations included an organic mechanized infantry component at the start of World War II, the proportion of mechanized infantry in such combined arms formations was increased by most armies as the war progressed.

The lesson was re-learned, first by the Pakistani Army in the 1965 War with India, where the nation fielded two different types of armored divisions: one which was almost exclusively armor (the 1st), while another was more balanced (the 6th). The latter division showed itself to be far more combat capable than the former.

Having achieved spectacular successes in the offensive with tank-heavy formations during the Six-Day War, the Israel Defense Forces found in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 that a doctrine that relied primarily on tanks and aircraft had proven inadequate. As a makeshift remedy, paratroopers were provided with motorized transport and used as mechanized infantry in coordination with the armor.



(68): **Panzer Vor** is a German phrase which means: 'All tanks forwards'

(69): **Feuer frei** is the command to start shooting in German military language (literally "fire freely!") and can be compared to "fire at will" or "open fire".

(70): **High Explosive Grenades** (HE) or concussion grenade is an anti-personnel device that is designed to damage, daze or otherwise stun its targets with overpressure shockwaves. Compared to fragmentation grenades, the explosive filler is usually of a greater weight and volume, and the case is much thinner – the US MK3A2 concussion grenade, for example, has a body of fiber (similar to the packing container for the fragmentation grenade).

(71): **Banking** -- Pushing the control stick in the cockpit to the left or right makes the ailerons on one wing go down and the ailerons on the other wing go up. This makes the plane tip to the left or right. This is called Banking. Banking makes the plane turn. Like a bicycle, the plane tilts, or banks, as it turns. This process is also called Roll.

(72): **Kharkov:** also known as Kharkiv, is the second-largest city and municipality in Ukraine. Located in the northeast of the country, it is the largest city of the historic Slobozhanshchyna region., Kharkiv is a major cultural, scientific, educational, transport and industrial centre of Ukraine, with numerous museums, theatres and libraries, including the Annunciation and Dormition Cathedrals, the Derzhprom building in Freedom Square, and the National University of Kharkiv. There are hundreds of industrial facilities throughout the city, including the Morozov Design Bureau and the Malyshev Tank Factory (leaders in world tank production from the 1930s to the 1980s). Sunflowers, which are the national flower of Ukraine, have grown in the country since the mid-1700s. According to MIR Corp, a travel company that specializes in eastern European destinations, sunflower oil became increasingly popular in Ukraine because the Orthodox Church did not restrict its use during Lent. (Orthodox church members weren't supposed to cook with butter or lard between Ash Wednesday and Easter.) As a result, fields of sunflowers became more widespread, and sunflower seeds became an in-demand snack.



(73): **Radiative cooling** is the process by which a body loses heat by thermal radiation. Radiation fog is a very common type of fog throughout the United States. It is most prevalent during the fall and winter. It forms overnight as the air near the ground cools and stabilizes. When this cooling causes the air to reach saturation, fog will form. Fog will first form at or near the surface, thickening as the air continues to cool. The layer of fog will also deepen overnight as the air above the initial fog layer also cools. As this air cools, the fog will extend upward. The most favored areas for fog development are sheltered valleys where there is little to no wind and locations near bodies of water. Wind would disrupt the formation of radiation fog. Radiation fog is usually patchy, tends to stay in one place and goes away the next day under the sun's rays. Thicker instances of radiation fog tend to form in valleys or over calm bodies of water.



(74): **9K118 Sheksna** is a laser beam riding guided anti-tank missile system of the Soviet Union, also known under the NATO reporting name of AT-12 Swinger. It is fired from the 115 mm (4.5 in) smoothbore gun of the T-62 tank. The system fires the same 9M117 missile as the AT-10 Stabber, BMP-3 100 mm (3.9 in) guided round, and Kastet round for the MT-12 towed gun.



(75): **Gun Breech** is a mass of metal at the rear end of a cannon that extends from the rear face to the rifling.



(76): **Wir Sortieren Leben** means We Sort Life in German

(77): **Carpet bombing**, also known as saturation bombing, is a large area bombardment done in a progressive manner to inflict damage in every part of a selected area of land. The phrase evokes the image of explosions completely covering an area, in the same way that a carpet covers a floor. Carpet bombing is usually achieved by dropping many unguided bombs. Carpet bombing of cities, towns, villages, or other areas containing a concentration of civilians is considered a war crime as of Article 51 of the 1977 Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions.



(78): "[**Auferstanden aus Ruinen**](#)" (English: "Risen from Ruins", lit. 'Resurrected out [of] Ruins') is a German patriotic song that was the national anthem of East Germany during its existence from 1949 to 1990.

(79): "[**Der gute Kamerad**](#)" ("The Good Comrade"), also known by its incipit as "**Ich hatt' einen Kameraden**" ("I had a comrade"), and the name **that was written in the story**, is a traditional lament of the German armed forces. The text was written by German poet Ludwig Uhland in 1809. Its immediate inspiration was the deployment of Badener troops against the Tyrolean Rebellion. In 1825, the composer Friedrich Silcher set it to music, based on the tune of a Swiss folk song.

(80) In military strategy, a **bridgehead** (or bridge-head) is the strategically important area of ground around the end of a bridge or other place of possible crossing over a body of water which at time of conflict is sought to be defended or taken over by the belligerent forces. Bridgeheads typically exist for only a few days, the invading forces either being thrown back or expanding the bridgehead to create a secure defensive lodgement area, before breaking out into enemy territory, such as when the U.S. 9th Armored Division seized the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen in 1945 during World War II. In some cases a bridgehead may exist for months.

(81): **Omorashi** (Japanese: おもらし / オモラシ / お漏らし, "to wet oneself"), sometimes abbreviated as simply omo, is a form of fetish subculture originating and predominantly recognized in Japan, in which participants experience arousal from having a full bladder or wetting themselves, wearing a diaper, or from seeing someone else experiencing a full bladder or wetting themselves.

(82): The best-known traditional outfit worn by women in (southern) Germany - the **Frauentracht** - is the **Dirndl**. A Dirndl is a women's dress, consisting of four main components: a bodice (connected at the front), a skirt, a shirt (worn underneath the bodice) and an apron (worn at the front, on top of the skirt). The Dirndl was initially created as a hardy outfit for servants and peasant women, and was made of soft, breathable and easily washable material. Later, under the influence of two Jewish designers known as the Wallach brothers, this hardy outfit transformed into a fancy, stylish and flattering one, made of expensive materials and designed to be shown off by the aristocracy. Although mostly similar in basic structure, the style and flourishes of the Dirndl varied somewhat from region to region. The Frisian Tracht, for instance, had one of the most distinctive styles in northern Germany. Worn to show off the wealth of one's family, it was elaborate and opulent, ornamented with jewelry, metals and other expensive materials. Although the Dirndl lost much of its popularity after the Second World War, today it is once again a favorite outfit at traditional German festivals and other special occasions - especially in southern Germany - and is worn as symbol of national culture and pride.



(83): The **áo dài** is a traditional Vietnamese national garment. Besides suits and dresses nowadays, men and women can also wear áo dài on formal occasions. It is a long, split tunic worn over trousers. Áo translates as shirt. Dài means "long". The term can be used to describe any clothing attire that consists of a long tunic, such as "nhật bình". The áo dài dress has traditionally been marketed with a feminine appeal, with "Miss Ao Dai" pageants being popular in Vietnam and with overseas Vietnamese. However, the men version of ao dai or modified ao dai are also worn during weddings or formal occasions. The ao dai is one of the few Vietnamese words that appear in English-language dictionaries. The ao dai can be paired with the nón lá or the khăn vấn.



(84): The **cheongsam**, also known as the qipao, is a Chinese dress worn by women which takes inspiration from the ethnic clothing of the Manchu people. It is most often seen as a longer, figure-fitting, one piece garment with a standing collar, an asymmetric left-over-right opening and two side slits. It was popular in China from the 1920s to 1940s, overlapping the Republican era, and was popularized by Chinese high society Shanghai. It is known as the socialites and women in sometimes mandarin gown.



(85): Post-traumatic stress disorder was a major military problem during World War I, though it was known at the time as "**shell shock**."

The term itself first appeared in the medical journal *The Lancet* in Feb. 1915, some six months after the "Great War" began. Capt. Charles Myers of the Royal Army Medical Corps documented soldiers who experienced a range of severe symptoms—including anxiety, nightmares, tremor, and impaired sight and hearing—after being exposed to exploding shells on the battlefield. It appeared that the symptoms resulted from a kind of severe concussion to the nervous system (hence the name).

By the following year, however, medical and military authorities documented shell shock symptoms in soldiers who had been nowhere near exploding shells. These soldiers' conditions were considered neurasthenia—a type of nervous breakdown from war—but were still encompassed by "shell shock" (or war neurosis).

There were some 80,000 cases of shell shock in the British army alone by the end of the war. Soldiers often returned to the war zone after only a few days' rest, and those who were treated for longer periods of time sometimes underwent hydrotherapy or electrotherapy.

In World War II, British and American described traumatic responses to combat as "battle fatigue," "combat fatigue" and "combat stress reaction"—terms that reflected the belief that the conditions were related to long deployments. Up to half of military discharges during the war may have been related to combat exhaustion, according to the National Center for PTSD.