

シズルマクシ

shizumaxi

Requiem - 願い - #2

原作・吉宗鋼紀 (アージュ)

文・内田弘樹

イラスト・CARNELIAN



ファミ通文庫





帰れないふたりのために

「……分かったわ。

私、これからも頑張って勉強して、
必ず党幹部になってみせる。そして――

貴方のような人間の
味方になってみせる」

グレーテル・イエツケルン





ハインツ・アクスマン

リズ・ホーエンシュタイン

どうか、あの幸せな日々を

「でも、私はお兄ちゃんを守るために……」

「リズ。君は、

**君だけのために
生きてもいいんだ」**

私の瞳が開かれる。
お兄ちゃんのためではなく、

私の、幸せのため？

「私、お兄ちゃんと会いたい……あの、懐かしい日々に戻りたい……」



私の微笑みが心の支えになるのなら――。

私がどれだけ頑張っても、ベトナム系市民への差別が無くなるわけじゃない。
それでも、私は思ったのだ。
私のために。私が守りたいと思うものを全てを守るために。

ファム・ティ・ラン

笑顔の価値は

Schwarzesmarken

Requiem -Wish- #2

Original Story by Kouki Yoshimune (Age)

Text by Hiroki Uchida

Illustration CARNELIAN

Front Piece and Text Illustrations Kyosuke Hyuga

3D modeling / Zoukei-mura

3D finish works / Virginal Art

Photography/Image processing/Yuji Takase [Takase Photo Office]

3D Direction / VOKUS

Translation, Editing and Proofreading

Mohamed Hassan

Illustrations

Gretel Jeckeln

For the sake of the two who cannot return home

".....I understand.

I'm going to keep studying and working hard.

And I will surely become a party leader. And then

I will become an ally

For the people like you."

Lise Hohenstein

Heinz Axmann

Please, those happy days.

"But, for the sake of protecting my Oniichan..."

"Lise. You...

It's for the sake of you and you alone

Not for your brother."

My eyes were opened.

It's not for the sake of Oniichan,

For the sake.... of my happiness?

"I want to see Oniichan..... and go back to those good old days..."

Pham Thi Lan

The value of a smile.

No matter how hard I try, discrimination against citizens of Vietnamese descent will never go away.

Still, I believed.

For my sake. To protect everything I want to protect.

If my smile is a comfort to you.....

Table of Contents

- For the sake of the two who cannot return home
- Please, those happy days
- The value of a smile
- Circe's disaster
- World Setting
- After Word

帰れないふたりのために

嫌われたくなかった
許してもらいたかった
だから——私は欲した



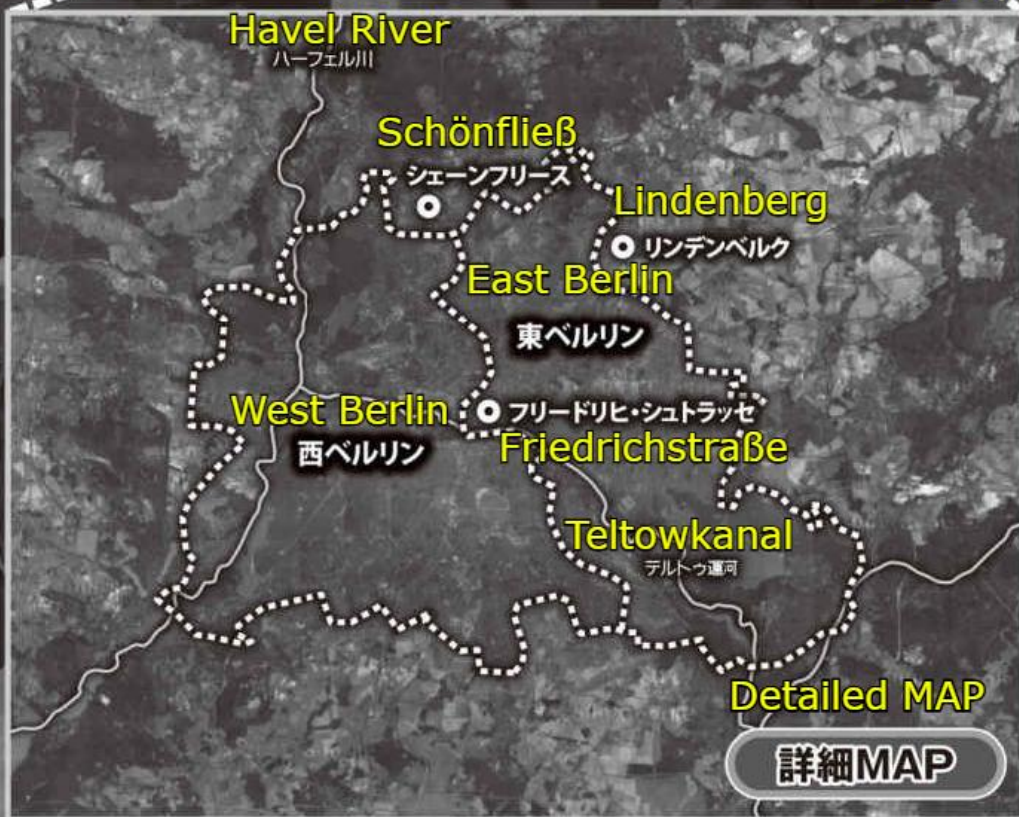
偽りの平和の下で 東ベルリンの虚と実

第二次世界大戦後、ドイツは米ソによって東西に分割され、首都ベルリンも同様に分断された。このため冷戦時代、ベルリンは冷戦の最前線となった

BETAの地球侵攻が開始された後も、東ベルリンは引き続き東ドイツの象徴としての役割を担った。東ベルリンの発展は社会主義体制の正しさの誇示や、対BETA戦に不安を覚える市民の心を繋ぎ止める手段となったからである。しかし、それゆえに東ドイツは東ベルリンからの首都機能の移転を認めなかったため、市民の疎開は殆ど行われなかった。また、強引な都市計画の推進による環境汚染や膨大な数の難民流入の問題も深刻だったが、そうした事実は隠蔽され、市民はBETAの攻勢が続く中でも、偽りの平和の中での暮らしを続けていた。



Regional MAP



Detailed MAP

詳細MAP

For the sake of the two who cannot return home

I didn't want to be hated.

I wanted to be forgiven.

That's why — I longed.

Under a False Peace. East Berlin's Falsehoods and Facts

After World War II, Germany was divided into East and West by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and the capital, Berlin, was likewise divided. This made Berlin the frontline during the Cold War.

After the BETA invasion of Earth began, East Berlin continued to serve as a symbol of East Germany. The development of East Berlin served as a demonstration of the legitimacy of the socialist system and a means of keeping the minds of citizens anxious about the war against the BETA at bay. However, because of this, East Germany did not allow the transfer of the capital's functions from East Berlin, and therefore, there was little evacuation of its citizens.

In addition, the problems of environmental pollution and the huge influx of refugees due to the promotion of aggressive urban planning were also serious, but these facts were covered up, and citizens continued to live under false pretenses even as the BETA offensive continued.

January 10, 1982, 11:30 a.m., former Polish territory
In front of the "Angermünde Fortified Position" on the east bank of the Oder River

I couldn't help but be frightened at the scene projected on my retina.

In the dark and hazy heavy metal clouds, a myriad of BETA - a species of extraterrestrial origin hostile to mankind - rushed toward us, blowing up earth and snow. It was a relief at least that there was no blizzard.

(20 minutes left until the scheduled arrival of the Luftwaffe units. Considering the time required for a Laserjagd, there is not a moment to spare.!)

I Second Lieutenant Gretel Jeckeln, a political commissar in the 2nd TSF Battalion "Fritz Ulbricht" [\(1\)](#) under the Oder Military Group of the the German Democratic Republic (DDR) — East German National People's Army (NVA),.... clicked my tongue on board my MiG-21 (Balalaika).

The speed of the BETA invasion was clearly faster than the briefing had indicated.

『—Squadrons, prepare to land at a spot 2,000 meters away!』

I heard the squadron commander's order, the lead surface pilot of 12 MiG-21s (Balalaika) which were advancing in a wedge (Arrowhead) formation, and using NOE flight across the snowfield.

『— 300 seconds of sweeping bombardment on the spot! We will use the diversionary attack to draw them to us and secure the route for the Laserjagds!』

The "Laserjagd" was a maneuver strike tactic for the destruction of the "Laser" class, which was the primary mission of the East German TSF units. The goal was to rush into the flank of the BETA wave groups invading the East German mainland, and close in on the Laser class under the cover of a heavy metal cloud formed by artillery AL (anti-laser) rounds fire, then completely destroy every last one of them. Although the loss rate was high, this was a life-or-death operation in the war in East Germany, where bombing by Luftwaffe units was essential to the destruction of BETA wave groups.

With a fluid motion, our squadron began landing and shelling. — A large number of BETA were destroyed, and an even larger number were drawn to the squadron.



「That's enough of a diversionary attack! Order a raid on the BETA swarm!」

Within minutes, I shouted in a high-handed voice. The power of a political commissar was always one rank above their own rank, making my position equal to that of a squadron commander.

『——We still haven't cut through enough of them! At least, after——』

「We are supposed to destroy the laser class within 20 minutes! With the mobility of the MiG-21 (Balalaika), we should be able to get within striking distance!」

『——To diminish the risk of losses, we should reduce the number of BETA in our path with sufficient diversion!』

「Disrupting coordination with the Luftwaffe will cause irreparable damage! If you have sworn allegiance to the Party and the State, then obey me! As a political commissar, my word equals that of the Party and the State!」

『——But..... ! 』

「Am I going to have you charged as a dissident element...?」

『——...! All TSFs, commence assault!』

With a series of "Roger" sounds, the squadron continued their boost jumps. — several of the voices contained hints of bloodlust.

But beyond that, no one said anything. This was because, as a political commissar, I had the authority on the affairs of all the squadron surface pilots as a proxy for the political power of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the present government in East Germany. Promotions and demotions of the squadron members were left to my discretion, and if I seriously accused them, they could be sent to a work camp with their families.

I had guessed that the pilots' anger was directed at me, but it was nothing more than a trivial matter to me.



An hour later, I was reporting to my superior, a political commissar attached to the battalion command, at the base where I had returned.

My squadron succeeded in destroying the laser class group as planned in the operation, and the East Germans regained control of the airspace on the battlefield. The enemy was now being destroyed by air and artillery surface control.

"Well done, Comrade Second Lieutenant."

The political commissar attached to the battalion headquarters told me in a good mood as she looked at the bundle of reports submitted by me.

"You have successfully accomplished your mission as planned and both the Political General Headquarters Command and the Party will be pleased with the results. It's all thanks to your precise political education. It was unfortunate that three MiG-21s (Balalaika) were lost in the course of the operation, but considering the fruits of the battle, it should be judged that the sacrifice was minimal."

The political officer attached to the battalion command did not seem to care about the deaths of the surface pilots. Among the political commissars, any sacrifice made to accomplish a mission was considered the right choice if it was efficient.

"Thank you."

I nodded with a smile.

It was the grave responsibility of the General Political Headquarters, the internal party organ of the military, and of the political commissars transferred from the General Political Headquarters to their respective units, to keep the army running according to the operational plan.

This was because the Party had a vital interest in the war situation, and to ensure that it was guided by the Party, it was imperative that the military operated according to its operational plan. In East Germany, the military was under the strong leadership of the Party, and all military actions were carried out on behalf of the Party. Given that the Party represented the will of the people, this was a natural consequence.

"I, too, feel honored to have contributed to the victory, having pledged my allegiance to the Party and to the state."

Still smiling, I continued. Deep down, however, I could not get rid of the memory of the surface pilots who sacrificed their lives in exchange for the victory.

(If there were no replenishment, just three or four consecutive days of battles like today's would wipe out the squadron)

But I wasn't going to talk about it. The political commissar's duty was to reflect the will of the Party to the military, and everything else was not subject to evaluation by the Party and the Political General Headquarters.

If I ignored this main principle, I would eventually lose in the competition among political commissars for promotion and in factional disputes. Only absolute loyalty, without questioning party policy, can save one's life and lead to a rise in rank and a seizure of power.

"I have pleasant news. There are orders to transfer you to the 666th TSF Squadron "Schwarzesmarken". New personnel will arrive tomorrow, so please hurry and complete the handover."

"I understand. Thank you very much"

I made a conscious smile to show my gratitude to my superior when I received a letter of transfer to a unit to which I had been requesting for some time. The 666th TSF Squadron held the title of "East Germany's strongest" TSF unit and was widely known among the public.

"It's the result of your hard work. I am also pleased with your transfer."

There was a groveling in my superior's voice. It was well known among political officers that the 666th TSF Squadron was an important surveillance target for the Political General Headquarters, and my assignment to such a unit was evidence that I had connections in the party center. In other words, she must have thought that if she could improve my impression of her here, she might be able to reap the benefits of my success.

I suppressed my boiling disgust — I had obtained this chance by adopting the same attitude as this superior officer.

After leaving the room, I made sure there were no strangers looking at me, exhaled heavily, and clenched my fists.

(Finally, I'm!)

I was filled with joy — If I took control of the 666th TSF Squadron and succeeded in my surveillance mission, I would be on my way to a higher career. With the backing of the party center, it should be possible for me to do so.

(That way, I can change this country for the better and even have the power to protect it from BETA and the West! My efforts so far will be rewarded.....!)

As a political commissar attached to a TSF unit, I have accumulated achievements, enhanced my own reputation, and finally seized this opportunity. I couldn't afford letting this opportunity go to waste.

Suddenly, I was reminded of the last moments of the surface pilots who lost their lives under my forceful political education, and of the resentful gazes directed towards me. I was trying to win the ugly power struggle by using up their lives....

A shiver ran down my spine. My memories of the summer four years ago came back to life. They were gnawing at my heart, but I consciously ignored them.

(I'm doing the right thing because if I don't, we, this country will!)

..... From somewhere, I thought I heard a nostalgic voice say, "That's not true."

But I shook it off and continued walking, clenching my fists even tighter.

**July 20, 1978 10:00 a.m. German Democratic Republic
Berlin-Karl Marx Integrated School Gymnasium**

In the gymnasium of the Berlin-Karl Marx Integrated School, placed in the center of downtown Berlin, all of the people in the school were gathered in the dry summer air.

Dozens of teachers, and nearly a thousand students. In East Germany, it was common and compulsory for students to move on to a 10-year integrated school at the age of six, and when all the students came together, the number of students naturally grew larger.

"Certainly, the war situation in Eastern Europe is showing signs of improvement. Operation Palaiologos, the offensive against the Minsk Hive that our country and its ally, the Soviet Union, are carrying out, is proof of this."

On the platform, a girl in a white uniform continued her closing speech. In East German integrated schools, uniforms have been mandatory since the outbreak of the BETA war to promote solidarity among students.

The girl's uniform had a lapel insignia (collar badge) on it indicating that she was in the ninth grade. Under the compulsory education system in East Germany, the school year was moved up in the fall, so she was now the oldest student in her grade after the graduation ceremony.

".....However, we should not be optimistic. Even if the Minsk Hive is gone, there are still several hives in the Soviet Union. Our country will be called upon to work more closely with our Soviet comrades, our socialist predecessors. We must work tirelessly to demonstrate to the whole world the correctness of socialism as a truly equal society."

Looking at the students from behind her glasses, she felt an inexpressible sense of elation. The Berlin Karl Marx Integrated School was an elite school where only the children of party leaders of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) were allowed to enter, and she was giving a speech as a representative of such students.

"Even now, on the front lines around Minsk Hive, many military personnel continue to fight for their homeland. Just recently, the 1st Tank Corps of the East German Army, which served under Lieutenant General Alfred Strachwitz, known as a national hero, achieved great success in the battle of Ukraine last year, and made a breakthrough into the Minsk Hive."

Lieutenant General Alfred Strachwitz, whose name the girl mentioned, was a well-known general in the West who skillfully managed his tank units in Ukraine and achieved numerous war successes, including stopping the BETA invasion at the Dnieper River.

"Saving on electricity and supplies, carrying on independent studies on socialism, serving in Pioneer ⁽²⁾ and Komsomol ⁽³⁾ — there are countless things we, as students, can do for our country."

Pioneer meant boys' and girls' groups, and Komsomol meant youth groups. These organizations were a socialist version of the Boy Scouts in the West, but unlike the Boy Scouts, which was purely voluntary, only socialist elites such as those who attended this school were allowed to join.

"Let's not tarnish the pride of our East Germany, which embodies the ideals of socialism, and let's spend our summer vacation days in a meaningful way to reward the efforts of our military personnel — Gretel Jeckeln, High School Representative, Karl Marx Integrated School."

The girl who finished her speech - Me - was sent off with thunderous applause.



After the closing ceremony, classmates gathered around my desk in the classroom.

"I knew you were amazing~, Jeckeln-san!"

"You once addressed the General Secretary as a delegate at a Pioneer parade in Berlin, didn't you? That's why you're at the top of the class~!"

"Thank you, everyone."

I replied with a sincere smile.

"It was only yesterday that my teacher asked me to give a speech at the end of the school day, so it was an impromptu draft, but"

"It was great! You are also going to compete in a speech contest after the summer break, right? Do you have a draft ready for that one?"

"Yes, roughly."

The speech contest sponsored by the city of Berlin was an event in which only particularly talented students like me, the daughter of a high-ranking party official, could participate. If one achieved excellent results in their speech, they would be assured of a career path in the party's central organization after completing their compulsory education.

"Oh, I know that one. All the speeches of the participants will be televised, right? I wonder if I could be shown as a classmate of Jeckeln-san.~"

"Stu-pid. That's certainly not enough to get their attention."

"Bleh~. Even though we have finally got a TV at home~."

Chuckles spread between the girls. — in East Germany, it was common practice for electrical appliances such as TVs and refrigerators to take years from order to delivery. It is the norm for private cars, for example, to be delivered over 10 or 20 years, and it is ordinary for citizens to reserve their next car at the same time they buy a new one, or for a grandfather to order one for his grandchildren.

My heart was filled with a sense of accomplishment from the fruit of my efforts, and I was genuinely happy with participating in the pleasant conversations of my classmates.

When the conversation had died down, I stood up, taking my bag with me.

"Oh, are you leaving already, Jeckeln-san?"

"Yeah. We're about to have a Pioneer meeting now. "

It was the natural duty of any aspiring socialist — I thought with a slight sense of superiority.

"I see. See you later, Jeckeln-san. Have a nice summer vacation!"

"Yeah, then kyaaaa!"

Just as I was leaving the classroom, I bumped shoulders with someone who tried to cross in front of me and fell on my buttocks. Several of my classmates shouted, "Are you okay? " and some rushed to me.

"Hey you, what are you doing!?"

I stood up and glared at the one who bumped into me. The other student was a blonde-haired male student with a sagacious demeanor — and not in the same class as me.

The boy gave me a disdainful glance and walked away without a word.

"What in the hell.....?"

The boy was so rude that I couldn't help but swear.

"He's always like that. That guy"

One of my classmates muttered with anxiety and fear.

"That guy? Do you know him?"

"Yeah. Martin Karel. He's in the next class. I've heard that his teacher is having trouble with him because he's strangely cold and yet he often criticizes socialism."

"I see....."

I glared sternly at Karel's back as he tried to disappear around the bend in the hallway.

"Well, next time I see him, I'll have to give him some political education in person."

"Political education....."

I ignored my classmates and muttered as I repositioned my misaligned glasses.

"It's because of antisocialists like him that the ideal of socialism is being tarnished."

My eyes were filled with pure anger.

11:00 a.m. German Democratic Republic
Berlin Friedrichstraße

The city of Berlin was in the height of summer.

Under a clear blue sky and large drifting clouds, a large number of citizens were passing by on the streets of the old-fashioned city. The average temperature was lower than usual thanks to the cold weather, which was said to have been caused by the BETA War, but this made the summer more comfortable.

(It's the best time of year to walk around Berlin, after all.)

I couldn't help but keep humming cheerfully as I walked down Friedrichstraße, one of Berlin's main streets.

(This is the ideal socialist society ...)

To me, the entire landscape of Berlin seemed wonderful.

The faces of the people walking the streets were so cheerful that it was easy to forget that we were now in wartime. In the distance, as if to show how East Germany has developed as a socialist state, many magnificently designed skyscrapers lined the streets against the blue sky. If you also go further into the suburbs, you will see many industrial parks.

(This is what father and mother and each and every citizen of Berlin have created)

Both of my parents had held key party positions before I was born and were now overseeing Berlin's urban planning, which was now under the party's leadership. They were also ardent socialists and were therefore highly respected by those around them, and there were always constant visitors to our home on holidays.

Because of this, from an early age I was proud of my parents and the socialism they espoused, and I devoted myself to my studies and activities in Pioneer, hoping to follow in their footsteps. My parents often told me. The ideal of socialism is what brought East Germany back from the devastation of World War II and made it more prosperous than the West in a very short time. The city we have built, Berlin, was a true symbol of this.

(So, at all costs, we must protect the system and the wealth of this country.)

Berlin hardly showed the colors of wartime. There were only a few posters on the street corners to raise morale, and soldiers in uniform were enjoying their vacations among the civilians, but the atmosphere was as peaceful as before the war.

(It is true that cars and electrical appliances are difficult to obtain, but clothing and food are inexpensive, and medical care and welfare are as good as they were before the war. There are no unemployed or

homeless people because the party is trying to eliminate the gap between the rich and the poor by providing housing and jobs to all citizens.....)

Even in the midst of the war against BETA, everyone was given the right to live and allowed to enjoy that right — For me, East Germany was a state that realized such socialist ideals, and protecting it was a must.

(But even if Operation "Palaiologos" is successful, if the Soviet Union continues to decline, East Germany may eventually be invaded and captured by West Germany.)

It was the worst possible future for me. The national news programs reported day after day how corrupt the western capitalist nations of the United States, Britain, France, and even West Germany were.

Protests by workers against harsh working conditions and exploitation by capitalists. The wealthy were fleeing overseas. Refugees and ordinary citizens were being abandoned. Recently, the expansion of the munitions industry has caused a serious health hazard due to environmental pollution... What would never have happened in East Germany, a democratic nation that emphasized welfare, was now a common occurrence in the West.

The ongoing Operation Palaiologos was being conducted as a joint operation between the East and West camps, but that was because both sides agreed on the objective of eliminating the Minsk Hive, and West Germany must have still been plotting to integrate East Germany. It was impossible to think that those in the West were not envious of East Germany's affluence.

(To prevent this from happening, I must also contribute to society with a higher degree of awareness

Winning the speech contest to be held after the summer break was supposed to be a big step toward that goal.

Still full of enthusiasm, I was about to cross one of the intersections, when I spotted a group of students from another school in front of me. They were all dressed in their school uniforms and were talking happily to each other as they crossed the street. After the closing ceremony, they went out to the city to play with everyone.

I was in a different position from them — my pride, cultivated over the course of my life, told me so, but I also felt a touch of envy and loneliness in my heart.

I did not have a single friend with whom I could socialize comfortably like that. Most of the students at school were the children of party leaders like me, and since they were potential future political opponents, I was told by my parents that I should not forget her position. My classmates admired me as an honor student, but they did not want to cross the line, perhaps out of envy for my position. Unlike my studies and service activities, I myself was not very good at socializing with others.

I had no connection to the colorful love affairs that my classmates often talked about. I didn't even think my body was attractive. In particular, I suspected that I have the most lacking breasts in my class. My

skinny body could be described as "slender," and my physical appearance was a small problem for a girl who aspired to be an elite. — I made an effort to avoid being conscious of it by telling myself so.

".....I need to get to the meeting place as soon as possible."

Muttering this to no one in particular, I tried to quicken my steps to get away from that spot.

But it was not meant to be. I recognized an unexpected figure on the other side of the street.

(Isn't that..... Martin Karel who bumped into me earlier?)

Karel, dressed in plain clothes instead of a uniform, was heading in the direction of Friedrichstraße station, the transportation hub of downtown Berlin, with his eyes looking around him as if he were on the lookout for something.

(Where is he going no way!?)

The words of my classmate crossed my mind — maybe Karel was trying to do something anti-socialist. Otherwise, he wouldn't have bothered to change into his casual clothes.

(If so, I'll get the proof and turn it in to the police.!)

I looked at my watch, and saw that there was still some time before the Pioneer meeting was to begin, then began to follow behind Karel.



Karel boarded the train to the suburbs at Friedrichstraße station.

(If I keep going after that guy, I won't be able to attend the meeting.....)

Just as I felt bewildered, a series of high-pitched roars reached me from the sky above, and everyone present looked up in surprise.

A formation of huge humanoid shadows - Tactical Surface Fighters - made their flight path directly over Friedrichstraße. Although this was a flight at an altitude that would have been unthinkable for ordinary aircrafts, since the start of Operation Palaiologos, the East German military seemed to have allowed such flights in order to raise the war morale of Berlin citizens and to make the presence of the new weapon, the TSF, known. The people walking along Friedrichstraße responded with cheers and applause.

(That's certainly the TSF named MiG-21 (Balalaika)!)

It was the newest TSF model from the East. It was first developed in the Soviet Union three years ago, but is now being produced under license in East Germany. Compared to the prototype F-4 (Phantom), it

had enhanced mobility, which was essential in close combat with BETA, and could be used in more practical operations. This was reported on TV and in newspapers, along with words of praise for the East's advanced TSF development technology.

The formation was flying over Berlin from west to east. Perhaps they were heading for the front line.



(TSF pilots — even the surface pilots were going into battle to protect our country, encouraging us like that. If that's the case, Then I am going too!)

Encouraged by the sight of the MiG-21 (Balalaika) blending into the blue sky, I decided to continue my pursuit of Karel.



(What are you trying to do here?)

I got off the train, appalled at the sight before me and careful to stay out of Karel's line of sight.

The name of the station was schönfließ. ⁽⁴⁾ The station was close to Oranienburg, ⁽⁵⁾ a city north of Berlin, about an hour from Friedrichstraße station.

Apart from a small station building and rusted railroad tracks, the area was nothing but vast fields. The only other things I could see were a few dwellings scattered among the fields and forested rolling hills on the northern horizon. The countryside was far more rural than Berlin. The train station was unmanned and decrepit.

According to the map posted on the train, this forest was one of the huge beech forests ⁽⁶⁾ that were scattered around the northern part of Berlin.

Karel was heading for the turnstiles ⁽⁷⁾ with a very small number of passengers who got off at this station.

(Maybe he was meeting a western spy in the countryside where it's less crowded or)

After leaving the station's ticket gate, Karel was about to head north - in the direction of the forest - along a road that divided the field into north and south.



"What is this?"

I was again speechless. The location was on a narrow road leading deep into the forest. I had followed Karel north for over an hour, and had arrived here. It seemed to be near the top of the hill, and I could see the scenery from a great distance.



"How could a place like this?"

The reason for my exclamation, however, was not that Karel was headed to such a remote location. I was in awe of the incredible sight that was unfolding before my eyes.

"Garbage is everywhere"

It was a vast flat area, as if a forest had been forcibly cut down into a rectangle, where countless piles of garbage had been placed in various places. It was so large that a small town could have fit in it.

"How stinky.....!"

An unpleasant pungent odor grazed my nostrils — No matter how I looked at it, what was in front of me was not general waste, but the kind of industrial waste discharged at factories. As if to prove it, there were many tanks with hazardous material labels mixed in with the garbage. There was no sign of any purification treatment.

(This would definitely contaminate the soil in the vicinity!)

Most of East Germany's industries were state-owned, and waste disposal was also carried out under the supervision of the state. In other words, it was possible that the dumping of this industrial waste was also being done with the approval of the state.

I covered my mouth with a handkerchief in my left hand and shook my head as if to deny my theory. Dumping hazardous industrial waste into the forests under the blind eye of the public — East Germany, which embodied the ideals of socialism, would never commit such a criminal act.

(The residents of the area will not remain silent Yes, this is not the state, but an illegal act committed by some anti-establishment parties under the guise of the state, and I'm sure Karel is involved!)

"What are you doing there?"

".....!"

Suddenly, I heard a young manly voice from behind, and at the same time, something sharp was thrust into my back.

(Martin Karel!?)

"Stay still, and turn around."

Slowly, with my head turned - just as I had imagined - there was Karel. The knife held against me was probably a small knife for self-defense.

Karel continued to look at me with the same disdain as before.

"You, you've been following me for a while now. What are our intentions? I overlooked it for a while, but"

I was being interrogated. — a shiver ran down my spine.

"From the way you're acting, it looks like this is the first time you've seen this."

"O... of course I am. I am not used to seeing criminal acts like that! Don't act like we are the same!"

"..... the same?"

"Don't play dumb with me! You are involved in the illegal dumping of this industrial waste!"

"Me involved in this? Ha-ha-ha!"

Karel suddenly started laughing out loud. It was so funny that he dropped the knife from his hand.

"....., wh what are you laughing at!?"

My face turned red and I raised my voice. I had never been laughed at so much by others before in my life.

"I mean, isn't it obvious! Such a huge amount of industrial waste dumped in a place where they're asking to be found. East Germany, the world's leading welfare state, would never do something like this! You dissident elements did it."

"Ahaha I see, you took it that way. You must be a genuine socialist."

"As a citizen of East Germany, I'm just saying what I think is right!"

"..... Then, let me ask you something."

Karel chuckled bitterly, then looked at me and asked in a stern voice.

"If I were an anti-establishment party, ⁽⁸⁾ why do you think I would dump this stuff in such a prominent place? Do you think people who challenge the state are that stupid?"

"O... of course! If you weren't so stupid, you wouldn't be trying to challenge the state."

My tone gradually faded... If Karel was right and this was the work of dissident elements, it was indeed a very sloppy act. The East German police force, with its superior capabilities, would have easily been able to expose them. The party has repeatedly warned that there were many cunning dissidents lurking in the country who have become pawns of the West.

(Then who did this)

Karel looked at me, who had fallen silent, and gave a small sigh of dismay.

"As for me, I'm just relieved that you're not the Stasi because if you were, I wouldn't have reacted this way."

"Ministry of State Security (Stasi)? How can I be a part of the Stasi?"

The Ministry of State Security (Stasi) was a secret police force that was in charge of maintaining domestic security and border patrol, and had nothing to do with ordinary citizens like me, or so I thought.

"..... Well, we'll talk about that in due course."

Karel returned to the original topic, putting away the knife he had dropped in his bag. He was convinced that I was harmless.

"So what will you do? Let me tell you, you can't accuse me of anything. I'm not breaking any laws."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"If you want me to tell you, I have one condition."

With a serious face, Karel held up the index finger of his right hand.

"What we do today must remain a secret between us."

"A secret If you're not breaking the law, why would you need to do that?"

"I'll tell you why, too, if you promise. Oh, and before you go, I'd be glad if you could accompany me on a little errand."

Perhaps it was true that Karel was not involved in any illegal activities. Otherwise, he would not have gotten away with it.

But I couldn't help but feel like I was involved in some kind of illegal sleazy activity. And I was genuinely curious about the identity of that industrial waste. In order to find out, I couldn't leave Karel here.

(If push comes to shove, I can press charges after I have solid evidence.)

"..... I understand."

I resolved myself and nodded.

"For now, I'll listen to what you have to say, Martin Karel. I just hope you are not who the rumors say you are."

At my sarcastic remark, Karel rolled his eyes in surprise.

"Heh. You knew the rumors about me and even my name. What grade and what class are you in?"

".....!? Don't tell me you didn't know who you were talking to?"

"Yes, and.....?"

"I'm the person you pushed in front of the class today! My name is Gretel Jeckeln..... and I even gave a speech at the end of the school day! I'm the top student of the ninth grade!"

"Aah...!"

Karel, seeming to have gotten the point, smacked his right fist into his left palm and smiled as if to make up for it.

"I am sorry. I'm not good at those speeches, I've never taken them seriously. I'm not even interested in the school itself."

"H...how rude!"

I glared at Karel. I was no longer angry at him, regardless of whether he was Anti-establishment or not.

"But Gretel Jeckeln is a name I've heard somewhere. Oh, I remember now. Did you know that you are quite famous among boys?"

(Surely because I'm an honors student.?)

If so, I wouldn't feel bad — I clumsily tried to smirk.

"Even though she was the class's top, she was lacking in the chest department. It was a level where I couldn't help but feel sorry for her....."

".....!"

A moment later, My face was flushed red, and my hand exploded into Karel's right cheek.

**3:00 p.m. German Democratic Republic
Lindenberg, a suburb of Berlin**

Karel and I went to a hospital in the city of Lindenberg, a suburb of Berlin.

We had taken a train and a bus to get there. Although the hospital was large, it was clear at a glance that it was a very dilapidated facility.

"What in the world are you doing bringing me here?"

In front of the hospital, I glared at Karel in frustration. His right cheek was still stained red.

Along the way, both of us had exchanged some information about each other's backgrounds. According to Karel's story, his father, like me, was also a party official — although for some reason Karel had a complicated expression on his face when I told him that my parents were involved in the development of downtown Berlin.

"Don't tell me,..... the people who threw these things away are here?"

I wondered if there was any medical waste at the garbage disposal area we just visited. — I asked Karel a question while I was trying to remember.

"That's not true."

Karel answered with a wry smile. His voice was slightly stiffer than before.

"..... My cousin is here, and I was supposed to go visit her today."

"Visit your sick cousin!? Then why would you want me to.."

"I want you to meet her. My cousin."

"Tell me why then...."

"It's the reason I was in that forest."

Again, I glared at Karel, but Karel's attention had already turned to the inside of the hospital.



Two hours later, Karel and I had left the hospital and were on our way to the nearest train station. As in the area around the Schönfries station, the surrounding fields stretched all the way to the horizon.

Both of us were silent. My face was half pale, as I had received a great mental shock at the hospital.

"..... So this is what you meant?"

My voice was trembling, my thoughts were still confused, and I was still struggling to formulate words.

"Your cousin, thanks to the illegal dumping of industrial waste as we just saw, is"

"....."

"Her eyes, she can't see like that that's why"

"Roughly speaking, yeah."

A sad smile appeared on Karel's face.

A brief conversation I had with Karel's cousin replayed in my mind's eye — Thank you, I'm feeling better today without any vomit, friend of Karel's? What color are your hair and eyes? I'd be happy to chat with you. None of my friends come here anymore... — the color of her pale skin was burned into my eyelids.

Her joints were twisted, and drool dripped endlessly from the corners of her mouth. I even felt a chill at the sheer strangeness of it all.

I overheard the nurse and Karel talking about how her health was deteriorating day by day and how she was unable to walk outside these days. Neither the nurse nor Karel spoke clearly, but if things continued in this way, she might die a slow and certain death.....

What shocked me even more was that there were many other rooms housing people in similar conditions — people who did not seem to be stricken by ordinary illnesses. No, it was worse than that — there were people whose appearance made me do nothing but avert my eyes.

In other words, the fact that they were housed in a rural hospital like that was a premeditated act.

"They were in a town called Bitterfeld ⁽⁹⁾. Do you know what it's like there?"

"It's a city in the province of Magdeburg, ⁽¹⁰⁾ which is, I believe, the largest chemical plant area in East Germany."

"The environmental pollution there is so bad with all the contaminants pouring out of the scientific plants, that there are several lakes with colors that look like a mixture of various paints. Even if you just pass through the city on the bus or train, there would be a foul smell that makes you want to vomit. If you're forced to live in a place like that, that's what you get."

"....."

"Even here in Berlin, there is no small amount of smog, and there will be even more. It is such heavy industry that supports the affluence of this country."

I could neither nod nor ignore it. The reality of the damage to the human body caused by environmental pollution that I was forced to face, and the scale of the damage that Karel was describing — there was no doubt about either.

(That industrial waste is illegally dumped by the state and even that is only the tip of the iceberg)

The image of a nation embodying the socialist ideals that I had believed in crumbled like a castle in the sand.

(The Party has announced at every turn that there are no environmental problems in East Germany, a welfare state, but that was an outright lie? Then what about the rest of the press?)

"I saw industrial waste in the forest earlier. All of it came from factories in or near the city of Berlin. Berlin is the cleanest city in East Germany, but rumor has it that there are many illegal dumping sites like that in the surrounding forests."

".....!"

A further shock disturbed my thoughts. It meant that my respected parents may have also been involved in the illegal dumping of industrial waste. No, it was impossible for a person in a position leading the urban planning of the city of Berlin not to know about it. But there was no way that my respected parents would have done such a thing — that is what I wanted to tell myself.

"H...Hey, then, then why?"

I asked, unable to look Karel in the eye and refusing to understand.

"Why doesn't anyone make an issue of it? Why don't you appeal to the party to improve things!"

"..... You already know the answer, right? Because the party would never admit such a thing. After all, there are officially no environmental problems in East Germany. If we admit the existence of a problem, the illusion will collapse."

"That doesn't mean"

"Besides, if I appealed to the party, I would be labeled as an Anti-establishment party or a spy for the West, and if I was not careful, I would be sent to a labor camp for ideological revision. No one wants to take that risk. So, no one will make an issue of it — thus creating a structure in which the problem will never be solved."

I clutched at the chest of my uniform to hold back the pain as I recalled myself stuffing Karel as an anti-establishment party in that forest.

"My cousin should be in a well-equipped hospital like the one in Berlin, not in that old hospital. But that was not allowed. If they gave her adequate treatment, it would lead to the fact that the state recognized the existence of environmental pollution. If things escalate, we could be kicked out of even that hospital and sent to a camp."

"....."

"If there is a problem, but it goes against their principles and ideals, they will pretend that it did not exist — that is the truth in this country. If the BETA invasion is not stopped, it could be worse. If the war situation continues to worsen, the issue of environmental pollution is bound to become even less of a concern than it is now. There will be more munitions factories and more pollution. The number of casualties will only increase."

Now that I had seen Karel's cousin, I could never say that it was a sacrifice - a necessary sacrifice - to protect East Germany.

"That's why I do my own legwork and investigate like that, to find out where the contaminated areas are in and around Berlin. Even if I can't do it now, I might be able to help improve the situation eventually. Then she might be able to get better treatment in a better hospital, too"

I nodded emphatically. I realized how ignorant I was.

(I just believed, as my parents had taught me, that East Germany was a wonderful nation that embodied socialist ideals. I was so proud of it that I gave up thinking for myself)

I felt crushed by my own inadequacy. The affluence of East Germany, or rather the capital city of Berlin, was a sham made possible by the sacrifices of those who had no voice. The fact that Karel's behavior seemed antisocialist was due to my narrow perspective.

I feared that If I had remained unaware of the facts and had continued to ride the rails as my parents encouraged me to do. Perhaps I would have been on the side of the oppressors of the weak like Karel's cousin, grasping the facts but crushing them in order to protect our national appearance.

And it was highly likely that my own parents, despite their involvement in such realities, were preaching the wonders of socialism to me.

(What the hell is that Where is socialism!? Where is the ideal state!? How can I believe in these things!?)

I felt like I was being plunged into the abyss. However, I was not in a position to criticize my parents. My current privileged position was based on the sacrifices made by Karel and his cousin, and I was enjoying it.

(But then, what am I supposed to do now)

"....., I don't think you need to feel responsible or brood over it."

"What?"

I looked at Karel, my eyes widening at his words. Karel stared straight ahead, not meeting my gaze. Perhaps he felt guilty for having told me this, knowing my parents' position.

"Only people like me should be doing this kind of thing. People like you, who have a promising future, shouldn't be concerned..... even if your parents are involved in these injustices."

"But"

"Besides, I still like this country, East Germany. Just like you."

Karel continued while looking at me with a relaxed smile.

"I am proud of this country, which upholds such a wonderful ideal of eliminating the gap between the rich and the poor and giving everyone the right to live. However, it is wrong to leave people to be victims of such ideals. Loving one's country and trying to solve its contradictions should go hand in hand without any problems. That does not change even if we are at war with the BETA — No, it is precisely in order to protect East Germany from BETA that we must resolve such contradictions one by one. And to do this, we must make everyone aware of the existence and seriousness of the contradictions themselves — if we succeed in doing so, the people themselves can change this country for the better!"

Karel seemed convinced that we could make reforms on our own.

"But showing the contradictions to everyone is naturally risky. So, you should do what you want, as you want. I will do the same. That's all there is to it. Everyone has something they must not lose."

"Then, what about your parents.....?"

"My parents are also genuine socialists. If I told them, they would stop me, of course, so I kept quiet. They might find out sooner or later, but I will pass that hurdle when it comes to it."

I had no answer. No matter how much injustice my parents were involved in, there was no change in the fact that I had to live up to the expectations of my parents who gave birth to me and served the nation. If I denied this, I would lose everything.

(But if it wasn't for the good of our country)

With a heavy heart, I could only follow Karel's back.



I came up with one answer for myself shortly after we arrived at Berlin's Friedrichstraße station.

(..... I have decided)

I nodded to myself as I followed Karel's back as he got off the train and headed for the station gates.

(..... I don't know if this is really for the sake of our country, but I can't look at something like that and not do something about it.!)

If East Germany is truly a nation that embodies the ideals of socialism, it is a problem that should not be allowed to go unattended. If Karel is going to confront it, I should also do what I can.

(I don't think I can take another path anymore now....., but even I have that much freedom!)

My distrust of my parents only increased, but that did not mean I was going to deny the beauty of socialism. Socialism was a system based on the good intentions of the people, and it was only natural that many hardships awaited its realization. I believed that if the truth was hidden from the public, then by bringing it to light and raising awareness of environmental pollution within the party, it would be possible to improve the situation.

"Hey, I need to talk to you about something."

".....Just keep walking, pretending you didn't notice."

Suddenly, Karel muttered in a voice that was tinged with nervousness.

"We're being followed. They're behind us."

"What?"

I gulped and involuntarily turned around, then stopped, remembering Karel's advice.

"Who the hell is tailing us"

"Probably the Stasi. There was no sign of them on the train, so they must have waited to ambush us at the station. Good grief, what a devoted bunch"

I was speechless. The fact that we were ambushed at the station meant that our actions had been notified somewhere in advance.

(Why, even someone like me!)

I couldn't believe it. I was the top student of the Karl Marx Integrated School, and I had no right to be subjected to such an act.

But Karel's demeanor was calm. Apparently, this was not the first time he has been followed by the Stasi.

"Wait a minute, We are not breaking any laws, so why the hell did the secret police come out and who the hell knew we were on our way here?"

"The Stasi has placed collaborators, or informants, throughout East Germany to keep an eye on suspected Anti-establishment parties, regardless of whether they have broken the law or not. Rumor has it that one out of every 10 citizens is an informant (collaborator)."

"One in every 10.....!"

A chill ran down my spine — if Karel was correct, then East Germany was under the full surveillance of the Stasi. It was probably not an official of the Stasi who reported us, but an informant (collaborator) who was their eyes and ears.

(This can't be then, in this country, who are we to believe?)

"..... Probably you are the target this time. They are going to track down where you came home and figure out who you are. They think you might be my accomplice."

"Accomplice ? We are just walking together....."

"It doesn't matter to them. They are always looking for enemies of the state. If your face gets out, you could be on their radar."

It couldn't be true — or that's what I thought, but I couldn't turn around. I felt someone's eyes on my back. I felt the cold sweat trickling down my back.

"I've heard that arrests by the Stasi have increased dramatically in the last few years. Maybe the surveillance system was being tightened in response to the influx of refugees. If this continues, it will only get worse."

"L...Lies! Where in the world did you hear that?"

"You can find out as much as you want if you want to. For example, you can listen to radio programs in West Berlin, where it is illegal to receive them, in secret. According to the broadcasts over there, the Stasi

has been carrying out indiscriminate terror attacks on West German communists (Reds) on numerous occasions. It is rumored that they are also inciting the massive demonstrations and strikes that are taking place in West Germany."

"Unbelievable...."

"But if you don't notice the contradictions in the state, you won't even sense those things yourself. Everyone is content with the pretense of a peaceful everyday life and the prestige of East Germany as a socialist state, and they don't want to do anything more about it."

I bit my lip in frustration.

"Regardless, the problem at hand must be resolved first. We have to give them the slip."

"Give the slip, how do we do that....?"

I asked, dumbfounded.

"How? Like this"

".....Kyaaaaaa!"

Karel suddenly grabbed my hand and ran as fast as he could to Friedrichstraße.

"Hey, what do you think you're doing!"

I shouted as she ran with Karel. I lost my composure at what had just happened.

"You're going to get away like this!? Can you even do that"

"This is downtown Berlin! If we get lost in the crowd, we can surely lose them! Even they can't do everything!"

"Even if you say so!"

"I can't involve you in something you have nothing to do with!"

".....!"

Wading through the crowd, we ran through Friedrichstraße — I kept staring at Karel's expression of impatience in my confused thoughts and breathlessness.

(Karel is really trying to fight the contradictions of East Germany alone that's why he is trying to protect me like this me, even though I said such terrible things)

Karel tightened his grip on my hand harder, and with a slight pain, I also felt the warmth of his hand.

(Come to think of it, I've never held hands or shared a secret with someone my age like this before)

Unspeakable emotions filled my heart, and I pursed my lips to endure them. I looked firmly at Karel's back, and kept running as fast as I could.

**7:00 p.m. German Democratic Republic
Berlin, Markgrafenstraße**

"Huff, huff.....!"

I exhaled roughly and stopped following Karel, placing both palms on my knees. I was completely out of breath, and it was unlikely that I would be able to talk if I kept running.

"Where are we?"

We arrived at a small park set up on the side of the street. There were only a few streetlights and old benches inside, and of course, not a soul to be seen.

"It's a park located at Markgrafenstraße. It's so desolate that hardly anyone goes near it."

Karel answered me while catching his own breath. He wiped the sweat from his face with the back of his hand. If I remember correctly, Markgrafenstraße was located several streets away from Friedrichstraße.

"Looks like we have managed to lose them"

"Re..Really"

"Yeah. There is no sign of anyone chasing us. If you go home like this, you won't be identified."

I nodded awkwardly. I felt a mixture of relief that the crisis was over and gratitude to Karel for saving me.

"Let's just sit on a bench for now."

"Th...Thank you."

".....?"

"I...I mean..."

I was too embarrassed to say the words, "You went to such lengths for me".

"Don't mention it. In our party slogan, we often say that if workers are united, we can get through any tough situation, and I think we were able to prove it."

"Party slogan?"

"Oh, ...!"

I said with a bit of restraint. Karel was not supposed to be friendly to the party.

But Karel burst out laughing.

"Haha even at a time like this you really love this country!"

"You You are laughing?"

"Because it's funny! We were being chased by the Stasi and as soon as it was over Ahaha!"

"No, I mean, because hahaha."

For some reason, I started laughing as if caught in the act. I seemed to have lost control of my emotions because of the tension and the fact that Karel laughed so hard at me.

For a while afterward, the two of us fell into a heap and continued laughing with tears in our eyes.



"..... speech contest?"

Karel looked at me in surprise as he asked me. The two of us came to our senses and took our places on a wooden bench under a lamppost.

In our hands, we each held a sandwich — the ones Karel had brought for dinner. Karel gave it to me without hesitation, and I accepted it with some confusion — it was the first time for me to have dinner with someone in the park at night.

"Can you even do that?"

"I I think so....."

I answered with a bitter smile. When Karel, who has a much better grasp of the reality of East Germany than I did, asked me this, I was not so sure that my opinion was really correct.

I slowly swallowed the last bits of my sandwich to ease my tension — It was quite tasteless.

"But I think I can do it. Speech contest scripts are always checked in advance, but some alterations during the speech are allowed, so I can take advantage of that and memorize the real script in advance"

"Memorize it, you say..... speech drafts aren't really that short, are they?"

"Don't worry, this is my area of expertise. I will let everyone know what is going on in this country."

I nodded firmly to Karel.

I was determined to publicize the environmental pollution problem in East Germany, which Karel was investigating for his cousin, in a speech contest to be held after the summer vacation.

(This is the only place where I can convey the truth to a wide audience)

It would be impossible to stop the speech once it has started, in terms of appearances, since it is a state-sponsored event. The Stasi will certainly be monitoring the event, but I won't commit any illegal acts. There was no reason for me to be arrested.

(I will be rebelling against both my father and mother, but I am sure they will listen to my appeal and improve the situation. If that happens, the world will surely be a better place. Besides, ...)

After another few seconds of silence, Karel gave me his answer.

"No. You mustn't do that."

".....! Why!?"

"Don't underestimate the power of the Stasi. It is certainly possible to broadcast your speech to the whole country in that way. But if you do that, you will be recognized as an Anti-establishment party and may be expelled from school. You will lose your future."

"No way! East Germany is a socialist state that gives every citizen a job! No matter how much influence the Stasi has, this much at least is"

"If that were true, even the environmental pollution problem wouldn't be covered up and you would have known about it by now."

".....!"

"Plus, it would cause a lot of trouble for your parents. If the Stasi were to pursue this, their position would also be in jeopardy."

"But My parents are high-ranking Party officials for this sake!"

"The party is not that simple. It is good if the state is stable, but if it becomes unstable, the authority of the Stasi will increase in order to tighten the screws. You can see from what we have seen today that this country is not as rock-solid as it looks. When it can no longer be mended, what comes next is control through fear, and when that happens, even high-ranking Party officials can be made an example of and punished."

"But then, you don't know what will happen to you either.!"

Something was welling up in me as I appealed to Karel. It was my greatest concern at the moment.

Although Karel has been concerned about my future for some time now, he has said nothing about his own future. This meant that Karel had only a pessimistic outlook on this battle....

Karel in front of me might also become a victim of a false ideal — With inexpressible sadness, I pressed Karel for an answer.

"I can't accept that people who are trying to do the right thing aren't being rewarded! East Germany is a socialist state! Otherwise, how can we have any pride or hope in our Vaterland.....!"

"....."

"Besides, if we don't do something about this problem now, if the BETA invade East Germany, it will be much worse"

"..... That is precisely why people like you should remain in the elite."

I froze at those words.

"At the end of the day, it's not the public that makes the decisions, it's the party. Only those in power can change the big picture."

Karel looked into my purple eyes. There was a slight but pleading nuance in them.

"That is why I want as many people in the party as possible who have a grasp of the reality of East Germany. Eventually, as the power of the Stasi grows, even the party could fall under its influence. If that happens, then it will be really hopeless. To prevent that from happening, ..."

"You want me to?"

"As I said before, I love this country. That's why I want someone like you to become a great person. If your future is promised, you should stay out of my life."

I looked down in frustration. Karel was rejecting my proposal in order to protect me and the future of East Germany.

Karel put his right hand on my shoulder as if to comfort me. I looked at Karel in surprise.

"Besides, it's not a given that I'm going to lose. Don't worry. If elites like you keep thinking about what is really right, you will find a way someday."

Then, Karel smiled bitterly.

"And, unlike you, I have bad grades. I can't become an elite like you, so I do the best I can."

I was still hesitant and silent. Karel nodded encouragingly.

"We need people like you to do the work that only you can do, and that only you can do. If you have the desire to save the unfortunate people, you will be able to change East Germany. It is your will, not anyone else's."

It didn't seem realistic to me — I wondered if I would ever have such a time when I would aspire to follow the path of the elites. However, I understood that Karel wished so from the bottom of his heart.

So, there was only one answer that could be uttered, no matter how unsure I was.

".....I understand."

I was about to touch Karel's left hand with my right hand, but I hesitantly withdrew it and nodded vigorously instead. If Karel couldn't do it, I would have to do it myself.

"I'm going to keep studying and working hard, and I will surely become a party leader. Then I will become an ally,..... for the people like you."

I stared into Karel's eyes.

"And I'm not helpless now either. If you ever need help, I will be there to help you. I promise."

"Thank you."

Karel smiled innocently. Perhaps he was just an ordinary boy who has grown up faster than I and the rest of our classmates. — Such thoughts floated in my mind.

"Then it's time for us to go home. The sun has already set and we have the Stasi to deal with, so we shouldn't stay any longer, and leave the park, just in case."

With that, Karel tried to get up from the bench.

"Wa, wait!"

I involuntarily grabbed Karel's left hand. I don't know why I did that. Karel asked curiously.

"What's wrong?"

".....Eh, I....."

(What the hell am I doing.....!?)

I was confused as I searched for my next words. My thoughts were one step away from delirium.

(I don't want to be separated from Karel here, because he is the first person who spoke to me as an equal, who taught me the truth, who protected me.)

"Um, ..., there is one thing I'd like to ask you"

".....?"

With the emotions that were rising up in me, I put my left hand on Karel's left hand, which I had been holding with my right hand.

"We can talk like this again, can't we? Like after school or Oh, we're going to be on summer break, so if you want to meet up, you can always"

"If we stand out too much, the Stasi will sniff it out. But....."

As if in thought, Karel put his palm closer to his chin.

"Yeah, I'll be busy with this investigation during the summer vacation, so maybe after it, we can take some time to talk."

"Really"

"Yes. I'll have progressed in my investigation by then, and I will be able to give you a summarized report."

I looked at our overlapping palms and smiled shyly.

I was sure that my future self will be different from my past self — I believed in such a certainty, even though I could not put a name to this emotion,



After returning home, My mind was still occupied with Karel when I entered my room.

(Martin Karel))

I muttered the name as I collapsed on the bed in my uniform. My heart was pounding.

(Karel is my first friend, I guess.)

I was not confident. I had only been with Karel for about half a day. Not many words were exchanged.

Still, in this half day, I felt as if I had gained something irreplaceable.

East German ideals and reality. Its victims. Karel's thoughts. The path that Karel showed me, and my promise to him. The warmth of our joined hands. I had not lost my attachment to my parents, but now that I had heard Karel's wish, I had no intention of doing anything about it.

(We can talk more after the summer break..... And I can learn more about Karel...)

The nameless emotion once again resided in my heart. I couldn't stop thinking more about it.

(Besides, Karel recognized me as a comrade no, a friend..... I'm sure he will ask me for help when he is in trouble I must be brave enough to do my best then)

I was sure Karel considered me a friend. Otherwise, there is no way he would have said all those things to me while harboring ill feelings towards my parents' position.

Perhaps Karel himself wanted a friend.

(Even though we are on different paths, our thoughts are the same Isn't that so, Karel?)

Remembering Karel's cheerful smile, I hugged the pillow in my hand.

(We can become closer, can't we? I'll do my best too to keep my promise to Karel.)

My first friend. My first comrade. I don't want to lose him. I don't want to be hated — I want to be with him more.

As if swept away by the various emotions that stirred in my heart, I fell asleep.

**September 1, 11:00 a.m. German Democratic Republic
Berlin-Karl Marx Integrated School Gymnasium**

".....I am Second Lieutenant Beatrix Brehme of the 8th division of the Central Bureau of the Stasi. I am here today to make an important announcement."

In the gymnasium of the Karl Marx Integrated School, where all the students and teachers were gathered for the opening ceremony, a female officer in a good-looking Stasi uniform slowly announced on the stage.

At the end of the stage, officers in identical uniforms lined up.

(Stasi! Why are they here.....!?)

My face paled as I looked at the female officer on the stage. Fear rippled through my entire body.

I had not seen Karel once on campus since this morning. I had properly seen his face on the two school days during the summer vacation. At that time, we couldn't talk to each other, but we could feel each other's feelings by the way we looked at each other.

(Even today, when I thought I might finally get to talk to Karel! That's why I even got brand new glasses)

My back teeth begin to rattle and shake — Beatrix, on the other hand, continues her story with an eerie smile on her face.

"Yesterday, our Stasi arrested Martin Karel and his parents, who attend the Karl Marx Integrated School here. The charge is counter-revolutionary." [\(11\)](#)

As the students' throbs swirled, My pupils constricted and lost their color.

"Martin Karel was charged with this crime because he was a spy for the West trying to expose our country's secrets."

(As a spy for the West!? No, Karel was just investigating the contaminated area for his blind cousin!)

Karel's words come back to me — officially, there was no environmental problem in East Germany. Therefore, the whole fact was pretended by the state to have never existed.

(Such a thing should not be allowed to go unchallenged.!)

I almost stood up involuntarily, but my whole body was frozen with fear, and I couldn't find strength in my legs. If I stood up now, I could be made a criminal as well.

(But I'm Karel's friend and if Karel was in trouble, I promised that I would surely help him!)

I realize the horrifying meaning of those words. I had lied to Karel. I was trembling with fear and unable to do anything while Karel was about to meet his doom....

(Still, I gotta get up and I gotta get up fast! I'm the only one who knows what Karel is thinking about.! If I don't, that kid in the hospital will too!)

But there was no strength in my legs — even as my despair at my own weakness deepened, Beatrix continued to speak.

"The Stasi wants information about his collaborators in this matter. If you have any clues, please contact the Stasi Central Bureau, Division 8...That's all."

The students were made to stand by the teacher's order. The Stasi officials got off the stage and headed out of the gymnasium, but Beatrix was the only one to walk up to me as she weaved her way through the other students and softly whispered in her ear.

"You're in luck, Gretel Jeckeln."

I gasped. I couldn't even speak out of fear. The Stasi somehow knew about my relationship with Karel. Karel was wrong in thinking that I would be safe as long as my face was not revealed.

"Thank your parents."

She let out a small laugh, and my whole body became hard as a stone. It meant that my parents took advantage of their position to cover up their suspicions of me. Perhaps they handed over a bribe.

Beatrix gently stroked my cheek as I stood there in a daze, and quickly walked away.



"Gretel, why did you get involved with that person!"

What awaited me when I returned home was my father's fury. My mother was still running around cleaning up my own political mess, apparently.

My father's voice was full of regret. Like he was disappointed in his trust for his only daughter.

"You should have known, without saying, that ideals without power have no meaning in this country! I'm glad we managed to talk to the Stasi, but worst case scenario, we would have lost not only our political standing, but even your future!"

"But, but!"

I tried to argue, holding back my tears.

"Karel has done nothing wrong and Father, you at least must have known what he was really doing! And the reason why! You want me to pretend that nothing happened! Covering up all the contradictions with fake ideals and even bribing the Stasi! At least we should think together about how we can help Karel!"

"Enough! You can't even do such a thing!"

My father's face was distorted with grief. I was speechless.

"Even I am not unaware of the seriousness of environmental pollution in East Germany However, it is the only way to give civilians the same life as in peacetime and at the same time maintain an all-out war system against BETA. Now that support from the Soviet Union is being cut off, East Germany is responsible for the production of munitions for all of Eastern Europe — we cannot afford to be concerned with small sacrifices!"

"Small sacrifices! Father, you didn't even see those people!"

"It doesn't change anything! Besides, we must be prepared not only for BETA, but also for our internal enemy, the Stasi. They are taking advantage of the worsening war situation to strengthen their internal control and expand their own authority. — we cannot afford to leave any openings. I was going to teach you after you graduated from the integrated school."

I gritted my teeth to suppress the shock inside me. My parents had a much better grasp of reality than I did.

"The authority of the Stasi will probably expand further in the future. The party center, which is in their hands and has a firm grip on privacy, will not be able to resist this, and that is why people like us must do what we can to correct this situation while protecting our current positions."

"So you want me to accept the sacrifice of innocent people!?"

"That's right."

".....!"

"We can't solve everything in one breath — we have to move forward, step by step, no matter how much it costs us."



I ran into my room to get away from my father. Tears streamed down from my eyes and despair consumed my spirit.

Both Karel and I ended up just dancing in the hands of our parents and the Stasi. Moreover, the suspicions against me were made to have never existed by my parents' intervention. This means that such injustices were routinely committed within the party. Even if, as father said, this was a necessary step to win the power struggle with the Stasi, it did not make sense...

Pressing my face against the pillow and crying aloud, I cursed my shallowness and helplessness.

(This is this is the socialist ideal!? This is not how it's supposed to be.....!!!)

But it was not anger that gnawed at my heart, but fear that overwhelmed all my emotions.

Fear of the Stasi. Fear of the future. Fear that I might have hurt Karel. Not only was I unable to save him, but I was kept alive by the injustice of my parents. No matter what the reason, I couldn't change that fact.

I would probably never see Karel again. The thought of what Karel would think of me scared the hell out of me. If I could see him again....

"As things are It won't end..... It never will!"

To take the same steps as Karel in the current situation would be suicidal. The authority of the Stasi is so powerful that even the party cannot reach it in some respects.

In East Germany, righteous deeds and ideals have no value. Only political power has value. If that were the case...

"I'm going to be a great person, just like Karel said I'm going to take power in my hands and I'm going to use my power to keep this system in place and fix it for the better... ...! I won't lose to the Stasi! Or even the BETA!"

I knew what to do to achieve that without having to ask anyone.

"I will achieve what I want by pledging absolute loyalty to the Party and the State! By any means possible.....and at the expense of anyone!"

No matter how much I am ostracized, hurt, and got my heart distorted — if it's only to embody the ideals of the socialist state in this country, which Karel said he loved.

No matter how many mistakes the Party and the State make. No matter how many victims I may have to see.

"For that sake, I must first..."

I looked out the window with a blurred gaze at the city of Berlin, which was beginning to fade into the evening.

To do so, I must demonstrate my complete loyalty to the party and the state in the speech contest in a week's time, and use it as a stepping stone to a promotion.



It was three years later that I became a Surface pilot attached to the Political General Headquarters after completing military school.

Only a very small number of officers were admitted to the General Political Headquarters, the military's internal party organization, but it was only natural for me to be admitted since I had made a name for myself not only by graduating from military academy with excellent grades but also by winning a speech contest in my 10th year.

During this period, the war situation in Europe was worsening due to the failure of Operation Palaiologos, and the flames of war were closing in on East Germany. The war was also leading to the expansion of the authority of the Stasi, which, by imposing even harsher information control, was able to block all problems, including environmental pollution, and lead East Germany into a distorted all-out war system.

By this time, however, I was no longer interested in the environmental pollution problem in East Germany, of which I had been informed by Karel. Not only that, the contradictions of socialism that I had witnessed in my own battles, and even the victims of these contradictions, were of no concern to me. Absolute loyalty to the party and the state, and a thirst for the power that came with it, were my one and only raison d'être under the pressure of fierce battles against the BETA and the endless political struggles.

I had no other way to maintain my spirit in this solitary battle.

Karel and his cousin — everything was sealed away in my memory.

March 10, 1983 Former Polish Territory Gdansk Bay "South (Jute)" Coastal Bridgehead

I couldn't help but be frightened at the scene projected on my retina.

The location was the Gdansk Bay Bridgehead in the former Polish territory. Our 666th TSF Squadron was participating in a counter-offensive operation against BETA under the command of UN forces in a mission named "Operation Neptune", and we have been fighting to the death for two days. In this operation, the 666th TSF Squadron was also required to demonstrate East Germany's political prestige against the West, which has superior military strength.

In the battle situation window, the BETA reinforcements, now far more numerous than expected, have broken through the flanks of the friendly European Allied Forces' warning lines and were advancing toward the ground forces. A large number of TSFs were rushing forward to intercept them. — But they were destroyed one after another by the irradiation of the laser class.

At the same time, Captain Irisdina Bernhard, commander of the 666th TSF Squadron, and my own superior, a political commissar attached to the Operations Directorate of the Warsaw Pact Military Command, were engaged in a heated argument over whether to rescue the European Union forces.

(I can't believe this, I can't believe this.....)

Inside the control unit, I had completely lost my composure. Feeling as if I was falling down into the abyss, I could do nothing but watch the scene on my retina in amazement.

The situation was bad. A political commissar attached to the Operations Directorate demanded that I dismiss Irisdina for challenging the Warsaw Pact military command's operational policy of ignoring the collapse of the Allied Forces in Europe. In response, I pleaded with my superiors to leave everything to me, but they suspected that I had been brainwashed by Irisdina.

I had to make a decision. Should I follow the party and the state for the sake of power and dismiss Irisdina, or should I follow Irisdina's insistence and act against the order to truly save our country, not just our national framework? If I chose the former, I would be left with my own path to success. However, at the cost of this, the bridgehead would collapse, and East Germany would be not only exposed to the further offensive of BETA, but would also lose the trust of the other countries and become completely isolated in Europe.

In the past, I would have dismissed Irisdina. Since I joined the Squadron, Irisdina, who had prevented my intervention as a political commissar by any means necessary and continued to hold the leadership of the Squadron, was the object of my hatred, whether she was a dissident or not. If only I could get to the bottom of the coup plan, I would not hesitate to send her to hell.

But there was also a genuine respect for Irisdina that now existed in my innermost being. Over the past three months, Irisdina had not only saved my life and my political position on numerous occasions, but

had also tried to save East Germany through a series of practical measures whenever possible. Even now, she was trying to prevent the BETA from heading for the bridgehead and for East Germany by saving the European Allied forces in harm's way.

In a further corner, a lone surface pilot was there, still speaking to me.

Second Lieutenant Theodor Eberbach. A surface pilot who was paired with me for a long time, and who had lost something as important as himself to the Stasi. That's why I had shown a little bit of naivete to him until now — but as it turned out, I was betrayed when Theodore was taken in by Irisdina.

Theodore was desperately trying to appeal to me, asking me what I truly wanted, and saying that if I wanted to do what was truly right, it was no longer enough to merely pursue power.

Finally, Theodore, with a cry from his soul, told me.

『—I still consider you to be an indispensable surface pilot for the 666th TSF Squadron! Think a little bit about what you're supposed to do and what's really right!』

At that moment, my mind was snatched by the words that Karel had uttered that day.

“Don't worry. If elites like you keep thinking about what is really right, you will find a way someday.”

The person who I wanted to talk with more. The person I always wanted to apologize to — the person I'm sure I would have loved.

I believed his words, and I have continued my efforts to protect this country and restore its pride. That was what Karel wanted for me, and it seemed to be the only way.

But the road was a thorny one. The more loyal I became to the party and the state in order to gain power, the more I kept scheming against the Stasi, the situation only kept endlessly worsening instead.

This trend did not change after I became Irisdina's watchdog in the 666th TSF Squadron and focused my efforts on uncovering her true identity. No, not only that. In my desire for power, I tried to do the same thing as the Stasi that had taken Karel away from me.

.....The truth is that I have known for a long time. I knew that I had chosen the wrong path. If I simply continued to do what the state and the party wanted, the BETA invasion and the tyranny of the Stasi would have caused the state and the party to cease to exist before I could gain power.

But I kept going because I didn't want to break my promise to Karel again. I wanted Karel to forgive me.

But if there really is something right inside of me....

(Forgive me, Karel)

I looked up in the air and muttered in a voice so small that no one could hear but me. Instead of holding back my overflowing tears, I gripped the control stick tightly.

(I want to go on the path I think is right, even if it means betraying your wishes because if I don't, even the existence of our homeland will be erased)

I was not convinced of my rightness. Even if I were to meet Karel again **in the place where I would eventually end up**, I was not sure if he would forgive me.

Still, if I fought alongside Irisdina and Theodore, I may be able to protect at least his homeland. They, like Karel, recognize me as one of their own.

After a few seconds that seemed like an eternity, I uttered a sincere line of dialogue that was unmistakably my own.

「You're a fool to talk to a political commissar like that. I'll take the time to give you some political education later.」

With a faint glint in my eyes, I weaved my words in broken sentences.

「Don't make me regret this, ...?」

『——! Comrade First Lieutenant!』

Theodore was surprised, Irisdina gave a small smile — and I took a big breath and gave the order as the political commissar attached to the 666th TSF Squadron.

「Comrade Captain, **let's go!** We are the 666th TSF Squadron, the strongest in East Germany. Let's show the insolent alien species and the unreliable Westerners what we can doooooooooo!!!!」

As my response reverberated, I pushed in the foot lever and began the assault.

(What would Karel say if he saw me like this.....)

Suddenly, the bitter feeling that seeped into my heart made me turn my face down.

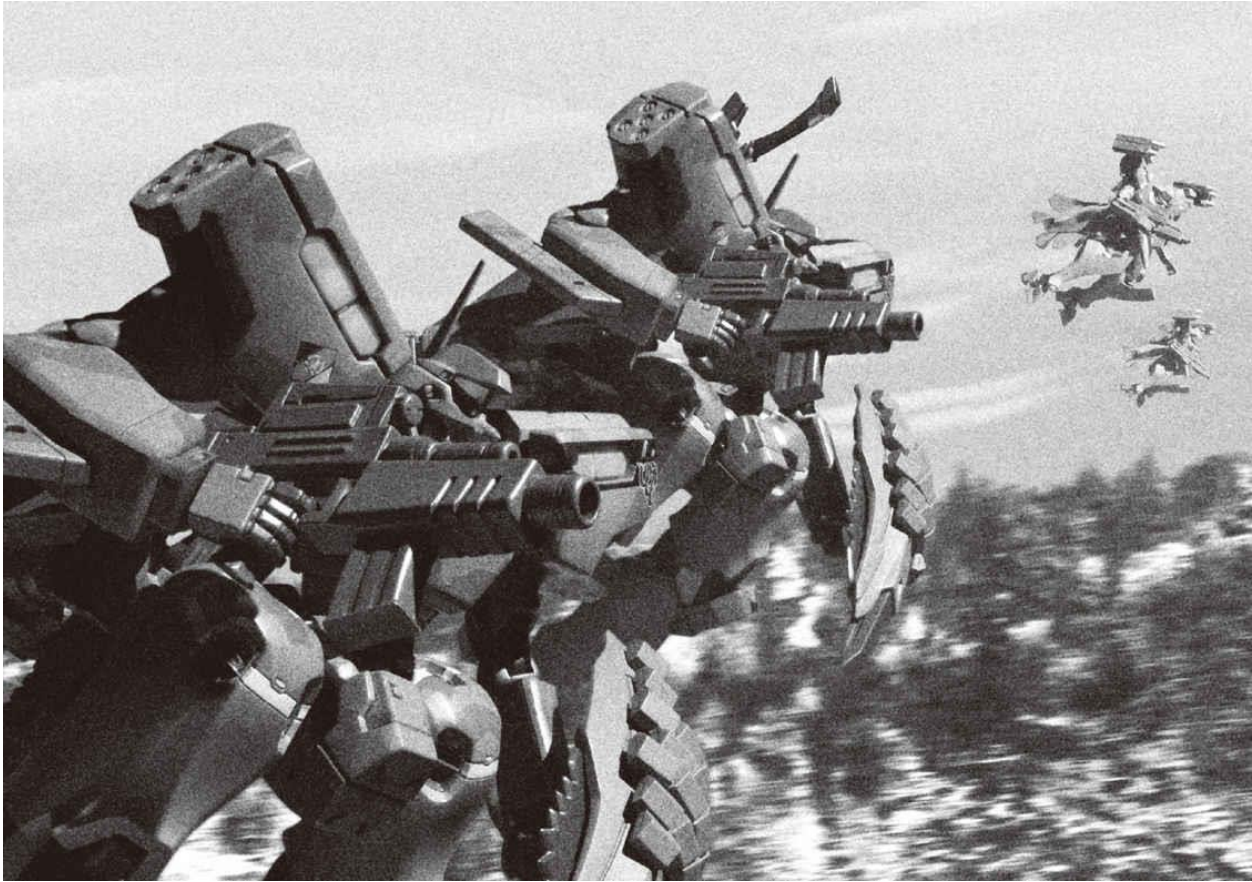
(But I still want to stick to my principles! I don't want to die doing nothing! So, even if I can't get Karel to forgive me, I will at least do something to make him understand, and then...!)

I went off the path. The destination was the same, But, my heart remained behind with regrets.

..... But from somewhere, I thought I heard a nostalgic voice say, "It's all right."

I closed my eyes tightly and let out a self-mocking - yet slightly reassuring - smile before turning to face forward again.

A few minutes later, the 666th TSF Squadron was joined by two F-14 (Tomcat) squadrons of the U.S. Navy's 103rd TSF Squadron (VF-103) "Jolly Rogers," which held the title of "The world's strongest." Using the mountain ridge as a shield, the squadrons launched a Laserjagd against the new BETA wave.



The battle for the fate of the Gdansk Bridgehead, East Germany, and all of Europe was about to begin.



どうか、あの幸せな日々を

私は自分を許さない	私が全ての元凶だから
私は奴らを許さない	私から全てを奪ったから
私は彼女を許さない	貴方を彼方に連れ去るから
私は貴方を許さない	貴方が幸せだから
——私が、幸せじゃないから	

シユタージュ 国家保安省と亡命者たちの戦い

東ドイツと西ドイツの国境線にも、東ドイツからの亡命と西ドイツからの攻撃を防ぐために、多数の国境警備隊が配置されていた。

1981年の時点で、国境警備隊は^{シユタージュ}国家保安省の統制下、8万名以上の兵力を東西国境に張り付けていた。この兵力は^{N V A}国家人民軍に換算すると6~8個機械化歩兵師団に相当する。また、国境近くには小規模な戦術機基地が幾つも設けられており、^{シユタージュ}国家保安省は少数の戦術機部隊と国境警備隊が連携して亡命者の索敵、捕縛を行っている。

こうした厳重な警備体制にもかかわらず、東ドイツからは西ドイツへの亡命者が後を絶たなかった。東ドイツ国内には多数の亡命支援組織が存在し、反体制派や西ドイツの協力者と連携しつつ、亡命者の国境突破を支援していた。



Please, those happy days

I will never forgive myself, because I am the source of all this.

I will never forgive them, for taking everything from me.

I will not forgive her, for taking you away.

I will not forgive you, because you're happy.

Because, I'm not happy.

The Ministry of State Security (Stasi) and the struggle of the asylum seekers

A large number of border guards were also deployed on the border between East and West Germany to prevent defections from East Germany and attacks from West Germany.

As of 1981, the Border Patrol, under the control of the Stasi, had more than 80,000 troops posted on the east-west border. This force was equivalent to six to eight mechanized infantry divisions of the National People's Army (NVA).

In addition, several small TSF bases have been established near the border, and the Stasi had a small number of TSF units and border guards working together to search for and capture defectors.

Despite these tight security measures, there was no end to the number of East Germans defecting to West Germany. Numerous asylum support organizations existed within East Germany, working with dissidents and West German collaborators to help the exiles break through the border.



**July 1973 German Democratic Republic
Berlin Prenzlauer Berg**

It was a beautiful sunny day in the middle of July. I was preparing lunch with my mother, full of anxiety. Her special eintopf ⁽¹²⁾ simmering in the pot did not look as delicious as usual.

"Don't worry, Liz-chan."

Mother said to me, while making a strained laugh.

"I've only met him once, and he's a very nice boy. A little unsociable at times, but"

"Really....?"

"Really Really. That's why you have to greet him properly. If you make that face, it will spoil your beautiful dress, won't it?"

Even with my mother's encouragement, my anxiety did not disappear.

Starting today, a boy named Theodor Eberbach will be living in my house.

What if I am bullied? I wonder if my important books and clothes will get dirty — I was more anxious than joyous at the thought of having a new family. The boys in my class were all selfish and very childish.

Just after lunch was prepared, I heard the front door open. I also heard my father's voice.

"Go to him, Liz-chan."

Mother tapped me on the shoulder. I squeezed all the courage I could muster, opened the door, and proceeded down the hallway to the front door.

There was a boy next to my father who was taller than me.

He had glossy red hair and beautiful green eyes. As mom said, he had a very unsociable face. But he stared at me in surprise, as if he had found a beautiful jewel in a dark, inky cave.

"Are you the one who will be my Oniichan"

Perhaps I had the same expression as the boy. The boy's mood was mature and very different from the kids in my class, and besides, his green eyes looked like real emeralds.

"Let me introduce you to my daughter, Liz. Theodore, you both are the same age. You were born earlier than her, but as her older stepbrother, you will protect her."

"Oh, um, ..."

Maybe we could get along. Maybe we could become a family. — While embracing such faint hopes, I ran up to the boy.

Then, as I had practiced many times this morning, I pulled one leg back at an angle, lightly bending the knee of the other leg while lifting the edge of my skirt with both hands and showed him my best smile.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Lise Hohenstein. From now on, I am in your care, Oniichan"

This is how Oniichan and I met.

And then, the next ten years - for me, seven happy years and three harsh ones - were the beginning.

May 1978 German Democratic Republic Berlin Prenzlauer Berg

Little Birds gathered in the row of trees in front of my apartment building, chirping as if to announce the arrival of spring.

The winter has been much longer since the war began, but the sunlight of spring, which has finally arrived, was streaming in from the living room window. The flowers in the garden looked somewhat happy.

"I'm glad. It's going to be another beautiful day"

I was in the kitchen cutting up a homemade ham, muttering to myself cheerfully. I was dressed in a red apron over the middle school uniform I had started wearing when I was 10 years old, which my mother had sewed for me several years ago.

Since both my mother and father were away for work this morning, I was in charge of breakfast. But all I had to prepare was ham, bread, coffee, and cheese, so it wasn't that much trouble.

"Okay, that's about it"

After preparing breakfast for both of us on the desk, I placed my hands on my hips in satisfaction and shouted out a line that I have repeated many times over the past five years.

"Oniichan, breakfast is ready!"



In the spring sunlight, I walked with Oniichan down the tree-lined street of Prenzlauer Allee. [\(13\)](#)

Prenzlauer Berg [\(14\)](#) was a large residential area a little east of central Berlin, with many cafes and crowded with people from morning. On either side of the street, medieval-style buildings rebuilt from the ruins of the post-World War II fire lined the street without gaps, and in the center of the street, a railroad track ran between the roads.

Walking alongside Oniichan on tree-lined streets like this to get to school has been a routine that has repeated itself every day for the past five years.

"I'm sleepy."

Oniichan mumbled as he shoved his hands into the pockets of his uniform, as if holding back a yawn. When he first came home, he was distrustful of people, but now he was all loosened up. His tone of voice was still brusque, but it seemed that the rest of our classmates apart from me thought he was still an unsociable person.

"Oniichan stays up too late. You need to go to bed earlier."

I looked into my brother's eyes under his heavy eyelids and responded in a troubled manner.

"It's okay to stay up late and play with friends, but you have to finish your homework as soon as possible. Just because Mama and Papa are at work and aren't home much, it doesn't mean you should break the rhythm of your life, okay?"

"I don't care. I'm already a junior in middle school."

"I care. Our school is a preparatory school, you know. If you don't study hard, you'll have a hard time later on."

"..... you're starting to sound like mother in what you say."

"Of course. Mama and Papa have told me to take care of Oniichan. You start slacking easily without me."

"Shut up."

Oniichan turned away with his lips pursed, perhaps frustrated that I was scolding him.

Taking care of Oniichan was laborious in this way, but I have never felt burdened by it at all. I found the other kids in my class troublesome, but with Oniichan, I could do anything willingly.

I didn't know why. I didn't feel the same way when I saw other boys. Why was it only Oniichan?

My parents were often away from home for work, but I have never felt lonely because Oniichan was always with me. Oniichan was brusque, but he was always there to help me when I was in trouble.

"By the way, your birthday is next month, right?"

Oniichan brought up the subject as if remembering.

"What would you like as a gift? I'll listen to what you want for the time being."

"Eh, Oniichan, are you buying me a present!?"

I asked in surprise. Oniichan raised his eyebrows as if offended.

"Hey, I bought you one last year. You forgot?"

"N...No, I didn't Thank you, Oniichan!"

"Woah.....!"

I reached out my hands to Oniichan and hugged him to let him know he guessed right.

It was my way of showing my appreciation for Oniichan. I've been doing it since I was a child, so I don't feel ashamed of it now.

Oniichan, who was hugged by me, blushed and shouted.

"Don't jump on me everywhere!"

"Don't worry about it. We are siblings after all."

"It's precisely because we are siblings that you should keep it in moderation!"

"Eh? What? Are you by any chance becoming concerned about your sister's physical development?"

"Id, idiot! Just get away from me!"

Oniichan pushed me away from him vigorously. Even though I didn't really dislike it, it hurt my feelings a bit when he did that.

"You.....You've got to stop that habit. You'll be misunderstood in many ways."

"I'm just a normal sibling bonding, right? I have nothing to be guilty of."

"We've got eyes all around us!"

"Ehhhh! Boring!"

Now it was my turn to pursue my lips. I was certainly aware that I was doing something conspicuous, but I didn't think it was strange, because Oniichan was my dependable precious family.

As if timed to coincide with this, an angular-looking train passed over the tracks, pulling a number of freight cars loaded with tanks, and making a hard noise.

"T-72, huh"

Oniichan casually muttered to himself as he watched the train go by.

As I recall, I was told that the T-72 was the main tank of the East German army and was used in the war against the BETA — not that Oniichan and I were particularly knowledgeable on military topics. It's just what we were taught in military training at school.

The war against BETA started the same year Oniichan came to my house. That war was now closing in on Poland, a neighboring country of East Germany. It was said that if the human race did not succeed in its counter-offensive, East Germany would also become a battleground within a few years.

If war approached, men may be forcibly drafted. If that happened, I would be separated from my Oniichan.

Of course, I didn't want that to happen, but it was something we couldn't control, and we could only hope that day would never come.

"Hey, Lizzy! Good morning!"

I heard someone's voice from far away — she was a friend of mine, and a member of the same theater group as me.

"You are going to school with your brother today as well? You are both passionately in love, aren't you? Hehehehe."

"Stuuuupid. That's completely wrong!"

He waved his hands and cheerfully accepted my friend's joke. — I certainly enjoyed being with Oniichan, but I believed it was only because he was an important family member.

Even Oniichan must have had at least one girl he liked. I am his sister, so if there was such a girl, I should support her. It would be a little sad to have Oniichan taken away from me, but

"I'll see you later, Oniichan. I have morning practice for the theater club, so I'll go ahead of you.!"

"Oh, hmm....."

Oniichan waved his hand even more shyly than before. I ran toward the intersection, waving my hand as well.

Somewhere in my mind, I felt a small distortion.



It was during my lunch break that day that I realized what it was.

"What kind of is that?"

On the roof of the school, I couldn't help but ask back, as if I had heard something wrong.

In front of me was the girl who called me out, a girl in the next class — and the exact opposite of me, a very graceful-looking girl, with beautiful silver hair that reached down to her chest and black ribbons. I had heard that she had relatives who were party officials, and that she had many friends because of that.

I unconsciously braced myself — I knew that my playwright father and mother did not like this country. If I had asked them if they liked it or not, I would have had the same opinion. I don't remember them ever saying anything about it, but maybe it came out in their attitude.

But the girl's words easily shattered my guess that she would accuse my family of being critical of the system.

"So I would like you to introduce me to Theodore-san."

Quietly, in a calm tone of voice — as if declaring war on me, the girl told me.

"You want to My Oniichan....?"

I was puzzled, but the girl continued nodding her head and saying, "Yes," as if she could see through everything.

"I have always admired Theodore-san, and I'd like to go out with him. He is a smart student with good grades and an excellent physique, so I think we would be a good match.

"Go out with him"

This girl and Oniichan dating — no, it doesn't feel right. This person doesn't suit Oniichan. She's not the right person for Oniichan..... I was sure of that.

"Can't you introduce me?"

"Oh, ..., no, no. That's not what I meant."

She pressed me for an answer after my vague reply.

"You are just Theodore-san's sister, so you should be able to do it, right?"

There was clear hatred in her voice.



I was walking home alone in the evening, looking down.

I had originally planned to show up at the theater circle, but after what happened at lunch, I wasn't really in the mood.

Oniichan was on his way out of school to play somewhere with his friends. I was grateful for that now — I didn't know what face to make when I saw him.

"..... I."

I muttered quietly, as if to let out my inner stagnation.

"....., she's a very, very nasty girl."

In the end, I refused her request.

I'm not sure why But I was sure that I didn't want to hand over my Oniichan to that girl.

Not surprisingly, as soon as she heard my answer, she changed her attitude and became agitated.

"You can't introduce me? What do you mean!?"

She screamed in disbelief and came close to grabbing me by the chest.

"I I told you I don't know either!"

I tried desperately to hold myself back from backing away. I didn't know why, but if I didn't stand my ground at that time, I felt like I would regret it for the rest of my life.!

"But no. I can't do that!"

"Why not!?"

I could think of only one reason why I rejected her request — I was sure that if I mentioned it, I would offend her even more. So, I decided to just bear it in silence...

"Damn it, this is why the families of the people who write the scripts for such low-brow productions are!"

She said as if throwing up. It was well known that many of the scripts written by my father and mother, which extolled the virtues of humanity and freedom, could also be read as a criticism of socialism, if a keen one looked at them from a certain point of view.

However, father and mother were prepared for this and were sending their works out into the world. They hoped that as many people as possible will have hope for the future and realize the contradictions of this system.....

"While begging the party for financial support, behind the scenes they are poisoned by the West, calling for freedom of expression. No wonder their kids grow up like this! I feel sorry for poor Theodore-san, being put in a house like that!"

I instantly scowled at her when she said that. I could forgive her for insulting me. But to insult my father, mother, and even my Oniichan, whom they both respect, was unforgivable.....the words I had been holding in my throat spontaneously came out.

"I have a reason."

"What!?"

"A girl like you is not worthy of Oniichan."

The next moment, my hand, with great force, flew across her left cheek.

Then she said, "Are you and Theodore-san having that kind of relationship, as rumored?" and walked away.

I am sure I looked very unreasonable. I was crushed with self-loathing.

"Why did I do that?"

Oniichan and I are just siblings — or so I should have thought to myself. I had no intention of tying him down.

But I still couldn't stand that. I couldn't allow myself to give Oniichan to another woman. In other words...

"Maybe she's actually right"

The distortion of my heart that I felt on the way to school — I was sure this was proof that I was in love with Oniichan. Perhaps it has been that way for a long time.

I want to stay close to Oniichan all the time. If I could be with Oniichan, I did not want anything else. But...

"Is that really okay?"

I was just his stepsister, so I didn't think it was strange — but I couldn't get her words out of my ears.

The reason was that it was only my ego that made me not want to be separated from my Oniichan. I found myself on Eberswalder Straße, ⁽¹⁵⁾ in the district next to Prenzlauerberg. The sun was already setting and the setting sun was illuminating the city in red.

"What shall I do?"

I didn't want to see Oniichan — that feeling came first. Even though I was the one in charge of dinner today.

I was standing there with a heavy mood.

"Lise...."

A familiar voice echoed from behind me, and I stiffened.

"O...Oniichan?"

I looked back with trepidation and saw Oniichan running up to me with a look of impatience on his face.

"Are you all right, ...?"

As soon as Oniichan stood in front of me, he grabbed my shoulder while out of breath, and asked anxiously.

"All right....?"

"Your classmates told me about it. They said you didn't feel well this afternoon. I rushed home and couldn't see you, so I"

I gulped. Oniichan had been looking for me all this time. Seeing that he was breathless, he might have been running around the city.

"B...but, the appointment with your friend"

"I turned him down. You're more important to me."

My heart was filled with guilt and I turned my head down to run away from Oniichan. My selfishness has caused trouble even for him. I knew I didn't have the right to love him.

"But I'm really glad. It looks like nothing serious has happened"

When I looked up at the gentle voice, Oniichan was smiling as if he was relieved from the bottom of his heart.

"Eh, ..."

Oniichan did not immediately ask what happened.

Maybe it was his character, but Oniichan would never do anything that would abruptly step into the bounds of someone's heart.

Oniichan pointed to a food stall (Imbiss) ⁽¹⁶⁾ across the intersection, under the elevated railway station. It was reputed to have the best Currywurst ⁽¹⁷⁾ in East Berlin.

"I was running and I got hungry. I'll buy you a drink. Hey, Lise!"

Oniichan was surprised. I had started to fall into tears. I couldn't stop myself.

My gratitude for my brother was filled with love — I tried to find the words with a puckered face.

"I did something terrible to Oniichan."

"Something terrible"

"There was this girl who wanted me to introduce her to you, and she asked me about it, but I didn't think she was right for you"

"....., Oh, so it was just that."

Oniichan responded as if nothing was wrong. I couldn't say a second word to the unexpected reaction.

"Don't worry about it. I have no need for that stuff."

"No need...?"

I parroted back in a murmur — Oniichan coughed shyly and took my right hand while turning his face away from me.

"Anyway, let's go!"

Oniichan quickly pulled his hand away. I was stunned and thought about the meaning of Oniichan's words.

(You mean, no way))

I stared at Oniichan's face, and felt a slight blush on my cheeks.

Maybe it was egotism, but I wondered if Oniichan might also be....

I began to feel somewhat foolish for being so depressed. I didn't have a clear answer, but maybe there was no reason for me to suppress my feelings.

Maybe one day I would be able to put this feeling into words. When that time comes, I was sure my father and mother would support me. And Oniichan, too...

"Yes. Thank you, Oniichan. Hop!"

"Whoa!"

I jumped on my brother. My own way of showing my appreciation — now with love added to it. I was the only one who could do this for Oniichan.

"Heyyyy, don't do that! People would get the wrong idea.!"

"Ehehe~ But you don't hate it!"

"Oh, God! That's enough!"

While playing with Oniichan, I felt, as always, an inexpressible happiness.

May these happy days continue forever.....

February 1980 German Democratic Republic
Lichtenberg, Stasi Berlin Headquarters ⁽¹⁸⁾

A creaking bed, a sorry mat and a thin blanket were my only warmth in my sleep. I could hear a yelling voice coming from somewhere.

I was finally interrupted from my permitted slumber, and my face contorted — some idiot had slept the wrong way, and the guards had knocked me awake.

One was not allowed to sleep here except on their back with their hands on the blanket. I made that mistake many times when I first came here. ⁽¹⁹⁾

Still enduring the yells of the guards coming from the corridor, and the shivering cold, I looked around the cell, which was still brightly lit despite the bedtime. The indoor heater was not working at all.

In the cramped room were the crude wooden bed I slept on, a washbasin that often broke, and a flush toilet without a toilet seat. All of this, of course, was in full view from the corridor behind the bars. The first day I was brought here, I used to take care of my business while crying, but that was a childish thing to worry about now. ⁽²⁰⁾

There was no clock or windows in the cell, and there was no way to measure time except by one's own physical senses — last night, the night before, and the night before that, I have been woken up the same way over and over again after bedtime. I felt unbearably sleepy all the time, yet I was never given enough sleep. The guards yelled at the prisoners about anything and everything in order to cut down their sleep until the last possible moment (their breaking point) before they die a slow and debilitating death. ⁽²¹⁾

Of course, there was torture in the name of interrogation during the daytime, and even when the interrogated were lucky enough that the guards had other prisoners to attend to, they were forced to stand within sight of the door bars the entire time. They were not even allowed to lean against the wall.

I didn't even know how many times I was punched and kicked during the interrogations. There were no areas left on my body without bruises. Several of my teeth were broken, and only half of my fingernails were left.

My body has adapted quite well to the pain of being punched, but when my nails were peeled off, I couldn't help but cry out from the unspeakable, intense pain.

While repeating questions that I couldn't possibly answer in a robotic manner, the indifferent interrogator kept hurting me like a machine.

But the hardest, most painful, most unbearable part of all was —

Suddenly, the bars of my cell were kicked violently. Fear forced my drowsiness to shut down.

"It's time for the interrogation. Prisoner 2049."

A man in the uniform of the Stasi told me in an emotionless voice. Prisoner 2049 was my name here.

"Follow me."

Gritting my teeth in frustration, I stood up to do as the man said with a heavy resolve in my chest.

If you disobeyed, you were sure to be beaten — and the night had only just begun.

An interrogator from the Stasi asked — also in a robotic tone.

"How deeply were your parents involved in the defection plan to West Germany that you participated in? Who was the ringleader? Who on the East side cooperated? And who in the West helped."

"..... I don't know."

I answered the question that has been repeated hundreds, no, thousands of times over the past few days with an empty consciousness. As soon as I finished speaking, sleep reached my brain and my consciousness vanished. — the next moment I was punched in the face by a soldier standing next to me and slammed against the wall with a sharp and severe pain.

"Ga.....argh!"

Before I had time to moan in pain, I was held from both sides and placed in the chair I had been sitting in. In my mouth was the taste of thick blood and a foreign object — another broken tooth, it seemed. When I was a child, my mother used to tell me that my teeth were so beautiful, and I was a little proud of them.

"I ask again. Tell us everything you know about the defection program you were involved in. Otherwise, you'll be stuck here forever."

"When I say I don't know, then I don't know! I have no!"

As if in reaction to the beating, the emotions I had been suppressing burst forth. I continue screaming, spitting out my broken teeth.

"But more importantly, is Oniichan safe? What about mama and papa? Do you really think it's fine to do this?"

I stared at the interrogator with anger and sadness — I knew there was no point in doing this. But if I didn't, I would sink into a sea of despair and guilt.

I could recall many painful events — My father and mother who lost their jobs because they were forced out of the theater industry due to pressure from the government because they appealed for freedom of

expression and fell into the depths of despair. Likewise, I tried to express the contradictions of our society in a theater group to make everyone aware of them, but the Stasi crushed my attempt and I was severely bullied at school. My older brother, who supported me and my parents while worrying about his own powerlessness. The end result of this was an attempt to defect to the West with the whole family and its failure.

In particular, the memory of the last event was still clearly burned in my mind. The forest at night, illuminated by the searchlight. The snarling gunshots, a pack of barking military dogs. We ran frantically through them, but the border guards of the Stasi caught up with us. My father's right leg was blown off by a gunshot, and I got separated from my mother, but I still tried to run away hand in hand with Oniichan, and then I heard a gunshot nearby... After that, before I knew it, I was being held here.

I didn't even know if my father, mother, and brother were alive or dead. We were oblivious to the whereabouts of our "comrades" who were heading west with us. I didn't know where this detention center was or how many days had passed since then, and who in the world snitched on us.

Every time I remembered, an irredeemable feeling filled my whole body — if only I hadn't tried to complain about the contradiction of my father and mother losing their jobs, if only I hadn't nodded to the asylum proposal, if only I had been able to run faster. Regret clutched at my heart.

But I definitely did not want to let those feelings out to the man in front of me. Besides, I didn't want to tell him the truth.

I knew. I knew that my father and mother were central figures in that asylum plan, that the plan involved theater people and friends in the West who were equally antagonistic to this country, and I knew the names of these people. Right before he planned to go into asylum, my father taught me about them in case of an emergency.

Oniichan did not know that — I refused to tell him. Oniichan was not at fault in this matter. I did not want him to suffer any more pain. He said it was enough that I was the only one who could hold the secret. Besides, I knew that Oniichan would protect me, and I would be fine.

Maybe the interrogator from the Stasi in front of me was relentlessly interrogating and torturing me because he has not been able to extract any information from anyone.

I absolutely couldn't let that be known. If Papa and Mama, and also Oniichan were still alive, they must have endured the same.

I didn't want to be the only one who lost to herself and became a traitor.

So, I will endure any interrogation, any torture, I promise.!

"I ask again. Tell me everything you know about the defection program you were involved in."

"I don't know anything. Even if I knew! I'm not going to tell you guys anything!"

The interrogator stared at me with glassy eyes that showed no emotion at all — then I screamed with all my remaining energy.

"We're not wrong.! Give papa and mama, and Oniichan, back to me!"

The interrogator sighed, picked up the receiver and began to say something. The usual signal — he was going to torture me now. The fear sent a shiver down my spine, and I could feel the blood drain from my face.

Yesterday we were subjected to water torture. ⁽²²⁾ We were left with a tub of water placed under our chins while our bodies were immobilized so that we could not move. If we lowered our faces even slightly, our noses and mouths would be immersed in the water and we wouldn't be able to breathe, but if we kept our faces up, there was no problem. However, it was not easy to stay conscious if you were left in a state of extreme sleep deprivation. Naturally, every time we felt sleepy, we repeatedly plunged our heads into the water and suffered the agony of being on the verge of suffocation.

(But I can't lose, I'll definitely endure!)

Suddenly, the door to the interrogation room behind me opened and I heard a round of sedate applause.

"Oh dear. You are just a little girl from what I see, but you have got some guts. I am impressed."

The man stood in front of me, clapping his hands happily. He was from the Stasi — a very high-ranking official, judging by the number of insignia on his chest. His brown hair was pulled back all over his head.

I stared at the man silently. I remembered his distinctive hair — the person who stood in front of us the moment I was separated from my brother. This man might have known what happened to my father, mother, and Oniichan...

"To endure such severe torture for the past few days, ... you are quite impressive in terms of both physical and mental strength. Come to think of it, you were a member of the theater club at school. I see. There are not many acts that require as much strength of mind as performing in front of others."

I continued to stare at the man. Other than that, I had no way of resisting here.

"Hm. And yet you haven't lost the will to resist. wonderful."

He lifted my bruised jaw with his thumb and forefinger — I was in pain and continued to resist with just my eyes.

"Then I shall break you."

The man snapped his fingers as if giving a signal to follow him. The soldiers again took my hands and led me out into the hallway behind the man's back.

I was taken to a room with nothing on it but a bed. However, there were a number of men waiting for me in the room.

"What, are you going to?"

I asked the man with the swept-back hair, my face pale. I had an idea — but I couldn't put it into words.

"What am I going to? Well, that's obvious, isn't it?"

The man turned to me and said with a rhythmic voice.

"It's an interrogation. We are obliged to examine you in every detail to prevent a repeat of the previous incident. At least that's what it will say on the paperwork... although it won't be quick."

"No, noooooo!"

Reflexively, I tried to escape, but a soldier standing next to me grabbed me by the arm and threw me back into the room. The men in the room laughed in a lowly manner.

I shook my head frantically through the unstoppable shivering.

"No help me Oniichan!"

"Calling for help is meaningless. Unless you're willing to confess everything, then it's a different matter."

".....!"

It was a sweet temptation — but to protect Oniichan, I still couldn't talk about it. However, I didn't want to do this, I absolutely didn't want to do this. This is not how Oniichan!

"It doesn't matter, even if you tried to kill yourself here and now during the interrogation. It's a common pattern."

I gulped. In other words, the man in front of me was saying that he could kill me here and pretend on paper that I tried to commit suicide and keep the whole thing quiet. That is how the Stasi has hidden the existence of its victims.

"Well, good luck."

"Wait no, nooooooooo!"

The man left the place with a wave of his hand, as if he felt no remorse. As I reached for his back, the men grabbed me by the limbs and pushed me down on the bed.

I have yet to forget the events of the next few hours.



Even after I was freed from the unspeakable violence, I was still left in that room.

I was sobbing on my bed. I was in pain I had never felt before, tired, sleepy, and feeling an inescapable sense of loss that was eating away at my consciousness at this point in my life.

"I'm sorry."

I muttered in dismay on the damp sheets.

I grasped tightly at my seat in frustration and sadness — the guilt was so overwhelming that I wanted to take my life right now.

It's not that I wasn't interested in such things either. I have even imagined many times that I would be with Oniichan. I even intended to dedicate my first time to him.

Perhaps, no, without a doubt, the humiliation in the name of torture must continue in the future. I could imagine where it would lead, and my body and soul began to grow cold.

"But now there's one less thing to protect"

Trying to find some relief, I forced a smile and muttered the line.

"Still, I can endure."

The door opened and the man with the swept-back hair from earlier entered.

"So... have you changed your mind?"

I didn't answer — I tried to continue to resist in silence. If I didn't, my heart might break.

"I see. Then I guess I don't have a choice. Hey."

As the man called out, one of his men approached me and scattered several photographs on the sheets.

A moment later, I couldn't believe my eyes. A sense of dread ran through my entire body.

"This is!"

"Haven't you noticed? There are several cameras in this room. The acts from before were thoroughly captured. And of course, there are videos too."

It was recorded — I was speechless. The man with the swept-back hair continues to pour salt on my wounds.

"Now, here's my question to you... how do you think your brother would react if I showed him the photos and videos that documented who you were earlier in the day, when he was enduring the same interrogations that you were?"

I reflexively got up. A mixed sensation of joy and despair engulfed me. Oniichan was alive — but I couldn't believe he was going to show him these photos and videos!

"No, ... don't!"

I screamed desperately. Oniichan would see me like this, soiled like this — it was unimaginable fear.

"Please, don't do that! Anything but that! Oniichan is, ... He is the only exception!"

"You have to hear the end of the story. I said, ... if I showed this to him, how would he react?"

The man with the swept-back hair asked again as a reminder, with a smile pasted on his mouth.

My imagination painted the worst possible future. If indeed Oniichan was enduring the same terrible interrogations and torture as I was, and if these photos and images showed that I was going through the same thing.....

".....Naturally, he will show his perfect obedience to us in order to rescue you. He seems to be a strong man to the core, but when he finds out that his stepsister has been put through such a hellish ordeal, well, you, being the smart one that you are, know what this means, don't you?"

My eyes involuntarily widened and I almost threw up. — it meant that Oniichan was going to give in to the Stasi to save me.

Oniichan was kind, and if he knew I was going through this, he would definitely try to save me. Even if it means sacrificing my mother and father, he has been entrusted by my father to protect me to the end, like a last will and testament.

And as a dog of the Stasi - a traitor - he will be involved in a number of nauseating acts. He will become a part of a system that we all hated and resented — a role that would be worse than death for him without a doubt.

".....! Don't!"

I hung my head with tears in my eyes. I couldn't let Oniichan go down that road.

"I don't care what happens to me! I'll do anything! So help your Oniichan.....!"

"It's not a question of helping or not helping. It's a question of showing or not showing."

.... "Don't get me wrong" — the swept-back hair continued, waving his index finger in a pretentious tone.

"That's right. If you tell us everything you know, and if you pledge complete reverence to us, the Stasi, then we will end your interrogation. As for your brother's treatment"

After a pause for a breath, he continued as if testing.

"It depends on your subsequent efforts, I suppose. Even if you survive the torture, I can send him to the frontline discipline squad at my discretion."

My heart was thumping — in order to keep Oniichan out of the hands of the Stasi, and depending on how hard I work, I might be able to return him to a world that has nothing to do with the Stasi.

But if I nodded my head now, I would become a pawn of the Stasi and would have to be involved in maintaining this corrupt system. Every day from now on would be more painful than dying.

Besides...

"What happens to Mama and Papa if I accept that"?

"You, do not mistake the value of your life. The only choice you have at the cost of your life is whether or not you will pledge your reverence to us in place of your brother. In the first place, there is no way that we would let the person who seems to be the ringleader of this defection case live, is there?"

Pain ran through my chest. — For them, it was no surprise.

"Well, if you insist, I may let one of them live. But in that case, we will be free to decide what to do with your brother instead."

My heart leaped again — if I tried to protect Oniichan here, I would lose Mama and Papa instead. My precious father and mother. I thought we promised before we defected that our family would always be together.

But if they want to use me, the Stasi would try to keep me vulnerable and grasp my weakness, then Oniichan might survive.

"Despite what you might think, I am not free. If I don't get an answer here, it's like we never had this conversation."

I searched for answers in my maddening thoughts. Anger, sadness, frustration, pettiness, regret — all kinds of negative emotions were overtaking me.

(But, I don't know what's right for me anymore)

As with my parents' case earlier, I didn't even know how much of the swept-back hair man's story was true. I didn't even know if I would be able to endure the days ahead.

But for the sake of Oniichan, I didn't care if my hands were covered in blood. No matter what the cost — even if it meant letting my father and mother die, at least Oniichan would be!

I shut my eyes, and mumbled as if spitting everything out.

"I swear."

"I didn't hear you."

"I swear!"

I made eye contact with the man with the swept-back hair and lifted my body, which was covered with numerous fluids and scars.

"I, Lise Hohenstein, pledge allegiance to the Stasi!"

"Good."

The man with the swept-back hair grabbed my chin again. Then, with a ghastly smile on his face, he whispered in my ear.

"From this day on, you are a dog of the Stasi and I, ...Heinz Axmann."

July 1981 German Democratic Republic Rothemühl Base, Neubrandenburg Province

The Rothemühl base was a TSF base for the armed police forces of the Stasi, located in a forested area of the province of Neubrandenburg in northeastern East Germany. Further to the east, looking toward the Polish border, was the "Pasewalk Fortified Position," part of the Oder-Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line. ⁽²³⁾

A year and five months after that day, there I was, in my cursed black garment.

One squadron of MiG-21s (Balalaika) advanced through the ruins built in the simulator's virtual world in short boosts. The Stasi markings painted on the left shoulder were reflected in the artificial sunlight.

『—All TSFs. 500 meters to your right. BETA group. Numbers over 200!』

The orders of my superior - the commander of the 2nd Squadron of the TSF Battalion "Baba Yaga" ⁽²⁴⁾ - echoed through the control unit. I listened to it while alternately staring at the scene ahead and the battle situation window.

Any margin for emotions was practically non-existent. This was my first full-scale simulator training in an urban setting. The battalion was a TSF unit dedicated to the war against BETA, but it had been formed only a month ago, and the majority of the Surface Pilots, including myself, had no experience in actual combat.

『—First Flight, follow me! We'll cut in from the front! Second flight, right! Third flight, left! There's an open strip of land 300 meters ahead that we'll surround and destroy!』

『—Baba Yaga 09, copy! Third Flight, move forward!』

『 『 「Roger!」 』 』

I shouted frantically as I received my call sign, "Baba Yaga 12," the fourth TSF of the third flight. The shock of the jumping unit shook my chest, which was dressed in a jet-black fortified suit designed by the Stasi.

In front of me were three MiG-21s (Balalaika), including the flight leader's TSF — all of them were less depleted of propellant and more skillful in maneuvering than I was. I was doing my best just to keep up with them — I was also aware that because of me, the entire flight's maneuvering was lagging behind.

The third flight leaped down an urban street lined with buildings about the height of a TSF's waist and came within striking distance of its target. Somewhat similar to Prenzlauer Allee in my hometown — I consciously shut down that feeling that came to mind unexpectedly.

『—Third flight, open fire! 10 and I will hit the Grappler class! 11 and 12, cover them and keep the tank class away from them!』

「—Roger! Take thaaaaat!」

I started shooting while shouting — hoards of tank classes were blown away one after another. Having never been in a real battle, the only BETA movements I knew were of those on this simulator.

Two other flights had already finished landing and started firing. The 12 MiG-21s (Balalaika) attacks slaughtered the BETA group in the twinkling of an eye.

In the meantime, a new reaction was seen in the battle situation indicator window — a large number of BETA groups were approaching from the front. However, the 3rd Squadron was beginning to head in that direction.

『—The efficiency of the attacks is not good! The 3rd Squadron has beaten us to it!』

The Squadron commander's exasperated yell. It was well known that the squadron commander was on bad terms with the commander of the 3rd Company.

『—Especially the 3rd flight! What are you waiting for? Your slow maneuvering is the reason...』

I felt pain in my stomach. It was my fault — or so I thought at the moment.

Suddenly, something huge appeared, crashing through the structure on the right.

「—The Grappler class... went around!」

I had just failed to notice — a moment later, I was hit directly by a Grappler-class blow from the side, and my vision went dark immediately afterward.



The Squadron commander's reprimand in the hangar lasted 30 minutes. It seemed that the reason he took the trouble to take us out of the simulator room after the training was to mentally pressure us by exposing us to the public eye of the maintenance team. The actual TSFs we were to board were lined up on the runway.

After yelling at the captain, he disappeared out of the hangar, seemingly still angry. With a sigh, the 3rd flight commander ordered us to disband and followed the squadron commander.



But that didn't put my mind at ease. I knew exactly what was going to happen after that.

Immediately after the flight leader disappeared from sight, I was suddenly grabbed by the throat and slammed against the wall.

"You bitch! You've got to be kidding me, ...!"

The girl who was the leader of the squadron's low-ranking surface pilots — a surface pilot wearing the same fortified suit of the Stasi that I was wearing — told me in an abject tone.

"Do you know how many times I have been reprimanded because of you!? It's not once or twice!"

My face grimaced as I dodged her gaze. Her words were true, so I couldn't refute them.

The other surface pilots around me were looking at me with something akin to hostility, as if in sympathy with the leader.

"Wasteful maneuvers, high propellant consumption,..... and missing the approach of the Grappler class! Do you intend to kill us!?"

"I...I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize! Show me results! You traitor! Quisling! ⁽²⁵⁾ Capitalist dog who tried to defect to the West!"

Traitor. Quisling. Capitalist dog — They all were my nicknames in this squadron. All the surface pilots in the squadron knew of my past crimes.

Of course, this was not public knowledge — but somehow my past was known to everyone in the battalion. Not only me, but the Stasi was thus unofficially undermining the social standing of ex-offenders and using them as a scornful deterrent.

"It's people like you that caused Operation Palaiologos to fail and allowed the BETA to invade the mainland! It was rumored that tens of thousands of generals died during the recent first offensive in the Middle Oder River Valley! Shame on you!"

She slapped my left cheek. Severe pain ran in the left side of my face and the taste of blood spread to my mouth — but it was a pain I was already used to.

I bowed my head in apology and turned to go to the locker room. Another surface pilot shouted angrily.

"Where do you think you're going without your self-discipline?"

"I....., have some business to attend to."

"You, you have got to stop joking around.....!"

"..... She's going to go back to meeting guys in town anyway, isn't she? You know, for these things."

It was the voice of the surface pilot who reprimanded me.

"Isn't the position of a whore suitable for a traitor? I bet she is lonely and **unfulfilled** unless she is on someone else's crotch."

I left the hangar in silence, hearing the unpleasant laughing voices that were pouring on me from behind.



Pasewalk, ⁽²⁶⁾ which was also the name of the fortified camp, was the closest downtown area to the Rothemühl ⁽²⁷⁾ base. It was an old town that dated back to the time of the Thirty Years' War, ⁽²⁸⁾ and is now used as a rest area for troops deployed to the fortified positions.

"So, how are things going for you these days?"

That evening I changed into my casual clothes and found myself in a cozy beer house facing the main street of Pasewalk.

A sumptuous meal was laid down in front of me, and across the desk from me was a major general in the armed police force. He worked in the command center that oversaw this area.

However, I could not entirely imagine that fact from his corpulence, stout physique and bald head. According to the man, he had a proclivity for teenage girls like me, and has used his connections to party officials to gain promotions. He was over 50 years old.

"Yes. No change."

I showed a smile that gave others only the impression of innocence — which, for me now, was easier than a real smile. It was thanks to the acting talent I inherited from my father and mother, and the training I received from Axmann. I had long forgotten how to put on a real smile.

"I'm having a bit of a hard time with the training, ...but I have managed to keep up."

"That's okay then. It pains me to think that a beautiful young lady like you is struggling under me. It is even more so when you will eventually join the battle against BETA. Are you sure you don't want me to transfer you to rear duty?"

"Yes. I only hope to make amends by defending my country on the front lines."

I replied without ceasing to smile.

"The sins I have committed are that great."

"Then there's nothing I can do for you, I suppose. It's regrettable."

"Not at all. I am happy that you keep seeing me in secret like this."

I clasped the Major General's right hand with both hands — his hair was so thick and sticky. It's the worst I've ever felt.

But I was used to it by now, and to having had this right hand stroking all over my body.

"Because I have nothing left."

"Oh, poor Lise."

The Major General clasped my hands back with his left hand — The worst feeling has worsened.

"Rest assured. Your honor will be restored one day by me, I promise."

"..... I, too, will never forget the debt of gratitude I owe the Major General."

"Don't call me that. You know what I mean."

"Oh, I'm sorry! I'll correct myself."

He flicked his tongue shyly. It was strange how men could really be fooled by this level of acting — for a moment, I thought of Oniichan's face, but I ignored it and stared into the murky eyes of the man in front of me.

"O-ji-sama..."

The Major General's expression relaxed, as if he was truly happy.

"Speaking of which, I've found something nice for you. I'll dress you later."

" Really? I wonder what it might be?"

I ask curiously, feeling a strong sense of nausea — what was it this time? Lingerie? Swimsuit? Why do men like these things? My last guy liked collars and piercings, and it was a pain to get rid of the marks. I have dealt with old men over 80 years old and even my own age.

The Major General took it out of the paper bag he kept at his feet and showed it to me — even with my acting skills, I was so shocked that my smile almost collapsed.

"It's a set of uniforms from the school you attended in Berlin until a year ago. I asked a friend of mine to order them for me."

As my consciousness almost froze, a memory of one day comes back to me. The tree-lined street of Prenzlauer Allee where I went to school with my Oniichan. The profile of Oniichan in his school uniform, just like me. A casual conversation. My precious daily life, which was ordinary, but peaceful and happy.

And yet, from now on, I will wear this uniform full of memories with the man in front of me...

"Thank you, ..., sir!"

I expressed my joy with teary eyes as I hugged the uniform given to me by the Major General.

"It's so nostalgic! Even though I might not look like it, I still got good grades in school. I was especially at the top of my grade in foreign languages"

That's why that man had his eye on me from the very beginning — I was convinced of that now. Because intelligence missions required not only acting skills but also a high level of language ability.

The Major General nodded benevolently, looked at his watch deliberately and stood up.

"Oh, it's late already. If we stay here, we'll run out of time — the same place as usual?"

"Yes, Ojisan. Anywhere"

"I see. I see. Well, I'll show you a lot of things about how the world works again, after I make love to you, that is."

The Major General approached me and brought his lips to my face. I closed my eyes as our lips met while enduring the feeling of vomiting. I twirled my own tongue and saliva around his inserted tongue, making wet sounds for a moment. I felt as if my reason was rotting away.

After we left the beer house, we headed off the main street, hand in hand. This was a section of the city where the military had set up a number of comfort stations and saunas.



After it was over, I left the Major General, but I did not head for the station, because a car came to pick me up immediately.

To tell the truth, I wanted to go back to the base right now, take a shower, erase the traces left by that man all over my body — and then soothe my body in bed which was exhausted from everything that occurred in succession. But... I got into the back seat without saying a word.

"So, what did you accomplish today?"

The man sitting next to me - Lieutenant Colonel Heinz Axmann - asked without preamble. He was staring boredly at the scenery outside and crossing his long legs in an exaggerated manner.

Chief of Staff of the Operations Headquarters of the Armed Police Forces of the Stasi — that was Axmann's current title. But behind the scenes, I knew that he was involved in counterintelligence within the Stasi. Before that - at the time of my arrest - I heard that he was also involved in intelligence against West Germany.

I took out a small listening device from my satchel and handed it to Axmann. Then I uttered my report in an emotionless voice.

"..... It's just as the Lieutenant Colonel has predicted. He has a large pipeline not only to the party center but also to the Soviet Union — he is definitely from the Moscow Faction. ⁽²⁹⁾ He said so himself. If the need arises, he could escape with me to Siberia with the help of his Soviet friends."

"I see, and how did you respond?"

"I intend to atone for my sins by defending my country. If I can make The Major General survive by offering my life, then I am satisfied. But if that's what Ojiisan wants, then"

He was listening to our conversations through wiretaps, but Axmann preferred to have me report directly to him.

Axmann looked out the window and started laughing out loud. I just stared at him silently, holding back my desire to kill.

"Good. Then, find out the name of his friends next time."

Axmann continued, flashing me a sideways glance.

"Recently, the Moscow faction has apparently been trying to negotiate with the Committee for State Security (KGB) to have its own reconnaissance satellite information from the KGB. He's probably one of the contacts. If we roll it right, he could turn that information over to us."

"Isn't the Stasi privy to the military, and is being provided with information by the Soviet Union?"

"We are. However, the information circulated only to the Moscow faction is more accurate. The difference in accuracy could be used by the Moscow faction to trap us."

"No matter how precious their lives are, to flee to Siberia ... What is the Moscow Faction thinking?"

"Everyone's life is important. Even more, if they are people who have a lot of things to protect. Unlike you of course, who have lost everything... You are in a bad mood today, aren't you? Are you unhappy with your current partner? But it's true that if you were to deal with officers of the NVA as before, even though you may have to approach them with a false name, you might be able to get a lead on your brother...."

I remained silent with my fists clenched. This man knew where my Oniichan was, but he would never tell me. On top of that, he taunted me like this.

As if sensing something, Axmann looked at the paper bag at my feet and smiled like he figured it all out.

"I see. He has a good taste."

My body stiffened. I have had that **kind of relationship** with Axmann as a result of the training I have undergone. The pain and fear of the torture and the promise I made to him outweighed everything, forcing me to be silent.

Axmann smiled contemptuously, as if he had read my thoughts from my expression.

"Rest assured. I won't do anything today, rather, I don't want to do anything."

"Eh"

"I am a fastidious person. I don't want to touch your filthy body after sleeping with such an ugly man."



The next morning I was walking along the forest road leading to the base. After staying at a nearby inn, Axmann's men drove me to the appropriate place.

In contrast to my body, which I was still dragging from exhaustion, the forest road was cool in the fresh air and morning sunlight. Except for the occasional passing cars, no one saw me.

I stopped there after making sure there was no one around. Then I muttered to myself with my bare emotions.

"... No more."

This triggered a torrent of tears and emotions that had been sealed away. I couldn't stand anymore — I fell to my knees and sobbed.

"Help me, Oniichan.....!"

Since that day, I have been a loyal dog of the Stasi and of Axmann.

My first assignment was to train as an intelligence officer. The Stasi wanted people for this purpose. I was the ideal person for the job because I was a talented actor, fluent in languages, and had a weakness they could control.

There, all kinds of things that were necessary for an intelligence officer were drilled into me. One of them was the art of honey trapping, ⁽³⁰⁾ as I mentioned earlier. The Stasi placed great importance on "Honey Traps" as a means of espionage, and I received thorough instruction in them. Thanks to this, my body was now capable of giving pleasure to anyone, including myself.

It was only after that that I was transferred to the Surface Pilot Training School of the Armed Police Forces. Although his intentions were unknown, Axmann seemed to want to utilize me as a Surface Pilot.

At the same time, the "Honey Trap" espionage mission was in full swing. The target changed many times according to Axmann's orders. Each time I used my body to entangle the target and extract important information from them.

I was ordered to continue the "honey trap" mission even after I was deployed to the field unit. This meant that my body was overworked without a break, and the negative effects of this were manifested in the form of a lack of growth in my piloting skills. But Axmann did not seem to care, and only dangled the illusion of my family's existence in front of me.

I can no longer remember how many people I have had to keep company. My mind and body have been defiled each time, my friends have cursed me with insults, My family's whereabouts were unknown, and there was no tomorrow insight. All of this has become an unbearable weight inside me.

"I've worked very, very, hard so far....."

I said to my brother's smile, which remained in my memory — but was gradually fading away.

The promise I made to Axmann has yet to be broken. As long as I continued to work for Axmann, Oniichan's safety would be guaranteed.

"But after all, I can't take it, no more"

Even if I could see Oniichan again, my body was already soiled. Besides, I knew too much about the inner workings of the Stasi, and I bet Axmann would never let me go. Both as an agent and as a de facto mistress.

Perhaps Axmann offered those terms, anticipating from the start that I would eventually be trapped in such an impasse.

"At this rate, I'm just going to keep on being defiled! When will I find out where Oniichan and the others are!?"

I cried aloud in the morning mist. The contents of the paper bag I was holding, the uniform stained to the point of releasing a strange smell, fell at my feet — I grabbed it with my right hand in a fit of rage.

"I'm going through all this, my friends keep making fun of me, and in the end, I could die at the hands of the BETA!?"

If this continued, I would definitely be a liability to my squadron. If that happened, I would be the first one to be abandoned on the battlefield — I didn't want my life to end like this.

"So, please. Save me, Oniichan."

You swore to protect me — I heard Axmann's sneer. I heard the voice of the other me, too, saying that Oniichan had to suffer because of me.

I knew. It was all a result of my own choice.

But, if I am at least allowed to cry out like this....

"You promised you would protect me, didn't you!? Papa should have asked you to do that too, right!? Then!"

Therefore, I hate Oniichan who didn't help me — I tried desperately to avoid thinking like that. If I came to that conclusion, everything about me would collapse.

The answer was not coming back from anywhere. Like a prince astride a white horse in a picture book world, Oniichan should have appeared, but he never did. In the first place, I was not even sure if he was really alive, as Axmann promised...

"Enough, ... I hate it Please no more....."

I continued tearing and weeping for a while after that. The refreshing chirps of wild birds from the forest stuck in my ears like a curse.



My first opportunity to go into battle came shortly after, in late July, when a new BETA wave appeared in the former Polish territory and began its advance toward the province of Neubrandenburg.

We were not deployed in the two fortified positions where the main forces of the NVA were deployed — "Pasewalk" and "Prenzlau" fortified positions, but the city of Szczecin ⁽³¹⁾ in front of it. Szczecin was an industrial and gulf city in Poland, where numerous industrial facilities were still in operation.

オーデルナイツ流域絶対防衛線北翼の戦い 一九八一年七月

一九八一年七月下旬、BETAはオーデル・ナイツ流域絶対防衛線の北翼ノイブランデンブルク県のパーゼヴァルク要塞陣地及び、ブレンツラウ要塞陣地、その前衛の旧ポーランド領シュチェチン市街に襲いかかった。東ドイツ軍のポーランドからの撤退完了からほどなくこの時期、オーデル・ナイツ流域絶対防衛線に展開した地上部隊の再編は途上であり、東ドイツ・ポーランド国境沿いの都市からの資材の搬出も未だ終了していなかった。東ドイツ政府はこれを受け、要塞陣地の守りを固めつつ国境沿いの都市に地上部隊を送り込み、市街を死守するよう命じた。国家人民軍は戦力の分散に繋がるとして難色を示したが、政府はこれを断行、国家人民軍の代わりに編制開始から間もないシュタージ国家保安省の武装警察軍を送り込んだ。

以上のような経緯の末、この北翼の戦いでは要塞陣地とBETAの侵攻開始と同時に孤立したシュチェチン市街で同時に戦闘が行われるという異常な状況が出現した。戦いは東ドイツ側の勝利に終わったが、結果的にシュチェチン市街は壊滅、防御部隊も大損害を受け、市街の死守という目的は果たせなかった。



Battle of the North Wing of the Oder-Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line — July 1981

In late July 1981, the BETA took up positions in the northern wing of the Oder-Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line at the "Pasewalk Fortified Position" in the province of Neubrandenburg, as well as the "Prenzlau Fortified Position" and its vanguard city of Szczecin in the former Poland territory.

Not long after the East German withdrawal from Poland was completed, the reorganization of the ground forces deployed along the Oder-Neisse Basin absolute defense line was still in progress, and the removal of materials from the cities along the East Germany-Poland border had not yet been completed. In response, the East German government ordered ground troops to be sent to the cities along the border to defend the cities to the death while strengthening the defenses of the fortified bases. Although the National People's Army (NVA) expressed reluctance to do so, claiming that it would lead to the dispersion of forces, the government decided to go ahead with the plan and sent an armed police force of the Stasi, which hasn't been a long time since its formation, instead of the NVA.



The development of the urban battle in Szczecin was unfavorable from the start. The city was half-fortified, but the BETA invasion far exceeded expectations and cut into the center of the city with no way out. The planned naval support was also rendered impossible by the penetration of the laser class.

Our battalion, which had been designated as a reserve, was ordered to go out just after the spearhead of the BETA approached a kilometer away from the shipyard's clustered blocks. The shipyard was swarming with troop ships under construction and destroyer ships under repair.

『—Battalion TSFs, let's move out!』

The battalion commander ordered the TSFs that were lined up at the gathering point near the shipyard.

『—Our mission is to defend the shipyard to the death. We will hit the incoming BETA as far forward as possible. It's the first battle for many of you, but you have endured rigorous training up to this point, and you will get through this!』

『 『 『Roger ! 』 』 』

My comrades shouted as if they were trying to hold back their rising tension, but I only whispered, "Roger," in a low voice. On the inside, I wondered what I would gain by enduring that rigorous training.

It was my first battle as a surface pilot, and I had no energy for it. With eyes that were probably as stagnant as mud, I stared at the battalion commander as he was making a proclamation, and at my comrades who were listening to him.

My mind and body were exhausted. I had been busy training and preparing for a sortie for the past few days, and even then I had to complete the "Honey Trap" mission that Axmann had ordered me to do. The fat major general of the armed police force, slammed all his desires in me, regardless of my convenience, as if to say, "This may be the last time." That was how human beings were after all... I tried to convince myself of this.

(Everyone should just die.)

I muttered in a soundless voice as I feebly clutched the control stick.

Devastating feelings dominated me. Usually, my memories of Oniichan and I acted as a stopper, but today was the only day I couldn't think of them.

For me, East Germany, as a nation and its citizens, has become nothing more than an object of hatred. The system in which one-tenth of the population was an insider in the Stasi was insane, and the citizens who unknowingly accepted it were insane as well. That's why my family was thrust down into hell. People in this country should all be killed by BETA. It would be in the best interest of humanity as a whole.

(But I might die before that.....)

I was still a liability to the battalion. My comrades already expected nothing from me. On my control unit, someone had scribbled "Gossenschlampe (Prostitute)!" The maintenance team seemed to have had the same opinion.

(That might also be a good idea

The lure of death was sweet. If I died, I could get out of the hell I was in now. The promise I made to Axmann would be for nothing, but Oniichan would surely forgive me. In fact, if I died here, I might be able to meet Oniichan somewhere else...

The battalion was quickly engulfed in chaos. My 2nd Squadron was also forced to engage in melee with the BETA alone.

『—Do....Don't come any closer!』

Surface pilots were screaming against the backdrop of the rubble-turned-urban area, and a large number of Grappler classes and Tank classes were crushed by artillery fire. However, the BETA overcame the carcasses and continued to approach.

『—Take thaaaaaat!』

(At this rate, we'll soon run out of ammo

I remained in a cold state of thought, sensing that the battle was drifting in the wrong direction. The squadron managed to continue resisting, but the surface pilots were losing their cool.

As usual, I had no desire to fight, no fear of BETA. But somehow, I knew what was happening on the battlefield.

『—...! All TSFs! Destroyer class group from the front right... numbers over 30!』

The Squadron commander screamed. Come to think of it, this must have been his first battle, too....

『—All TSFs, begin assault! Keep them away from the shipyard!』

(Close combat with a destroyer class? No matter how many orders you give, that's not the way to fight

The squadron began its assault — destroying the spearhead of the Destroyer class group with a landing bombardment. However, some of them from the next wave slipped through — and in the blink of an eye, a flight's worth of TSFs was crushed.

『—Aaaaah!』

『——Gaaaah!』

『——Why, why won't they stop, Gaaaah!』

In the midst of the squadron commander's death throes, the remaining TSFs avoided the Destroyer class' rush and recklessly repeated firing into their rear. The surviving flight leaders were also overwhelmed, and no one was able to regain control.



Meanwhile, the Destroyer class group, while decreasing in numbers, was running into the shipyard one after another. The squadron's strength was no longer enough to stop the rush. The density of the group was also increasing — at this rate, escape would be impossible.

「.....! All TSFs, evacuate!」

I shouted, ignoring the chain of command. My thoughts were still cold — even though my comrades were dying in front of me, I didn't feel any emotions.

「We can no longer stop the Destroyer class from rushing forward — there is no point in fighting here!」

『——Shut up! A traitor doesn't have the right to give orders!』

One of the surviving surface pilots - the one who had grabbed me by the throat at the time - screamed back with murderous intent.

『——There was no order to withdraw! Besides, these guys will never forgive my comrades!』

A cold rage seeped into my thoughts. I wanted to find comfort in dying...I haven't lost that thought. But I definitely did not want to die for these idiots.

(Yes, That's why!)

I calmly assessed the situation while repeating the intense combat maneuvers. The squadron commander had been shot down and the remaining surface pilots were unable to make rational decisions. The data link was also disrupted due to the influence of the heavy metal cloud.

It was more than enough, Besides, I had a number of connections that I had made with this body. I was confident that I could rub out any political problems that would arise.

「——Waaaahhhh!」

I started short boosting backward, shooting into the destroyer class with an outright scream. On the log data, at least, it didn't look like I was skimping on this — the surface pilots ahead of me shouted in disbelief.

『——You're going to use us as a shield to escape? Even if such a thing is allowed....』

I silently continued firing and retreating. Two MiG-21s (Balalaika), sensing my intentions, also followed.

Meanwhile, the other remaining TSFs amidst the Destroyer class group were being destroyed one by one. Even if they tried to escape, they were in too deep and lost their chance to do so. If they tried to fly up, they would be sniped by the laser class — there was no escape now.

『—— You traitorrrrrrrrrrr!』

As the agonies of my companions' deaths echoed in my headset, I made a successful retreat without any emotional wavering.

After joining up with the main battalion, it was praise, not reprimand, that was directed at me.

The battalion commander did not have a problem with my arbitrary withdrawal, instead he appreciated my calm judgment in bringing back three MiG-21s (balalaikas) in a situation where the squadron was in disarray. Unlike the NVA, the Armed Police Forces had no political commissars and were flexible in their interpretation of orders, perhaps due to their meritocratic ⁽³²⁾ character.

Then I fought through the urban battle in Szczecin until the NVA TSF unit destroyed the laser class with a laserjag and the Luftwaffe began to blow up the BETA wave with carpet bombing — and I survived.



The city of Szczecin, now reduced to rubble, was littered with countless BETA carcasses, and the entire city smelled strange.

I was alone on the roof of an intact, abandoned factory that had become a temporary gathering place for the rest of the battalion, staring at the setting sun. The sky was already blue and dark, and only the western sky was tinged with a pale orange.

"I survived"

I spread my right palm, which was wrapped in a fortified suit, across my chest — my words did not bring forth any emotions. There was no joy in the fact that I could move my body unharmed. There was also no remorse for abandoning my friends, or feelings of wanting to mourn their deaths.

All I could feel inside was a strange lack of response in my hands and a sense of pride that such an outcome was deserved. A person like me, who had been through a living hell, could not possibly be ruled by fear in a battle against BETA. To me, human beings were much uglier and more horrifying than BETA.

Two new emotions intertwined within me.

One was the confidence that I may have acquired some important characteristics as a surface pilot before I realized. My first battle, a significant rite of passage for other surface pilots, was nothing more than a trivial event that did not impress me in any way.

The other was the fear that my inner self was changing. Certainly, I have changed since that day. I have seen and tasted every kind of filth in the world, and it was becoming commonplace.

I did not want to be a ruthless person like Axmann or a lowlife like that Armed Police Force Major General. I just wanted to be reunited with Oniichan and regain my happiness once again. I'm not like those people....

"Then why don't I feel anything at this sight?"

I stared at the vast ruined city of Szczecin — human beings and remnants of what used to be human beings were clinging to the rubble and ground surface, mixed in with numerous BETA corpses. If I had been a student, I would have shed tears at the horrors in front of me. But now, I feel no emotion. Even if I hated this country and its people, how could I have come this far?

"Oniichan, I'm scared of myself"

I put my hand on my chest to stifle my anxiety and remember Oniichan's face.

"I may not be the me you know any more, Oniichan."

The longer I continued to fight to save Oniichan, the greater the distance between us became. I may not be able to go anywhere anymore.

If there was any saving grace, it was that this battle has opened up a future for me as a surface pilot. The battalion commander told me that he was considering keeping my flight with him in the reorganization that was scheduled to take place after our return to the Rothemühl base. My comrades, who had been saved thanks to my resourcefulness, also turned to me in gratitude.

If I continue to hone my skills, I may become a necessary asset to the armed police force as a surface pilot — and escape Axmann's curse.

I gazed at the western sun disappearing into the horizon.

(So, please, be alive somewhere, Oniichan...)

『—All non-occupied, look to the sky to the east! The heroes of the NVA are here — we will have to be like them sooner or later.』

Suddenly, I heard the voice of the battalion commander. I turned around to the other side in surprise.

In the eastern sky, several blue flames could be seen. There were 12 of them — enough for a squadron of TSFs. At an altitude of more than 500 meters, they seemed to be enjoying the sky, which was no longer threatened by the laser class.

『—The 666th TSF Squadron "Schwarzesmarken". It is said to be the strongest TSF unit in East Germany. This time, thanks to them, we succeeded in the Laserjagd.』

(That's the 666th TSF Squadron)

I had heard about the name of the unit in the course of an intelligence mission. And the name of its commander...

"Captain Iridina Bernhard, ..."

I stared at the string of the flames beyond, muttering in a low whisper.

I had also heard from Axmann about Iridina's background.

She became a hero in the Stasi three years ago when she snitched on her brother, the main culprit in a coup attempt by dissidents. However, she was also rumored to be a dissident. and also one of Axmann's dogs...

(What dog? You were treated just like a hero, not disgraced like me.)

I could imagine why Axmann would not torture Iridina for her weakness as he did with me — to create dissonance among the dissident survivors by daring to hold her up as a hero, or perhaps he wanted to show off Iridina's abilities and eventually bring her into his own camp. In any case, Axmann did not seem to intend to give Iridina any more work than necessary.

(You sold out your brother without a care in the world, and yet, you're in your current position.!)

A flame of jealousy swirled in my chest. Why is it only me who is like this!?...Even though all I wanted was to be happy with my family. Even though I only wanted to protect my brother....

(Resistance to the state only strengthens the control of the Stasi as a reaction. Any sign of this will not be missed by the Stasi)

Perhaps it was foolish of my father and mother to try to challenge such a country. If that had never happened to us, we would be here today...that thought flickered in my mind, and I shook my head in denial...

『—Inghild, are you all right?』

Suddenly, a woman's voice mixed with noise entered my ears. It was a transmission from some unit, and the fortified suit was receiving it. I gulped and searched for the source of the transmission with my eyes... and I was appalled.

(The 666th TSF Squadron! The radio frequency band is close to the one our battalion uses!)

The Armed Police Forces and the National People's Army (NVA) did not share data links, and the radio frequency bands ⁽³³⁾ allocated to the TSF units overlapped. This was the downside of sectionalism ⁽³⁴⁾, but it was a common coincidence on the battlefield.

『—The damage to the right jumping unit appears to be superficial. If it seems to stop moving, switch to one-engine flight. Don't worry, we'll follow up — this is the second Laserjagd you've done since you were inducted into this squadron. Take it easy.』

『— Oh, thank you very much, Captain.』

(Captain!? Then, this is Irisdina Bernhard's voice)

It sounded like kindness caged in coldness — I contorted my eyebrows as if loading my hatred in them. I will never forgive the woman who sold out her family.

I couldn't bear to listen - I tried to cut the transmission - and I heard it.

『—You too, Theodore.』

『—Yes.』

My eyes widened at the sound of a name and a voice I swore I would never forget — as if a bolt of lightning had struck my spine, my breathing stopped, and I couldn't think about anything else.

『— You did a good job today protecting the injured Inghild, but use the dagger only after you have improved your skill a little more. If Walter had not followed up, it would have been dangerous — be careful from now on.』

『—Roger.』

I stared at the 12 MiG-21s (balalaikas) flying overhead, frozen in place.

**October 1991 German Democratic Republic
Halle, Altstadt base**

"So what do you think?"

I was putting my necktie in my private room in the living quarters of the base. My underwear and contraceptives were scattered on the bed.

"About what.....?"

I asked as I took a hot shower in the adjoining bathroom. The warm water pouring from overhead cascaded down to my twin hills that had plumped over the past year, even though I didn't wish for that.

There was no fear that the conversation would be eavesdropped. The room was cleaned beforehand by Axmann's men.

Axmann asked mockingly.

"Don't be coy. You know where your brother is and what he is doing."

"....."

"I have checked the logs left on the reinforced equipment you used in the battle at Szczecin. Coincidences are a scary thing. Well, I thought it was about time I told you about it, in recognition of your efforts, but anyhow, why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't think I needed to."

"The reason is ..."

"I will not see Oniichan."

"After all those years of hoping for a reunion? Wasn't your very purpose in life to be reunited with your brother?"

Axmann asked, raising one eyebrow. I replied as if shaking something off.

"I swore an oath of allegiance to the Stasi and to you, and I will not change it now."

"....."

"And I'm sure that promise still stands. As long as I am devoted to you, you would never do anything to Oniichan — Though I don't know why he was assigned to the 666th TSF Squadron."

"I see. Makes sense in a way."

Axmann nodded in admiration as he slipped his arm through the officer's uniform of the Stasi.

"If I may add on my honor, I had nothing to do with his assignment to the 666th TSF Squadron. Perhaps after he became a surface pilot, a dissident faction of the military transferred him to the 666th TSF squadron to support Iridina. He has a deep resentment against the Stasi — just like you."

What a brazen person, the very same person who took away my innocence and brought me into the Stasi... — I chose the next words carefully in my mind while holding back my anger.

With the way this conversation was going, maybe Axmann could answer some of my questions.

"..... Is Oniichan involved with dissidents?"

"So far, the chances of that happening are zero. He believes the rumors that Iridina is a dog of the Stasi and hates her. It seems that he has fallen into misanthropy, ⁽³⁵⁾ perhaps because of how much he endured during that incident."

I felt relief and heartache. Oniichan was also suffering from the trauma of the incident, but because of that, he was getting closer to that woman....

"As for the Stasi, it is a desirable sample of ex-offenders. The more distrust of others that takes root in the population, the easier it is for us to control them. If people don't trust each other, no one will be willing to work in solidarity to bring down the system."

Axmann said in admiration. I did not nod, but on the inside, I was in complete agreement. That was why East Germany has maintained this corrupt system.

"But there is a good chance he will get to the truth. Above all, Iridina should lead him to it. Well, he'll need some kind of trigger."

"I see."

"Are you worried? That your brother might become this woman's pawn, join her dissident group and fight against you? Oh, or would you rather join them yourself?"

I turned off the shower. After a few seconds of hesitating silence, I made it clear to Axmann.

"No. I believe in Oniichan. That he would not engage in such a dangerous act."

"....."

"Besides, as I mentioned earlier, I am a dog of you and the Stasi. I have no other choice and I will not ask for it myself. Just knowing that Oniichan is alive and well, and that he is on the same path as me as a surface pilot, is enough for me to be saved."

"If you answer too close to the ideal, you'll lose credibility. Especially since you're so smart."

"You're overthinking things."

"Well, that's okay. You'll be meeting face to face one of these days, and I will know by then. Also, continue your approach to the Major General of the Ministry of the Interior. He may have leaked the movements of our faction to the West. That is why I have brought you to this base."

"Understood."

"You are a competent intelligence officer. You can be confident. Your brother will be pleased too."

"I appreciate the compliment. However, I am"

"Don't worry. I will eventually set up a chance for you to see your brother again. So look forward to that, and be zealous in your missions."

Axmann finished dressing and left the room, waving to me in the bathroom. Silence returned to the private room as soon as the door closed.

I gazed emotionlessly at the drops dripping from the skin of my whole body and muttered a few words.

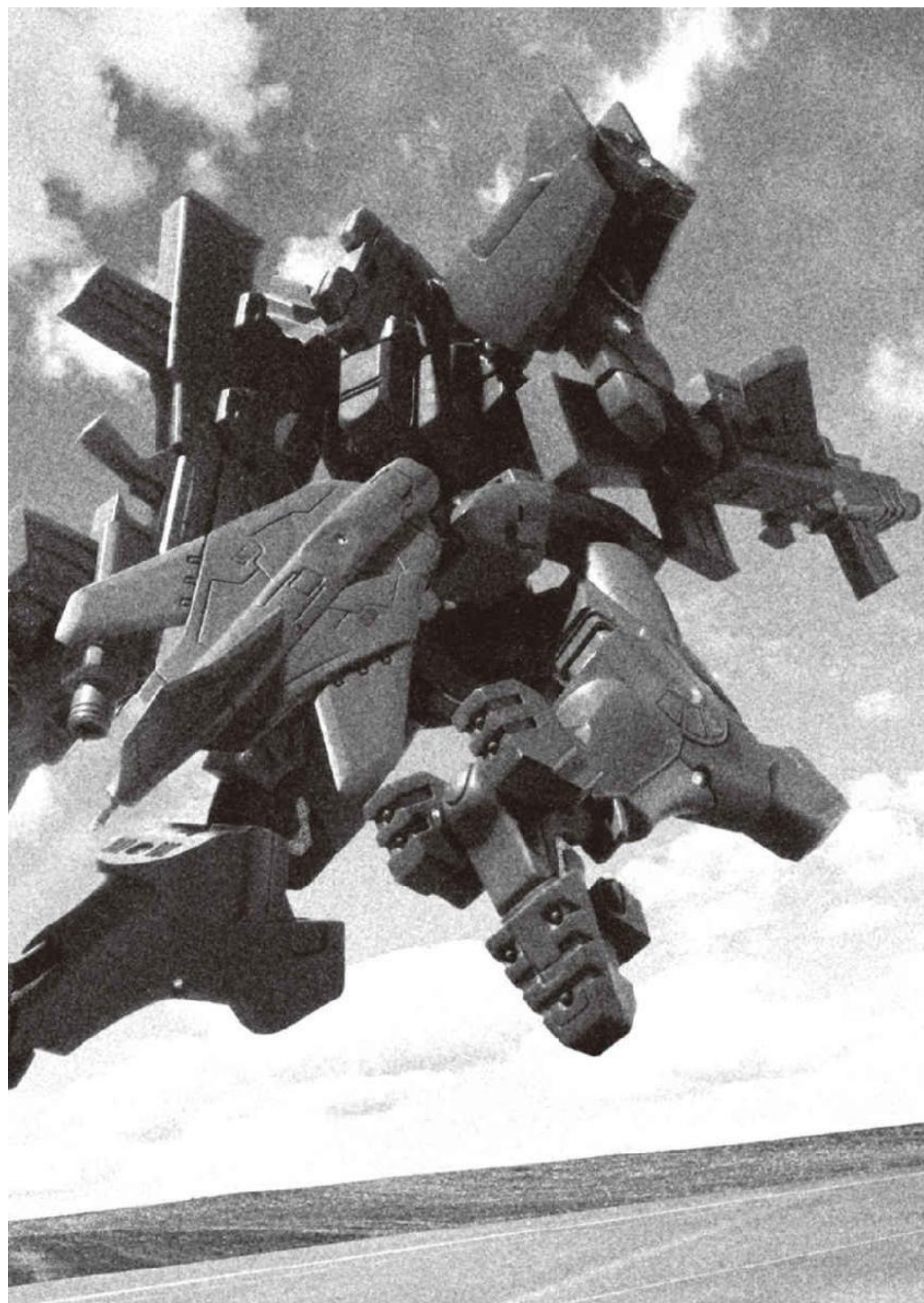
"As expected, I knew it was coming."

I bit my lip in a mixture of fear, anxiety, relief and joy.



Under a rare clear blue sky, two MiG-23s (Cheburashka) took off on the runway.

After returning from a training flight, I watched the back of my TSF as I handed it over to the maintenance team. The magnificent ascent while keeping the variable wings ⁽³⁶⁾ of the jump unit in place — an attitude control ⁽³⁷⁾ that was nothing short of magnificent. There was no doubt about it.



"Hey, that's the rumored 'Wehrwolf' ⁽³⁸⁾ battalion, right, flight leader?"

A female surface pilot under me asked in surprise. She was one rank below me, and belonged like me to the 1003rd TSF Squadron.

"The most powerful TSF unit of the Stasi equipped with MiG-23 (Cheburashka), said to have prevented the defection of the NVA's MiG-21 (Balalaika) in the incident in Eisenach six months ago."

"..... I know."

I gave a small nod. Of course, I would not reveal that I knew any more information about the "Wehrwolf" battalion.

The commanding officer was Major Beatrix Brehme, a highly-skilled surface pilot. She was the contemporary of that Irisdina, and The battalion was the de facto private army of the Moscow faction, which opposed Axmann's Berlin faction, and had close ties to the Soviet Union.

They were not people I wanted to have anything to do with. Even though almost no one knew of my relationship with Axmann, I was an enemy in the eyes of the Moscow faction. I was also disgusted by their position, as their main mission was to hunt defectors.

" ... Oh, is that so?"

My subordinates looked at the MiG-23 (Cheburashka) with awe-struck eyes.

It was not unreasonable. The 1003rd TSF Squadron was a TSF unit designated as a reserve force for the Armed Police Forces, and there were about three people, including myself, who had experience in battle against BETA, but none had experience in AH (anti-human) warfare. The skills required for AH (anti-human) warfare were completely different from those required for BETA warfare, and so the elite of the "Wehrwolf" battalion, equipped with the MiG-23 (Cheburashka), were giving us training.

Like the NVA, the Armed Police Forces were placing reserve TSF units at bases west of the Elbe River, where there was no danger of being caught in a BETA offensive such as the Altstadt base, and were training new surface pilots to facilitate replenishment when frontline forces were exhausted.

"How did this 'Wehrwolf' battalion end up in such a backward base?"

"They are probably on their way back from a border security mission"

"I see, that seems right"

She replied and hurriedly walked away from me. Even in this base, I was known as a traitor who tried to defect to the west. Since I had reached the point of having my own subordinates, I have not been subjected to the same insidious torment as before, and the frequency of "Honey Trap" missions has

decreased, so I was no longer having trouble with the growth of my abilities. However, as usual, few people wanted to have a private conversation with me.

With a sigh, I stared at the blue sky as the MiG-23 (Cheburashka) disappeared.

I suddenly felt nostalgic — when I was a student, I used to go to the neighborhood park with Oniichan on days off when the weather was nice like this. He would accompany me to practice my acting, we would take walks, and we would eat lunch together on the grass.

But I didn't shed a tear. Not because I forgot how to really cry.

I now had a glimmer of hope.

(Oniichan was alive. He became a surface pilot and was assigned to the 666th TSF Squadron)

The fact that Oniichan was alive meant that my efforts to date had not been in vain. For me, that alone was a great relief.

But I felt uneasy just as much.

(The 666th TSF Squadron has that woman)

Irisdina was supposed to eventually attempt to take in Oniichan. If I were to believe Axmann's words, Oniichan had fallen into misanthropy and hated Irisdina, but I didn't think it would last. He was a kind person. If he was given something to protect, he will be easily swayed. Especially if he thought he lost me in the incident — he will try to make up for it by protecting someone else.

Perhaps it will take the form of joining a dissident group. A person as skilled at winning people's hearts and minds as Irisdina would definitely do that.

The dissidents have so far not taken any significant action. However, it was also true that three years after the attempted coup d'etat, they were regaining power and might take advantage of the political unrest caused by the BETA invasion to take action again. If Oniichan continued to be taken in by Irisdina, the worst situation could emerge.

(If Oniichan was attracted to that woman)

It was not out of the realm of possibility. If Oniichan thought I was dead and Irisdina slipped through the cracks. No, not only Irisdina, but any woman other than me, I would never allow that to happen—.

Moreover, there was a good chance that Oniichan would be killed in action before then. The 666th TSF Squadron claimed to be the "Strongest in East Germany," but since it was always sent to the fiercest battlegrounds, its loss rate was not low. If this were to happen, all my efforts would have been in vain.

(I need to see Oniichan soon. As soon as possible.)

In my impatience, I felt a burning longing, ⁽³⁹⁾ but I was not allowed to reveal it. The conversation I had with Axmann in my private room yesterday came back to me.

(If I show weakness, Axmann will use me more than ever:)

Axmann must have calculated everything and created this situation. If I had said willingly that I wanted to see Oniichan now, Axmann would have asked me for more loyalty in exchange for his promise to do so.

Axmann may be planning to send me to the 666th TSF Squadron in the future to turn Oniichan into an informant (collaborator) by my own hand, and to disintegrate the squadron from within. From yesterday's conversation, I'd say that speculation was considerably true. That may be why Axmann did not prevent Oniichan's incorporation into the 666th TSF Squadron.

(But if I do, I will meet Oniichan under the cover of the Stasi — with the deception of my past history.)

It's not that I wasn't tempted. But if I did, even Oniichan will be bound by the chains of the Stasi. I've been through hell to protect Oniichan from the Stasi, and now I'm going to pull him into the Stasi — it's just too ugly and outrageous.

(I haven't fallen that far yet)

I clench my two fists, feeling as if my whole body was being strangled by chains.

(My mind and body were devoured in defilement, but at least, I wanted to protect him)

So what to do — I could not even find the answer to that question.

The influence of the Stasi was so powerful that even if I told them everything and tried to seek asylum with Oniichan, I did not think we would succeed. Switching to the dissident camp was also out of the question — this time we would both be killed by the Stasi.

The reason I did not tell Axmann that I had learned of my Oniichan's survival was not only to avoid showing weakness to him, but also because of this hesitation.

How can I save Oniichan and myself from this hell? At least, until I get the answer, I was going to keep doing what I'm doing... I could not really tolerate the dread and anxiety ... but...

(So until then, I will live as a surface pilot. I have that power now.)

At the moment, I was working my way across TSF units tasked with anti-BETA warfare. I haven't even completed training in AH (anti-human) warfare like the "Wehrwolf" battalion. There was probably a meaning in that for Axmann.

As a surface pilot, I could live like a human being by fighting BETA — that was my last stronghold.

(So wait for me, Oniichan. I will find a way. I will bring back our happiness.)

I took my gaze away from the blue sky, where the MiG-23 (Cheburashka) had disappeared, and turned my body toward the hangar. A briefing on the squadron's next mission was about to take place. I had to shower and change my clothes before then.

Axmann was scheduled to attend that briefing.



Half an hour later — I was in the briefing room with the other surface pilots in my squadron, doubting my own ears.

"We are to be released from our training for the war against BETA and put into an active security mission on the East-West German border.?"

"That's right."

In response to the dubious question from the commander of the 1003rd TSF Squadron, Axmann on the platform nodded with his usual smile.

"As the war against BETA intensifies, there is a growing need for more TSFs on the front lines. At the same time, fear of BETA is spreading among the general public, and the incidents of defections to West Germany are on the rise. In order to cope with these two contradictory situations, the Operations Directorate has ordered the reserve TSF units deployed west of the Elbe River to do so."

Most of the surface pilots had hardened expressions. I must have looked pale as well. In the Stasi, the term "Active security mission on the East-West German border" can only mean one thing...

"However, we will dispatch about one flight to test the effectiveness of the program first. Since this is a highly political operation based on information obtained by the intelligence division of the Stasi, we will choose our own personnel. The base of operations will be in Saalfeld, in the province of Gera, in southwestern East Germany."

It felt like a knife in the neck. That meant I was sure to be selected. No, Axmann might have had that intention from the beginning when he transferred me to this squadron.

But for what purpose?

"May I confirm something?"

The Squadron commander asked. He too was a man who had experience in anti-BETA warfare and at the same time retained his good sense as a surface pilot.

"What exactly do you mean by 'active security operations on the East-West German border'? Is it correct to assume that it is what I have heard rumors about?"

"Good question. Let me be very clear here to eliminate any misunderstandings."

Axmann nodded humorously and looked at me, and not at anyone else, his mouth pulling into a tight line.

"It's a hunt for defectors."

Axmann answered clearly and concisely.

"As surface pilots of the armed police forces of the prestigious Stasi, you will carry out the arrest of anti-socialist East German defectors in order to preserve the socialist regime — is there anything wrong with that?"

November 1981 German Democratic Republic Saalfeld Base, Gera

『—1003rd Saalfeld Dispatch TSF Flight, Moving out!』

In the darkness, four MiG-21s (Balalaika) took off, trailing blue flames.

The time was 4:12 am. The Saalfeld ⁽⁴⁰⁾ base was located in the Sheaffer Mountains, a vast mountainous region that forms the southern border between East and West Germany. Most of the mountainous area was covered with mountains and forested areas more than 600 meters above sea level, and at this time of the day, even the faint lights of the towns scattered in the mountains could not be seen. The only place to go would be near the border, which was heavily guarded, but once that was breached, the conditions were the same.

That was why asylum seekers used this southern border and this time to defect — just as we have done before.

「.....!」

I endured my boiling discomfort and, as the third TSF in the flight, I followed the second TSF through the darkness.

The orders given by the operations headquarters through Axmann were clear.

It was estimated that a group of more than 20 asylum seekers would begin their action between Sonneberg and Bad Lobenstein on the southern border earlier today. The defections involved asylum support organizations from both the East and the West, and it was believed that a safe asylum route had already been carved out by border guard insiders. The dispatched flight should work closely with the local 12th Border Guard Regiment to accomplish the mission. He also noted that a Western TSF unit has also been confirmed to be deployed on the other side of the border. We were free to open fire. However, we were asked to strictly refrain from any actions that could lead to an armed conflict with the West.

Given the scale of the project and the accuracy of the information, someone inside the asylum group must have tipped off the Stasi about part of the project. Perhaps an informant (collaborator) was mixed in with the asylum support organization itself.

".....Why me?"

After that briefing, I visited Axmann's office and pressed him for an answer.

"I have been repeatedly transferred to TSF units whose primary focus has been anti-BETA warfare. And yet"

"There is no deep meaning about it."

Axmann said rebukingly.

"The only thing I can say is that it has something to do with your next mission. This mission should be a good experience for you."

I froze as if I had swallowed a stick. In other words....

"You want me to find out what Major Beatrix Brehme and the 'Wehrwolf' Battalion are up to?"

"Yes. 'Wehrwolf' is the trump card of the Moscow faction. The Moscow faction will rely on the battalion's strength at various points. You will monitor it and report back to me."

I remained silent. Certainly, if I were to be assigned to the "Wehrwolf" battalion, this operation was beneficial. I couldn't afford to make any mistakes after my assignment to the "Wehrwolf" battalion, so it was better to gain some experience first.

But, there was concern in my heart.

"Once assigned to the "Wehrwolf " battalion, I will be more involved in defecation missions like this one. It's not something I'm too keen on. Besides..."

(I did not know when I'll ever see Oniichan.)

"Don't worry. The infamous 'Wehrwolf' battalion does not always kill civilians. Their emphasis on the AH (against humanity) warfare is also a bluff against the NVA, West Germany, and us."

"....."

"Moreover, you will probably be sent to the 666th TSF squadron by Beatrix, not me, after you are assigned to the 'Wehrwolf' battalion." I don't think she would misread your value. Even if she did, I don't think she would have grasped the extent of your relationship with me."

"In other words, you want me to be a double agent, monitoring both the 666th TSF squadron and the "Wehrwolf" Battalion."

"Even we do not have an abundance of talented people like you. Of course, when we do, we'll release you from your special assignment."

I removed my gaze away from Axmann.

Axmann's words certainly made sense, but there was no way that Axmann, who was all about far sight and deep design, was thinking just that...

"Don't think too much. From the very beginning, you had no choice."

Axmann traced my jawline with his index finger, then he went straight to unbuttoning the collar of my BDU.

"You shouldn't have to dirty your hands in this mission depending on how you go about it. Your mission, in the end, is to capture the defectors. I wish you all the best."

"..... Yes."

I nodded my head with one thought in mind as the Axmann played with my chest, which was overflowing from the BDU.



So, I had made up my mind.

(I will succeed in this mission without a single casualty to the asylum group!)

I may have sacrificed many things to save Oniichan, but at least I did not want to lay a hand on people who were not related to me...

Not long after the sortie, the dispatch flight separated into two detachments and, with reduced engine output, leaped slowly along the border through the mountains and forests.

No matter how high the search-and-rescue capability of TSFs was, this was the only way to search an area of dozens of kilometers with a single flight against humans. Normally, it would have been more efficient to set up a wide-area search-and-rescue network with a single TSF, but that was prohibited in order to prevent us from defecting. Border patrol soldiers on the ground were also not allowed to act alone for the same reason. It seemed to be a common practice for defectors to include border patrol soldiers, as the destinations were widespread in front of them.

I took a glance at the war situation window — The 12th Border Patrol Regiment was deployed near the demilitarized zone (DMZ) ⁽⁴¹⁾ on the border, conducting vigilant surveillance. Several drones were also deployed overhead. However, on the other side of the DMZ, a squadron of TSFs was on alert, whether the west knew about it or not. They were reacting to our sortie. Also, over there, a western asylum support organization would be standing by to receive asylum seekers.

(I really want them to get away but I can't afford to)

Memories of a year and eight months ago come back to me. An unfulfilled escape in a dark forest, just like the one below. Now I was about to do the same thing I did then, but in the opposite position. — My stomach juices rushed into my chest.

The MiG-21 (Balalaika) data was shared over a wide area and couldn't be missed after discovery. Moreover, failure to find them and allowing them to defect would surely lead to tighter control by the Stasi — resulting in more people being unhappy.

But I also painfully understood the feelings of the defectors. I have been one of them.

Perhaps some of them were also acting knowing what their actions would bring to their homeland. But still, they were trying to escape from this corrupt system in order to protect their families, their comrades, and what they believed in.

(So, at least, not a single casualty — to give them a chance to survive, like me and Oniichan. The asylum group is likely to include the children of the asylum seekers these ones haven't sinned.....)

The next moment, the infrared sensor responded. Feeling a chill down my spine, I silently turned my gaze to the area where the response had occurred — a corner of the mountain forest between the border patrol cordon and the demilitarized zone (DMZ).

There was no doubt. Multiple thermal reactions were running at full speed through the forest on rugged terrain.

The border guards were not moving. They have completely slipped through the line of alert in less than 5 minutes. They will reach the demilitarized zone (DMZ) — we, no, I, have to move.!

「— Altstadt 03 to 01. Target in sight! We will now commence interdiction ⁽⁴²⁾ action! See data link for location!」

『— 01 Copy that. Don't let the traitors get away!』

「04, follow me!」

『—Roger!』

The ugly karma of a traitor hunting down a traitor. With a contorted expression on my face, I made a nosedive with the TSF along with my subordinates. We transitioned into NOE flight until the tops of the trees rubbed the TSFs.

High-pitched jet sounds echoed through the mountains. There was no way the asylum group could have been unaware of our approach, but the swarm of heat-source reactions in our line of sight did not stop, and they continued their frantic run toward the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Once they reached the DMZ, the use of force by both East and West would be impossible, and the success of the asylum would be assured.

(.....! The proximity of TSFs will not stop them. The same goes for warning shots — but directly aiming at them would be.....!)

Meanwhile, the heat source reaction was rapidly approaching the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Our intrusion into the airspace over the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was not allowed, so in reality, we should have been turning around any moment now. Our trespassing could take us anywhere, and it would start a war with West Germany.

The asylum group was just moving forward through the mountain forest. It was as if an escape route had been set out for them. Perhaps someone had previewed the area beforehand.

(Then I will!)

「Altstadt 04, reverse direction and distance yourself from the demilitarized zone (DMZ)! Then slam 120 mm grenades (HE) into the flanks of the defection group!」

『——03, What.....!?』

I forcefully flipped the TSF 180 degrees — killing the momentum by turning the nozzle of the jumping unit forward, stopped with my back just above the demilitarized zone (DMZ) border, and fired a series of 120 mm grenades (HE) into the front of the asylum group.

An explosion reverberated in the mountain forest — many trees were knocked down, but this should have physically blocked their escape route. I guessed that the use of firepower to destroy the terrain near the demilitarized zone (DMZ) might later become a political issue, but with Axmann's backing, I would not be held responsible.

Sensing that my shooting had destroyed their route, the asylum group stopped.

Behind me, over the other side of the demilitarized zone (DMZ), Two similar TSFs - F-4s (Phantom) - were just observing us.



Post-processing began immediately.

A few minutes after my squad stopped the asylum group, the border guards arrived by helicopter, followed by people from the Stasi, including Axmann. I was ordered by Axmann to send my subordinates back to the base and remained there — to confirm the facts, I guessed.

The asylum group numbered 20 people, three of whom were children. They were siblings from the same family: an older brother about 15 years old, a sister a little younger than that, and a baby who was not yet able to hold his head steady. I looked away involuntarily at their mud-caked forms. I didn't need to be aware of their reasons.

Still, there was relief within me. I had accomplished my mission without a single casualty. At least I did not end their lives.

The entire asylum group, with the exception of the baby, was handcuffed and herded into a corner of the forest. Border patrol soldiers pointed the muzzles of their guns at them to prevent them from escaping.

"I see. So the information was correct."

Axmann looked at the exile group admiringly. A gentle smile played around his mouth.

"But even though there was a betrayer in the border patrol, ...to try to get so many people to defect at once and almost succeed in doing so. You guys are pretty good. You deserve our respect."

The addressed man who appeared to be the leader of the asylum group did not answer. However, he was looking at Axmann with anger in his eyes.

As Axmann said, there have not been many cases in the past where such a large number of people have attempted to defect. The more people in asylum, the greater the probability of failure. The more people, the more room for informants (collaborators), and the slower they could move when breaching the national border.

In other words, we have precisely destroyed their plans for asylum, which they had calculated to be successful, taking such assumptions into account. The asylum support organization would have no choice but to suspend its activities in the future.

"But this is our job, too. Don't take it personally. Besides, thanks to the guards here, none of you would be here without losing your lives. I think you can thank them."

Of course, he meant me. The eyes of the asylum group were on me — I could only look away.

"To brainwash such a young child into becoming a tool for the maintenance of the state system"

One of the asylum group members said, his voice trembling.

"Have you no shame! Why can't you see that the nation of East Germany is rotting away!?"

"I know that much."

In defense of me, Axmann replied as if he had heard a funny joke. My inner anxiety was evident — Axmann was too talkative right now.

"However, if we allow selfish and self-serving acts such as yours to go unchecked, the number of people who do the same will increase, and the nation of East Germany will cease to exist. Because isn't that so? Nobody wants to be killed by BETA, and nobody wants to be a shield for the West. You want to get out of such a country as soon as possible — I certainly know the feeling!"

Axmann nodded to them in sympathy.

"But is that really what you want? If East Germany is destroyed, all of Western Europe, which is still not properly equipped for war, will also be destroyed. If that happens, mankind will eventually perish. In other words, we are protecting the entire human race at our expense. You are not the enemy of East Germany, you are the enemy of mankind. Be aware of that."

That was Axmann's philosophy and one piece of the truth. It was also supported by the Stasi's intelligence operations to the West — but the defector continued to refute it.

"The very existence of such a prison-like state is a blight on humanity! If only you guys weren't here, we might be able to get some help from the West.!"

"The reality is grim. The West wants to turn East Germany into a battlefield. They don't want their homeland to be a battlefield either. Aren't they not giving any regard for our fatherland by doing so? They might not hesitate to use nuclear weapons, you know? What about those stuck in East Germany? Our system would give all citizens peace until that time eventually comes."

"But that doesn't mean this is acceptable!"

"Frankly, I'm tired of hearing your opinions. It's time for me to sleep in a soft bed...so.."

After a painstaking gesture of dismissal, Axmann took a breath and then turned to me.

"Lise, I want you to shoot all the adults."

"Me, ...?"

My thoughts froze. I didn't understand what this guy was saying

"Didn't you hear me?"

To my speechless self, Axmann held out his own pistol and continued as if to admonish me.

"You kill them. You captured them, then you should finish the job until the end.?"

"Wa ...wait a minute:!"

I couldn't help but raise my voice in protest.

"This mission is supposed to be about capturing a group of defectors! Their purge does not serve any!"

"Things have changed."

Axmann said unsympathetically.

"I have just received a report that we have some approximate information about their background. That means they are no longer of any use to us. Besides, we need to let the dissidents and asylum support organizations know how scary we are."

We will kill everyone here to make an example of them — that's what Axmann said. I repeated my words as if looking for a place to escape.

"But I am a surface pilot, and such work should be done by the Border Patrol!"

"You are my dog before you are my surface pilot."

".....!"

"In the "Wehrwolf" battalion, a more demanding mission awaits. I don't want you to be intimidated by this level. You don't want to mess up over there either, do you?"

I felt as if I was being trapped in an impasse. If I didn't gain the trust of the "Wehrwolf" battalion, I wouldn't be allowed to be assigned to the 666th TSF Squadron. If that happened, I would not be able to see Oniichan again.

But if I did that, I even though I wanted to keep being human at least...

"What if I said I did not want to do it.....?"

"I'm going to kill you, and then I'm going to kill your brother."

Axmann simply replied, and then he reholstered his pistol and pointed it at me. I couldn't even say a word back.

"If you resist my order here, you will eventually betray me, and at a fatal timing. I would rather kill you here than have you do that to me."

The muzzle of the gun was being held against me — I did not know how serious Axmann was about this, but if he was serious, he would not only kill me but also Oniichan.

"Rest assured. **Only adults should be disposed of.** The children are innocent."

The children are innocent. — I felt as if these words exonerated me. I had already abandoned my father, mother, and comrades back then. The children were in the same situation as I was then. If I could keep these three siblings alive by getting my hands dirty, I would

The asylum seekers were to lose their blood relations at Axman's words and mine.

"All adults in a row, please."

I barely managed to utter the words to the border patrol soldiers who were pointing their assault rifles at the asylum seekers on the spot as I endured the feeling of vomiting.

"On the knees, hands behind the hips..."

In that posture, they would naturally fall forward.

I then gave up all thought and mechanically shot and killed the 17 kneeling adults by firing bullet after bullet into the backs of their heads.

Each time the trigger was squeezed, something red and a soft gray object shattered around it, and the target lost power and fell forward. The children screamed as a reddish-black substance oozed from the back of the blown skulls.

"..... It is over."

After the last shot had been fired, I turned to Axmann with an inescapable sense of guilt. The smell of nitrous smoke and ammonia stung my nerves. My hair, including my ribbons, was soaked with blood, and the droplets of blood had drawn multiple red lines on my jet-black fortified suit — I did not look at the corpses lined up on the ground.

"Good."

Axmann gave a satisfied answer — I nodded as if saved. This was the end of this terrible mission for me. I would go back to the base, vomit in the bathroom, take a shower, and cry on my bed until I ran out of tears — as I always did.

"Then let's put the finishing touches on it. Kill the children."

I opened my eyes wide. Unable to understand the words that came into my emotionally deadened ears, I was lost for words.

"What, ...did you say?"

"The children are innocent, but now that they have witnessed the murder of their parents, they could be a threat in the future. Besides, it is convenient for us to show our ruthlessness to the opposing forces. So, they will die here."

"But, I have exhausted ⁽⁴³⁾ all of the bullets out of the handgun."

"They are children. We can do something about it. You can use the stones lying around your feet."

I stared at the man in front of me with an ashen face, aghast. As usual, he was delightfully addressing me.

A certainty arose in my heart, a paroxysmal desire to kill.

This man enjoyed watching me suffer.

This order, when you get right down to it, might be only for the sole purpose of inflicting a psychological blow on me.

"For what purpose, ..."

I asked, unable to bear with it anymore. A dirty body and a corrupted mind. Why was I doing this

I shed tears unknowingly. The pistol that had exhausted all its bullets spilled from my hand.

"You still harbor naive thoughts — dreaming of breaking free from the spell of the Stasi with your brother. Isn't that right? That is why you pretended to be uninterested in your brother, and were trying to be human."

My pupils narrowed. — Axmann had read my thoughts perfectly. He knew what my last wish was.

"Such naive thinking must be abandoned. You are no longer a human being. You must be my faithful dog until the end."

"Why, just me"

"That's because you can be used, naturally. Besides, The difference between you and Irisdina in political value is too great. It is you, not Irisdina, that I want to have on hand."

".....!"

"You want to see your brother, don't you? You want to be happy, don't you? I can give you that. But only after this East Germany and the Stasi are in my desired shape. And for that, I need the 666th TSF Squadron to be held down, and I also need the cooperation of both you and your brother. Therefore, you must remain loyal to me."

I continued to cry and let out shallow breaths. If I fulfill Axmann's wishes, I might be able to see Oniichan, but in order to do that...

"But I'm protecting Oniichan because I don't want him to end up like me."

"Stop pretending to be something you're not, Lise."

"Pretending..."

"You can live your life for no one but yourself. You have been down such a tough road only for that reason."

My eyes opened again. Axmann's words were absorbed into my heart like sunlight shining through the clouds.

Not for Oniichan, but for my own happiness. For my modest happiness, which has fallen to a place from which there was no longer any turning back.

Who in the world could criticize me if I go off the path for that?

I have done just that. Even Oniichan, even my father and mother, do not have that right. I would never allow that!

Besides, if Oniichan continued to be like this, he would be taken in by the dissidents and finally killed by the Stasi. I wanted to break that fate. I was the only one who could save Oniichan, and that led to my happiness — what was wrong with that?

"I want to meet Oniichan."

Feeling strangely comfortable, I started walking toward the three children while swaying my feet. On the way, I held a reasonably sized stone in my right hand. I would kill them as cruelly as possible. If that was what Axmann wanted. If it led to my happiness.

In front of me, the oldest of the siblings hurled shouts of abuse at me. Murderer, fiend, human scum — and yet he was leaning in front of his siblings to protect them. I have seen it somewhere, a relationship like that. But in my eyes, the three of them only looked like mere puppets full of flesh and blood. — I strongly chanted in my mind.

"I want to be reunited with Oniichan and be happy once again and go back to those good old days"

My vision was blurred. My old memories were revived. The happy seven years I spent with Oniichan. Eberswalder Straße at the setting sun. Yes, **there was no reason why I should not have fallen in love with Oniichan.** Then there was no reason why I shouldn't love Oniichan and be happy with him.

I had a small smile on my face without knowing it. When this job was done, I would obtain a ticket to see Oniichan.

I could do even such a terrible thing. I was sure I could do well in the "Wehrwolf" battalion. I was sure that Oniichan would come with me to the Stasi if I explained the situation properly.

No, even if that woman takes him in, I will definitely rescue him. If I had a heart-to-heart talk with Oniichan, I would undoubtedly be able to do it...!

"That's why, I!"

The first to be disposed of was the younger sister. Then, without pause, I killed her older brother. The less time they were separated, the better, and that was it. — I don't remember much about the baby.

January 1982 German Democratic Republic Spreewald, Frankfurt

One MiG-21 (Balalaika) flew very low over the border area at midnight, trailing blue flames.

『—Damn it, I can't shake it off! If we don't do something about it, First Lieutenant!』

『—Don't give up, Jennifer! We have 30 seconds to reach the DMZ on the west side! Until then...』

.
A moment later, perhaps sensing a killing intent from behind, the two MiG-21s (Balalaika) spread out to the left and right — avoiding the explosions of the 120 mm grenades (HE). From the start, The evasion action was based on the certainty that the enemy fire was not from an Armor-piercing fin-stabilized discarding sabot (APFSDS), but a howitzer (HE) — They had a firm grasp on that tactic. [\(44\)](#)

The two TSFs were also pursued by enemy TSFs, but avoided fatal injuries due to their dangerously low altitude, skillful evasive maneuvers, and protection provided by the Schürzen held on their left main arm. All of the reactive armor plates had been discarded from the Schürzen, so there was no risk of detonation.

Moreover, the two TSFs purged the back gun mount and most of the propellant to reduce weight, and the MiG-21s (Balalaika) were faster than their catalog specifications.

The commander shouted in anticipation as he continued his skillful flight and evasive maneuvers.

『—I don't give a damn what kind of bullets these devils fire! The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is almost there..... less than 10 seconds left! Jennifer, let's go!』

『—Roger that, Lieutena.....』

Suddenly, a huge, dark-gray object pierced the fuselage of the TSF, which had evaded to the right, with great force. — It exploded and its parts scattered everywhere.

『—A halberd!? Don't tell me, they threw it !?』

A new enemy TSF was approaching rapidly from below, similarly purging its back gun mount.



『—..! Forgive me, Jennifer! I will take revenge for you after I reach the west, I promise...』

As he shouted the name of his falling comrade - his lover - in the black smoke, the remaining one changed course and maneuvered to bypass the one in front of him while avoiding the fire of the two behind him.

『— Like this! If I keep going like this...!』

The MiG-21 (Balalaika) kept pushing forward into the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Five, four, three, two...

As if to smash that faint hope, a single MiG-23 (Cheburashka) swooped down from directly above, with its Schürzen raised.

『— An ambush..... from above!』

A moment later, that MiG-21 (Balalaika) was pierced through the chest armor by the Schürzen blades of the MiG-23 (Cheburashka) and fell to the ground without causing an explosion.



"The above is a record of a recent engagement between our battalion's 3rd Squadron, 3rd Flight, and two MiG-21s (Balalaika) operated by the defectors during an active security mission over the Harz Mountains."

In the briefing room of the TSF base in Spreewald, a vast forested area south of Berlin, in the Halbe Forest, the chief of staff of the TSF battalion "Wehrwolf" announced.

In front of him on the platform, the surface pilots of the "Wehrwolf" battalion, including myself, were assembled. And right beside him, the battalion commander, Major Beatrix Brehme, was watching the briefing with her arms crossed, and a smile that had a hint of composure.

"What should be noted here are the movements of the defector' MiG-21s (Balalaika): evasive action based on reading the 120 mm bullet type, weight reduction by purging the back gun mount, propellant, and the reactive armor plates of the Schürzen to prevent induced detonation — all of these tactics were designed to fend off our pursuit and reach the west side in the shortest possible time. It is anyone's guess, but considering that all the surface pilots who have attempted to defect have used the same method, it is likely that the support of an asylum support organization is behind this. This is even more so when many of them are TSF units of the NVA, whose main focus is the fight against BETA."

The chief of staff turned his chin to the image on the projector — an aerial maneuver of a Stasi-colored MiG-23 (Cheburashka).

"Perhaps in the future, the tactics of the surface pilots planning to defect will become more and more skillful. Thereafter, do not underestimate the enemy and go on your missions, remembering that the performance difference between the MiG-21 (Balalaika) and the MiG-23 (Cheburashka) is great, but it does not guarantee absolute safety!"

「 「 「Roger!」 」 」

The surface pilots of the "Wehrwolf" battalion raised their voices in unison. My voice accompanied them was that of a surface pilot overflowing with enthusiasm, but on the inside, I was forever empty.

"..... In addition, the success of this security mission was largely due to Second Lieutenant Lise Hohenstein, commanding officer of the 3rd Flight, 3rd Squadron."

The chief of staff officer looked at me — at my light blue eyes that were probably as cloudy as sludge. But I had the same look since I have been assigned to the battalion, so I should have not raised any suspicion.

"Second Lieutenant Hohenstein, you skillfully led your flight and shot down two defected TSFs. The last blow, which was aimed only at the surface pilot in the control unit to prevent the TSF from exploding, was also brilliant. You never knew what political problems might arise if debris was scattered in the demilitarized zone (DMZ). For your achievement, the headquarters of the TSF has decided to award you with the First Class Hero Medal."

"Thank you!"

I went up on the platform as I replied, and the Chief of Staff awarded me a medal. A defector criminal turned Stasi, a traitor, a murderer, a spy for the Berliner faction, was a hero — Even jokes had a limit.

"Second Lieutenant Mürenkamp, you too. That blow with the halberd was a turning point in the battle. Continue to do your utmost best."

"Ha! Thank you, Comrade Captain!"

Farka Mürenkamp — a halberd-wielding surface pilot who was a part of my element, raises his salute.

The chief of staff of the War Department said to sum up.

"That concludes today's briefing. I have one last word from the battalion commander — Major?"

"It's exactly just as you said, chief of staff. The enemy is up in arms and we must stop them."

Beatrix shook her wavy black hair and put her hands on her hips on the platform.

"The war situation on the front lines is also tightening. At present, our battalion's main mission is to maintain security, but we don't know when we will receive orders to go to the front. Stay alert!"

「 「 「Roger!」 」 」

The surface pilots looked at Beatrix with genuine respect. I made an effort to give her the same look, but on the inside, I was spitting out words of contempt. — They were the kind of people who were thinking of fleeing to Siberia.



As soon as the briefing ended, I was praised by the battalion surface pilots.

In the two months since I had been assigned to the "Wehrwolf" battalion by Axmann, I had succeeded in gaining a reasonable amount of trust as a surface pilot of the battalion and as one of its flight leaders. The "Wehrwolf" battalion was more meritocratic than the other TSF units of the Armed Police Forces, and there was none of the insidious torment of the units to which I had been assigned. Although I did not have all the details, it seemed that some of the battalion members, like myself, were ex-criminals turned Stasi, so talking about their past was half-taboo.

Apart from the role assigned to me by Axmann and my impression of the Moscow group, the "Wehrwolf" battalion was the most comfortable unit for me.

At least here I wouldn't be cursed as a traitor. And, perhaps in consideration of the importance of the mission, Axmann has also ordered that the "honey traps" be suspended. Thanks to this, I was free from chronic fatigue, lack of time to practice, and forced physical relations, and I was able to work hard on my missions, both in public and in private.

I did not care about the means as long as I got to be happy with Oniichan, and I was willing to sacrifice everything for that. I was no longer a decent human being.

And that was no exception, even for the people in this battalion.

"Congratulations, Senpai."

After the warm reception of our friends was complete, Farka, who was also receiving praise, replied with a courteous bow of her head.

"I couldn't have stopped the other one by myself. It was thanks to you, Senpai."

"I didn't do anything. As I said right after we returned, I did what I could."

I waved my hand and laughed.

"That aside, Farka, were you okay with being surrounded by all those people earlier? Standing in front of people is not your forte"

"Yes. I was nervous, but I managed to"

Farka shrugged her petite shoulders and smiled bitterly. A cute gesture that even I found endearing — how could such a child be in the "Wehrwolf" battalion and how could she slay TSFs with a halberd without a care in the world?

(No, that was the same for me.)

Since I have been assigned to the battalion, I have participated in numerous security missions and have gotten my hands dirty. And each time, I have achieved success and built up the trust that I have today.

I felt no guilt about that. For me now, I did not find the lives of others as valuable as the lives of the BETA. Rather, I felt better about the BETA. At least the BETA were clear about being my enemy. I could even respect them for that.

Besides, the AH (Anti-Human/Against Humanity) battle was also surprisingly interesting.

The talent and skills required in AH warfare were completely different from those required in BETA warfare. There was a game to be played. Therefore, when the mission was accomplished, it was an exhilarating experience unparalleled in the war against BETA.

Probably because outsmarting others satisfied the black jealousy in me. Someone happier than me should not be allowed to try to escape to the west as I did and succeed in doing so and be happier. Everyone should be kept in the prison of East Germany as planned by the Stasi and be invaded by the BETA — and be massacred by them all.

(I will win the trust of the "Wehrwolf" battalion and head to the 666th TSF Squadron — and bring Oniichan into the Stasi. And with that, I will make the 666th TSF Squadron and Irisdina belong to the Berlin Faction))

While I was happily conversing with Farka, another part of me reaffirmed my resolve.

(It was the only way for Oniichan and I to survive and be happy.)



On my way from the briefing room to the living quarters with Farka and the others, I was stopped by an unexpected person.

"Second Lieutenant Hohenstein, a moment?"

"Battalion Commander?"

Beatrix was waiting for me in the hallway. This was the first time in the past two months that Beatrix had spoken to me personally in this way.

I had a surprised expression. — I was half serious and half acting. Within the "Wehrwolf" battalion, my reputation was certainly growing. If Beatrix saw value in me and took action, it was about time.

Beatrix approached me, her dark hair and voluptuous breasts swaying, and placed her right hand on my shoulder.

"You did well in the battle the other day. I would like to thank you as well."

"Thank you, Major."

"I understand that you participated in several anti-BETA battles in the TSF unit of the Armed Police Force to which you previously belonged. After you were assigned to the battalion, did you have any confusion about AH (Anti Humanity) warfare despite going through the training?"

I was silent for a moment, weaving my thoughts. I had to guess what Beatrix's purpose was in asking such a question. I had to win the trust of my battalion as quickly as possible for my mission, so I had been a no-brainer for AH (against humanity) from the beginning — maybe she suspected the cause.

According to Axmann, Beatrix was also a first-rate spy master. She must have been well aware of the possibility that the "Wehrwolf" battalion might be infiltrated by spies from the NVA, the Berlin faction, or, worse, from her supposed comrades in arms, the Soviet Union.

".....I'd be lying if I said I weren't."

I replied in a somewhat dispirited manner, trying to sound honest.

"But as the battalion commander probably knows, I am a traitor and I deserve to be called one."

After being arrested by the Stasi two years ago, I was released on condition of a confession and incorporation into the Stasi — that's what it said on my personal record. It was not unusual for criminals to be transferred to the Stasi. However, from that point on, my career has been fixed so that my relationship with Axmann was absolutely illegible. Axmann's cover was, so far, perfect.

"Therefore, I hope to create a place for myself by responding to the trust my country has placed in me."

"Don't you have a wish you'd like to fulfill?"

In the back of my mind, a smile arose. I knew Beatrix would definitely notice it.

As the BETA offensive intensified, the name of the 666th TSF Squadron, which was active on the front lines, became more frequent, and we were hearing more and more about it, and the names of their surface pilots. It was no surprise to think that I was fighting in the Stasi knowing that my brother was alive.

And everyone in the battalion's surface pilots knew that the 666th TSF Squadron was the biggest rival to the "Wehrwolf" battalion.

"There is none"

"....."

".....I am only loyal to my fatherland and my battalion."

"I see."

Beatrix nodded in satisfaction and said nothing more. Then she turned around and walked away.



The training ground was covered with snow. In this season, a day without a blizzard was rare, and today, as usual, the visibility was extremely poor.

The battalion was conducting AH (anti-humanity) warfare exercises, simulating urban warfare in winter. Two squadrons were currently engaged in a battle, the 1st and 2nd squadrons, and my 3rd squadron had parked its TSFs on the apron of the exercise area and was watching the battle from inside the control unit.

Battalion headquarters personnel, including Beatrix, did not participate in this, but they were supposed to be somewhere on the training ground, watching the battle.

(Beatrix's words yesterday were definitely a prelude to getting me to sneak into the 666th TSF Squadron)

I was thinking about it as I watched a total of 24 MiG-23s (Cheburashka) engage in intense maneuvers in the ruined city center.

(In other words, I was one step closer to becoming a double agent for the "Wehrwolf" Battalion and the 666th TSF Squadron.....)

I couldn't help but smile. If things continued as they were, I would be assigned to the 666th TSF Squadron in the not-too-distant future, although it wouldn't be right away, and that too, with the full backing of the Moscow Faction. Perhaps my career would be completely covered up.

Until then, I was worried about two things: whether Oniichan would survive and whether he would be taken in by Iridina, but judging from the squadron's performance, it seemed that the former was at least

unfounded. Oniichan had survived while taking part in many Laserjagds, and the loss of the squadron's surface pilots was far quicker for the newcomers than the experienced ones.

Axmann's Berlin faction was also carefully monitoring them, while holding back the Moscow faction that opposed the NVA in any way, in order to eventually incorporate the 666th TSF Squadron into the Berlin faction. It was unlikely that the squadron would fall into political difficulties — for now.

A window unfolded on my retinas, signaling the end of the competition. I let out a deep breath and tightened my grip on the stick.

Next, my 3rd squadron and the 1st squadron would have a mock battle.



The mock battle proceeded with the 3rd squadron having the upper hand. The 1st squadron had lost two flight leaders early on, and its leadership was greatly disorganized.

『—We are going to go all in at once! All hands, forward!』

『 『「Roger!」 』 』

The voices of the surface pilots were composed. Everyone was serious about the exercise. For the Stasi, defectors - human beings - were the main enemy along with BETA. Even in training exercises, it was absolutely unforgivable to cut corners. — if you did poorly, you would lose your own life. For us, the AH (Anti Humanity) war was not a game.

(This exercise was probably based on the case of a defector TSF unit, or perhaps a rebel force, entering an urban area.)

I was leading my flight in pursuit of the 1st squadron, feeling the abnormality of East Germany, which had to conduct exercises under such assumptions, and the unshakable reality that the national system could not be protected unless such an exercise was carried out.

There were six TSFs remaining in the 1st squadron. No TSF has been damaged yet. One more push and victory was assured...!

「Farka, follow me!」

『—Copy that!』

My MiG-23 (Cheburashka) chased after enemy TSFs while avoiding one ruin after another, and Farka's MiG-23 (Cheburashka) followed closely behind its maneuvers. The right main arm held a halberd and the left main arm held the Schürzen.

In the case of AH (Anti Humanity) warfare with current generation TSFs, gunfire was often prevented by Schürzens, and a direct hit did not always result in a fatal wound. However, the halberd was useful because it could smash even that and cause damage to the TSF. The surface pilots of the NVA were accustomed to fighting BETA mainly with artillery fire, and therefore, they had no idea that they could be attacked by TSFs with halberds. When they confronted Farka, they often failed to respond properly.

Suddenly, A new window was projected on the retina.

(A new TSF broke into An enemy! There was nothing like that on the exercise schedule, what the...)

The reason for this soon came to my mind. In order to put more pressure on the 3rd squadron, which was just beginning to seize victory, the battalion command' MiG-23s (Cheburashka) entered the battle on the 1st squadron's side. The number of MiG-23s was four.

Creating unexpected situations as in a real battle to determine the true value of the surface pilots and to improve their skills — Beatrix's typical behavior. From now on, the squadron would have to fight against Beatrix, who boasts the strongest skills in the battalion, and her followers.

『—Flight leader, up here!』

「.....!」

I dodged on the spur of the moment. — a moment later, two MiG-23s (Cheburashka) swooped down and landed on the ground, swinging their Schürzen blades. The call sign displayed in the battle situation window was Wehrwolf 01, which meant...

「—Battalion Commander!? Tsk!」

The two TSFs immediately activated their back gun mounts and began firing two guns simultaneously — and we were forced to retreat beyond the ruins. Unlike the battle against the BETA, in the AH (against humans) battle, the shelling was carried out while performing intense maneuvers, so the hit rate was low and the chance of shelling itself was small, so ammunition consumption was also reduced. Therefore, simultaneous firing of two or more guns was recommended.

The next thing I knew, Farka and I were split up and I was forced into a 1-on-1 battle with Beatrix's MiG-23 (Cheburashka). The precision of Beatrix's maneuvering and bombardment was so overwhelming that I could do nothing but continue to evade.

(.....! At this rate, the propellant will be!)

The remaining propellant was running out due to the continuous maneuvering, which was even more intense than the battle against BETA. Other allies were also being pushed by the 1st Squadron, which had regained its momentum, and no relief could be expected.

(But even so, why target me — why hold me down and crush Farka, who has a halberd, first?)

『—What's the matter, Hohenstein? At this rate, meeting your brother will continue to be a wish, won't it?』

Beatrix was talking to me in her normal tone of voice. Radio communication, too, has somehow become limited to me and Beatrix.

『—If that happens, you will not be able to fulfill Axmann's orders and you will lose your future... won't you?』

A chill ran down my spine in an instant — Beatrix knew about my relationship with Axmann and my purpose!

『—If you lose... as soon as this exercise is over, I will have you shot in front of everyone as a spy.』

I looked at Beatrix with rapt attention, and was lost for words — there was a smile of bloodlust on her mouth. I did not know when Beatrix realized who I was, but there was no doubt that the woman in front of me was serious.

(If I lose here, she will kill me.....?)

While avoiding the pursuit of Beatrix's MiG-23 (Cheburashka), I tried to hold back the shock I had received, and work out my thoughts.

(After I have come so far.? Even though I have worked so hard.....?)

A wave of despair washed over me. I was vulnerable not only to Axmann, but to Beatrix as well. Even if I won this mock battle, would I be able to achieve my goal? In the first place, there was no chance that I could beat Beatrix.

『—Come on, fight me, Lise Hohenstein! Is that the extent of your feelings for your brother!?!』

Repeatedly firing two guns simultaneously, Beatrix's MiG-23 (Cheburashka) drove me back to the border of the exercise area. I counterattacked while continuing to evade, but her reaction speed was so overwhelming that I was unable to inflict even a scratch on her.

『— Or maybe, you would give up everything here and die? Maybe that would make your brother happier.!』

(Would my brother be happier if I died here?)

It certainly could have been. In order to fulfill Axmann's wishes, Oniichan also needed to be incorporated into the Stasi. Would that really make Oniichan happy?

「.....! But still, I...!」

I gritted my teeth as I landed the MiG-23 (Cheburashka) as if I were slamming it into the surface of the earth. The actuators in each part of the TSF warned of overload, and a powerful G and shock hit my whole body, but I ignored them and forcefully inverted the TSF. Then, at the same time as it came to a stop, it ignited the rocket engines of my jump unit at maximum output and plunged into Beatrix's MiG-23 (Cheburashka) while holding my Schürzen.

「I want to be together with Oniichan...!」

Beatrix's TSF approached in the blink of an eye. The damage alert fills my field of vision as I received a barrage of the two simultaneous shootings.

I did not think Beatrix could be defeated with this attack, but if I could at least get in one stroke with the halberd before it's all over....

「I want to live and seize my happiness...!」

The figure of Beatrix's MiG-23 (Cheburashka) filled my retina. I swung my Schürzen and tried to cut through her jump unit as we passed each other.

Beatrix then abandoned both main arm assault cannons, instead, she held the Close Combat Dagger that was stored in the knife sheath, and attempted to charge against me from the opposite direction.

It was my loss - I felt a realistic prospect of death - but if I killed Beatrix by having a head-on collision with the fuselage here, it would be to Axmann's benefit. I made up my mind in an instant, pushed down the control stick as it was with a yell, and then.....

『——Flight leader, evadeeeee!』

A split second later, I saw a Farka's MiG-23 (Cheburashka), having shaken off the pursuit of enemy TSFs, descending with its halberd raised above its head.

Five minutes later, the exercise's supervisor ruled the 1st and 3rd squadron a draw and notified them that the mock battle was over.



"I was kidding."

That evening, in the battalion commander's office at the base, Beatrix told me with a mischievous smirk etched on her mouth.

"I wanted to know how prepared you were — oh, and don't worry about the information leak. I deleted the conversation we had during the last battle with commander authority. I am the only one who knows who your real master is."

I had no answer. I was relieved that I had survived, but the surprise at Beatrix's nonchalant attitude had robbed me of any room for thought.

(Indeed, we neither won nor lost)

At that time, Beatrix and I were not able to win or lose in a 1-on-1 thanks to Farkas's intrusion. The battle continued with Farka's addition and the exercise ended shortly after.

Perhaps Farka had noticed that Beatrix and I were having some sort of conversation — an unnatural situation, since we were in the middle of a battle and the radio was still blocked. But Farka has not said anything to me. Maybe she thought it was not something she should know.

"You look like you want to ask me why I did this, don't you?"

"..... yes."

I had several questions. Why did Beatrix let me, a spy for the Berlin faction, live?

And why did she try to fight me? If Farka had not intervened at that moment, I would have crashed my TSF into Beatrix and we would have both been martyred — Beatrix would have been able to predict such an action if she had known my position.

"I like you."

I froze in place with my mouth hanging open. Beatrix's giggle grew even louder.

"I've done my research on your true background. I thought you were too good to kill, and above all, I wanted to know the source of your will to survive."

I gulped. Surely, I am trying to get my own happiness, ignoring Oniichan's convenience — a thought that was hard for ordinary people to understand. But that was why Beatrix was interested in me

"But, the Major is hostile to the Berliner faction"

"I do not perceive the Berlin faction as a threat."

".....!"

"The intelligence capabilities of the Moscow faction exceed those of the Berlin faction — we have a huge sponsor in the Soviet Union, and the center of the party and the Stasi are also under strong Soviet influence. That is why Axmann played you as a card in order to overturn his inferiority complex. That is my interpretation of the situation."

I couldn't deny it. I could infer that from the fact that she knew all the truth about me.

"Well, being the man he is, he may have sent you here in anticipation of this happening sooner or later."

"..... and?"

Barely able to bear it, I asked ... turning pale.

"What are you going to do with me now?"

"Nothing in particular."

Beatrix replied as if it was nothing.

"I'll use you as a battalion surface pilot, as I have in the past. Your talent is real. I will also assign you to the 666th TSF Squadron, as Axmann and you have requested. That squadron is a major concern for the Moscow faction."

"....."

"If you want to leak information about the battalion to that guy, go ahead. That won't destroy the battalion or me. But be aware that the more you get involved with the Berlin faction, the narrower the path of retreat for you and your brother."

If the Moscow faction eventually took control of the Stasi, my Berlin faction would be purged, along with Oniichan That's what Beatrix was implying.

"You can stay his dog or you can be my dog — it's your choice. It is up to you to decide what leads to your happiness. However, I am willing to set you free after you have served the Moscow faction's cause. Provided, of course, that you behave appropriately."

"....."

"That's all from me. How about you?"

"There is one thing"

I barely got the words out, my mind shaken by repeated shocks.

If I asked Beatrix now about other things, I did not know if she would tell me or not. But this was enough for the moment...

"Why did you risk your life just to know my true intentions?"

"I don't like the idea of putting only my subordinates in danger."

Beatrix's blood-colored eyes caught mine. Her expression was serious — Beatrix was definitely speaking her beliefs.

"The battalion's mission is as dirty as it gets, but that's why, as the commanding officer, I felt I had to stain my hands. It's a bloody path, and because of that, it is necessary to take pride in our mission."

It was the opposite intention of Axmann's. That man saw everything but himself as a tool.

"It's the same thing in your case. I thought it was the only way to make you trust me — as I said before, I hold you in high esteem as a surface pilot. I needed to know your true intentions and the basis of your purpose in order not to put the rest of my subordinates in danger."

"....."

"If it was just for Axmann, or for your brother, I would have disposed of you regardless of whether you won or lost. People who look for reasons to fight for others like that will eventually lose their way in the face of harsh reality and put their comrades in danger."

I bit my lip, my cruel decision forced upon me by Axeman two months ago — has now saved me.

"The rest is I guess, Confidence. We have several trump cards to overthrow the Berlin faction."

"That's"

"If you are so inclined, I don't mind showing you one of them. It looks like it was brought into the base just yesterday,..... and we'd like you to be involved in its testing as a selectee from the battalion."

I gasped. There was no record of any new equipment being brought into the hangar yesterday.

This meant that there were hangars that were not open to the public even within the Stasi. Perhaps the Berlin factions were not even aware of them.

Beatrix patted my frozen shoulder and opened the door herself.

"Follow me. I'll show you. I will show you what we will be eventually asking for as our trump card... The symbol of the Soviet's source of power."



The hazy blizzard colored the runway white. After I left Beatrix, I stood there in my BDU and coat, trying to cool down my aroused state of mind. The temperature was below freezing, but my mind and body were on fire.

(Beatrix gave me freedom of action and risked her life to confirm my true intentions)

A warm feeling dwelled in my heart — I knew why. Because Beatrix was the first person since that day to look at me and act for my sake. Nobody - not even Oniichan - had saved me, but Beatrix was the only one who cared deeply about me and took the risk for me.

Of course, this may have been intended to keep me away from Axmann and put me under her own thumb. But even so, I was becoming attracted to Beatrix's personality.

And that TSF we just saw in the hangar deep underground. If that TSF is in the hands of the Moscow group, it will be a force to be reckoned with.

The presence of that TSF suggested the possibility of an armed clash between the Berlin and Moscow factions, and the NVA in the near future.

I had no intention of passing this information on to Axmann. I did not want to jeopardize Beatrix's position, and I also wanted to take the initiative away from Axmann by keeping the information. I also wanted to control that TSF with my own hands someday.

Three possibilities were born, which filled my heart only with despair. To continue to follow the Berlin faction and overthrow the Moscow faction, or the opposite, to join the Berlin faction and overthrow the Moscow faction. Or else, I could initiate an armed conflict between the two and take advantage of the opportunity.

I did not know when that chance would come. I was not interested in the cause, but I wanted to live up to Beatrix's trust. I wanted to pursue my potential as a surface pilot, which was adapting to both anti-BETA and AH warfare. Various thoughts floated in and out of my mind — I couldn't seem to come to a conclusion yet.

"That's what I will be trying to ascertain"

I looked at my right palm. The blowing snow was sticking to it, and melting into my skin with a slight stinging pain. It was as if it was my past.

"I'll stay here and try to keep fighting, with blood on my hands. So..."

I laid that damp palm on my chest and covered it with my left palm. Then I closed my eyes, exhaled a white breath, and prayed to something I have long since ceased to believe in.

"Until then, stay alive, Oniichan"

And please, those happy days, once again....

**February 1983 German Democratic Republic
Spreewald, Frankfurt**

The ceremony of the transfer was brief, as if to accommodate the tightening of the war situation.

Under a cloudy sky, I was lined up on the runway with other surface pilots who were also being transferred to other units. I was wearing the uniform of the Stasi. They were of far better quality than those of the NVA.

In front of us, the surface pilots of the "Wehrwolf" Battalion were lined up in a perfect row.

"Finally, the battalion commander has a few words of advice for you."

After a few quick ceremonies, the battalion adjutant announced to us. At the same time, the battalion commander, Beatrix, stood before us.

"Until today, you have served with great dedication in our 'Wehrwolf' battalion." I am proud of you, and I know that you will be able to face the challenges of your next assignment and remain loyal to your country. I have high expectations of you."

"All hands, salute!"

At the adjutant's command, we raised our right hands in unison. The other surface pilots and Beatrix followed suit.



All hands, disband. — the adjutant's order rang out, and as the battalion leaders left the scene, Beatrix passed in front of me, sending me a sideways glance that seemed to include some meaning.

After spending a last moment with Farka and my friends, I headed to the nearest train station. A car was supposed to pick me up there.

Soon a black luxury car stopped in front of me. I silently opened the back seat door and sat there.

"Good job, I'd say, but read this first."

Axmann said this without greeting me as usual. He handed me a bunch of papers.

I gave it a read and nodded as I sighed.

"I too have been briefed on this by Beatrix. Katia Waldheim, a defected surface pilot from the west, was newly assigned to the 666th TSF Squadron. "

"Yes. And by meeting her, your brother is"

"I know that, too."

Just the other day I was in close proximity to a MiG-21 (Balalaika) controlled by Oniichan on the battlefield.

"Then it's time to talk. After your assignment to the 666th TSF Squadron, watch out not only for Irisdina and your brother, but also for her movements. She is the surface pilot that Irisdina tried to rescue with the fate of the squadron at stake. Therefore, there is a possibility that she holds some kind of secret."

"Understood."

"Good luck. Best wishes to your brother and Iris."

Axmann waved his hand in a dismissing manner, and with this, it was the end of his business with me.

After the car left, I received a document from Axmann — an investigation report on the 666th TSF Squadron, which I will now be assigned to as a surface pilot of the NVA under the cover of the Moscow faction. I stared at the report. There was a photo there of Oniichan which seemed to have been photographed in secret at some base.

My unbearable feelings leaked out in words.

"We meet at last, Oniichan....."

With that, I was reminded of the year so far in the "Wehrwolf" battalion.

I ultimately could not come to a conclusion about the path I should choose.

The war situation continued to worsen, and with it the factional war between the Moscow and Berlin factions intensified, making it impossible to read the situation. In recent days, the Moscow faction had been reaching out to seize power from the NVA while taking on the Berlin faction, and was halfway to succeeding. The most recent battles were the one on the Neisse River a month ago and the recent one on the Middle Oder River. I was present at both of those battles and witnessed Oniichan and his comrades. I also saw how he had changed.

The situation has not moved for a year, with the Moscow group prevailing. However, there was a possibility that the Berliner faction would join forces with Warsaw Pact member states and the NVA in an effort to overturn the situation.

That was why I kept an eye on the situation, passing limited information to Axmann. Beatrix also did not want to let go of me from the battalion until the decisive moment came, and did not immediately try to sneak me into the 666th TSF Squadron.

I agreed with that. An inadvertent approach to Oniichan could lead to an overreaction by the NVA, which was wary of infiltration from the Stasi, and by Iridina herself, and could limit my own options.

Finally, a month ago, I was assigned by Beatrix to the 666th TSF Squadron — and I was on my way to them.

The objective was to monitor the 666th TSF Squadron and deter them from operating as dissidents, as was Axmann's desire. Of course, particular attention was also to be paid to Iridina Bernhard and Katia Waldheim. And also....

"Oniichan, please don't go down that path until I get there"

I stared at the picture of Oniichan again. An inexpressible pain ran through my chest.

The recent radio intercepts during the recent battle in the Middle Oder River Valley led to Oniichan raising suspicion as a collaborator with the dissidents. If it had not been for Oniichan's quick thinking, we would have been able to capture Katia Waldheim and Oniichan in that battle at the fortress of Neuenhagen. I desperately clung to him with my MiG-23 (Cheburashka) to hold off his MiG-21 (Balalaika), but we had to pull back just in time.

If this continued, Oniichan and I would certainly become enemies. No, if the situation continued to get tougher, whether or not Oniichan was a dissident, the 666th TSF Squadron would become an enemy of the Moscow faction, and Oniichan might get caught up in it.

The only way to avoid that was for me to move Oniichan's heart. Only then can I - together with Oniichan - choose a new path. Yes, it was not impossible for me and him to escape from this country and

head west once again by taking advantage of the civil war that the Berlin and Moscow factions might cause.

So far, there was no solid evidence that Oniichan had been taken in by Irisdina. So, there must still be a chance left....

I looked up at the sky. Unusually, there was no snow. However, thanks to the thick clouds, no sunlight was reaching the sky, and the world was gray. The clear blue sky above the tree-lined avenues of the Prenzlauer Berg that I remembered so well was completely different.

And yet, I was....

"Wait for me, Oniichan."

I muttered the words that I have been, ...no, and would be repeating over and over again any number of times now and in the future. The wish that has become my everything.

"I will save you, I promise."

Episode End.



笑顔の価値は

絶望に満たされても どうか見失わないで
この世に生まれた意味を
笑顔の価値を
貴女を必要とする人が 必ず傍にいるから

ポーランド撤退戦 1980年3月

1978年のミンスクハイヴ攻略を図った「パレオロゴス」作戦の失敗は、人類に致命的な影響を与えた。この戦いで北大西洋条約機構軍とワルシャワ条約機構軍は大損害を受け、北大西洋条約機構軍は前線からの離脱を余儀なくされた。残されたワルシャワ条約機構軍も「パレオロゴス」作戦の傷を癒やせないままBETAの大攻勢を受け、ポーランド本土侵攻を許してしまった。

1980年3月、東ドイツ軍はポーランド撤退戦の最中にあった。この時点でポーランドの7割以上がBETAの制圧下となり、ポーランド軍も壊滅していたが、国内には多数の難民が残されており、東ドイツ軍は難民の脱出を支援しつつBETAの侵攻を1日でも遅らせるため、ポーランドの各地に広がる森林地帯を緩衝材として激戦を展開していた。



The value of a smile

When despair fills you, please don't lose sight of it.
What it means to be born into this world.
Your smile is valuable
Because there will always be someone who needs you.

The retreat from Poland — March 1980

The failure of Operation Palaiologos, an attempt to capture the Minsk Hive in 1978, had a fatal impact on humanity. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) forces suffered heavy casualties in the battle, forcing NATO to withdraw from the front lines. The remaining WTO forces, unable to heal from the wounds of Operation Palaiologos, were also subjected to a massive BETA offensive, which allowed the invasion of Poland's mainland.

In March 1980, East German troops were in the midst of a retreat from Poland. At this point, more than 70% of Poland was under BETA control and the Polish army had been destroyed, but there were still many refugees in the country, and the East German army was engaged in a fierce battle using the forested areas spread throughout Poland as a buffer in order to help the refugees escape and delay the BETA invasion for even one day.



May 1966 German Democratic Republic Berlin Lichtenberg

It was around my fifth birthday that I realized this.

I was walking with my mother that day along Herzbergstraße in Lichtenberg, a suburb of East Berlin.

On the way home from a neighborhood Kindertagesstätte ⁽⁴⁵⁾ in the evening. A series of cafes with colorful Vietnamese signs and stores selling Vietnamese goods lined the streets, and the aroma of Nước chấm ⁽⁴⁶⁾, Nam Pla ⁽⁴⁷⁾, and other seasonings and incense wafted through the air. The people on the streets were all Vietnamese, with skin colors similar to mine. The language they used to speak with one another was naturally Vietnamese, and I could hear Vietnamese folk songs playing on a radio-cassette player somewhere.

For me, Tei Lan, the eldest daughter of the Pham family, ⁽⁴⁸⁾ this was a scene I took for granted. It was a part of my peaceful daily life.

However, that day, I came to that realization.

"Hey, U." (Archaic Vietnamese for Mother - Pronounced Ou)

I innocently asked my mother, who was holding my hand.

"Why can't we go where the Germans are?"

The first trigger was when I saw the townscape of Berlin on TV at my Kindertagesstätte.

It was a world I had never seen before.

People whose skin color was different from ours were dressed nicely and walking around the beautiful city.

I told my Kindertagesstätte teacher that I would like to go there, but the teacher showed me a lonely smile, and said that I shouldn't go there too much, and told me nothing more.

So I asked U. I thought U, who was always kind, would answer my question.

U showed me a lonely smile, and then replied.

"That's because we're Vietnamese, Lan-chan."

"Vietnamese people are not allowed to meet with people from Germany? Even though we live nearby"

I wanted to ask various questions, but I didn't inquire any further. I had somehow guessed what was behind my U's smile.

We Vietnamese and Germans were different.

Even though we were both humans, and lived in the same city, we were different in some way.

I became aware of this again after I started attending a school in downtown Berlin on a recommendation.

And in the same year — the war between BETA and mankind began.

Vietnamese People In East Germany — Resources

- 1- [Migration, Integration into East Germany and livelihood pre unification.](#)
- 2- [Guests of the socialist nation? Foreign students and workers in the GDR 1949-1990.](#)
- 3- [Former Contract Workers from Vietnam in Eastern Germany between State Socialism and Democracy 1989-1993](#)

March 10, 1980, 2:00 P.M. Polish People's Republic
Pomerania Region Czersk Forest

The forest road was like a path leading to the underworld. ⁽⁴⁹⁾

Countless refugees were making their way through a narrow unpaved road that winded through a coniferous forest more than 30 meters high, exposing themselves to the blizzard. On the roadside lie cars and armored vehicles that have run out of fuel. Around them, wounded people and those who were no longer strong enough to even walk were gathered close together, and those who had run out of strength were laid out in the open as frozen corpses. Soldiers who were supposed to protect the refugees were sparsely seen, but most of them had lost their weapons and continued walking, looking not so different from the refugees. There was almost no visibility, and only the high-pitched sound of the wind could be heard echoing like screams.

Still, the refugees silently continued to advance through the white darkness. One by one, they ran out of strength, but no one showed them mercy. People called this forest road "The Road of Death". ⁽⁵⁰⁾

A young girl, with only 10 days left until she turned 12 years old, her black hair fluttering in the wind and her coat heavy with snow, was making her way through the snowstorm. She had already lost the feeling in her face and limbs, but she had not lost the will to live from her eyes.

The girl struggled to connect her exhausted consciousness to the chain of events that have taken place so far — four years ago, she was forced to leave her birthplace to escape the BETA invasion. She left Minsk and entered a refugee camp near Warsaw, Poland, and then moved from there to Bydgoszcz in northern Poland. But a week ago, the refugees were caught up in a BETA offensive there, and were scattered. She was too, along with her family and classmates, and continued to seek refuge to the west, believing that everyone was still alive.

She did not know when this escape would end. Her last meal was a piece of stale bread provided by the military three days ago. She has not eaten any snow — as he has seen many people die of dehydration caused by diarrhea after eating snow to quench their hunger and thirst.

(If I die here, I won't know for what reason I've lived!)

Ever since she could remember, she has been constantly hounded by BETA, and at the evacuation site, she has been treated as a Kutsume-Mono. ⁽⁵¹⁾ It would be so unrewarding to die in the field like this....

(Mom, Dad, where are you.....?)

Gritting her teeth in frustration and sadness, she still tried to step out — and noticed something unusual.

A low sound accompanied by vibrations. It gradually became louder and louder, until it was followed by the sound of countless footsteps. Screams and confusion erupted among the refugees.

(No way, ...BETA!?)

The girl stood cowering in fear as the refugees fled in all directions off the forest road and into the forest.

(We have to run.! But where to run in this blizzard, where the BETA might come from anywhere... ..)

At that moment of despair, an artificial high-pitched sound echoed faintly from behind. She quickly turned around to see several pale flying bodies approaching rapidly.

"T....Tactical Surface Fighters!"

One of the refugees announced jubilantly.

"The TSF Squadron came to our rescue!"

(TSF? So, are we saved...?)

Just as she turned to the smiling refugee who had raised his voice, the girl saw huge spider-like monsters avalanching down from the forest all at once.



My body - Second Lieutenant Pham Thi Lan of the 642nd TSF Squadron - tensed up when I saw the war situation window in the control unit of the MiG-21 (Balalaika), the TSF I was flying.

This was not the first time I had seen an avalanche of tank class hordes surging into groups of refugees with nowhere to run, but still....

『— Captain, we have to hurry!』

Second Lieutenant Viola Hausser exclaimed. She was a surface pilot the same age as me, and was also my classmate at the military academy. Together, we were the second oldest surface pilots in the squadron after the squadron commander. However, her appearance was rather small to say the least, and together with her quirky amber hair that extended down to her waist, she somehow reminded me of a small animal.

『— At this rate, all the refugees on the forest roads will be killed!』

『— If we increase the output any further, we will annihilate the refugees before the BETA!』

The newly projected emotionless expression of the company commander silenced the bitter Viola — as long as we did not know where the class was, we could not increase our altitude. Therefore, we had no choice but to do NOE flight just above the forest road as if we were weaving through the coniferous forest, and if we went too fast, the exhaust from the jumping unit would hit the refugees.

『— But, at this rate』

The tragedy was expanding on the window — a swarm of tank classes attacked the flock of refugees, mincing the fleeing people one after another.

Meanwhile, the squadron had six TSFs, and with the BETA penetrating the entire area of the Czersk Forest, ours was the only TSF unit that could be assigned to the forest roads in the area.

The winter offensive by BETA, which began a week ago in northern Poland, has successively breached the front lines of friendly East German and North Polish military groups from both flanks. Tens of thousands of troops, mainly Polish troops whose withdrawal had been delayed by BETA pressure, and more than 500,000 refugees who had taken refuge in the city of Czersk behind the Polish army, were forced into the Czersk Forest. The city was in the process of being destroyed. After being forced to retreat more than 50 kilometers, the main military group barely managed to reestablish a line of fire and began a rescue operation of Polish troops and refugees who had fallen under BETA's semi-encirclement in the Czersk Forest.

Together with the 642nd TSF Squadron, as part of the North Polish Army Group, we were fighting on the forest roads in the Czersk Forest on a daily basis, dividing our strength in many parts, in order to help the refugees escape to the west.

『—We'll be fighting amidst them anyways! Let go of your sentimentality! That's just the way it is here.!』

『—.....!』

『—Each TSF, prepare 120mm Canister ⁽⁵²⁾ shells! Land with artillery bombardment to wipe out the BETA group on the forest road and prevent enemy infiltration! As always!』

The whole squad choked — if we fired to create a landing zone, we would engulf the refugees who were mingled with the BETA on the forest road.

Guilt followed, but the order was given. I calmly adjusted my sights.

『—Fire now!』

A succession of gunfire sounds roared, and a moment later, an explosion occurred beyond the blizzard, blasting away the BETA and everything else in its path. The TSFs charged into the outburst of the explosion, crushing everything then and there as they ceased movement.



I consciously ignored it and quickly glanced at the information projected on my retina. On the forest road, the BETA continued their assault on the refugees, and to the left The small species were approaching like an avalanche from the forest to the south.

(As usual, no large species!)

Although forests were basically no barrier for humans against large species that could knock down buildings, vast coniferous forests of tens of thousands of hectares, such as the Czersk Forest, slowed down the invasion speed of large species. In addition, since the Northern Baltic Sea coast was covered with plains, large species tended to head in that direction due to the speed of invasion.

However, the vast number of small species could not be managed in any way, resulting in allowing it to infiltrate the forest.

『— Pham and Viola, you are to clear the BETA on the forest road! Four TSFs, including me, will intercept the avalanche of BETA! The tank class will come through the trees. Keep your elements coordinated!』

「Roger!」

『—....! Copy!』

Viola replied with a look of displeasure. She did not make eye contact with me. I also made an effort not to look at Viola.

Two MiG-21s (Balalaika) thrust their Schürzen to the ground, held assault cannons on both arms, and dashed toward the tank class attacking the refugees.

『Get away from the refugees...!』

With a yell, Viola poured a barrage of shots on the BETA. In order to reduce the damage to the refugees, who have become indistinguishable from the tank class, we were trying to avoid the stray bullets as much as possible.

Tanks classes were popping off one after another. However, Viola was clearly not following the overall battle situation.

「You're in too deep, Viola!」

I shouted as I got behind Viola's TSF to hold it back.

「You are leaving yourself exposed on both sides ...」

『—That's your job, isn't it? Don't tell me what to do, you gook!』
Gook ⁽⁵³⁾ — a derogatory term used in East Germany for the so-called uncivilized half-human yellow race.

I could not continue speaking. I did not believe that Viola, who despised me, would listen to me, and it was not like her instructions for me to guard her back were not without reason.

『—Pham, Viola, you have a new wave of tank classes and warrior classes headed your way... over 300! Stop them!』

『「Roger!」』

We both responded to the squadron commander's new orders. However, Viola continued to eliminate the tank classes on the forest road — only I could stop the BETA from advancing through the forest.

「Takeee thaaaat!」

I gulped as I was confirming that the light spots (blips) indicating the small species were disappearing one after another from the battle situation window as the bombardment began — but in the next moment, I felt a shudder at the sight in my field of vision.

Dozens of tank classes were trying to climb the trees and jump on us.

「.....! Retreat firing」

I was about to pull the stick reflexively, but I remembered my surroundings. In the narrow wooded area, I could not go fast enough to maintain distance by firing backward.

Taking advantage of this momentary gap in my thoughts, the tank class made a surprise attack and threw themselves on my TSF one after another. In the blink of an eye, nearly 10 of them attached themselves to the TSF and immediately began to eat away at it.

(If I eliminate them with a dagger, I'll never make it in time! Besides, if they continued to approach from the front like this Viola!)

Fear of death filled my heart. As the eerie sound of crushed armor echoed, I checked behind me in another window — Viola was engaged in a melee with a tank class attacking the refugees, and it looked like she had no time to support me, or was she just making it look that way?

「.....! That's enough!」

I gathered my resolve, and ignited the rocket motors of the Jump unit. Then, during the sudden rise of the TSF, I forcefully applied horizontal rotation and tried to tear off the tank class by centrifugal force.

While enduring the feeling of vomiting from the intense G's that overcame me, I checked the status window — I've succeeded in peeling off quite a few of them, but several were still stubbornly attached to me. I then heard an ear-splitting alarm — some of them had eaten through the chest armor and reached the vicinity of the control unit.

「—...! Oh no!」

As soon as they landed, they cut the propellant supply to the Jump unit and severed the auto balancer, causing the TSF to slide and collectively pulverize several of them. The safety of the FCS (Fire Control System) ⁽⁵⁴⁾ was also deactivated. I then pointed the assault cannons in both arms at myself, and started continuously firing 36mm armor-piercing rounds (HVAP).

The tank class and my MiG-21 (Balalaika) armor parts were popping off one after another. Several shots grazed the chest, and the control unit was hit by the impact. This was a dangerous tactic that could have resulted in a bullet to the cockpit block if I were unlucky, but it was the only way to immediately eliminate the large number of tank classes that attached themselves to the TSF.

Within seconds, all the tank classes attached to my TSF were eliminated, but at great cost, with damage to the armor of the entire body and several of the joints rendered inoperable. The jump unit was unscathed, but had a propellant leak.

「.....! Woaaaaaaah!」

While holding back the tears that welled up as soon as I was freed from the fear of death, I resumed my bombardment of the tank class group in front with a shout.

『—What are you doing, Gook!?!』

Viola rushed in from behind. It seems that she has completed the sweep of the tank class in the forest road.

『—Being obsessed with a tank class is the work of amateurs! If you're not determined enough, why don't you go back to China?』

I was not Chinese. More importantly, why didn't you help me? — I suppressed those words and continued shooting while saying words of apology.

Immediately afterward, many new light spots (blips) appeared in the battle situation window. This time, a swarm of small species was approaching from the forest to the north. There were more than 2,000 of them — more than what six TSFs could hold off.

(If nothing is done, we will be caught in a pincer attack.)

If the tank class were to cling to me again in this state a fear of death, more real than ever, sent shivers down my spine.

『—All TSFs. This forest road is temporarily abandoned! Five kilometers behind us is a small village called Olszyny. We will intercept them there!』

『—Captain? Then the refugees here...』

Viola interjected, not satisfied with the squadron commander's decision.

『—If we can reduce the number of enemies in Olszyny, we will be able to clear the BETA from the forest roads. Our casualties will be minimal!』

I tightened my grip on the stick. If we retreated here, the BETA will definitely kill all the refugees on the forest road.

『—Then we should at least retreat gradually above the forest road! If we leap at a low altitude as we did earlier...』

『— If you try to NOE in a forest infested with tank classes, you will be swooped down on from all directions! And there are damaged TSFs out there!』

Viola glared at me — I could only pretend not to notice.

『—Hundreds of thousands of refugees and tens of thousands of Polish troops still remain in the Czersk Forest. Do not mistake what must be done! All TSF, begin jumping!』

「Roger!」

I responded as if taking the lead. The other surface pilots followed one step behind. Viola's gaze on me now seemed to be filled with curses.

I ran my eyes to check the situation on the ground, escaping her gaze — and again felt a shiver.

A girl was standing on a forest road, which was filled with the wreckage of small species and refugees from the bombardment. Her face was still innocent, and her black, bloodstained hair was blowing violently in the snowstorm. The girl was staring at the MiG-21 (Balalaika) in horror. Perhaps it was because she had been shown a scene that the word "gruesome" did not suffice to describe, or perhaps it was because she realized the fate that was to follow...

『—Th, that's!』

Viola also noticed the girl's presence and - after a moment - was speechless. A group of tank classes were closing in behind the girl.

I gritted my teeth, averted my eyes, and looked in the direction the troops should have been heading toward.

『—Why, these children are not being rewarded!』

Viola's moaning murmurs reached my headset with the sound of her fist punching the console.

4:00 p.m. Polish People's Republic

Pomerania Region Szczecinek Forest Borne Sulinowo Base

The Borne Sulinowo base, where the 642nd TSF Squadron was deployed, was located in the Szczecinek Forest, adjacent to the Czersk Forest. Originally a base for the Soviet Air Force stationed in Poland, it was now a base for Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) forces, including Polish and East German troops.

After returning to the base, I went to the TSF hangar. I apologized to the maintenance team for the damage to my TSF and offered to help them with their work. Although I was not solely responsible for the damage, acting as if the damage to the TSF was natural would cause unnecessary friction. And, being of Vietnamese descent, I had no choice but to help, no matter how exhausted I might have been.

As soon as I stepped into the hangar, which was filled with blowing snow and the bustle of maintenance work, I realized that I had made a mistake in the timing of my visit. There, in front of my MiG-21 (Balalaika), were other surface pilots, including Viola. They seemed to be venting their frustrations from today's battle, and there was a risky mood in the air.

I, as usual, tried to pass by with a smile plastered on my face, hoping that nothing would happen to me.

"Wait a minute, you gook."

One of Viola's entourage stopped me. He should have been one of her trusted friends and a Surface pilot, and he had long, reddish straight and distinctive hair.

"Don't you have something to say to Viola? It was your fault we have not been able to save the refugees in today's battle, wasn't it?"

"Such a thing, I"

I responded with a smile and a few muddled words so as not to offend his mood unnecessarily — a tactic I learned during my school days when I was severely discriminated against and tormented simply because I was Vietnamese.

Besides, this was not the first time I had been tangled up with Viola and her friends like this. This had been repeated on every occasion since I had been assigned to the squadron, and when surface pilots younger than me and inexperienced in actual combat joined in, there was not a single person who could reproach them.

"Don't play dumb. I heard from Viola. She told me that your TSF was damaged by the tank class eating away at it, so the squadron commander chose to retreat."

They were words mixed with lies. However, I replied calmly while suppressing my emotions.

"That retreat was to avoid being attacked from both sides (Pincer attack) by the tank class group, ... and you will understand how and why I was damaged if you look at the logs."

"What? Are you going to blame your precious comrades-in-arms of all things for the damage to your TSF? What would you do if Viola had been attacked from the rear?"

"As I said. Such a thing, I"

I was trying my best to deny it without ceasing to smile — but suddenly, Viola approached me quickly and struck me on the cheek with her right hand as hard as she could.

".....!"

With a withered sound, I collapsed to the floor. Viola's entourage showed ill-boding smiles, and the maintenance team, which continues working in the hangar, pretends not to see them.

"Don't be so glib! you're a gook who can't even protect her own backside."

Viola, her mouth twisted with a sense of superiority, lightly kicked my body with her right foot while I was still on the floor. I involuntarily shrank back with a small moan.

"You don't care about protecting Poland anyway, do you?"

"B....but"

I waited for her next words with a smile pasted on my face. I have learned many times in my past experiences that anything I said in the current situation would only be taken away as a statement or evidence later.

(And there's a reason why Viola and her colleagues are so concerned about Polish refugees)

Just before I was assigned to their squadron — three months before the Battle of Poznań, she and her teammates had been working with a squadron of Polish TSFs in the rescue of BETA-sieged friendly armies and refugees. They succeeded in doing so after overcoming various hardships. The Polish TSF squadron that fought with them at that time was wiped out in the retreat that followed while serving in the 642nd TSF Squadron, but they still treasured the friendship that had been nurtured up to that point in their hearts until today.

"I'm sure that's right. Gooks like you are migrant workers in this war. Your parents emigrated to mainland East Germany for money, too, didn't they?"

"....."

"Each and every one of you is in a very good social standing, isn't that right? Legally speaking, you take the jobs that we and other refugees from the East (Ost-Flüchtling) who lost their homeland should have taken, live a luxurious life with subsidies from the government, and send the money you receive back to your homeland. rather, It's not just a rumor that the start of the BETA war has made your life easier than before."

Viola's words were partially true.

During the Cold War, East Germany recruited immigrants from small and medium-sized socialist countries such as Vietnam and Cuba with the promise of generous benefits in East Germany in order to compensate for labor shortages caused by economic development and to demonstrate international cooperation among socialist states scattered throughout the world. My parents also came to East Germany as overseas workers (Gastarbeiter) ⁽⁵⁵⁾ in search of a better life.

(But now, thanks to this war, we are forbidden to return home and our livelihood security has been suspended. We have no choice but to work and live here in East Germany.)

However, even if I had explained these circumstances, there was no way they would have been accepted. It's exactly because it was the case for them too that they were looking for an outlet for their resentment.

"I heard rumors about them at the military academy, but I don't think they're the same human beings. Oops, I meant they were gooks, not humans. After all, their skin color is different from ours."

I listened to the sound of their vulgar laughing voices as I felt the pain in my chest from being verbally abused for something I had no control over, such as the color of my skin, but I smiled and kept silent. Viola grabbed me by the chin with her right hand as if pouring more salt into the wounds.

"Good for you gooks. Unlike us, you don't have to worry about your homeland being overrun for the time being. Even though we are fighting not only to save the refugees in Poland, but also to delay the BETA invasion of the East German mainland for even one more day."

As Viola said, the North Polish Army Group deployed in northwestern Poland had been fighting for that very reason since the Polish withdrawal.

The fact that we were supporting the withdrawal of friendly forces in a forested area that was unsuitable for BETA warfare, even in the harsh winter season, was also an indication that we were committed to holding the current line of defense for as long as possible, even for one more minute and one more second. Currently, a defensive line is being constructed on the border between East Germany and Poland to prevent BETA invasion, and at least until it is completed, East German troops deployed in Poland had no option to withdraw.

"I'm sure you've made as much money as you can while we're fighting the BETA, and you're getting ready to run away, aren't you? It makes me uncomfortable to think that such surface pilots are fighting alongside us!"

Viola spat abominably at me. My smile wasn't disturbed and I took it on the forehead. — I didn't refute anything. I didn't resist anything.

"You're a miser! Yellow monkey! Parasite! Compared to you, the Junkers, who are similarly human, are still better! I bet you don't even think anything about that last girl you saw anyway!" [\(56\)](#)

".....! Th That's not."

Despite feeling deeply wounded by Viola's numerous abusive outbursts, I still haven't let go of my smile. Viola continued as if to lay it all out there.

"Even that smile is fake, and you're probably looking down on us. I don't mind. Instead, I'll just treat you like this every day. It seems that even the squadron commander pretends not to notice us."

It was like swallowing lead — the squadron commander knew how Viola and the others were treating me, including in battle, but never spoke to them about it. I knew why. To maintain his leadership under difficult battle conditions, he had to provide a scapegoat for the surface pilots' resentment, contributing further to the overall war situation.

"There is not even one person on your side. If you don't want to be tormented anymore, don't go against us. In battle, you never know what will happen."

I felt the cold touch of the fear from a few hours ago creeping up on me. — I didn't know if Viola really did not try to save me intentionally at that time, but I wouldn't be surprised if the same thing happened again in the future.

"Oh, yes, yes. We have to go and visit and express our condolences to the refugee children, so I'll leave the cleaning of our MiG-21s (Balalaika) to you. If the children's adorned surface pilots smell like sulfur from the cleaning work, they will be disillusioned. You, who is a barbarian gook to begin with, wouldn't mind that, would you?"

Viola had a twisted smile on her face. It was as if she was implying that I should know what would happen if I disobeyed her.

"You've got to wash it off with all your heart. Our TSFs have not only the body fluids of the abominable BETA, but also the precious blood of the refugees who sacrificed their lives. It's different in value than the lowly blood that flows through your veins."

".....!"

"See you, gook."

Viola, while turning around, took one more kick at me before parting. Her entourage followed with a giggle. The maintenance team pretended not to notice. The other surface pilots just watch from a distance. Not once did the political commissar attempt to correct the disorder of communist thought.

I was unable to endure the unbearable feelings anymore, nevertheless, I stood as if nothing had happened.



It was around the time the date was about to change when I finished cleaning the TSFs. There was no one in the shower room where I entered to wash off the sweat and dirt, and the only sound that could be heard was the sound of water as I bathed in it.

As I showered, various thoughts passed through my mind, and I just stared at my hands, which were covered in the sulfur smell.

When I first started school, the first thing that was brought up was the smell of the Vietnamese neighborhood that was ingrained in me. Most of my classmates did not know that there was a Vietnamese quarter in Berlin or even where the country of Vietnam was located. We were not treated as human beings just because we had different skin colors and smells.

And now the smell of the BETA's bodily fluids seeped in.

"I didn't do anything wrong"

I shut my eyelids tightly and let out a small murmur. Droplets of water trickled down my cheeks and fell onto my taut chest.

"I studied diligently to make my mother and my family's life a little easier and even passed the East German military academy....., but this country doesn't treat me like a human being."

Discrimination against Vietnamese immigrants like myself was the norm in school and in the military. Neither teachers nor superiors would do anything to correct it.

And only those who did so advocated on stage about the splendor of socialism, which allows for the coexistence of diverse racial groups, and the importance of international solidarity. What was most frightening to me was that they meant it in earnest. How ruthless people can be in order to diverge awareness of the gap between reality and ideals....

There were many fellow Vietnamese who disappeared from school and the military because they could not stand such unreasonable treatment.

I was able to endure it because I was smiling and ignoring it as I gave up everything. Even though my heart was torn to shreds, if I didn't resist, they wouldn't do anything more than that to me.

(But I'm a surface pilot too despite everything, I'm risking my life fighting BETA)

Viola and her entourage were using the cause of carrying on the thoughts of their Polish comrades-in-arms as a shield, and using themselves as a tool for relief from the sorrow. They were the ones who were taking jobs away from refugees. The most plausible reason for this was that they were using war as a means of making money, to prepare to flee Eurasia.

(If you think about it for a moment, you realize that it was East Germany itself that wanted foreign labor and our lives are even tougher than the East Germans' thanks to the suspension of security)

But I cannot do anything about such unreasonableness. All I could do is paste a smile to protect myself and try to lessen that torment as much as possible.

If mainland East Germany was exposed to the BETA invasion, the Vietnamese community in Berlin, their hometown, will be lost. In this case, the government's first priority would be the safety of the German people, and the migrants might be exterminated without any chance of escape.

In order to delay this even for a day, and to help my family, who were forced to live in hardship due to the suspension of coverage, I must risk my life to fight the BETA.

(Even today, if Viola hadn't been so obsessed with clearing the forest roads, she wouldn't have been haunted by the tank class.)

Suddenly, the memory of today's BETA battle, along with the horror of that moment, snapped into my mind.

A girl standing with a look of despair on her face on a forest road filled with BETA and human debris, and a myriad of tank classes approaching from behind her — that girl would have been devoured alive in less than a few dozen seconds.

I had abandoned that girl. Her life should have been even more unrewarded than mine. Even though I had no other choice, even though she was only one of the thousands of refugees lost in today's battle, the thought of it filled me with guilt.

In spite of this, Viola and the others said that I didn't care about the girl anyway.

".....! Aaahhhh!"

With a teary cry, I punched the wall of the shower room with my right hand. No doubt there were listening devices planted by the East German secret police — the Stasi and political commissars, but that did not stop me from screaming.

There was intense pain in my fist. However, I did not care and punched the wall once again. By doing so, I wanted to heal my heart, which had been torn to shreds by Viola and the words of the others, no matter how little.

"Even I, even I!"

I want to protect everyone. I want to save as many people as possible, and delay the BETA invasion for even one more day...

"But this, THIS.....!"

I don't want to die for this country. I don't want to be a toy for them. I want to escape from the hard days.

"Still, I'm a surface pilot..... because I'm Tía and U's child, and I can't get rid of this blood!" (Archaic Vietnamese for Father - Pronounced Teer. With a bit of a rise like asking a question)

So I must do my best. I must fight. No matter how much my comrades may despise me.

As long as I keep smiling, as I have been doing, I can make it through.

".....!"

I exhaled roughly and stopped punching. My right hand and the wall were stained red. The color of blood was the same for everyone, but that didn't mean anything here.

(My blood is not vile.....)

But if I couldn't say it back, it was the same as admitting it — and after a few minutes of crying until I felt better, I looked up and saw a clock on the wall.

The time was exactly 1:00 am. Considering tomorrow's wake-up time, I would probably get about three hours of sleep. If I slept any less, tomorrow's mission might be hampered.

According to what was said at the debriefing, the retreat from the Czersk Forest was expected to continue after tomorrow.

Even at this very moment, on the trails in the forest, the refugees were still trying to make a desperate escape to the friendly defensive lines, bathed in a blizzard and shivering with fear of the BETA and the cold. In addition, on that defensive line, ground troops were holding the line against the BETA offensive.

Compared to them, I could say that I was in a far better position, having warm meals and a place to sleep as long as I could get through the BETA battles and the torment of my friends.

I, soaking wet, smiled to myself in self-deprecation.

(I trick myself into thinking so, to give me the energy to live)

I cursed my own shamefulness. If I were trying to maintain my pride by realizing that there are beings lower than me, then I was just like Viola and the others.

(Even though nothing should make me happier than fighting the BETA as hard as I could.....)

I shook my head, trying to ignore and escape from everything. Then I opened the door to my private room with my right hand, which was still in pain.

I could only live in this world by doing so — or so I thought.

March 11, 4:00 p.m., Polish People's Republic
Pomerania Region Szczecinek Forest Borne Sulinowo Base

The next day, upon returning from an operation at the Borne Sulinowo base, the unexpected words of my superior officer awaited me.

"A week's vacation?"

After the debriefing, I was called to the command center, where I repeated the words I heard in bewilderment.

"Yes. Any disagreement?"

The squadron commander of the 642nd TSF squadron asked with a serious expression.

He was an Air Force pilot-turned-survivor of the rapidly dwindling numbers of Operation Palaiologos. Aside from his attitude toward me, he was a perfectly capable commander.

"You are not unaware of the leave regulations issued by the Northern Polish Army Group Command, are you?"

"You allow surface pilots who have been on the front line for more than one year to take a leave of absence every six months to return home."

"That's right. I say it applies to you."

"But to leave the squadron in these difficult war conditions, ... when we're short of TSFs and surface pilots....."

Besides, I never knew what kind of sarcasm Viola and the others would say to me... that fear dwelled in my heart.

The squadron commander nodded his head in a sullen manner.

"Yes. However, it is also my responsibility to maintain the morale of the squadron by giving them leave as stipulated. Especially if we're in an unfavorable war situation."

"I understand that, but"

"Then stop grumbling, and just take orders. With enough luck, you should be able to change trains and reach Berlin the day after tomorrow. Go and show your parents that you are well. You haven't been back to Berlin for a long time, have you?"

The squadron commander was right: I had not been back home for more than three years. Not only the severity of the war situation, but also the jealousy and contempt directed toward me had discouraged me from doing so.

"The retreat from the Czersk Forest could end at any time. On the contrary, if you wait for it to be over, you will break down too. And we are not giving you preferential treatment alone. It has been arranged that you will be given leave in turn while maintaining the squadron's strength."

"Then why was I the first to?"

"I have put you through a lot of hardship. You need to relax once in a while. It's the least I can do."

The squadron commander looked away at the window as if ashamed.

I understood his intentions and quickly saluted him as if to express my gratitude.

"I understand. Second Lieutenant Pham Thi Lan will accept the leave."



The journey to Berlin required more time than expected. Train schedules were disrupted, perhaps reflecting the chaos on the front lines, and most trains headed for East Germany were not able to travel at speeds that would allow them to move with the refugees crammed in. In order to prevent refugees from being smuggled into the country, border guards from the Stasi sometimes checked all passengers for entry permits.

At the same time, I was presented with evidence that the BETA war was steadily closing in on East Germany.

I saw the huge black smoke billowing from a burning forest near the Polish-East German border town of Goleniów — the East Germans had decided that the forest was an obstacle to defending the Oder-Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line, and were burning the forest area themselves.

As the North Polish Army Group has demonstrated, forests could serve as a buffer to slow down the invasion speed of large BETA, but for small BETA such as tank classes and warrior classes, they were easily penetrable. In addition, if a laser class enters the forest, the trees would act as a barrier to prevent the TSF's Laserjagds and pinpoint bombardment.

I arrived in Lichtenberg, 10 kilometers west of Friedrichstraße, the center of Berlin, on the evening of March 14, three days after receiving my leave.



As soon as I stepped into the Vietnamese neighborhood, I felt an indescribable sense of relief.

Symbolic red and yellow signs and banners. The aroma of seasonings and incense stimulating the nostrils. Folk songs that flew out of nowhere. The words exchanged by people passing by on the street.

(I am finally back)

Dressed in a BDU and a coat, I stepped forward with a sense of serenity. Compared to Poland on the front lines, it was a veritable paradise.

(I thought I might never go back home.)

My parents' house was off the main street, but before I got there, I planned to show up at a small Vietnamese restaurant owned by my mother. There, I would definitely be able to eat my mà's home-cooked food.

(I haven't eaten a decent meal in three days.)

However, when I calmed down and looked around again, I began to notice minor discomforts.

The number of people coming and going was increasing even though it was not a festival. There were many orphans and homeless people sitting by the roadside. I heard voices that seemed to be speaking Chinese or Cambodian, not Vietnamese, and the people passing by on the streets seemed to have no vigor at all.

With a heavy heart, I frowned. I knew that this change had been brought about by the East German government.

For some time, the government had adopted a policy of segregation, forcing almost all Vietnamese to live in the Vietnamese quarter of Lichtenberg. And then, with the current influx of Asian refugees and the increase in the number of overseas workers (Gastarbeiter) due to the escalation of the BETA war, it is likely that the government has tried to force all immigrants into this city. This has led to the deterioration of the city's economy and sanitation.

As I learned in school and in the military, the majority of East Germans perceived the Vietnamese as unidentified entities, or else as taking advantage of East Germany's plight and taking away its wealth. It was probably their policy to hide anything that might arouse civil unrest.

(Perhaps the government is keeping us Vietnamese isolated and alive as an outlet for the general public's dissatisfaction with the current regime. People can be distracted from reality if they realize that there are beings lower than themselves)

Just like me and Viola. — Tormented by a heavy depression, I quickened my steps as if to shake it all off.

**March 14, 7:00 p.m. German Democratic Republic
East Berlin Lichtenberg**

As soon as I cozily stepped into the small Vietnamese restaurant, the place was filled with a whirlwind of cheers.

The restaurant was still full of regular customers whom I had been endeared to since I was a child. In no time at all, a large quantity of beer and food was prepared, and the party began. Soon, other regular customers who heard the rumors and my four younger siblings who had come home from school joined the party, and the place became a bit like a festival, with chairs and tables lined up not only inside the restaurant but also in the alleyway.

But even at this very moment, the tragic retreat from the war in Poland was still going on, and it was a fact I could not forget, even though I was at peace for the first time in a long time.



"So, why did you suddenly come back, Lan-chan?"

My U asked from across the kitchen as the clock ticked past 8 p.m. The regulars were still in the restaurant, but the party was over and they were chatting at their tables, beer mugs in hand.

"Why you ask All I know is that I was ordered to take a leave of absence."

Sipping from my coffee cup, I replied with a wry smile. Her daughter, who had been in the war zone, had suddenly returned without prior notice. It was natural to wonder if something had happened to her.

The coffee I was drinking was a substitute coffee brewed Vietnamese-style. Vietnam was the world's second largest coffee producer after Brazil, and the culture of coffee drinking has been brought into this city.

I continued, taking my time to savor the coffee I had grown accustomed to since childhood.

"Surface pilots on the front are allowed to return home every six months to maintain morale, so it's no surprise."

"You came back abruptly without any sort of notice. When I first saw you, I thought you were a ghost, you know."

"It couldn't be helped. It was really abrupt. I honestly wanted to call you, but I didn't have the time."

"Well, just seeing Lan-chan alive again is enough to make me happy. Even if you go to the other world, your father will be there, so you don't have to worry."

"Is that something you should be saying to your daughter~?"

I laughed again at my mother's line, which could be taken either jokingly or seriously.

I lost my father to illness just before entering military school. Since then, the family finances have been supported by me and U.

Tía worked as a laborer in a suburban factory and ran a dojo as a Shorinji Kempo [\(57\)](#) master, so we seldom saw each other at home.

All I remember is that I was strictly trained every day as a child. But now that I think about it, Tía may have been trying to give me the strength not to be defeated even when I was exposed to discrimination.

(Then maybe that means I'm not living up to my dad's expectations right now.)

I thought forlornly as I stared at the black liquid shimmering in my coffee cup.

(Now I'm just doing nothing but pasting a smile on my face and dodging my true feelings)

"So, how are you doing these days, Lan-chan?"

That must have been the main question, U asked as she looked into my eyes.

"I've heard rumors that Poland is in trouble, but nothing on TV or radio. There are now more Vietnamese and Chinese from the East in here, but I haven't tried to ask them"

(That's because of the gag order. [\(58\)](#))

The East German government forbade refugees fleeing the country from spreading stories about BETA and the war zone within East Germany. In this country, it was an everyday occurrence to have one's speech controlled.

Without knowing how terrifying the BETA are and how tight the war situation is, ordinary citizens will go about their daily lives in peace, without a sense of crisis, until the day the East German mainland is overrun by the BETA.

(U is no exception)

".....I'm doing reasonably well."

I answer clearly so as not to raise any suspicions.

"I'm a guard — a TSF surface pilot, so I don't have to worry about food or a place to sleep. I've had it pretty easy, if you ask me. **I've been very fortunate with my comrades-in-arms.**"

"Is that so Well, that's assuring."

U smiled gently as she relaxed her shoulders.

"I was wondering if you were being bullied in the military because of your gentle nature, but it sounds like you're doing fine."

"....."

"We're getting by over here. As you can see, the town has been devastated by the war, but the regulars are still coming, and the kids are helping out a lot."

I looked around the restaurant — where my four younger siblings were helping to wash dishes and take orders. All of them were far from my age, even the eldest, who was less than 12 years old.

(If the draft age is lowered in response to the deteriorating war situation, those kids will probably stay out of the war for another three or four years.)

I hope something will have changed by then, I thought as I looked at my younger siblings.

If the war continued to progress under the East German military's unfavorable position, my younger siblings would eventually be drafted into the army and would be on the battlefield as soldiers. In the worst case scenario, my siblings and I would be killed in the war within a few years, and the Pham family bloodline would be completely cut off.

Even if the draft was inevitable, I wanted to at least push the war back into a better situation so that my younger siblings would have a better chance of survival — an empty wish, I knew, but still, I could not help but wish so.

(That's why I went to military school and decided to become a surface pilot)

I was not without inner contempt toward my parents, who had emigrated to East Germany. If my parents had not immigrated to East Germany, I would not have been discriminated against.

However, if I could increase the chances of survival of my four younger siblings, even just a little. If this leads to the protection of our hometown....

U, too, was aware of my conviction, so she did not oppose my decision to enroll in a military academy.

"So, how are the kids doing these days?"

As if to divert my attention from the negative feelings that raged inside me for a moment, I tried to change the subject.

It was then that I heard the shouts of abuse echoing from the street.



On the street, a lone Vietnamese boy was being assaulted by several East German soldiers. There was a commotion all around, but no one was willing to help the boy.

(What in the world!)

After telling my younger siblings not to leave the store, I opened the door and could not hide my agitation at the sight before me.

Three years ago, this would have been an impossible scene. Germans would never have entered the Vietnamese neighborhood and vice versa.

The boy was hit with a straight right hand by the leader of the group and plunged into a street stall (Imbiss) — and as if that weren't enough, the leader said without any regard.

"Who the hell do you think you are, a Vietnamese, asking us to pay you, huh!?"

The leader of the group looked around at the many cigarette packages and beer bottles scattered on the street.

"We, the Germans, came here to check on your behavior while on vacation. Don't act all conceited, you maggots who sponge off East Germany!"

".....!"

I clenched my fists with anger. In short, these soldiers were trying to make off with the goods. The boy tried to stop them — and got retaliation.

(Just because we are immigrants, at any cost, such a thing should not be allowed to happen.!)

I checked the soldiers' lapel badges. All of them were Unteroffiziere ⁽⁵⁹⁾ army branch infantrymen. From the way they carried themselves, they seemed to be old-timers in their own right. They must have come here to release the frustration that had built up on the battlefield.

Looking out onto the street, the Vietnamese people could only stare at the commotion from a distance. Many of them just walked past as if nothing had happened.

The situation in front of me took my breath away — it showed that such commotion has become a daily occurrence in this city.

"If you have learned your lesson, don't ever cross us again! And for the rest of you who are watching! It would be better for all of East Germany if you were all BETA fodder! Remember, it is wrong for subhuman gooks to live like Germans!"

With those last words, the German soldiers took the stolen goods and left.

At the same time, those who had been watching the commotion from afar scattered with an air of relief. There were a lot of people who could help the boy, but only a few did.

I stared at the scene with a feeling that was neither anger nor dismay. The German soldiers who had assaulted the boy for absurd reasons were unforgivable, but so were the Vietnamese who were completely indifferent to their actions.

"..... Our hands are tied. Unfortunately, that's the position we're in here in East Germany."

".....!"

I looked at her with my eyes opening wide. — U was smiling with resignation and looking out at the street, where the usual bustle was returning.

She was the same as myself, who was trying to ignore the torment from Viola, just as I have always done.

"What, are you saying.....?"

I was muttering in a trembling voice, still absorbed in an angry impulse. At the sound of my voice, U turned around in surprise.

"Lan-chan?" [\(60\)](#)

"It's not right, no matter how you look at it!"

Unable to contain myself, I raised my voice. U, who had nothing to do but smile and give up in the face of the German soldiers' brutality, was nothing more than a mirror of myself.

"We may be Vietnamese, but we are the same humans, the same citizens of East Germany! I too am fighting as a surface pilot..... to protect not only this city but also the country of East Germany, but what's with that attitude from everyone! That's slavery itself!"

I knew that I was wounding myself by my own words. But still, my feelings would not subside.

"Did we all come to this country to be enslaved by the Germans and finally killed by the BETA! What will happen to me and my brothers and sisters born here? What am I supposed to fight the BETA for?"

"Lan-chan, stop it!"

".....!"

"We decided to live in this city, in this country. Please, don't say that here!"

U's reprimand made me regain my composure. — just because it was a Vietnamese neighborhood didn't mean there weren't informants (collaborators) working for the Stasi lurking around the corner. Although no one ever talked about it publicly, the headquarters of the Stasi was located in Lichtenberg.

The reality was that there were people who shared the same Vietnamese blood but were siding with the Stasi and taking monetary advantage of them. — my shoulders trembled with anger.

"Then What should I say!"

"Lan-chan....."

"I don't want to be like U and have that fake smile on my face!"

I looked away, muttering in disregard, and told her that I was going home first. Before I could hear U's words of restraint, I ran as fast as I could down the street.

(What am I fighting and dying for? What am I going through all this pain for! What am I enduring all bitter emotions for! Even though I didn't even ask to have Vietnamese blood in my veins.!)

To give a future to my younger siblings. To protect this hometown — but how much meaning is there in fighting to fulfill that purpose? To endure reality, ... What value is there for my smile?

I ran from the place with tears in my eyes.

May 1, 1:00 p.m. Polish People's Republic
Pomerania Region Szczecinek Forest Borne Sulinowo Base

On that day, many transport helicopters and trucks were coming and going constantly at the Borne Sulinowo base. There were also MiG-21s (Balalaika), which appeared to have been newly brought in. The weather was snowy, but the air temperature was much higher than before, indicating the arrival of spring.

『—Reinforcements? Moreover, a new East German TSF unit?』

Viola asked in a voice laced with surprise as she woke up her TSF, which had been taken out to the apron in a maintenance support stretcher trailer for sortie.

『—After all the losses we've suffered over the winter』

I tried not to react to the words, but on the inside, I agreed. During the winter, the TSF units of the Northern Polish Army's collective defense line had suffered heavy losses, and the TSFs and surface pilots that were being replenished were being reassigned there. It had been a long time since we had seen a new TSF unit assigned to this base.

『—It's only because we've suffered so many losses.』

The squadron commander continued to add.

『—The North Polish military group has not recovered from the winter's blows. When spring arrives and the snow begins to melt, the land will turn to mud and the human side will be slow to move. The top brass are preparing for this and are trying to increase their strength while they still can.』

Then he looked around at the faces of the surface pilots in his company.

『—The battle to withdraw from the Czersk Forest is finally getting closer to the end.』

Viola and her entourage made eye contact and smiled shyly. I stared at them in a cold mood, keeping a blank expression on my face.

True to the words of the squadron commander, the retreat from the horrendous Czersk Forest was almost completed a week ago, thanks to the tremendous bleeding efforts of the North Polish Army Group.

Although the operation was announced as a success, the number of refugees rescued was not made public. Similarly, the losses of the East German and Polish forces that completed the withdrawal were not disclosed, but it was rumored that no matter how optimistic the estimate, 30 to 40% of the forces would have been lost.

The 642nd TSF Squadron also lost six surface pilots during the winter, but barely maintained its strength because it received intermittent replenishment. At another base, there seems to be a squadron with a loss ratio of more than 200 percent — that is, more than 24 surface pilots were lost during the winter.

(Given this, it is only natural that the military would be eager to reorganize its forces before the thaw.)

If the aforementioned rumors were to be believed, the North Polish Army Group would be literally annihilated if subjected to two offensives of the same size as last Winter. If this were to happen, the forces that should be deployed on the Oder-Neisse Basin Absolute Defense Line would cease to exist, and East Germany's collapse would be decided before the battle on the mainland.

(And yet, why did I do that)

The bitter memory of a month and a half ago consumed my mind... On the day I returned home to Lichtenberg, I stayed at my parents' house for the night, and then flew back to the base. The ostensible reason was that it took longer to travel than planned due to the worsening traffic situation, but a big part of it was that I could no longer stand the obsequiousness of the people in the city. I have not even been in touch with U or my younger siblings by phone or letter.

Meanwhile, the torment from Viola and the others continued. They were always abusing me in public, forcing me to work and cutting into my rest time, and on several occasions, I almost died because of them. Nothing has changed in the environment surrounding me, only the war situation was getting worse.

(If things keep going like this, I won't be able to take it anymore.....)

Clutching the stick, I felt a sense of loss and foresaw my own downfall. It might be easier if I die, I even felt like it.

(No matter how little, I want to leave my brothers and sisters with a better future..... but I also don't want to die in vain.....)

I shifted his gaze to the battle situation window on my retina to escape the maze of thoughts. So far, there has been no significant movement on the front lines.

The 642nd TSF Squadron has been working to prevent the resumption of the BETA offensive since the retreat from the Czersk Forest. The squadron was actively engaged in a gradual reduction operation in order to delay the situation for even one day. Fortunately, the presence of the laser class has not been confirmed for the past few weeks, and it has been possible to call on artillery and air support.

『—The markings on the shoulder of that MiG-21 (Balalaika) 666 (The number of the beast)? No way, the 666th TSF Squadron!?!』

One of Viola's followers muttered in disbelief as he gazed at the squadron of TSFs.

『—Why are the guys from the Todesgott squadron on this base?』

With these words, the air in the squadron became frigid instantly. I, and even Viola, fell silent. The rumors that haunted the 666th TSF Squadron were known to every surface pilot fighting in Poland.

『—I believe the 666th TSF Squadron is the unit that bears the two names of "Black Declaration/Sentence" and "Schwarzesmarken.", isn't that right?』

The youngest surface pilot among the entourage asked, his breath taken away.

『—The TSF Unit rumored to be the "Strongest in East Germany," has fought its way through the retreat from Poland. But because they are the strongest, they always appear in the areas where the most intense offensive is expected, and they are like the God of Death (Todesgott). It is also said that the commander is also a person who would use other units as shields without a second thought.』

『—They have recovered abandoned Polish military TSFs and supplies from the battlefield and taken them for themselves, forcibly incorporated fallen mechanics, and in any case, they would do everything necessary and stop at nothing in order to defeat the BETA.』

The surface pilots muttered rumors. However, I knew that the rumors surrounding the 666th TSF Squadron were not the only ones. The other surface pilots probably did not dare to speak out for fear of being tapped by the Stasi.

(I believe the commander of the 666th TSF Squadron became a hero when she ratted out her own brother to the Stasi)

It was a rumor I heard when I was in the military academy. I remember that it caused quite a stir because the commander of the 666th TSF Squadron was well known at the time as someone who had graduated at the top of her class from the academy.

(.....The military's publicity material stated that she had recently been promoted to the rank of captain in recognition of her past war service, even though she was only one term my senior.)

『—They are the opposite of what we are. Especially a commander like Irisdina Bernhard.』

Viola was muttering to herself as if she was about to vomit, as if she knew almost the same rumors that she had heard.

『—To use their compatriots as a disposable tool. I can't believe we are the same surface pilots. I feel like I should be ashamed of myself.』

I strengthened my grip on the stick again. — I've heard this line many times before, but it seems that to Viola, I as a Vietnamese was not even her "compatriot".

However, I had no intention of denying that Irisdina Bernhard was a bad surface pilot. It was not the act of a human being to snitch on a family member whom she had blood ties with. It was beyond low-life.

My inner feelings aside, Viola turned towards me on the Window camera and made a snide question.

『—Don't you think so? Or perhaps a surface pilot like you, who is different from us, might not even feel some sympathy?』

「That's not」

I smiled as usual and tried to pass it off — in my heart, hatred raged against Viola, who identified me with someone without moral principles like Irisdina Bernhard, and against myself, who could only respond to her malice with a smile.

『—It's true that there are bad rumors about the 666th TSF Squadron, but it doesn't mean that this battle zone is an expected target of the BETA offensive.』

The squadron commander interjected. He probably thought it would be a bad idea to spread an unintended misunderstanding among the surface pilots about the war situation, let alone about me and the 666th TSF Squadron.

『—This base is located in the center of the Szczecinek Forest, more than 20 kilometers from the front line — the western edge of the forest. It is close to the city of Szczecinek, which is the source of military operations, and is connected to other rear bases by lakes and rivers in the forest. Given the high probability that the enemy offensive will be launched on the plain, it is inevitable that elite troops will be deployed to this base, which is surrounded by forest and easily resupplied.』

『—So, you're saying that's the same reason they came to this base?』

One of Viola's entourage pointed out on the runway with a scornful laugh.

There, a number of small jets were being brought in by special trailers. For a moment, they looked like Cold War-era fighter jets, but there was no cockpit in sight.

(Unmanned Reconnaissance Aircraft?)

I confirmed the name of the unit in the situation window. The East German Army's 293rd Radio Guidance Battalion. As expected, it was a unit specializing in the operation of unmanned reconnaissance aircraft. All of the drones seemed to be Soviet-made, with a somewhat unrefined design.

『—That's right. Even under the control of the laser class airspace, an NOE-capable UAV [\(61\)](#) is still useful. They can even be considered expendable...』

It was at that moment that a warning sign appeared on my retina. A high-pitched siren echoed across the runway as well.

『——Code 991!?!』

Following Viola's puzzled voice, the base command center sent battle situation data.

A BETA wave group containing many large species was advancing into the Szczecinek Forest from the west.

The estimated number is over 20,000. This was the same large-scale BETA attack that the East Germans had suffered defeat from in Poland so many times in the past.

(So they intend to advance westward while overrunning the forests as they have done in the past.?)

『——All hands! New orders from the base! We will abandon our original mission and launch as soon as we are ordered to intercept the BETA wave group that has emerged from the west! We are the firefighters who will extinguish the flames of the enemy's breakthroughs. There will be war inside the forest! Brace yourselves...』

The squadron commander's voice was interrupted again, and a series of gunfire echoed through the air. The artillery supporting the ground troops deployed on the front edge of the forest had begun interdiction ⁽⁶²⁾ bombardment.

Then, after a moment's pause, numerous bands of flashing lights blinked against the eastern sky.

『——Even laser class.....!?!』

One of the entourage muttered, turning pale.

『——No way, they intend to advance while cleaving the forest with the laser class!?!』

BETA have never shown such behavior before. They basically only advance by force.

(If that's the case, and suppose there is a laser class, if we tried to get close and initiate melee combat while the forest acts as a buffer against the larger species like before, they could prevent our breakthrough.)

The moment I thought that, I realized, and involuntarily yelled.

「Captain! At this rate, the front line could be breached in a short time! We should launch a sortie as soon as possible!」

『——Don't try to run the show when you're a gook! What in the hell...』

「There are not only forests, but also lakes and rivers in the path of the BETA. If the BETA reach these areas while overrunning the forests, and if they are used as invasion routes, they could break through the Szczecinek Forest and avalanche into the plains behind us!」

『 『 『.....!!』 』 』

The faces of those who tried to throw more abuse at me froze.

As I just said, there were several lakes and rivers running like forest roads across the forest in the path of the Destroyer class on the battle situation window. All of them were less than 5 meters deep, and a large species would be able to traverse them without much reduction in speed. Unless, of course, they tried to stay there, no one could predict what the BETA would think...

「If that happens we will be cut off from the path of retreat and become under siege by the enemy!」

シュチエチネク森林の戦い 一九八〇年五月

一九八〇年五月、北ポーランド軍集団は2カ月前のBETAの攻勢によってチェルスク森林を失っていたものの、その西方のシュチエチネク森林に再度布陣することで防御ラインを維持していた。シュチエチネク森林はポーランド西部に広がる森林地帯のひとつで、BETAの東ドイツへの侵攻を防ぐのに最適な位置にあったが、森林の南北には平原地帯が広がっており、北ポーランド軍集団はBETAが平原に向かいやすい傾向があることを考慮して地上部隊の主力をそちらに展開していた。

五月一日、BETAはシュチエチネク森林への攻勢を開始。北ポーランド軍集団は森林地帯を緩衝材として突破の阻止を図ろうとしたものの、光線級の出現と、森林内に流れる河川や湖にBETAが雪崩れ込み、それを侵襲路に西進したため戦線は崩壊、森林内に第4戦車軍を残したまま後退を余儀なくされた。雪解けの季節が迫っており、このまま第4戦車軍がBETAの包囲陣にとどまった場合、泥濘の中でBETAに殲滅されかねない状況となった。第4戦車軍が包囲網を突破できるかは、森林という自然の要害に立て籠もった光線級を早期に排除できるか否かにかかっていた。

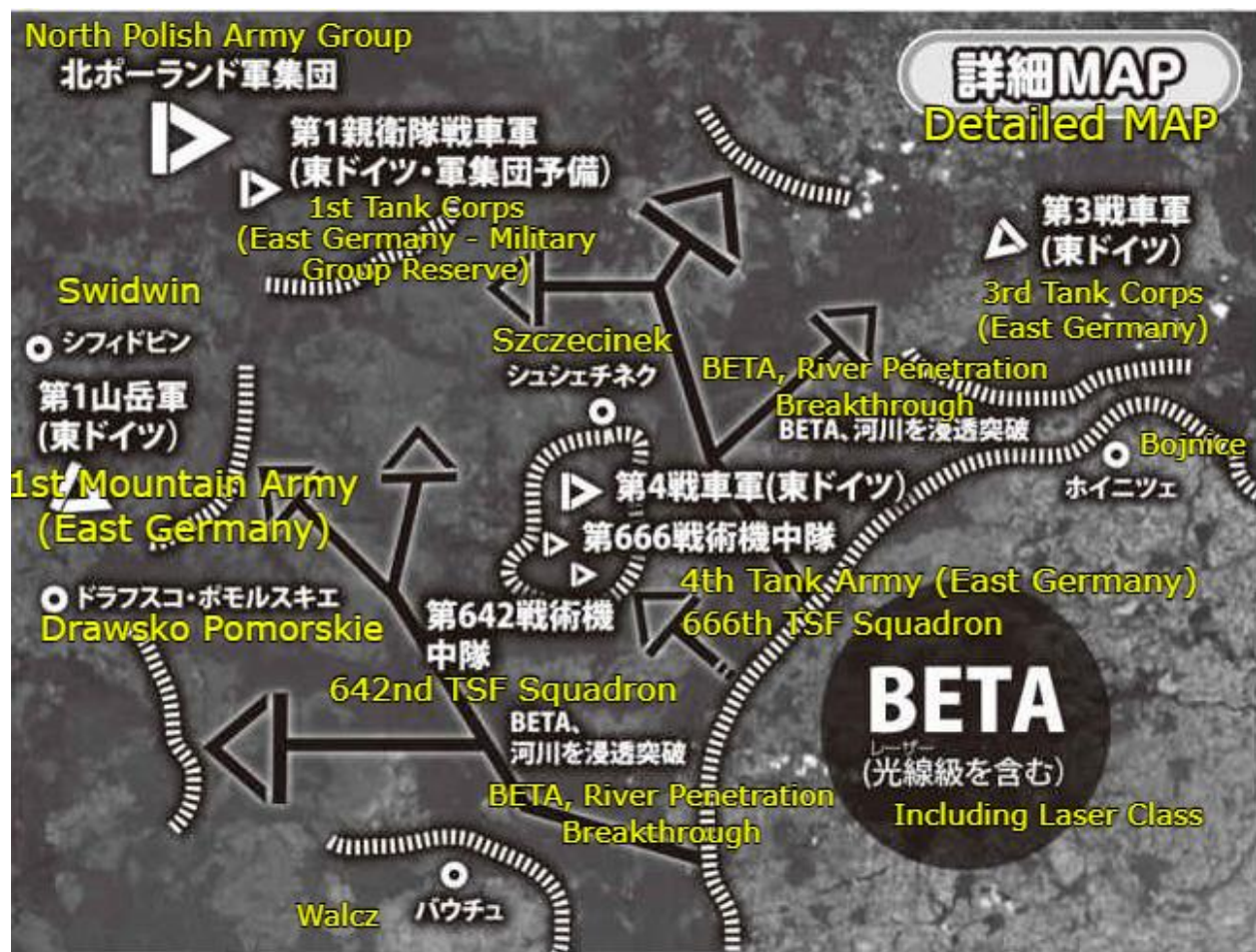


Battle of Szczecinek Forest, May 1980

In May 1980, the Northern Polish Army Group had lost the Czersk Forest due to the BETA offensive two months earlier, but maintained its defensive position by re-establishing it in the Szczecinek forest to the west. The Szczecinek Forest was one of the forested areas in Poland Borland and was in the best position to prevent the BETA from invading East Germany, but there was a plain area to the north and south of the forest, and the North Polish Army Group had taken into account the tendency of the BETA to move toward the plains and had positioned its main ground forces in these areas.

On May 1, BETA launched an offensive into the Szczecinek Forest. The North Polish Army Group attempted to block the breakthrough using the forest area as a buffer, but the appearance of the laser class and the avalanche of BETA into the rivers and lakes flowing through the forest, which they used as invasion routes, caused the front to collapse, forcing them to retreat, and leaving the 4th Tank Army in the forest. The melting snow season was approaching, and if the 4th Tank Army remained in the BETA encirclement, it could be annihilated by the BETA in the midst of the thawing ice and mud.

The 4th Tank Army's ability to break through the encirclement depended on its ability to quickly eliminate the laser class that had taken up position in the forest, a natural stronghold.



May 1, 2:00 p.m. Polish People's Republic
Pomerania Region Szczecinek Forest Pilawa River

The 642nd TSF Squadron was ordered to intercept a BETA group advancing on the Pilawa River, which flowed about 20 km south of the Borne Sulinowo base. It was a BETA group. The Pilawa River was only about 15 meters wide, but it merged with other rivers and lakes at various points, and a breach would have meant the collapse of the Northern Polish Army Group's defensive line.

As I had predicted, a part of the BETA group broke through the ground troops deployed on the outer edge of the forest, reached the riverbank while overrunning the forest, and switched there to the invasion route with its momentum. Since the BETA offensive was also underway in other areas, the majority of the ground forces were unable to respond.

When my squadron had gathered in the assigned position, the BETA wave group had already invaded about 10 kilometers up the Pilawa River and was behind the ground forces' defensive line. The supporting artillery units had also been prevented from gaining surface control by the laser class and were now completely silenced.

On my retina, projected was the sight of multiple Destroyer classes rushing headlong down the Pilawa River, which flowed through the forest as if dividing it.

(The forest is in the way, so we can't get to the flanks or the rear.....!)

『—All TSFs! Fire two cannons simultaneously upon landing! First, destroy the leading Destroyer class group and block their path! Concentrate your fire on the legs! We'd like to gradually reduce them by backward firing, but we can't afford to fall back any further!』

With simultaneous affirming sounds, The 12 MiG-21s (Balalaika) of the 642nd TSF Squadron landed with a powerful splash — and began firing as soon as they stopped.

In an instant, a series of explosions occurred around the Destroyer class that was leading the charge. The Destroyer class was blown off its legs and fell to the ground. The ones following it also slowed down as if like billiards.

『— Now is our chance! Let's move!』

「Roger!」

I answered assertively. — then I turned my attention to the corner of my field of vision for just a moment, and there were the anxious expressions of the other surface pilots.

The squadron's surface pilots were well-trained, but only I had experience in melee combat with large species using the Schürzen.

They were skills acquired through the constant lack of support and having no choice but to be exposed to critical situations. The Shorinji Kempo movements that my father instilled in me may have been passed on as well — however, it was only a possibility, and it was not something I would willingly do if I could avoid the risk.

(Still, there is no other choice.....!)

The Destroyer classes were repeatedly crashing into each other, and as we were pouring suppression fire on the struggling BETA group, we made a boost jump to get behind them, and this time, a number of Grasppler classes and Tank classes, which seemed to fill the entire river, came into view.

『—The 1st and 2nd flights will continue to break into the BETA swarm, cutting into it flight by flight and stopping it in its tracks! Third flight, support fire from the rear! Don't let them take even a single step forward!』

With the squadron commander's order, eight MiG-21s (Balalaika) jumped into the BETA swarm. Among them were Viola's TSF and mine.

『—Ooooooh!』

「Haaaaah!」

My element continued bombardment while surrounding the BETA. and in a flash, the surrounding area was filled with their carcasses, dying the Piława river in crimson red.

Perhaps because the two flights of eight TSFs were pressured to work together in close proximity, the surface pilots were able to steadily destroy the BETA with maneuvers that showed no lack of close combat skills. Even the BETA that slipped through the net of artillery fire was intercepted by the simultaneous fire of two assault cannons of four TSFs waiting ahead, and turned into a mass of flesh.

Although the momentum of the BETA rushing in from the front had not yet abated, the squadron's temporary line of defense was fully functional due to the limited combat surface area.

(If we keep going like this, we may be stuck here until all our ammunition is depleted...)

With relief, I checked the battle situation window for a moment — and realized that my prediction was completely off the mark.

Indeed, the BETA swarms on the Piława River were stopped by the 642nd TSF Squadron, but on other rivers, the BETA infiltration continued, and the defensive line constructed by the ground forces was half meaningless. Some BETA had completed their traversal of the forest and reached the plains behind Szczecinek. The ground troops on the outer edge of the forest have begun to retreat while continuing to fight back, but they have not been able to keep up with the speed of the BETA invasion.

(If we don't do something, the whole base will be surrounded...!!)

I had flashbacks to the tragic images of refugees and friendly troops who were in the middle of evacuating from under enemy siege, which I have witnessed many times in the past few months.

It was at that moment that a new window arose on my retina with a warning sound.

(Preliminary irradiation warning of a laser class? No way.!)

『—All TSFs, Random Number Avoidance! There's a laser class somewhere...!』

The squadron commander exclaimed, and in the next moment, several flashes of light extended over to the squadron, scattering from the coniferous forest to the right with a thunderous roar. — a moment later, three MiG-21s (Balalaika), including the squadron commander, exploded, and their wreckage scattered in all directions.

My eyes widened in horror — we were within the irradiation range of the laser class!

The 3rd flight commander - the second-in-command - yelled his orders while conducting support fire.

『—The 1st and 2nd flights will continue close combat while using the BETA as shields! Third flight, follow suit! If they break through here gaaaah!』

『—Aaaaaah, don't come closer! Don't comeeeeeee!』

The 3rd flight commander and his subordinates screamed. This time, the 3rd flight was being jumped by a large number of tank classes from the forest on its side. In the blink of an eye, each TSF was devoured up to its control unit, and the screams of the surface pilots echoed through the air.

『—No, no,... Kyaaaah!』

『—Zimone!』

Viola and her followers screamed in succession. A TSF was hit by a Grappler class amidst the melee combat while being vigilant to the irradiation of the laser class. Other Grappler classes swarmed around the TSF that had been knocked off, and they were further battered.



『——……! You bastards!』

Viola resumed shelling in a rage. No matter how you looked at it, she was not in a state of mind to make a calm decision.

(If this continues, ……!)

I glanced at the battle situation window — The present squadron members with the highest seniority were now me and Viola. The remaining TSFs were damaged one after another. No order had been given to withdraw — perhaps the command center was too confused to do anything about it.

「…! All TSFs, Achtung!」

There was no time for hesitation. — I shouted with determination.

「 If we don't do something, we will be wiped out! We are retreating to the Borne Sulinowo base to regroup!」

『——..!? Are you kidding me? There's no way we can just run away! It's because of them that we lost our friends!』

Viola scowled at me with her bloodlust laid bare.

『——We haven't even been ordered to retreat! At least until we run out of ammunition...』

「I'm telling you, if you do that, you won't be able to retreat! The BETA are already behind us...」

『——Don't tell me what to do, you gook! Who do you think you owe your living to?』

The moment I heard that line, something snapped inside me. I bashed her with a scream, obeying my inner emotions.

「What are you then!? You who can't even make a better decision than that gook!!」

『——,,,,,,!』

Viola froze — she had not expected me to raise my voice.

Ignoring Viola, I continued.

「It's as you said, we may owe you our living, ……., but do you really think you can fight this war alone!?!」

Unconsciously, my eyes become misty with tears.

「Do you really think you can gain victory over the BETA with such narrow-mindedness? There are no Germans or Vietnamese for BETA! I don't like it either, and I'm not talking out of my ass here.....!」

My wailing silenced her other followers as the battle unfolded.

「But still I, I!」

I want to protect my brothers and sisters, I want to protect everyone, I want to protect my hometown, I want to protect this country — these unvoiced words welled up in my throat.

A moment later, an explosion occurred inside the BETA group surrounding the 642nd TSF Squadron. The bombardment rained down from the rear.

「What the?」

『—— Reinforcements!』

Viola and I were stunned. At the same instant, 12 MiG-21s (Balalaika), which seemed to have arrived from the rear, leaped into the BETA group and slaughtered them with close combat maneuvers and artillery fire.

The 12 TSFs did not stand still for even a moment — it was clear at a glance that they were moving to avoid the irradiation of the laser class. The crushed tank and grappler classes were left half killed, and they used them as shields against the laser class. It was not a method that anyone could have used, and considering the BETA's vitality, it was extremely dangerous, but the squadron did it with superb coordination.

I stared at the left shoulder of a MiG-21PF (Balalaika), which appeared to be the captain's TSF, to confirm the squadron's affiliation — the number of the beast (666) came into view.

「..... The 666th TSF Squadron!?」

Immediately after, a blonde surface pilot with a dignified expression appeared in my retinal window.

『——Do you hear me, 642nd TSF Squadron!?』

「.....!?」

『—— I am Captain Irisdina Bernhard of the 666th TSF Squadron. Leave this place to us and fall back to the Borne Sulinowo base! This place is about to be surrounded by BETA — it's pointless to fight back here!』

I blinked my eyelids in astonishment. The commander of the infamous 666th TSF Squadron was trying to cover our retreat.

「B....but where did the order come from!？」

『——Not from anywhere! But I have the tacit approval of the 4th Tank Army Command — rest assured, if anything should happen, I will take responsibility!』

「..... !」

『——Hurry! You are not the only unit needing retreat cover! If you don't, the BETA will overrun you without being able to establish a siege position! The same goes for the refugees taking refuge in Szczecinek! In the forests, tank class infiltration has begun!』

Viola's whole body stiffens at the word "refugee". I shouted without a moment's delay.

「All TSFs, fall back along the Piława River! Start jumping!」

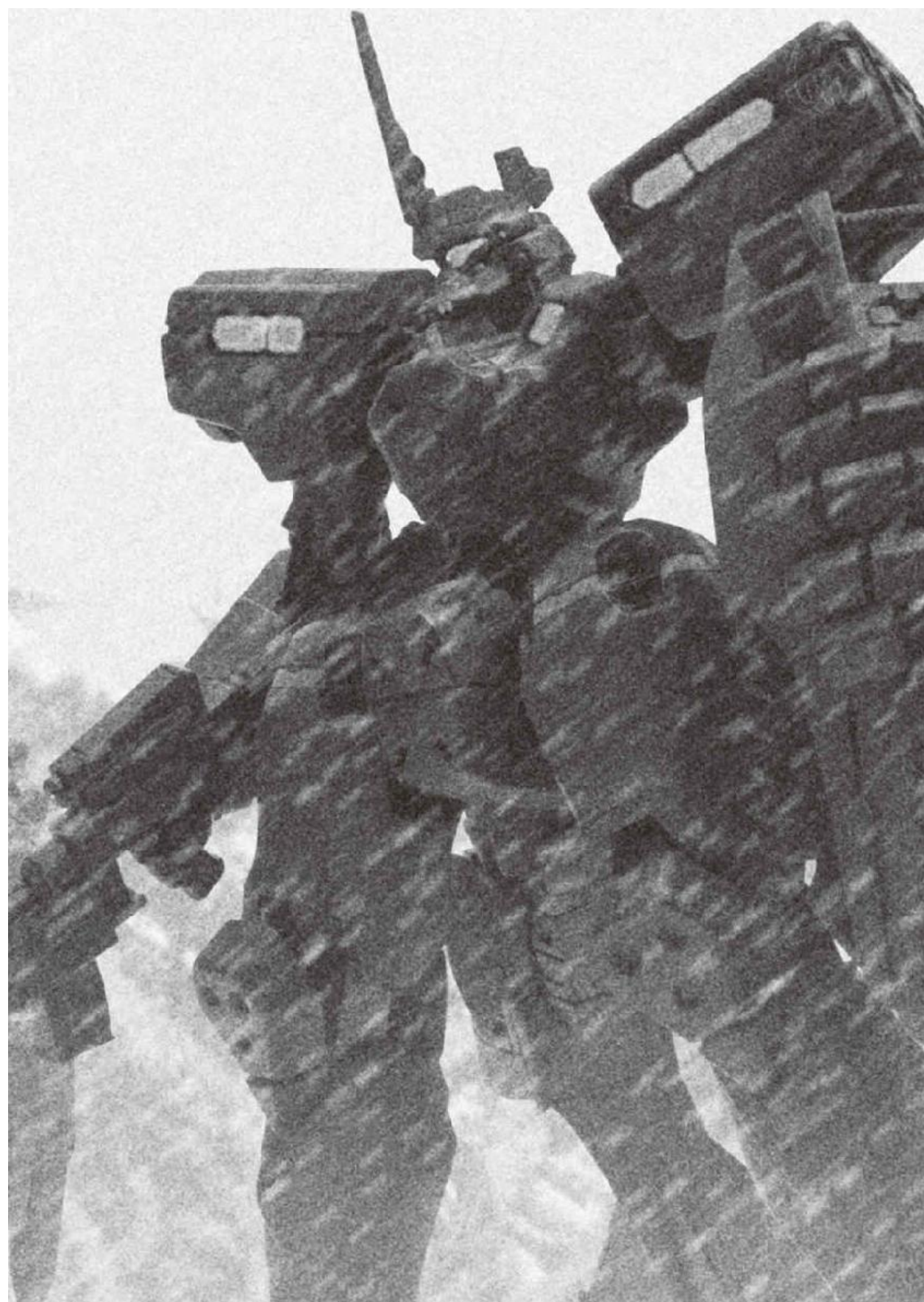
I took the initiative and started retreating. The other TSFs, including Viola, followed, as if swept away by the situation.

『——All TSFs, we will keep the BETA distracted until the 642nd TSF Squadron retreats to a safe zone! Follow my rear!』

With Irisdina's shrieking command — the 666th TSF Squadron, with Irisdina as the vanguard, launched a mighty counterattack on the BETA group without a hint of hesitation. Some TSFs cut down the Grappler classes with their Type 77 close combat halberds in one fell swoop, while others used the explosive reactive armor of the Schürzen to blow away BETA hordes. There were indications that the entire squadron was focused on close combat.

(The emphasis on close combat, the principle of the CO, that brilliant leadership — is this really how a woman who ratted out her family to protect herself fights?)

With disbelief, I retreated just above the Piława River, and kept watching the battle of the 666th TSF Squadron.



May 1, 7:00 p.m. Polish People's Republic
Pomerania Region Szczecinek Forest Borne Sulinowo Base

The Borne Sulinowo base was in the midst of chaos. It seemed that TSF units, unable to return to their base because the BETA had blocked their retreat, were pouring in one after another in search of cover and assistance. Tank and infantry units that had retreated from the forest, as well as refugees who had failed to escape from nearby villages, were being housed at the base, further contributing to the confusion.

The war situation was becoming desperate. The BETA had penetrated the Szczecinek Forest, and the 4th Tank Army, deployed in front of the defensive line, was besieged with more than 200,000 refugees. A breakthrough was impossible without neutralizing the laser class that had penetrated the forest.

"The 666th and 642nd TSF Squadrons are to exterminate the laser class in the forest. ...?"

I asked as I choked.

"That's right."

Captain Iridina Bernhard, commander of the 666th TSF Squadron, gave a small nod.

Certainly, with BETA infiltrating the entire Szczecinek forest, this base could be exposed to BETA attacks at any moment, but it was too reckless a proposal.

"As long as the laser class are destroyed, the 4th Tank Army will be able to escape to the friendly defensive line by itself. Normally, the TSF battalion to which I belong should carry out the operation, but the other two squadrons have evacuated to another base and we cannot coordinate with each other. Therefore, we have no choice but to break out of the situation with the forces we have now."

After returning to the Borne Sulinowo base, I was ordered by the base command to replace the squadron commander who had been killed in action as the temporary commander. Although I was hesitant about taking command as a Vietnamese, I decided to accept the assignment to repay the death of my squadron commander, who had secretly cared for me.

Iridina's proposal had not yet been approved by the command center, and it appeared that she was planning to make a proposal after involving other units in advance. This was probably the reason why the meeting was held in front of the apron instead of the regular briefing room.

I stared at Iridina's handsome face. The suspicion that she was a dog of the Stasi had not disappeared. However, the precise command she showed during the retreat battle earlier — at least, as a commander of a TSF unit, she might be a person who I could trust.

(I don't know how she feels about immigrants, but)

I pushed that doubt aside to ask her about another lingering doubt.

"However, how do you intend to approach the laser class!? unless the laser class are on a forest road or river, it is impossible to approach them by NOE flight or using other BETA as a shield!"

"I have a plan. It would be the first of its kind in the East German Army."

Irisdina gave a brief outline of that plan.

I gulped. Certainly, with that strategy, there was a possibility of eradicating the laser class. However, it was a risky strategy compared to the usual one.

"For now, this operation has been approved by the political commissar of my squadron. You don't have to worry about political problems. The 4th Tank Corps Command will not refuse to listen to the proposal of the "most powerful" TSF squadron in East Germany."

She continues to instigate my determination.

"Besides, you know what will happen to the Northern Polish Army Group if the 4th Tank Army is lost."

"What about the chain of command, which would have to be unified if it were a joint operation with two TSF squadrons?"

"Naturally, you will be under the command of my squadron. I will also be entrusted with your lives."

(In other words, the primary control of the 642nd TSF Squadron will also be entrusted to this commander)

I had a bad feeling — once I hand over command, this 666th TSF Squadron commander will be able to handle the 642nd TSF Squadron as she pleases. In the worst-case scenario, it could even result in us being disposed of as shields as long as the primary control is with her.

Alarm bells rang in my head. If this commander was as low-life as the rumors were making her out to be.

People could be as low as they want to be when the time comes. I have seen examples of this in my own life.

".....Why my squadron?"

Perhaps she approached the Vietnamese because I, the temporary commander, was easier to deal with than the Germans — such black-hearted feelings dwelled in me.

Irisdina, perhaps reading my mind, gave a small smile as if in rebuke.

"From now on, it is better to refrain from arguing in battle. Unless you're under a heavy metal cloud, who knows who's listening in real time?"

(She heard about my conversation with Viola!?)

I was lost in my embarrassment and could not speak. Irisdina laughed as if she had expected that reaction and continued as if she had guessed everything.

"I don't know what kind of life you have led, what kind of hardships you have endured. However, the thoughts you shouted at that time are not wrong. That is why I wanted to work with you this time."

"My, thoughts?"

"It is up to you whether you fight with bitterness or complete resignation. Only you can decide how you will live your life."

I averted my gaze to my feet. I realized that Irisdina's words were nothing more than a casual reprimand to me.

(Not what I'm fighting for, but how I want to live my life from now on)

U's words from two months ago came back to me — we decided to live in this city, in this country.

At that time, I had rejected U's words, letting my emotions get the better of me. However, when I thought about Irisdina's words, they may have been an expression of U's strong determination. She said that she would live in this town until the end of her life, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

(Then how should I live from now on)

If I just moved forward foolheartedly without an axis, I would lose everything. That was why I had to decide for myself how I should live my life — I had the feeling that Irisdina was telling me so.

"Oh, by the way, there's another reason I chose you."

Irisdina added mischievously.

"When I heard your words, I wanted to see your true smile."

"My true, smile?"

"A gentle smile seems to suit you best. Is it an Asian smile? Or perhaps that's a bit of a discriminatory expression."

My eyes were wide open. It was the first time in my life that I was told that a part of my disgusting and insufferable personality suited me best.

"Your smile is the smile of one who has will and determination. You have the strength to keep smiling for your friends, no matter how hard times get. That is something not just anyone can do — You should cherish it."

I then said as Irisdina was about to turn her back on me.

"H, hey.....!"

Involuntarily, I stopped Irisdina. I had something to ask.

"What is it?"

"Tell me one thing"

Amidst a mix of questions about herself that were lingering in my mind, I asked that one question with a serious expression on my face.

"What do you intend to fight for and how do you intend to live your life, Comrade Captain?"

"..... just like you."

Irisdina let out a forlorn smile as she let her silky blonde hair flutter in the cold wind.

"I will save this country and as many East Germans as I can until my body rots. That is all."



"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

A shout echoed through the hangar as Viola grabbed my BDU by the collar as if to strangle me.

After a preparatory meeting with Irisdina, I gathered the survivors of the 642nd TSF Squadron and explained the joint operation plan with the 666th TSF Squadron.

There were six surviving surface pilots, including Me and Viola. The remaining four were all Viola's followers. They were all in shock at the loss of six surface pilots at once, including the squadron commander, and their nerves were on edge

"The 666th TSF Squadron you mean we will be under the command of that woman! Of course she's going to use us as a shield! If you give her primary control, we won't be able to escape in case of an emergency!"

She stared at me as she twisted up the collar she was holding.

"I don't know why you agreed to do such a thing as joining forces with them to attack the laser class! Are you out of your mind!?"

"We decided it was the only way."

I responded to the agitated Viola with my usual smile. Although I had just revealed my true feelings during the battle, that did not mean that I could suddenly change her attitude.

"Where are the guarantees?"

"I can honestly say that I don't have any. It's all in the feeling I got when I talked to Captain Bernhard."

"Then!"

"Then you and the others can stay here."

".....!"

Viola stopped speaking. I had said it clearly, without breaking my smile.

"In my meeting with Captain Bernhard, I approved the 642nd TSF Squadron coming under the command of the 666th TSF Squadron. It can be interpreted that this is only during combat. So, for example, if all the surface pilots except myself were to fall ill before the sortie and be unable to go out, it would not be a breach of promise."

"What, are you saying.....?"

"I'm saying it's enough that I'm the only one who will die, the maggot who sponges off East Germany. Isn't that what you all want? Everyone is afraid to die anyway."

Viola clicked her tongue and pushed me aside coldly. She was silent, as if she was holding back her anger.

I still had a smile on my face, but on the inside, I was calm and aware that things were going according to my calculations.

(This is fine, isn't it, U?)

I thought of U's sad face that I saw in my hometown.

(I will also keep on living here as an East German surface pilot with pride. I don't care how much they hate me as a Vietnamese, or conversely how much they fear me. I will protect everyone in my own way with my own determination.)

The others stared anxiously at the exchange. They too must have been distrustful of the 666th TSF Squadron and Iridina, but more than that, they must have been worried about what would happen if they failed to destroy the laser class and escape became impossible.

"....., you have a lot of nerve to dare me to do that."

Viola crossed her arms in a reluctant manner.

"I'm fine. In consideration of your guts, I'll take you up on what you said earlier. Even I want to save the refugees trapped in this besieged camp as well."

"I just don't want to die in vain," she added, glaring at me, and finally said....

"In return, if you ever turn tail and run away, ... I will kill you with my own hands."

**May 2, 10:00 a.m. Polish People's Republic
Pomerania Region Szczecinek Forest**

It was early in the morning of the day after the siege that the 4th Tank Army command ordered all troops to prepare for the breakthrough. They were determined to escape even if it would bring them into disrepute with the North Polish Army Group Command, which would not allow them to withdraw, and with the Party, which disliked retreat.

The breakthrough offensive was to begin at the same time as the sorties of the 666th and 642nd TSF Squadrons, which were assigned to destroy the laser class.

The aim was to disperse the BETA by launching attacks on multiple fronts simultaneously, but the biggest factor was the weather. If the weather turned clear, the snow would begin to melt and ground troops and refugees would be blocked from any mobility, making escape impossible.

Just before the operation began, the 642nd TSF Squadron was deployed to the site of a village in the Szczecinek Forest.

An anti-aircraft tank platoon and an infantry company were deployed around the perimeter to block the approach of the smaller species. The village was also connected to a forest road.

(Will Captain Bernhard's plan really work?)

With time to spare before the start of the operation, I stared at the war situation window.

(If the search results are correct, the target laser class group is 25 km south of the squadron's deployment position.)

The estimated irradiation distance of the laser class against TSFs was estimated to be less than about 20 kilometers based on previous war lessons. If the TSFs gain an altitude of even a few meters, they would probably be immediately irradiated.

The 666th TSF Squadron, like the 642nd TSF Squadron, was deployed just within irradiation range.

(This is the best arrangement for two TSF squadrons to cut into the heart of the BETA group and reach the laser class in the shortest possible time, while also attempting a pincer attack.)

If the laser class were in the wrong position — I could only imagine the worst, but for now, I had no choice but to ignore it and wait.

Viola and the others, perhaps concerned about the same thing, continued to stand by silently, with greasy sweat on their foreheads. Their usual bravado seemed to have waned in the face of the gambling strategy entrusted to them by the untrustworthy surface pilots. Or perhaps yesterday's defeat was taking its toll.

(The conditions before the mission are terrible.)

Now I wanted to call Viola and the others cowards, and curse at them. I wanted to make them feel miserable by doing so, and I wanted to make up for the humiliation I have endured. Such black-hearted emotions dwelled in me. Considering what they have done to me, it would not be enough if I let them die.

(However, such a thing will not make anyone happy or benefit anyone.)

I added more pressure to my palm holding the stick to suppress these ugly feelings.

(All I have to do now is to make sure that the squadron's surface pilots are in perfect condition for a successful operation.)

You have the strength to keep smiling for your friends no matter how hard times are — I ruminated on Irisdina's words.

(If my smile is really for the benefit of my friends, ...)

「Viola, would you like to make a little small talk?」

With a conscious effort to calm my mind, I told her with my usual smile.

「It's a way to pass the time before the mission.」

『—Small talk what the heck?』

Viola replies in a frightened manner. Perhaps she was afraid that I would take revenge on her in this battle.

I nodded slightly.

「It's about my hometown.」

『—Hometown..... you mean somewhere in Asia?』

「No, the country of Asia precisely Vietnam is the home of my parents, my roots, but not my home. I was born and raised in a Vietnamese neighborhood in Lichtenberg, Berlin.」

Viola made no response. She stared at my face as if she could not guess my intentions.

「In the Vietnamese Quarter, there are basically only Vietnamese immigrants and their families. The store signs and banners are in Vietnamese, the streets are filled with the smell of Vietnamese seasonings and spices, and you can hear Vietnamese folk songs coming from around the corner. Anyway, it's a town that is all Vietnamese.」

The scene of the Vietnamese town naturally comes back to me. I continued in a tone that was a mixture of regret and nostalgia.

「To an ordinary German like Viola, it can certainly seem eerie. People of different skin colors, languages, and cultures living huddled together in a corner of the capital it's reasonable to be looked down upon.」

『——.....』

「But still, that city is an important home for me. Indeed, we may be maggots gathering around East German wealth. I don't deny that, as many Vietnamese immigrants are laborers. But still, I want to protect my hometown, and East Germany.」

『——.....What the hell are you trying to say?』

Viola asked in an obstinate tone. I smiled again, feeling surprisingly calm myself.

「In other words, my hometown is a place where you can easily travel abroad, even though you are in East Germany. It's quite an interesting place, don't you think?」

『——.....So traveling abroad is not a pipe dream in these times.』

My words and smile, which seemed out of place, caused Viola's mouth to curl up in a faint smile — an air that spread to the other pilots, and within seconds, a smile spread to all the surface pilots in the squadron.

I continued to smile, but inwardly, I felt relief and surprise.

It was a story that I had waved in an attempt to relax everyone, but I had not expected it to have such an effect.

(But, like this, this operation might work...)

It was then that the heavy roaring sound of artillery fire reached us from a distance. The monitor caught a smoke grenade signal indicating that other TSF's units under the 4th Tank Army had launched an attack against a group of BETA on a forest road used as an escape route.

(It has started!)

『——Attention 666th and 642nd TSF Squadrons and supporting units! The 4th Tank Army is on the move — it's time for the hunt you've been waiting for!』

We heard Irisdina's order. Her gallant figure was projected on the retina.

『— In this attack on the laser class, the most important thing to focus on is speed! We will do everything we can to crush the laser class before they get out of control! 293rd Radio Guidance Battalion, release all drones!』

As soon as she finished her words, more than ten drones flew over the 642nd TSF Squadron's heads toward the laser class. The same number of UAVs also flew over the 666th TSF Squadron's heads, aiming at the point where the Laser Class was predicted to be.

A moment later, dozens of lasers flashed toward those drones — and they exploded one after another. At the same time, however, the coniferous forest that stretches along the straight line connecting the laser class and the UAVs also explodes, engulfing the area in flames and water vapor.

(They took the bait...!)

A smile of satisfaction was etched on my mouth.

Irisdina's plan was to use the drones as decoys to trigger the irradiation of the laser class and burn down the surrounding forest. The source of the irradiation had been pinpointed.

The laser class in the forest was difficult to destroy because it was protected by trees, so we had to force the trees to disappear. — Based on this idea, Irisdina asked the 293rd Radio Guidance Battalion for assistance, and the operation was approved. The direction and angle of the laser beams could also be adjusted to some extent, assuming that the drone would be sacrificed.

According to Irisdina, this tactic was not her original idea, but a common practice in the Soviet Union and Finland. Both countries had huge areas of forests within their borders, so they were quick to solidify their countermeasures against the laser class.

(However, even for the Soviet Union and the Nordic countries, it is not a tactic that can be used very often. As the number of laser classes increases, a tremendous increase in the number of drones will also be needed.....)

When the UAVs were wiped out, several corridors of scorched earth more than 10 kilometers long appeared around the laser class. Large forest fires were raging, but at least now the TSF units no longer had to leap directly over the forest to approach the laser class.

As if to replace them, artillery bombardment began. The artillery units were to support the assault of two TSF squadrons as well as deploy heavy metal clouds with their spare AL (anti-laser) warheads.

A series of gunshots and explosions overlapped with Irisdina's orders.

『—It's time, don't let the laser class get away! 666th and 642nd TSF Squadrons, move in for the assaulttttttt!』

『『『『『「Roger!」』』』』』

With a synchronous response, the six MiG-21s (Balalaika) of the 642nd TSF Squadron began their charge toward the forest road directly in front of them.

(The distance to the laser class is less than 20 km — a creeping flight (NOE) at maximum speed should allow us to reach them in a few minutes! The large species haven't penetrated here yet!)

As I entered the scorched-earth forest road corridor, - the remains of the burning forest - I gazed off in the distance. A large amount of black smoke and fire sparks were taking away my vision, but I was able to keep my eyes on the target thanks to the continuous laser-class intercepting bombardment.

(No matter what it takes, we need to close in on them while the heavy metal cloud is still in effect!)

Six MiG-21s (Balalaika) advanced at very low altitudes, billowing black smoke and sparks of fire. The tank class attacked from the forests that had escaped destruction, but thanks to the lack of large species, they did not pose a significant threat.

(We can do this.....!)

At that moment, Irisdina's tense voice reached us at the moment where she felt victory was within her grasp.

『—— All TSFs! There is a new BETA group in B-24 — Destroyer class group!』

「..... !」

With a shiver down my spine, I took a glance at the war situation window — as reported by Irisdina, more than 20 Destroyer classes were rushing toward the laser class. They were advancing, kicking up debris from the burning forest.

(Are they going to shield the laser class!? They could arrive there faster....!)

Given the relative speeds of the squadron and the Destroyer class, the time to contact would be less than 20 seconds.

『—— Split the 642nd TSF Squadron into two flights of three TSFs, one for the Laser class and one for the Destroyer class!』

(You want me to use one of them as bait?)

If three TSFs engage in close combat with the tank class and destroyer class, there is a high risk of total annihilation — I was lost in my thoughts.

『—Pham Thi Lan, keep moving forward!』

I was overwhelmed by Viola's sudden angry voice that I was again lost for words. I didn't expect Viola to call out to me at this time, and this was the first time Viola has ever called me by my real name.

『— You, who excel in close combat should only be facing toward your sole target, the laser class! And Constance, you should have prior experience with fighting the laser class Follow Pham!』

「Viola, what are you.....!」

『— The remaining three TSFs will open up a way out for Pham and Constance with me! Landing at a distance of 2,000 from the Destroyer class! You'll have to stop right in front of them because of their high relative speed. Start retreat fire immediately!』

『 『 『Roger!』 』 』

「Viola, then you guys will」

『— Shut up! Go and tidy up the laser class quickly! Otherwise, I'll go around saying that the Vietnamese are Untermenschen ⁽⁶³⁾ who can't even fight a proper war against BETA!』

「..... !」

『— If you are an immigrant, so do like immigrants and listen to us Germans!』

Four MiG-21s (Balalaika) started landing at the same time as Viola's shout — the Destroyer class was already in sight. Behind them, there was also a swarm of Laser classes.

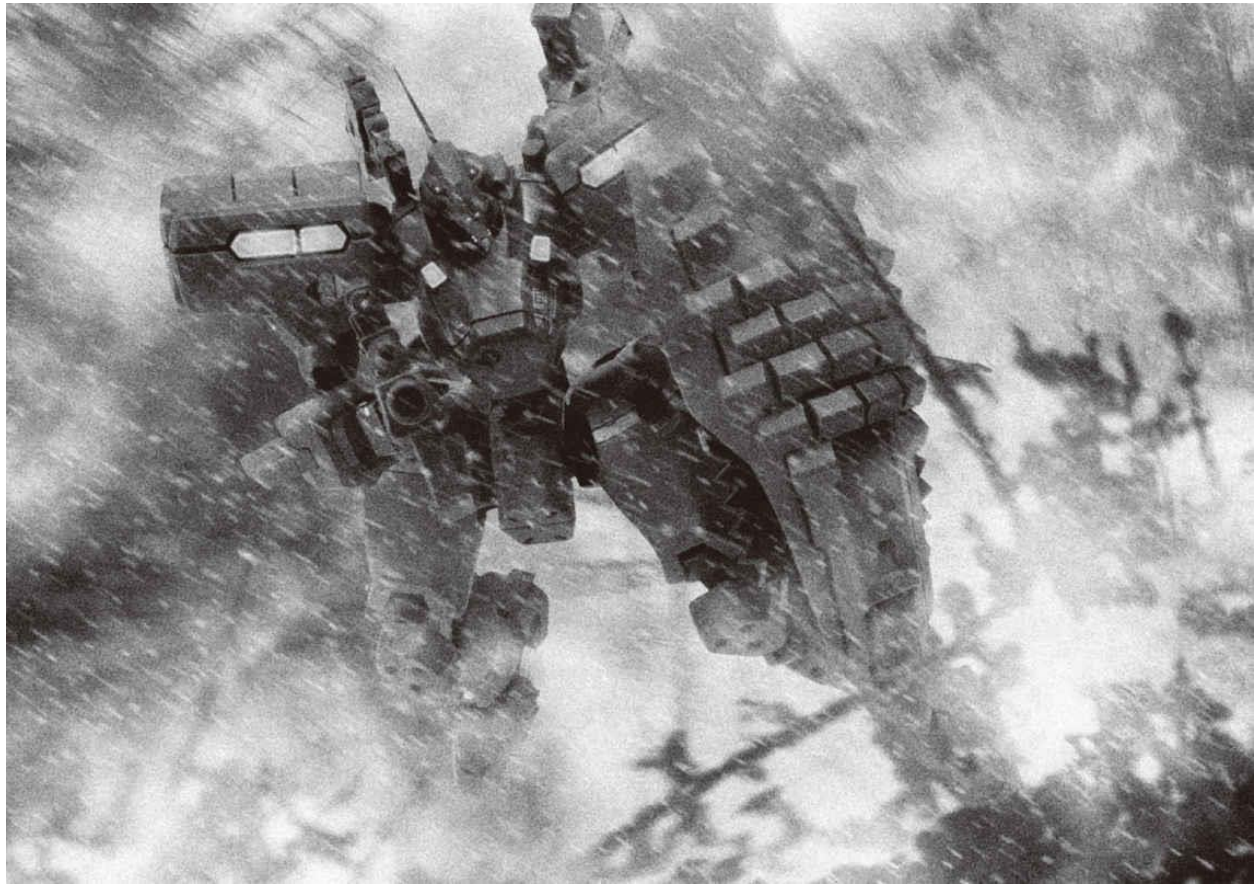
The 666th TSF Squadron was also closing in on the laser class from another direction while avoiding the BETA group.

「.....Thank you! Thank you!」

Viola's usual tirade brought tears and a **false smile** to my face... After a moment, I made my resolve, stared at the shimmering laser class beyond the burning forest, and let out a war cry that tore my throat out.

「Stay away from my hometown!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!」

The sound of lasers scorching the atmosphere, the rampaging beats of the Destroyer class, the roars of the Jumping units, and the voices of my **comrades** — I embraced all of them as I charged toward the laser class with MiG-21 (Balalaika) in one breath.



May 2, 11:00 a.m. Polish People's Republic
Pomerania Region Szczecinek Forest
Borne Sulinowo Base

When our squadrons returned to the Borne Sulinowo base, the runway was still in chaos.

However, the atmosphere was not as sorrowful as it was yesterday. As a result of the elimination of the laser class group by the 666th and 642nd TSF Squadrons, temporary airspace control was secured, and transport helicopters could come and go. At least, this would allow the sick and wounded to preferentially escape until the next group of laser classes are confirmed to be approaching. The sky remained snowy.

(I'd love to wind down, but that doesn't seem possible right now.)

After I and the other surface pilots left the TSF on the apron with the maintenance crew, I looked around the runway, feeling overwhelming fatigue.

(Even if the Destroyer class is annihilated, it does not guarantee the success of the 4th Tank Army's escape. We don't even know when the BETA will send a second wave against us. Besides, ...)

I gazed at the TSFs of the 642nd and 666th TSF Squadrons lined up on the runway.

The total number of MiG-21s (Balalaika) that returned was 14. The 666th TSF Squadron suffered no losses, while the 642nd TSF Squadron lost two TSFs. Fortunately, in both cases, the crew members escaped together with the control unit and were secured by other TSFs.

In addition, all three TSFs, except for mine, have sustained more than medium damage, making it impossible for us to launch another sortie. If replenishment did not arrive at this point, the squadron would remain embedded under the command of the 666th TSF Squadron. Perhaps, during the reorganization after the evacuation, I alone might be absorbed into the 666th TSF Squadron as it was.

(Still, we were able to destroy the laser class and survive with all of the squadron's surface pilots)

Staring at Viola's TSF, which had lost its right main arm, I thought with both pain and relief.

(Maybe the credit of the battle will go solely to the 666th TSF Squadron, which is well known, but still)

All this was possible thanks to Irisdina, who had given us a plan to save our lives, and Viola and the others, who shook off their hesitation at the last minute....

"..... You don't think the success of this operation was due to anyone but yourself, do you?"

Viola, who had been nearby for some time, spoke sullenly from beside me. Her companions were also around.

As she hit the bull's eye, I received her words as was my habit with my usual smile, feeling flattered.

"Y..., yes, I think so. Is there any problem with"

"I'm saying that kind of attitude annoys me! Good grief, puff up that big chest of yours with little pride, or I won't be in a position to manage all the other kids!"

"Ch, chest! Viola, no way, was that always on your mind?"

"Don't evade the point! Good! The credit for this battle goes to you, Pham Thi Lan. Without you, we would not have been able to defeat the laser class and we would not have survived. Admit that much to yourself."

"What?"

I stared at Viola in disbelief. It was unprecedented for Viola to praise me so openly. I was so shocked and confused that I let my usual cautious attitude show.

"I'm just a surface pilot, and I survived this battle because of Captain Bernhard's command, and, you see, I'm Vietnamese, which you and the others hate."

"I have my pride and I'm not going to apologize for what I've done and I'm not going to accept people like you with open arms. But I will say this."

After a self important reminder, Viola took a deep breath, looked into my pale brown eyes, and said it all at once.

"You are an East German, just like us. And a prideful surface pilot of East Germany, the commander of the 642nd TSF Squadron, who led this operation to a successful conclusion without any casualties."

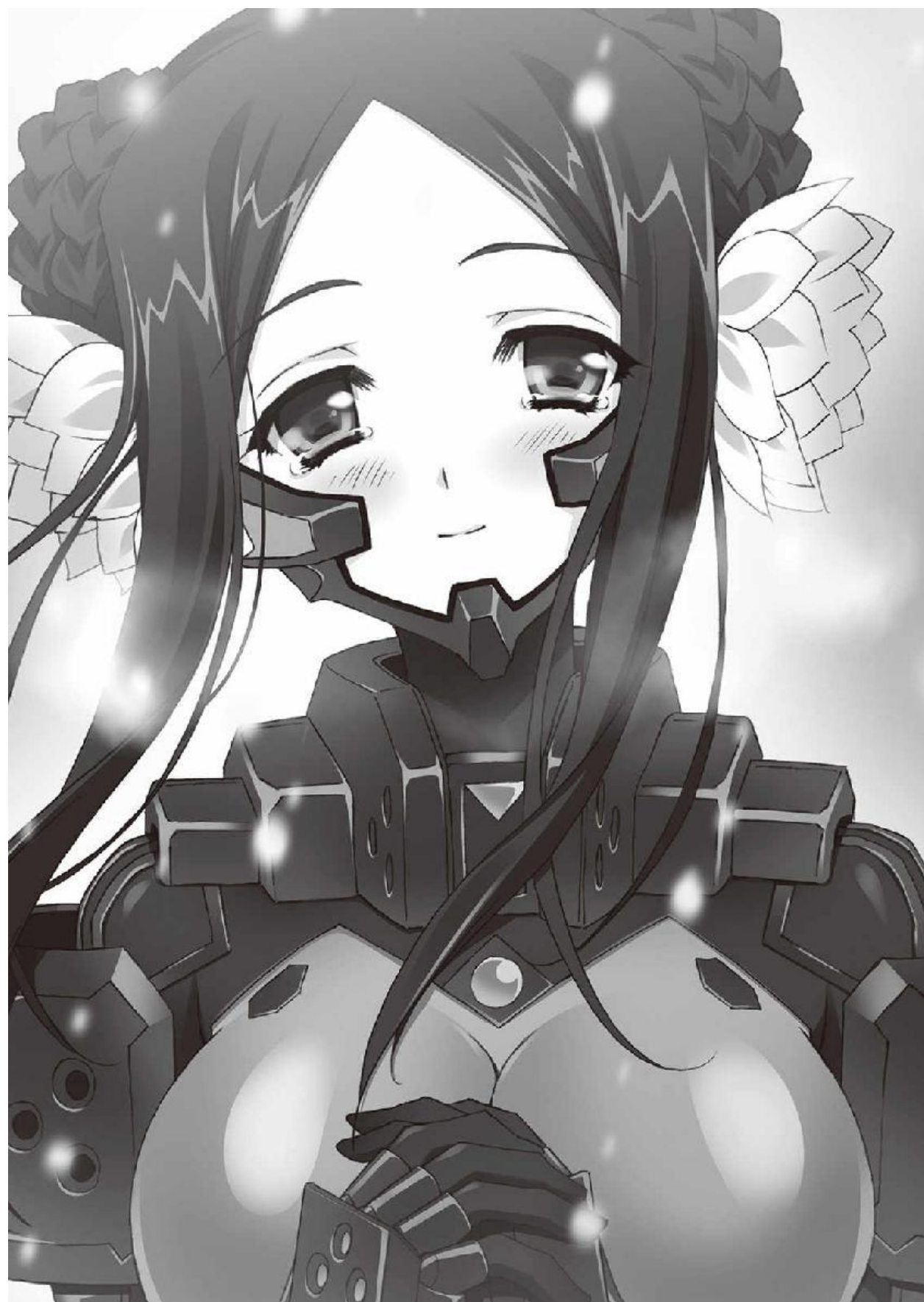
".....!"

"Your smile and courage saved us all. As much as it pisses me off, ... I will give it to you."

My eyes were wide open. Warm feelings welled up in my chest and my vision became blurry.

"See! You should smile, as you always do. All of us in the 642nd TSF Squadron agreed that your smile is extremely cute. I really envy you."

I was reminded of Irisdina's and U's words, and was overwhelmed with a tidal wave of emotions.



I looked down for a moment, looking bashful, and then smiled softly, expressing the flood of emotions in my heart.

"..... Yes! Thank you very much"



At that moment, I certainly had a sincere smile on my face, but on the inside, I knew.

Even if Viola and the others approved, I knew that no matter how hard I tried, the unspoken discrimination against Vietnamese citizens would not end.

And that there was no way to stop this country from going down the road to destruction.

Still, I believed. I strongly and intensely believed.

That this world was still worth fighting for.

Not for anyone else, but for me. For me to be me. To protect everything I wanted to protect.

If only my smile could help the hearts of those fighting this war.

Six months later, I was selected by Captain Bernhard to join the 666th TSF squadron and was taught everything I know now — but that's another story for another time.

Episode End.

SUPER

HUNTER KEBEL

キルケの災厄

東西の文化交流を図る宴席

——いざという場合、助力してほしい——

アイリスディーナは自分にそう言ったのだ。

なら、私は……



Circe's disaster

Banquet for cultural exchange between East and West
In case of an emergency, we would need your help.
Irisdina said so to me.
Then, I will

**March 17, 1983, 4:50 p.m. Former Polish Territory
Gdańsk Bay, Gdańsk Base, runway.**

「—Gdańsk CP (Command Post), this is Hucklebein 23, passing the 10-kilometer radio beacon.
Requesting permission to land.」

Communication with the control tower. Getting permission to land. After circling the runway, the TSF was ready for landing. — the usual return sequence for me, Second Lieutenant Circe Steinhoff, a member of the West German Army's 51st Tactical Armored Battalion "Hucklebein".

The Gdańsk sky of the ending winter was tinged red with the sunset afterglow. With the sea to the north and the hills to the south, there was almost no chance of receiving a laser class irradiation as long as the current line of defense was not breached. While enjoying the brief luxury of overlooking the horizon illuminated by the setting sun, the TSF landed on the designated runway.

I left my favorite TSF (Tornado) with the maintenance team waiting for me on the apron and stepped out to the high-lift car. Leaning my back against the cargo railings, I took a deep breath. The wind ruffled my rich black hair, and my butterfly hair ornament shone in the evening sun.

This afternoon, the battalion was still on a scouting mission into the Polish interior, which was still under BETA control.

The entire Gdańsk Bridgehead was in danger of collapse due to the waves of BETA attacks, but it was saved by the cooperation of the 51st Tactical Armored Battalion "Hucklebein", the U.S. Navy's 103rd TSF Squadron (VF-103) "Jolly Rogers", and the East German 666th TSF Squadron "Schwarzesmarken". It has been a week since the battle. There was no sign of a re-offensive on the bridgehead, and the battlefield was briefly at peace.

However, although the crisis was over, the UN forces deployed at the bridgehead had suffered heavy casualties in the recent battle, and the future course of operations was unclear. Therefore, in order to defend the final line of defense in East Germany, the shield of Europe, the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) forces were ordered to withdraw ahead of time.

The face of Theodore, with whom I had a conversation in the morning, came back to me. He was the hero who had saved the Gdańsk Bridgehead, but if the UN forces abandoned the bridgehead, their homeland would now be in danger.

(..... I wish that those guys would be safe at least)

I wondered if he was struggling for his age. — Theodore's face in my mind's eye looked slightly more mature than his colleagues of the same age.

"Yo, what the hell are you doing here, all gloomy and shit?"

"Kyaaa!"

As soon as I stepped off the high-lift car onto the ground, a whisper in my ear from behind made me scream.

It was a familiar voice, so I reflexively yelled.

"Major! How many times have I told you to stop startling me like that!?"

"Don't be stingy. It's all cool."

The battalion commander, Major Joachim Balck, in his fortified suit, laughed as he ignored my angry voice.

"It would be impolite not to properly greet the precious Fräulein ⁽⁶⁴⁾ (ojōsama) of the battalion, wouldn't it?"

"That's not a reason. And please don't call yourself Fräulein. You are not even a landowning aristocrat (Junker)."

"I have the blood of a Luftwaffen Experte, ⁽⁶⁵⁾ which is more valuable than a Junker, so why don't you show some respect? Nevertheless, why are you not an Experte yet as a man? Or on second thought, that would tarnish the Experte's name."

Behind us, our colleagues from the Battalion were happily laughing as they watched us bicker. The composition of Balck's sexually harassing jokes and me suffering from them has become a Battalion specialty.

I told Balck grudgingly, who was enjoying my reaction, my face turning redder even more.

"Stop messing with me all the time. Aren't there other surface pilots in the squad with the same age (marriageable age) like me?"

"Somehow my jokes become sexual harassment when it's not you."

"It's sexual harassment enough even for me!"

I muttered moaningly, running out of energy to even get angry.

But this was not to say that these exchanges were unpleasant — when I was assigned to the battalion, I Circe Steinhoff, who tended to keep my distance thanks to my grandfather's name and my tight personality, was treated with openness by Balck. Thanks to him, I was now able to fit in with the battalion.

Balck asked, not caring about my concerns.

"Anyway, are you going to be at Oktoberfest today?"

"They were serious about it? At a time like this?"

Oktoberfest ⁽⁶⁶⁾ was an annual event held in the West German state of Bavaria from September to October. Originally a local festival to celebrate the beginning of the brewing season, Oktoberfest was now a national celebration and the largest beer festival in the world, and this was no different during the war years.

But it was March and we were in Northern Poland. The time of year and the region were off.

"I heard that our (West German military) brass had been planning this for some time. It's probably because of the joint operation between the East and West camps."

(In other words, this operation will also be an opportunity for cultural exchange.....)

There was a limit to how far the top-down approach alone can break down the barriers between East and West. Mutual understanding at the local level would be indispensable. In addition, I believed that the taste of beer in West Germany was second to none.

"Tomorrow, the people in the east will return to their home countries. That's why I feel they're taking this opportunity now. I guess there's a farewell party aspect to it."

Maybe I could talk with the guys from the 666th TSF Squadron, and if it was a banquet, the politics would be left aside.

"I see. Perhaps this is a good opportunity to show the guys in the East the strength of our culture."

"You're not being honest, aren't you? Why don't you just tell them you want to be friends with them?"

"Absolutely not."

"..... Oops, it's about time. Hey, the shower time is about to end. Let's go."

"The time limits in the shower room are different for men and women, and even if they were the same, I wouldn't be foolish enough to head there with you, Major."

I glared at my superior with a reproachful look, as he stuck out his tongue in a deliberate manner.

**7:00 P.M. Former Polish Territory
Gdańsk Bay, Gdańsk Base, TSF Hangar**

The out-of-season Oktoberfest organized by the West German Army turned out to be surprisingly elaborate.

The venue was a TSF hangar at the Gdańsk base, but tables were lined up in the center as if in a beer hall, and on all sides were food stalls (Imbiss) serving the specialties of each country participating in the operation.

The event also featured a number of overly courteous female waitresses, half of them were female soldiers, but all of them were running around the venue in traditional South German costumes (Dirndl). Also, they held several one-liter beer mugs with great gusto, just like at the original event.

"It seems like a matter of pride to go this far"

I said admiringly, dressed in my BDU and holding a beer mug in one corner of the hall.

TSFs were being serviced in the area next to the hangar where the event took place, and TSFs continued to take off and land on the runway, indicating that this Gdańsk base was still on a war footing (Preparation for war).

However, the expressions on the faces of the generals participating in the festivities were all cheerful, and it seemed to be a refreshing break for them. Not only the European Union and Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) forces based at the Gdańsk base, but also U.S. and UN forces deployed at the Gdynia base in the north were present in large numbers. They were all drinking beer as if they were bathing in it.

"Are the 'top brass' colluding with beer brewers to promote their products? I've heard that beer traders have started recently to move their breweries overseas in preparation for the BETA invasion of the mainland."

"Senpai! Let's skip the serious talk at least at a time like this!"

◉Second Lieutenant Kristol Koch, my junior and colleague, said dismissively.

The group of young surface pilots, including me and Kristol, arrived at the venue about an hour earlier and just kept drinking from then on.

There was no sign of Balck, who invited me here. — he might not be participating or he might be elsewhere.

Kristol took a good swig of her beer and then told me with a slightly different optimism than Balck.

"Fuwaaaa! It's a good thing that the war situation has settled down, isn't it? You have played a part in it, so let's have a little fun. Festivals are for having fun."

"Well, yes, but"

"Oh, or is it because of this kind of loose atmosphere? Does it make your blood tingle? When it comes to combat, is it possible that you actually awaken another personality? Like a literal witch (Circe)."

The name Circe meant witch in Greek mythology. ⁽⁶⁷⁾

".....Do you want to be sunk in Gdańsk Bay?"

I did not dislike the sound of the name, but I had no idea what my grandfather really meant when he named me that. I had asked him several times, but he always laughed and misled me.

"Hey, waitress, more beer! I'll have a Krombacher!" ⁽⁶⁸⁾

Kristol ordered more as if nothing had happened. While holding back a sigh, I admitted that my junior colleague's words made sense. Since I was here to relax with my friends, it was not in good taste for me to be suspicious of what was going on behind the scenes.

And it was a rare opportunity to taste several kinds of beer, even in West Germany. I have another mission tomorrow, but as long as I didn't drink enough to be drunk, I should be fine.

(A friend you can hang out with without constraint, huh?))

The conversation I had with Theodore and Anett in the morning unexpectedly came back to me.

(In East Germany, where it's infested with the surveillance of the secret police - the Stasi -, it may be difficult to even get such friends.)

The West German military intelligence organization, the Federal Intelligence Service (BDN), which was effectively the secret police, was also said to be doing some pretty shady work. Even so, East Germany, where the secret police were involved even in personal relationships, seemed so unusual that it made the BDN seem almost endearing. ⁽⁶⁹⁾

Even if East Germany was eventually destroyed and the army and refugees took refuge in West Germany, the Stasi alone had to be eliminated. Otherwise, even the unity between the East and West camps that was fostered in this operation could be lost again.

(I wish there was something I could do to help.)

"Anyway, doesn't senpai have to go?"

At Kristol's question, I asked back with a curious look on my face.

"Have to go where?"

"To the 666th TSF Squadron. If they're here, I guess you should at least say hello~."

"As much as I'd like to."

I pointed at a corner of the venue with my chin. Kristol looked in that direction and made an approving face.

The Squadron pilots were in the hall with the maintenance team and were greeted and questioned by soldiers from other countries. Both Theodore and Anett responded with bewilderment.

There were also U.S. Navy soldiers — probably surface pilots of the 103rd TSF Squadron (VF-103) equipped with F-14s (Tomcat). There were also a number of soldiers from the 51st Tactical Armored Battalion, who had participated in the mission together with them, and who might have felt a sense of rivalry with the U.S. Navy.

"If I show my face now, it will only cause trouble."

"You say that, but aren't you really worried about that red-haired boy~?"

Kristol asked with a smirk.

"This morning, you were nowhere to be found, weren't you senpai? Where did you go? Rumor has it that you were meeting with that boy"

How preceptive! With an inward twinge, I replied in a stern voice.

"Stop talking like the Major."

"But you had an argument with him the day before."

"What does that have to do with this?"

"I thought since you hardly had any actual male presence in your life so far, seeing the red-haired boy in action in that battle might have made you interested in him."

"You know,....."

I murmured in a fed-up manner again, but on the inside, I was certainly flustered.

Kristol was right, I would be lying if I said I was not interested in that man — Theodore.

After all, Theodor was the first East German with whom I had a direct conversation, and at the same time, he was the hero who saved the bridgehead. If Theodore had been killed in the final stage of the laserjagd, the bridgehead would have been destroyed and I might have died too.

Besides, Theodore was the first person of the opposite sex who was my age and not overly modest or coy toward me. I was attracted to talking with him, who wasn't aware of my true lineage. That part was true.

But I couldn't quite ascertain whether it was a romantic interest or not. I thought I would be able to rely on him to be my partner, and his high reputation around me would make it easier to introduce him to my grandfather — if he really wanted asylum, I would be willing to help him with that.

(Hopefully, we'll get to know each other.)

I was aware of my feelings that I would never be able to express to anyone else. The opposite sex, which would see me as I was, was almost impossible to find in West Germany.

"Sorry to interrupt this conversation, but do you have a minute?"

Suddenly, a voice came from the side of the room — a familiar voice that made me turn my head and roll my eyes the next moment.

She had clear blue eyes and flowing blond hair. She was wearing the BDU of the East German army, which I always ridiculed for its unrefined design, but it rather made her virtuous presence more prominent.

Captain Irisdina Bernhard, commander of the 666th TSF Squadron.

Behind her was a female East German military surface pilot — apparently her attendant. Judging from her skin color, she was probably an Asian immigrant.

Everyone had heard about Irisdina from the newspapers and other media reports, and everyone in the room tried to stand up, but Irisdina hurriedly restrained them.

"Wait, this is a banquet hall. I don't want to ruin the atmosphere."

"But you are"

"Please, stay as you are... I'm not going to take up too much of your time."

When we were told that, I and the others had no choice but to take our seats. Perhaps out of concern for us, Irisdina also pulled up a chair close at hand and sat down.

Irisdina looked at me, smiled kindly, and opened her mouth.

"You must be Second Lieutenant Circe Steinhoff. You are the one who told me about the need for support in that battle. I wanted to thank you in person. Please accept my deepest gratitude."

"Oh no, I have done nothing to be thanked for."

I fumbled my words, perplexed by the sudden mention of my name.

I was used to meeting military brass because of my grandfather's involvement, but in front of me was the commander of the 666th TSF Squadron, the "Most powerful in East Germany. Although I had no respect for the East German army itself, I was still nervous when I was facing a real hero.

Irisdina slightly nodded.

"No need to be modest. Your courageous action saved the bridgehead in the end. We are grateful for your understanding."

"....."

"And if you recognize us as comrades-in-arms, please remember that there are those in East Germany who wish to fight with you against the BETA. I, too, am glad to be able to fight with you."

Irisdina added, seeming a bit lonely.

"Although we were able to join hands on the battlefield, the gulf between East and West Germany is still deep. It will not be bridged overnight. However, every human being knows that BETA has no east or west. That is why I want to cherish what I have gained from this battle."

"If you don't mind, we can talk about that here"

"Isn't that a politically dangerous statement?"

Irisdina coolly replied to my concern.

"Now that the recent battle has created an atmosphere of reconciliation between East and West Germany, it is my duty as a surface pilot of the National People's Army (NVA) to maintain good relations with you. Isn't that so, Pham?"

"Yes. And there's no one here but us."

It would be better if there were no political problems and everyone was silent — they both expressed this unspoken agreement.

Irisdina then stood up.

"Well, there is still some work to be done before we leave — I'm reluctant to say farewell, but this is where I must leave you. I look forward to seeing you again. Pham, I'll leave the rest to you. It's all right for you to cut loose, but don't cause too much trouble for the rest."

"Yes. Thank you, Captain."

Irisdina responded with a one-handed gesture, and then walked away at a quick pace, her blonde hair swinging and shimmering like jewels.

I stared at it, appalled.

"As one would expect from a hero, her words are very persuasive."

Kristol muttered in admiration. I was not sure if she had felt goodwill toward the East Germans, but she had to admit that Irisdina's words were correct.

"In fact, the bridgehead was saved thanks to the three armies working together, and She was also the one who attracted the Fort class. She is truly a hero of our time."

The attendant. — The surface pilot called Pham smiled.

"But she's surprisingly girly, you know? She enjoys collecting beautiful teacups and drinking delicious tea and coffee with them. I've had the pleasure of sitting with her several times."

"Huh."

Kristol responded as if detached from reality. I was no different. It was out of character for Irisdina, who was talked about widely as a surface pilot who has experienced many battles, and it was beyond the realm of imagination that a culture similar to ours would have taken root in East Germany, which was under a socialist regime to begin with.

"Sorry to interrupt your fun."

Perhaps sensing our embarrassment, Pham put her hand over her mouth apologetically.

"I'll excuse myself. If you don't mind, I'd like to see you again so we can toast together later. I'm sure Theodore will also be very pleased."

Pham bowed politely and disappeared into the crowd, leaving an indescribable silence in its place.

I thought back to Irisdina's words. I want you to help me in case of an emergency — that's what Irisdina had said to me.

(And what's with the Asian guard that was with her.....? I don't think she was part of the last mission.)

"I still think senpai is like a witch (Circe)....."

Kristol muttered as she sighed.

"It must be something in your blood To make you gain the appreciation and gratitude of someone like her."

Unable to answer anything, I slurped my beer mug down to get Kristol out of my sight.

7:30 P.M. Former Polish Territory
Gdańsk Bay, Gdańsk Base, TSF Hangar

"I heard you had a hard time. How popular."

"Just drop it....."

When I emerged from the bustle around the 666th TSF Squadron after the noise had died down, I was greeted by the exhausted Theodore. He seemed to have no energy to get up and sat down languidly on a chair.

After the battle, Theodore was kept in the medical ward for examination and did not appear in public. Therefore, the soldiers who had participated in the operation were overly hospitable to the hero who had saved the bridgehead, as he had finally made his appearance.

Theodore's face was clearly flushed red from being offered alcoholic beverages as per the hospitality at the banquet. The pile of empty mugs on the table testified to the intensity of the situation.

"Theodore-san, are you all right?"

Katia rubbed Theodore's back anxiously. In contrast to Theodore, Katia seemed to be completely sober — When I looked closely, I could see several bottles of soda in the shade of the beer mug. Was she not able to handle alcohol, or simply couldn't help but drink too much of it?

I was impressed by Theodore's exhausted appearance.

Theodore could have predicted this when he participated in the event, yet he did not run and hide, but showed up and accepted everyone's hospitality — in other words, he must have decided that this was his political role and acted accordingly.

(More than competent enough to be a surface pilot, and politically astute - It just keeps getting better and better).

"Good grief. Theodore, you slacker. I can't believe you are bothered by this much."

Anett muttered condescendingly. Her words were clear, but her face was stained vermillion and she looked quite drunk.

"The last victory party was nothing compared to this. Isn't that so, Lise?"

"That's true, but Oniichan is still recuperating, and we shouldn't push him too hard"

The surface pilot called Lies made a strained laugh. She seemed to be drinking to an extent, but there was no particular change in her complexion. She was looking at me somewhat warily.

I looked to the corner of the table where Pham and a brusque female surface pilot were sitting across from each other. Pham was waving her hand smilingly, but the unsociable pilot was drinking her vodka silently, apparently with no intention of joining the conversation.

There was no sign of the Political commissar who had been yelling during the Laserjagd battle, or the strong-looking male pilot who seemed to be Irisdina's second-in-command.

"So, what are you doing here?"

Anett said bitinglly. It seems that her IFF (Identification friend or foe) has been judging me as an Enemy from the very beginning, probably due to the incident in the morning.

"..... did you come to pester us again?"

Maybe this place was a chance to make Theodore aware of me. Besides, it was also a chance to achieve the other purpose of my visit here....

I put my hands on my hips and lifted my chin in a condescending manner.

"I came all the way over here to say hello to you, but your red face is saying a lot. I bet you are not even a good drinker anyways."

"What the hell? Nothing of that sort at all! Do you want to compete and see who can hold their liquor more? I'll take you up on it!"

Anett reacted as expected, and I responded with a smile on my face.

"I don't want to. Unlike you, I'm not going to neglect my mission tomorrow. I came here for a reason..."

I put my hands around the shoulders of the dozed Theodore and held his body, especially his chest, close to mine — Anett and Lise's expressions froze.

"H, hey, ...!"

"Your name's Theodore, isn't it? Why don't you come back and have a drink with me? I'll take the time to tell you all about West Germany. Politically, it won't be a problem, isn't that right, Theodore?"

Anett was the first to react. She slammed the mug she was holding onto the desk and stood up vigorously. Slightly later, Lise stood up as well.

"Theodore is one of us! Don't try to seduce him!"

"That's right! And please get your body away from Oniichan as soon as possible! He's tired and needs to rest! I'm his sister and if I say so, then there's no doubt about it! I'll take responsibility for taking him to the living quarters, so you all need to leave!"

This girl was Theodore's sister? And she seemed to be a brocon While I was amazed, Anett exclaimed.

"Lise, don't just say whatever you want! Theodore is here to drink with me!"

"Why are you trying to keep Oniichan all to yourself too, Anett-chan! Your turn ended with that hospital room incident! From now on, it will always be my turn!"

"Th....That was just an accident Anyway, Theodore stays here!"

"No, you should let Oniichan rest! As his sister, I am prepared to sleep with him!"

"I don't know what you mean, but"

Somewhat bewildered by the unexpected entry of Lise, I continued, keeping my body close to Theodore's.

"OK. All of you, if you want to claim ownership of Theodore, let's make it straightforward."

Deep down I smiled. As for Anett, I knew that she was an intuitive type — a surface pilot with muscles for brains, and now she was in an alcoholic state. I was a little drunk myself, but I was confident that I could win any contest that came my way. I had no information about the surface pilot named Lise, but seeing how distraught she became as soon as I put my body close to Theodore's, I was sure there was plenty of room for me to take advantage of her mental state.

"Well, then, in a manner fitting for surface pilots, we should..."

Shall we each tell a story of our heroism on the battlefield and have the spectators evaluate it?

"It's already decided."

".....! Major?"

I turned around, reflexively, and there stood a familiar face — Balck, commander of the 51st Tactical Armored Battalion, looking as if he had heard something interesting.

The appearance of the Major caused everyone around him to try to stand up at once, but he restrained them with his hand.

"This is a no-holds-barred party. Don't worry about differences in position or class. I heard you were here, so I was just curious."

"That's fine, but what are you talking about.....?"

I asked, wary. The fact that Balck was poking at a time like this was in itself a bad sign.

Balck twisted his mouth in a smile.

"It's the **"Ejiken"** (Surface Pilot Tournament)"



"Ladies and gentlemen, gathered here at the out-of-season Oktoberfest! The battle to clear up the friction between East and West Germany is about to begin! The "strongest in East Germany" 666th TSF Squadron and the girls of the elite 51st Tactical Armored Battalion from West Germany will face off! The name of the match is **"Ejiken"** !"

Balck gave a cheerful preface as if he were singing a hymn. Attracted by his voice, a crowd quickly formed. However, it was inevitable that the crowd was somewhat divided into east and west camps.

"The rules are simple! You play the well-known Asian three-way game of Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck), where the loser takes off his or her clothes in an unlimited time match until giving up! If you don't want to take off your clothes, you can just chug a glass of vodka, but if you overdo it, you can be sure that tomorrow will be a disaster! Clean up the vomit you will spew on the control unit yourself!"

The crowd erupted with excitement.

"Three will be participating! From the 666th TSF Squadron, Second Lieutenant Anett Hosenfeld, the only halberd user in the squadron, and her junior, Second Lieutenant Lies Hohenstein! Both of them are smoking hot!"

The crowd's eyes went to where Balck's hand was held out — there were Anett and Lise. Anett was as drunk as ever, and Lise was almost sober, but both were smiling confidently and waving to the crowd.

"From the 51st Tactical Armored Battalion, Second Lieutenant Circe Steinhoff, known as a [cool beauty](#) with a sharp tongue and the blood of the Luftwaffe's greatest Experte! As her commander, I must say, this girl is one fine jewel!"

The crowd's gaze now fell on me. I glared at Balck hatefully, my face turning red.

"The prize is the right to spend a pleasant evening with the 666th surface pilot here, Second Lieutenant Theodor Eberbach! I don't mean anything obscene by it, of course, but still, you wouldn't mind that, would you, lad?"

Laughter and jeering comments flew about from the spectators. — Theodore didn't respond. Until a short while ago he was still in a daze, even though he seemed to be putting up a resistance for some reason, but after Balck forced him to drink about five shots of vodka, he ended up leaning against the desk as if his soul had completely drained out of him.

Balck turned toward me and confidently told me, showing his white teeth.

"How's that for a prize.....?"

"I don't care! Why are you suddenly taking this conversation in a direction I don't understand!"

I yelled reflexively. However, because Balck had suddenly started dividing the room, I had missed the timing to interject.

"This is nothing but a sexual harassment banquet! I'll sue the Legal Affairs Bureau!"

"For the sake of East-West friendship, isn't it important to be the catalyst that brings everyone's hearts together? That's why I am putting my heart into it....."

Balck passed it off in an easy-going manner with a plausible reason.

"And I've heard that **"Ejiken"** is one of the traditional arts dedicated to the gods in some Asian countries?"

"If it's mutual understanding between the two camps, then there should be a more sane way! Besides, why is the ratio of participants two to one!"

"It's a handicap, and it looks like the other side is already ready anyways. Besides, this is a game you already started. You can tolerate a little disadvantage. If you don't like it, show me some other way to handle it."

"I'm representing my battalion in this match! If we lose, it will affect the reputation of the battalion!"

"If you don't lose then it's fine, right? Well, it's my unit, so it's more typical to be this loose."

".....! Each and every one of you is!"

I turned to Lise and Anett, giving up on trying to persuade Balck, who was a bit of a pushover,

"If you lose, it will be an embarrassment to the squadron! I mean, is this politically acceptable?"

"Don't worry, I'm going to win."

Anett answered nonchalantly.

"Besides, before I came here, I was told by a Political commissar attached to the squadron that 'we have to allow a certain amount of exchange in order to deepen the friendship between East and West Germany.'.....It was surprising that Comrade Lieutenant would say something like that..... Ha ha ha ha~!"

"This situation is far from "a certain amount!"

"Moreover, I'm a halberd user, you know. I can cut any opponent in two with one slash, of course! Ha-ha-ha-ha~"

(This girl is hopeless, I have to do something quickly...!)

"Fufufu."

Anett laughed eerily. I was not sure if it were the effects of alcohol or something related to her remark.

"Errr, jeez. That ... ummm. Theodore, say something too!"

"I intend to win too. Against you, and of course against Anett-chan as well."

A neat and clean smile showed on Lise's face.

"I will share Oniichan with everyone as much as possible, but I will not tolerate any sneaky acts."

"What the hell are you talking about!?"

I looked at Pham and the other surface pilot, and Pham was smiling, while the unsociable female pilot was silently slurping her vodka without a care in the world as before.

"You want to run? If the Major's words are correct, then the descendant pilot of the best Experte in the West German Luftwaffe was afraid of the challenge of the East German surface pilots."

I gulped at these words and looked at the spectators' side — where the battalion's surface pilots, including Kristol, were happily watching the match and jeering. No matter how you look at it, this was not a situation where I could just back down.

I hesitated for a few seconds, almost groaning, and then made a decision. I gulped down the contents of the mug in my hand as if it were medicine.

".....! All right, I get it! I'll do it! Don't underestimate the heiress to the Steinhoff name!"

Perhaps confirming my resolve, Balck once again held his hands out in front of the crowd.

"That's it then. Time for round one! Let's go!"

「 「 「Jan-Ken (Schnick, Schnack)——」 」 」

8:00 P.M. Former Polish Territory
Gdańsk Bay, Gdańsk Base, TSF Hangar

Twenty minutes had passed since the battle began, but it was too one-sided.

"Why, why can't I win!"

I shivered as if an electric current was flowing through my entire body, and stared at my open palm with a bright red face — the hand that represented paper (Papier) in Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck). In high spirits, Anett and Lise held their hands up in the air with two fingers in open scissors (Schere).

I combed my fingers through my hair several times to calm my mind — I had lost more than 10 times, so I had taken off my shoes, hat, and even my socks, and already had a few gulps of vodka.

In a state of intense drunkenness, I gritted my teeth and removed one of my remaining garments, a BDU jacket. The spectators cheered as I revealed my upper body covered by a tank top and my white-toned arms. The generals, who at the beginning of the event had been divided into east and west drinking groups, now mingled together and made noise side by side.

"Now all I have is a pair of BDU pants, a tank top, and some underwear. grrrrrrrr....."

Anett laughed as she rubbed her hands suspiciously, like a middle-aged man about to sexually harass someone. Anett has also lost a few times, but she chose to take swigs of vodka and has yet to take off a single piece of clothing. — However, it seemed to me that Anett, now fully drunk, would not even mind taking it off.

Lise, on the other hand, was nearly unharmed, having only taken off the shoes on both feet. Of course, she had not drunk a single glass of vodka.

I clenched my teeth. If possible, I had to turn the tables here and seize the momentum.

Anett hid her right hand behind her back and shouted with vigor.

"Now let's move on to the next round! Jan-Ken (Schnick, Schnack)..."

「 「 「Pon (Schnuck).」 」 」 」

The three of us held out our right hands at the same time — I with the stone (Stein), Anett with the scissors (Schere), and Lise with the paper (Papier). In other words, we were in a draw.

(This pattern again.....!)

In many cases, this was the case when it came to draws. In other words, I would make the winning move against Anett, and Lise would make the winning move against me. The other patterns were more or less 50-50.

What this meant was....

(This girl named Lise, she's got her sights set on me!?)

Lise was probably anticipating the moves that Anett and I would make as they were being played out. Of course, Lise, being human, was not perfect, and therefore the probability was not 100%, but it was a good example of some of the rules of psychological warfare in Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck), — Determine what the opponent will play based on the previous move, if the opponent made the same move twice in a row, they would often make another move, etc. Her winning rate has probably increased by taking into account the aforementioned factors, and by abandoning hesitation and taking an aggressive approach to the game. If she was doing this while supporting Anett, her quick thinking and intuition were extraordinary, even taking into account that she was a surface pilot.

Also, my own lack of luck may have added to it. Even if Lise had used such moves, as long as Anett intervened, I should have had a slightly higher chance of winning.

Now, "luck" was running away from me... Come to think of it, when Balck started this kind of thing... I was aware of it.

And the fact that this pattern continued meant....

"Now, the next one... Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck)!"

I, still in hesitation, put out my hand as if pushed by Anett's yell. The result was....

"Yay! We won again!"

"You did it, Anett-chan!"

Anett and Lise clasped their hands together in excitement. My body, which was burning hot from the alcohol, shivered.

(I knew it, this girl!)

She was strong — I felt firsthand the high level of Lise's ability. Her reflexes and dynamic vision were probably superior to those of an ordinary person, and she seemed to be able to change her moves with subtle timing that would not lead to an atodashi. ⁽⁷⁰⁾

Come to think of it, Lise also assisted Theodore's assault in the recent Laserjagd. This surface pilot, despite appearances, might be one of the best in the 666th.

"Aaaah. Look at us going. Lise also seems to have been lucky. We are in perfect form, aren't we?"

"That's right! I think we can even form an element at this point!"

"Not a bad idea! I'll suggest it to Comrade Lieutenant next time~! Hahaha~, hiccup"

While Anett was talking in a hiccup-infused, carefree manner, I was frozen in place as I gave her a side glance.

If I took off any more of my clothes, I would be exposing my underwear to the public. Normally, this would not bother me, with how all eyes were upon me today, it was a different matter. However, if I were to drink any more alcohol, I would lose my rational judgment, and the situation would likely worsen further.

"Hey, Hey, Hey, what are you going to~ do?"

Anett was getting to the point here. Lise looked at Balck as if to ask for help, but he had no intention of offering it. The others in the battalion were also waiting for me to make a decision, their gazes filled with passion.

".....! Ok then!"

I made my resolve, then I took off my BDU pants with a mighty thud and threw them high in the air. My pure white panties and slender legs were exposed to everyone, who were abuzz with excitement. Shame overcame me, and I wanted to run away on the spot.

But I dared to puff out my chest and act as if nothing was wrong.

"Co.... Come to think of it, I moved around in that suit when I was in the surface pilot training academy, so it's nothing!"

Ah, that made the **"Ejiken"** appropriate for surface pilots, it just came to me. And surprisingly, it made sense...I declared loudly, feeling like crying to myself for a moment as I was convinced on the inside by Balck's words.

"Even though you are saying that, your face is all stained red ~?"

"Shut up! I'm going to make you go through the same, or worse, so get ready!"

Although I have been speaking sharply with vigor, it didn't change that I was driven into a corner.

If I lost one more time, I only had my tank top to take off — as I said, it was better than when I was wearing the fortified suit for training. That colorless, transparent protective coating was not much

different from being seen naked — even if it was to blunt the unnecessary sense of shame, I remember feeling quite relieved when I received my regular fortified suit after being commissioned.

In any case, I would have to give up if I lost anymore. I certainly would have liked to get to know Theodore better, but this was not a game that should be continued by making a spectacle of my nudity. I was also aware that I have already over-served the spectators.

(But I can't lose without doing anything!)

I wanted to avoid that. Above all, my pride would not allow it.

I took a deep breath and forced myself to think calmly — although the alcohol was making me considerably clumsy. For a moment, the haze in my head seemed to clear.

(The problem is this girl Lise.....)

Perhaps Lise was trying to embarrass me for trying to make a pass at Theodore, I didn't know, but she was clearly out to get me. Apparently, as was my first guess, Lise was a severe Brocon and would not tolerate having anyone else sharing her brother.

In order to win the match, I needed to control Lise's movement, not Anett's, and still regain my "luck".

(Then I will play my unexpected hand!)

"Let's get on with it! Jan-Ken (Schnick, Schnack)——"

Anett, riding the momentum of her winning streak, shouted out in high spirits. I reached out with my hand, as I have in the past.

「 「 「Pon (Schnuck).」 」 」 」

Lise opened her eyes wide at the hand that was put out.

"Eeeeh? Why?"

Anett raised her voice in surprise. Along with Anett, Lise had also suffered defeat.

(Yeah!)

I dared to change my hand to the one I thought it would lose just before the round because of the possibility that she was reading my unconscious pattern. Furthermore, I was playing with the opposite hand from my dominant hand, as it was possible that she analyzed my habit. There might have been other reasons for Lise's strength, but if I could reduce even one cause for my mistakes, I might have a chance to win.

Inwardly, I was relieved from the bottom of my heart. I lifted my chin and raised my waist as if proud of my victory. I was ridiculously dressed in panties and a tank top.

'Mhmm, we've lost It can't be helped Here I go!"

After staring at her hands curiously, Anett took her BDU jacket without hesitation. It landed on the spectator side, and an unusual cheer erupted. Anett opened her arms to receive the cheers. She was quite the silly girl — after all, she seemed to have had quite a bit of alcohol in her system.

"Wow, ..., you really did it"

While taking off her socks, Lise muttered in admiration. She seemed to have noticed my intentions.

"Don't underestimate the West German surface pilots too much! You may have your battle-tested instincts, but our theory ⁽⁷¹⁾ is more advanced than yours!"

"Heeey, Liseeeee, what is she talking about~? Is it tasty~?"

"Don't worry about it, Anett-chan. She is talking to me."

Lise smiled as she said this and rolled up the sleeves of her BDU for the first time since she got here. It seemed she was getting serious.

(But now this girl can't use the pattern she's been using so far. I can move ahead now!)

It was not perfect, but it would have helped me avoid a one-sided defeat. Now all that remained was to get Lise's two reading choices off the table. And if I could turn the tide of my "Luck" with this victory....

"Let's start fighting back! Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck)!"

This time, to my surprise — I had been defeated by both Anett and Lise.

(This can't be! I lost this time too even though I played a different hand! Were they this quick to discover my new pattern!?)

I wanted to think that "Luck" had just left me again, but when I saw Lise smiling at me coldly, I could only think that it was a targeted result, just as I had guessed.

".....!"

I clenched my fists in frustration and took off my tank top. Like Anett, I tossed it to the spectators, who cheered loudly, and I felt all eyes on my chest.

(T....They should be in a good size and not in a bad shape!)

Perhaps my shame has reached its limit, and my whole body began to tremble as if I had a fever. I tried desperately to suppress it by shrinking both my arms and legs, but perhaps this made me look indescribably alluring, which in turn made the spectators' cries louder.



I, who was descended from the strongest Experte of the Luftwaffe, had accepted the competition with great enthusiasm and ended up in such an ugly situation. I felt not only embarrassed but also ashamed.

(I I want to die.)

I felt like crying. I tried to keep my composure by thinking that If it were just panties and a bra, it was just like a bathing suit, and it was better than the fortified suit that made me feel like I was wearing vinyl, but...

(It's not every day I'm exposed to such a public audience with my training gear on!)

I looked around as if looking for solace — Theodore was still being swept away by the situation, but Balck has a big smile on his face and his friends in the battalion were whistling and cheering. I have always been perceived as a cool beauty, so being dressed like this was apparently the best amusement he could get.

(I will kill these guys someday!)

"..... You've got some serious nerves, don't you~!"

Anett said in a complimentary manner. She seemed to think that her victory was unassailable. She approached confidently with her hands on her hips as if imitating me.

Perhaps sensing that the next match was to be a decisive one, the spectators quickly quieted down and gazed at us with intense enthusiasm.

I endured the shame and continued to struggle with my thoughts.

(Something, anything to reverse the situation!)

If I could suppress Lise, I would have a chance to win, but I couldn't find a breakthrough. No matter what moves I make, I was certain that I have developed some habits and that Lise was reading my patterns using them as clues, but I didn't think I could do anything about it.

That said, surrendering was out of the question — after the spectators had been so excited, abandoning the match would be more of a stain on Steinhoff's name than a defeat.

(Something to at least buy me some time until I can find a plan!)

Anett was approaching closer, and Lise was smiling smugly behind her... I stared at the two of them and frantically kept thinking. Not that I was disregarding Irisdina's words, the gap in ability between both of us was not something I could overcome overnight.

(Gap? Overnight.....?)

I was struck by a flash of inspiration. I looked at one part of myself, and then at the same parts that Anett and Lise had, and a thought flashed through my mind.

After a few seconds of silence, I prepared myself, straightened my back and puffed up my chest. My bosom, encased in a white bra, swayed slightly as I pointed to the ceiling.

"Have some nerves? Isn't it obvious? I can't be bothered with something like this. Besides..."

Pushing down my extreme shame, I slowly put my hands on my hips and bounced my breasts proudly, abandoning all pride — a series of gasps of surprise and delight from the spectators could be heard.

"I'm more proud of my body than you are of yours. You're a pure flat-top TSF carrier, aren't you?"

".....! What the hell~!?"

Anett shouted in an unprecedented manner. Her face, stained red with alcohol, turned to an even darker red.

"I've got some of that, too! Take a look if you want!"

My eyes widened. I wasn't surprised by Anett's angry voice.

(Good! She took the bait!)

Everything went according to plan. I had dared to provoke only Anett by talking about the size of her breasts. It was so embarrassing that I almost swooned at the thought of making a move that would emphasize the size of my own breasts, but this was all part of the road to victory...!

With a pathetic smile on my mouth, I moved forward to Anett and pressed my chest against hers to make her have a real feeling for the mass of my breasts encased in my white bra.

"Really? Isn't it because you don't want to show your flat body that you are so desperate to win?"

"Mukka~! That simply isn't true!"

"Theodore isn't satisfied with a modest chest like yours, is he? I guess all the nutrients from wielding a halberd go to your muscles and not there, huh?"

"Th....That's not a nice thing to say!"

Anett looked like a heated pot with steam blowing out. As if to make a point, I thrust my forefinger firmly against her chest.

"If you're frustrated, why don't you show that sorry thing in front of everyone? If you win that way, you might be able to prove that your brain is not entirely muscles, right?"

".....! I WILL DO ITTTTTT!!!!!"

I was burning with shame at having to shake my breasts in front of Anett and everyone, but it was a necessary sacrifice for victory.

Triggered by this, Anett instantly removed her tank top and BDU pants, quickly changing into the same outfit as me. Her lean yet softly curved full body was revealed.

On the inside, I took a triumphant pose. This was what I have been aiming for.

If you had a personality like Anett's, you must have had a complex about the size of your breasts. Especially if drunk. If that was the case, then I had to provoke her and make it impossible for her to make normal judgments — just like the gap in observational skills between me and Lise, which she may have cultivated in actual combat, the gap between Anett's breasts and my own breasts couldn't be bridged overnight!

(Even though the country was divided into East and West Germany, girls share the same concern about the size of their breasts Yes, there are no east-west borders there!)

It felt like an unreasonable stretch to me, but strangely enough, it made sense. Regardless of their political standing or skills, Anett and the others were still flesh and blood human beings. All that remained was to let the momentum take over and strike only Anett...

Lise's facial expression changed as she drew closer to Anett.

"What are you doing, Anett-chan? To take off your own clothes!"

"I can't just stand there and keep quiet after being made fun of so much! You are going to watch me win right here and now!"

"You're not going to take her challenge, are you!?"

"Don't worry, don't worry! We've had a sweeping victory so far~! It's a piece of ~ cake! I have a lucky break!"

I could see Lise's hardened expression. The winning streak that had been built up by Lise's dark plan has backfired....

The spectators were more excited than ever about what was happening. Two female surface pilots from East and West Germany staring at each other in their most outrageous outfits. The male surface pilots

from the East and the West put their shoulders around each other and shouted in unison. It was a silly but historically picturesque scene.

I confidently placed my hands on my hips as I shoved my own breasts against Anett's chest.

"Fu, that's the spirit! Let's see who's going to give up first!"

"This time we're going to settle this!"

"Tomorrow the newspapers will write that the best East German surface pilots of the 666th TSF Squadron fled the Oktoberfest completely naked! It will be remembered by all as a triumph of capitalist greatness!"

"No, I bet tomorrow's newspaper will say that the descendent of the best experte in Luftwaffe history, prostrated herself stark naked! Not only all of Europe, but the whole world will weep as the very triumph of socialism!"

"Stop messing around and let's get started! Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck)!"

"A tie! Again! Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck)! Yes, I won!"

A moment later, I removed my bra with blinding speed and covered my breasts with my left hand. The spectators were in a frenzy of excitement and couldn't stay still. No one - not even me - could stop this momentum. In order to prevent Lies from interrupting, I had to maintain this exaltation — I couldn't say I was embarrassed and so on anymore.

"I haven't lost yet! And if I lose any more, I'll make it up to you in vodka! I'll even overpower you in a drinking contest! I don't care what happens tomorrow anymore!"

"Same here! Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck)! I lost!?"

Before I could say anything, Anett, like me, took off her bra and covered her breasts with her hand bra. There was no longer any sense of shame.

"Hmph, now that it has come to this, I'll win even if I have to strip naked!"

"Oh, I don't know about that. Some things are best kept secret, you know? Isn't that true, guys?"

Turning toward the spectators, I hugged my chest with both hands while curling my entire body as I had done earlier, and threw a wistful glance at the audience... The excitement in the audience had reached its limit, and here and there the East and West camps had even begun to pour beer at each other. It was an appeal that threw pride off the window, but it was very effective.

".....! Just because they are a little big that's all! So are mine!"

Anett tried a similar gesture. — the spectators got excited, but with less vigor than before. Anett's face went from red to black as she realized what this meant.

"That's it! I will kill you! I will certainly destroy you and this whole **Ejiken**. Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck)!"

"That's more like it! You should give up already! Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck)!"

"That's my line! Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck)!"

"Jan-Ken-Pon (Schnick, Schnack, Schnuck)!"

**10:00 p.m. Former Polish Territory
Gdańsk Bay, Gdańsk Base, Rest Room**

The white ceiling and fluorescent lights jumped into my sight as I woke up.

"Where am I.....?"

"Oh, you're awake.?"

A voice came from above my head. — I jumped up startled to find Pham Thi Lan, the Asian surface pilot of the 666th TSF Squadron, in the hangar. The location was a rest room adjacent to the hangar — apparently, I was unconscious, using Pham's lap as a pillow.

"Why am I here? What about the match?"

Puzzled by the situation, I tried to gather my thoughts. I remember chugging about five shots of vodka in just my panties and was still trying to continue the game....

Recalling that much, I fearfully checked my current appearance — I was wearing West German Army BDUs, both top and bottom. I could feel my bra on my chest. Someone must have helped me change.

"You did....."

Pham shook her head with a slight chuckle.

"I didn't do anything to warrant your thanks. Your people still had more noise to make, and I needed some air."

"But, no I mean, thank you."

I bowed my head slightly.

"So, who was the winner from earlier? I don't remember the last round"

"Oh. That didn't end up being a win for anyone."

"No one won? Why?"

Even though I went that far, I couldn't believe it! — a scowling expression appeared on my face, and Pham let out a faint smile again.

"Didn't you notice? You'll know if you look behind you."

I turned around to see Anett, also wearing BDUs, leaning against the back of a chair with a pale face, asleep.

"Uh, this is"

"During the "Jan-Ken-Pon", both of you fainted and fell down on the spot. It was almost at the same time. So the game never continued. Lise-chan and Theodore-kun were taking turns playing with the other generals who came by."

Pham smiled reminiscently and continued.

"I think you two might have a distinctive affinity. You have pride in yourselves. You are both very competitive and somewhat unyielding, ... Maybe both Anett-chan and Theodore have made a good friend"

"That's I am not...."

"You were really trying to make it less of a game of "Jan-Ken-Pon" and more of a contest between the best of both worlds, weren't you? You were trying to let everyone know that both the East German surface pilots and the West German surface pilots are fighting desperately against the BETA, right?"

".....! That's"

I gulped — Pham's words were exactly what I had been thinking. The purpose was to make Theodore aware of himself, but at the same time...

"You sensed what Captain Bernhard wanted. Thank you. Your feelings made me very happy. I'm sure your superiors thought the same thing and came up with such a crazy idea."

Now that you mention it. — I nodded sincerely.

Perhaps Balck also wanted to show everyone that the East German surface pilots were just as capable of drinking, making noise, and fooling around on such occasions as their Western counterparts. That would certainly be more direct and effective than my own formalistic approach. I have long suspected that Balck seemed to have a better understanding of East Germany than I do.

Perhaps Pham knew the intent, which is why she did not stop Balck or warn Anett and Lise.

"It made everyone in the banquet laugh and see each other from different perspectives. I'm sure this is something that will be important in the future."

I thought of the faces of the other generals who had cheered us on. Everyone was smiling, and no one seemed to question the fact that I was with an enemy from our past.

She saw through me. Maybe even Balck. — I suddenly got embarrassed and my face felt hot.

"So keep up the good work. I hope you will always be friends with them"

Pham smiled as if she was a flower about to bloom. I nodded my head, unable to find the right words to say. Although I was humiliated in the end, what I had tried to do was not a mistake.

After saying that much, Pham smiled wickedly at me, as if she remembered something.

"But Oneesan doesn't think it's very nice of you to try to hog Theodore-kun to yourself. Theodore-kun belongs to everyone at the moment. Why don't you try to be a little more straightforward instead of trying to make Anett-chan aware of you?"

"I didn't mean to"!

I denied it with a blushed face. However, Pham kept smiling as if she knew everything.

"Or, instead, would you like to come to East Germany? Katia has already moved before, and we are always open to that. It's as you said, for Theodore-kun, the more the merrier, and I don't think there's no chance at all"

"As I was saying"!

Then, I felt something move behind me — Anett raised her back with her eyes closed.

"Grrrr! I told you not to talk about my breasts in front of me! Huh, What am I doing here~.....? Pham-nee and Circe!?"

Anett, still sleepy-eyed, was astonished. Pham and I looked at each other and laughed.

(It may have been a disaster for me, but it may have been a good thing in the end.....)

Festivals are for fun — Kristol's words came to mind. If we could get to know each other and laugh like this, as Pham said, we might be able to transcend our positions and join hands. I thought it was a naive idea, but realizing it was the ideal, and it was what made us human.

If so, I am sure that one day I will be able to fulfill Irisdina and Pham's wishes. I too should be able to fight alongside Theodore and his friends. I have to temporarily put on hold the taking of Theodore's heart, but I am sure that there will be a chance.

With Anett looking at us curiously, Pham and I just kept laughing.

Episode End.

List of First Appearances

For the sake of the two who cannot return home

(MUV-LUV ALTERNATIVE TSF CROSS OPERATION)

(Included in Gianism Vol.2)

Please, those happy days

(MUV-LUV ALTERNATIVE TSF CROSS OPERATION)

(Included in "Total Eclipse" & "TSFIA" compilation Vol.6)

The value of a smile

(MUV-LUV ALTERNATIVE TSF CROSS OPERATION)

(Included in "Total Eclipse" & "TSFIA" compilation Vol.5)

Circe's disaster

(Newly written)



世界設定

東ドイツ国内の難民、移民問題

東ドイツにとって、人口と経済の問題は切実な懸案だった。東ドイツは西ドイツに対し、その双方で劣っていたからである。このため東ドイツは冷戦中にベルリンの壁を築いて東ドイツから西ドイツへの人員流出を阻止し、同時に他の東側諸国（ベトナムやキューバ、アンゴラなど）からの移民を積極的に受け入れた。

BETA大戦の勃発は、東ドイツの人口問題のさらなる改善を促した。BETAがソ連をはじめとする東側諸国に侵攻したことで、膨大な数の難民（東方難民）^{オーストリア・スロバキア}が東ドイツに押し寄せたからである。しかし、難民の流入による人口の急激な増大は、その統制を任された国家保安省^{シュタージ}の権力拡大を招き、東ドイツ国内の監視体制のさらなる強化に繋がった。また戦況の長期化に伴い移民と難民の生活環境も悪化、治安の不安定化を懸念した一般市民による差別も激しくなっていた。東ドイツ政府は一般市民の不安を和らげるために移民を移民街に隔離するだけでなく、大量の難民を難民キャンプに送り込み、最低限の生活を保障する代わりに過酷な労働作業に投入、さらには積極的に国家人民軍^Nや武装警察軍に取り込むことで前線の兵力不足を補った。

東ドイツの対BETA戦は、こうした移民と難民の犠牲によって成立していたのである。



范氏蘭（ファム・ティ・ラン）

第666戦術機中隊次席指揮官のファム・ティ・ラン中尉は、戦前にベトナムから東ドイツに渡ったベトナム人労働者を両親に持つ二世であり、厳密に言えば東ドイツ人となる。しかし、東ドイツの一般市民は移民に関する知識が乏しく、彼女のようなベトナム二世であっても差別の対象となった。

シュタージ 国家保安省の歴史と諜報活動

東ドイツの秘密警察である国家保安省は、第二次世界大戦後に東ドイツのソ連占領軍で創設された人民警察事務局の秘密警察部門、K15を源流としている。東ドイツ建国後、K15はソ連国家保安委員会の後ろ盾を得て急速に権力を拡大、一九五〇年に国家保安省として独立を果たした。

国家保安省はドイツ社会主義統一党の一党独裁体制の維持という目的を果たすため、国内に多数の一般市民の非公式協力者——情報提供者を配置した。東ドイツでの情報提供者の割合は悲観的な推測によれば10人に1人と言われ、この過酷な監視体制によって東ドイツの一般市民の言論は完全に封殺された。また、国家保安省は軍や政府にも情報提供者を潜り込ませ、情報の収集と権力拡大を図った。その手段としては、標的との肉体関係を利用する「蜜の罠」も用いられた。

また、国家保安省は西側諸国でも諜報活動を開、特に西ドイツでは多数のスパイを活動させるとともに、西ドイツ国内の「ドイツ赤軍」をはじめとする共産主義組織と連携し、多数のテロ事件を実行した。

ベアトリクス・ブレーメ

戦術機大隊「ヴェアヴォルフ」大隊指揮官、ベアトリクス・ブレーメ少佐。同大隊は国家保安省独自の軍隊、武装警察軍の精鋭であり、東西ドイツでの亡命者狩りや治安維持任務に活躍した。



シュタージ
国家保安省徽章



World History

Refugees and Migrants in East Germany

Population and economic issues were of critical concern to East Germany. East Germany was inferior to West Germany in both areas. For this reason, East Germany built the Berlin Wall during the Cold War to prevent the outflow of personnel from East Germany to West Germany, while at the same time actively accepting immigrants from other Eastern countries (Vietnam, Cuba, Angola, etc.).

The outbreak of the BETA War further exacerbated East Germany's population problems, as BETA's invasion of the Soviet Union and other Eastern countries brought huge numbers of refugees (Ost-Flüchtlinge) into East Germany. However, the rapid increase in population due to the influx of refugees led to an increase in the power of the Ministry of State Security (Stasi), which was entrusted with the control of the refugees, leading to a further strengthening of the surveillance system in East Germany. In addition, the prolonged war worsened the living conditions of immigrants and refugees, and discrimination against them by the general public, who were concerned about the instability of the security situation, also intensified. In order to alleviate civil unrest, the East German government not only segregated immigrants in immigrant areas, but also sent large numbers of refugees to refugee camps, where they were put to hard labor in exchange for a minimum standard of living, and actively recruited them into the National People's Army (NVA) and armed police forces to make up for the lack of troops on the front lines.

The war against BETA in East Germany was erected at the expense of these immigrants and refugees.

Pham Thi Lan

The 666th TSF Squadron second-in-command, First Lieutenant. Pham Thi Lan. A second-generation East German whose parents were Vietnamese laborers who came to East Germany from Vietnam before the war, making her, strictly speaking, an East German. However, the general public in East Germany lacked knowledge about immigration, and even a second generation Vietnamese like her was subject to discrimination.

History and Intelligence Activities of the Ministry of State Security (Stasi)

The Ministry of State Security, East Germany's secret police, originated from the K-5, the secret police division of the People's Police Criminal Investigation Department, which was established by the Soviet occupation forces in East Germany after World War II. After the founding of East Germany, the K-5 rapidly expanded its power with the backing of the Soviet State Security Committee and became an independent Ministry of State Security in 1955.

In order to fulfill its objective of maintaining the one-party regime of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the Ministry of State Security deployed a large number of civilian unofficial collaborators and informants throughout the country. The ratio of informants in East Germany was said to be one in ten according to pessimistic estimates, and this harsh surveillance system completely silenced the East German public. The Ministry of State Security also had informants row into the military and the government to gather information and expand its power. As a means to this end, they used physical relations with their targets, like the honey-trap.

The Ministry of State Security also conducted intelligence activities in Various western countries, particularly in West Germany, where it had a large number of spies active, and carried out numerous terrorist attacks in collaboration with the "German Red Army" and other communist organizations in West Germany.

Beatrix Brehme.

Commanding officer of the TSF Battalion "Wehrwolf" Battalion, Major Beatrix Brehme. The battalion belonging to the Stasi was an elite unit of armed inspectors, which was active in the hunt for asylum seekers and in security operations in East and West Germany.

Afterword

Nice to meet you if it's your first time, and good to see you if it's been a while.
I am Hiroki Uchida, in charge of the text for the "Schwarzesmarken" series.

Now, as I always do, I will give an explanation for those of you who are new to the series.

"Schwarzesmarken" is a shared world work of "Muv-Luv", the "Super Royal Road School Adventure Game" and "Muv-Luv Alternative", the "fairy tale of Love and Courage" series developed by the game brand AGE.

However, even if you pick up "Schwarzesmarken" out of the blue, 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 two short stories from the previously published "MUV-LUV ALTERNATIVE TSF CROSS OPERATION "Schwarzesmarken" & "TSFIA" compilation" series, one short story from the magazine "Gianism", and one newly written short story.

The first three are past stories of characters from the "Schwarzesmarken" book series (hereafter referred to as "the book"). The last one is an episode that takes place after the end of the third volume, and I think that even those who have already read all of the former will enjoy it.

So here we are at volume 2 of the short story collection.

In this issue, we have Gretel, who has grown up rapidly in the main story and is rising in popularity; Pham, the squadron's most popular heroine; Lise, one of the characters who forms the basis of the main story; and Circe, who was active in the "Neptune" operation as a surface pilot in the West German army.

I remember that the short story about Lise was particularly difficult to write, because it was quite voluminous, even though I was writing it while working on the main serialization. However, since I was in high spirits while writing it, I think it turned out to be as good as the other short stories.

Also, I am personally very pleased with Gretel's short story, which touches on the falsehoods and realities of East Germany, and Pham's short story, which touches on the immigration issues in East Germany. If readers have a chance to travel to Berlin, it might be interesting to drop in on the real setting locations of the stories.

I also enjoyed writing a short story about Circe, who is portrayed as a sharp tongued cool beauty character, but I enjoyed writing about an unexpected side of her. The West German army during the period of "Schwarzesmarken" is interesting in many ways, and I would like to write another story about Circe and her friends if I have the chance.

Gretel, Pham, Lise, and Circe play important roles in the story. I hope you enjoy the stories starring these ladies!

Speaking of "Muv-Luv" related topics, "Muv-Luv Alternative Total Eclipse" was released on May 16 for PS3 and Xbox 360. The story unfolds "beyond" the anime and novel versions, so fans are encouraged to play the game!

I have been visiting Tokyo once a month for work for the past six months or so, and each time I visit various restaurants in Tokyo to relieve the fatigue that has built up from work.

My latest favorite is Umemura, a sweet shop in Asakusa. It was the subject of a famous gourmet manga. The beans there are especially good! I've only been there a few times, but when the timing is right, I'll hit it up.

I also go to a standing buckwheat noodle shop (soba-ya) near a train station and slurp up some soba. I live in the suburbs of Nagoya, which is a cultural area of Kishimen, not Soba or Udon, so there are not many standing-only Soba restaurants. I am not used to eating standing up, so I am happy when I can sit down to eat.

I am envious that there are more foreign restaurants in Tokyo than in Aichi Prefecture. The other day I went to one of the few Belarusian restaurants in Japan and enjoyed authentic borscht. When I think of Belarus, I think of the capital Minsk, and when I think of Minsk, I think of Minsk Hive.....I couldn't help but think of the Belarus of the "ALT" world.

I would like to thank the many people who helped me this time as well.

Thanks to Ms. CARNELIAN for being in charge of the illustrations. Thank you very much for finishing the illustrations in such a short time! I am very impressed with the enthusiasm of the new illustrations this time. Especially the illustration of Lise on the front page, which made me shiver the moment I saw it. The illustration of Circe in the text was also lovely!

Mr. Kouki Yoshimune, the original author. Thank you very much for your supervision of this project. I look forward to the future development of the "Muv-Luv" series!

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.

The serialization of this edition of TechGian is reaching its climax. I hope you, our readers, will continue to follow along!

We hope to have the next volume available to you relatively soon.

See you in the next volume!

A certain day in June 2013 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's Notes

(1): I believe it refers to a member of the **Ulbricht** Group. The Ulbricht Group was a group of exiled members of the Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, or KPD), led by Walter Ulbricht, who flew from the Soviet Union back to Germany on April 30, 1945. Composed of functionaries from the KPD and ten anti-fascist prisoners of war, their job was to seek out anti-fascist individuals and prepare the groundwork for the re-establishment of communist organizations and unions in postwar Berlin. There were two additional regional groups, the Ackermann Group in Saxony and the Sobottka Group in Mecklenburg. Many of the group's members later became high-level officials in the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

(2): A **pioneer** movement is an organization for children operated by a communist party. Typically children enter into the organization in elementary school and continue until adolescence. The adolescents then typically join the **Young Communist League**. During the Russian Civil War from 1917 to 1921, most of the Russian Scoutmasters and many Scouts fought in the ranks of the White Army against the Red Army. Between 1918 and 1920, the All-Russian Congresses of the Russian Union of the Communist Youth (**Komsomol**) decided to eradicate the Scout movement and create an organization of the communist type, that would take Soviet children and adolescents under its umbrella. This organization would resemble the Scout movement in its form but properly educate children with Communist teachings. A national pioneer organization is often named after a famous party member that is considered a suitable role model for young communists, such as Vladimir Lenin in the Soviet Union, Enver Hoxha in Albania, Georgi Dimitrov in Bulgaria, José Martí in Cuba, **Ernst Thälmann** in East Germany, Damdin Sükhbaatar in Mongolia, and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam.



(3): The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, usually known as **Komsomol**, a syllabic abbreviation of the Russian Коммунистический Союз Молодёжи (Kommunisticheskiy Soyuz Molodyozhi), was a political youth organization in the Soviet Union. It is sometimes described as the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), although it was officially independent and referred to as "the helper and the reserve of the CPSU". It was the final stage of three youth organizations with members up to age 28, graduated at 14 from the Young Pioneers, and at nine from the Little Octobrists.



(4): **Schönfließ** is a district in the municipality of Mühlenbecker Land in the district of Oberhavel in Brandenburg . Until October 2003 it was an independent municipality, which was first mentioned by name in a document from the 13th century. In the 1960s, barracks were built on the outskirts of the village, in the Bieselheide , which were under the responsibility of the GDR Ministry for State Security . From 1990 onwards, new homes for around 500 families were built on this site, which meant that the population of around 400 (1989) increased fivefold within 20 years. Since then, further new residential buildings have ensured continuous growth in the number of inhabitants.



(5): **Oranienburg** is a town in Brandenburg, Germany. It is the capital of the district of Oberhavel. Due to its heavy bombing, Oranienburg is the "most dangerous town in Germany"; it is the only town in Germany which pursues a systematic search for unexploded ordnance (UXO) based on postwar aerial photos and magnetic or radar underground measurements for metal. By 2017 about 200 had been disposed of, and 350 to 400 were estimated to remain. It is estimated that the search and disposal will continue throughout the rest of the century. In one case 12,000 residents had to be evacuated. The federal government does not finance the removal of foreign UXO.



(6): **Beech** is a genus of deciduous trees in the family Fagaceae, native to temperate Europe, Asia and North America. Recent classifications recognize 10 to 13 species in two distinct subgenera, Engleriana and Fagus. The Engleriana subgenus is found only in East Asia, distinctive for their low branches, often made up of several major trunks with yellowish bark. The better known Fagus subgenus beeches are high-branching with tall, stout trunks and smooth silver-grey bark. The European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) is the most commonly cultivated, and very abundant in France and [Germany](#).



(7): A **turnstile** (also called a turnpike, gateline, baffle gate, automated gate, turn gate in some regions) is a form of gate which allows one person to pass at a time. A turnstile can be configured to enforce one-way human traffic. In addition, a turnstile can restrict passage only to people who insert a coin, ticket, pass, or other method of payment. Modern turnstiles are now incorporating biometrics which means retina scanning, fingerprints, and other individual human characteristics which can be scanned.



(8): A reference for those wondering about the original words and their chosen english counterparts: 反社会分子/han shakai bunshi literally means Anti-Society Molecule/Element, so I have decided to translate it as Anti-establishment parties. 反乱分子/hanran bunshi literally means insurrection/mutiny/rebellion element, so I translated it as dissident element. 反社会的/Hanshakaiteki means antisocial or illegal or contrary to public order, so I translated it as antisocialist.

(9): **Bitterfeld** is a town in the district of Anhalt-Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. Since 1 July 2007 it has been part of the town of Bitterfeld-Wolfen. It is situated approximately 25 km south of Dessau, and 30 km northeast of Halle (Saale). At the end of 2016, it had 40,964 inhabitants. During the East German (GDR) era, it gained notoriety for its chemical industry complex which caused remarkably severe pollution, even by GDR standards. On 24 April 1959, it also was a scene for the Bitterfeld Conference, locally known as the "Bitterfelder Weg". This conference sought to connect the working class with the artists of the day to form a socialist national culture.



(10): Magdeburg is the capital and second-largest city of the German state of Saxony-Anhalt, after Halle (Saale). It is situated on the Elbe River. The Allies bombed the city in 1945, destroying much of it. In 2005 Magdeburg celebrated its 1200th anniversary. In June 2013 the city was hit by record breaking flooding. Today, Magdeburg is the site of two universities, the Otto-von-Guericke University and the Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences. Magdeburg is situated on autobahn route 2 and autobahn route 14, and hence is at the connection point of the East (Berlin and beyond) with the West of Europe, as well as the North and South of Germany. As a modern manufacturing centre, the production of chemical products, steel, paper, and textiles are of particular economic significance, along with mechanical engineering and plant engineering, ecotechnology and life-cycle management, health management and logistics. Intel plans to build its largest plant in Europe in Magdeburg by 2027.



(11): A **counter-revolutionary** or an anti-revolutionary is anyone who opposes a revolution, particularly one who acts after a revolution in order to try to overturn it or reverse its course, in full or in part. (Like a revolutionary government) The adjective, "counter-revolutionary", pertains to movements that would restore the state of affairs, or the principles, that prevailed during a pre-revolutionary era.

The German Empire, and its predecessors the Holy Roman Empire and German Confederation, operated under counterrevolutionary principles, with these monarchical federations crushing attempted uprisings in, for example, 1848. After the 1867–71 creation of a new German realm by Prussia, chancellor Otto von Bismarck used policies favored by Socialists (such as state-sponsored healthcare) to undercut the opponents of the monarchy and protect it against revolution.

Not long after the German Revolution of 1918–1919 and signing of the Treaty of Versailles, a failed coup d'état known as the Kapp Putsch was instigated by various elements opposed to the Weimar Republic. It was led principally by Wolfgang Kapp and Walther von Lüttwitz.

During the Weimar era, the German Realm became an ideological battlefield between "red" and "white" factions, with the state eventually becoming bifurcated between the conservative Junker nobility which dominated the army and other high offices, including the presidency with Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, and the leftist revolutionaries who attempted several coups in the 1920s and later gained a base in parliament via the Communist Party of Germany, which, being internationalist in nature, opposed the extremist nationalism of the new National Socialist German Workers Party (Nazis). The Nazis, by making common cause with the counterrevolutionaries against the Communists, effected a takeover of the German state, at first under the adopted imagery of the monarchical era and only later (after the death of Hindenburg) under purely Nazi imagery.

The Nazis did not publicly characterise themselves as counterrevolutionaries; they condemned the traditional German forces of conservatism (e.g., Prussian monarchists, Junkers, and Roman Catholic clergy), whom they labeled as reactionaries (Reaktion) and coupled with the Red Front in the Nazi Party march *Die Fahne hoch* as their enemies). Nevertheless, in practice the Nazis supported many of the same ideas as these factions and virulently opposed revolutionary Marxism (e.g., using the conservative Freikorps to crush Communist uprisings), ostensibly idealising German tradition, folklore, and heroes, such as Frederick the Great). The fact that the Nazis called their 1933 rise to power the national revolution showed that they understood the popular hunger for some type of radical change; nonetheless, they understood the equally powerful popular impulse toward stability and continuity, and rejected the parliamentarianism of the Weimar Constitution as merely a first step towards Bolshevism. Thus, for instance, they catered to reactionary tendencies among the German people by propagandistic demonstrations linking the Nazi state to the traditional Reich ("realm" or "empire") by referring to it informally as the "Drittes Reich" ("Third Realm"), implying a specious continuity between it and the historic German entities appealing to German reactionaries: the Holy Roman Empire (the "First Realm") and the German Empire (the "Second Realm"). (See also reactionary modernism.)

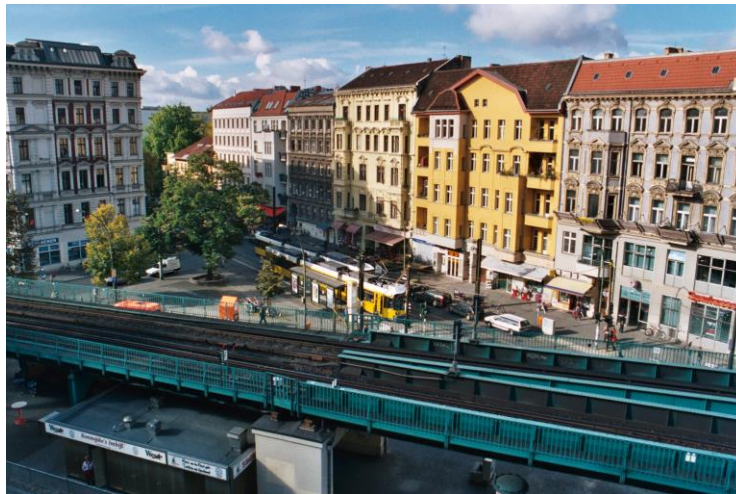
(12): **Eintopf** literally means "one pot," eintopf is a German stew. Though it usually has both meat and vegetables, eintopf refers more to the way this dish is cooked than the ingredients included. Since there is so much flexibility in the ingredients, this stew allows for creativity in its preparation and is a good choice for people who have excess vegetables they are trying to find a use for. The meats included in eintopf are often pork based, but can be beef — including ground beef — or chicken. A type of German sausage called mettwurst, polish sausage, or bacon are most frequently used. Meat is not necessary in this stew, however.



(13): **Prenzlauer Allee** is a major avenue in the Prenzlauer Berg district of the German capital Berlin and one of the main thoroughfares of the north-eastern Pankow borough. The arterial road connects the centre of former East Berlin at Alexanderplatz via Karl-Liebknecht-Straße with the far north-eastern districts and the orbital motorway Berliner Ring (BAB 10) via the Bundesautobahn 114. It starts at Prenzlauer Tor, formerly the site of a historic city gate on the road to Prenzlau, leading uphill northwards to the border with the Pankow district, where it continues as Prenzlauer Promenade. In between the dual carriageway run the tracks of the Berlin tram M2 line. The Ringbahn of the Berlin S-Bahn network stops at Berlin Prenzlauer Allee station.



(14): **Prenzlauer Berg** is a locality of Berlin, forming the southerly and most urban district of the borough of Pankow. From its founding in 1920 until 2001, Prenzlauer Berg was a district of Berlin in its own right. However, that year it was incorporated (along with the borough of Weißensee) into the greater district of Pankow. From the 1960s onward, Prenzlauer Berg was associated with proponents of East Germany's diverse counterculture including Christian activists, bohemians, state-independent artists, and the gay community. It was an important site for the peaceful revolution that brought down the Berlin Wall in 1989. In the 1990s the borough was also home to a vibrant squatting scene. It has since experienced rapid gentrification.



(15): **Eberswalder Straße** is an overground station located on the Berlin U2.svg line of the Berlin U-Bahn network. It is located in the Prenzlauer Berg area of the city on Schönhauser Allee, a major street running from the city centre north towards Pankow. The station is a raised iron structure on stone columns, designed by architect Alfred Grenander. The station opened in 1913 as Danziger Straße. It was severely damaged in December 1943 and was also closed during the last months of World War II. The post-war division of Berlin put it in the Russian sector. In 1950 it was renamed Dimitroffstrasse, in honor of Bulgarian communist leader Georgi Dimitrov who had died in the previous year. In 1991, following the reunification of Germany, the station's name was changed in order to remove its political links. The station was named Eberswalder Straße, a street that crosses Schönhauser Allee very nearby.

A local landmark below the elevated tracks at the south end of the station is **Konnopke's Imbiß**, a well-known fast food stand that sells **currywurst**. Max Konnopke started selling sausages on the same spot in 1930 from a board strapped around his neck. In 1960 he built the hut that served as the food stand until replaced by a new construction in 2011.



(16): Konnopke's Imbiß (also called Konnopke) is a snack stand in the Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg near the intersection of Schönhauser Allee and Eberswalder Straße . It is considered the first snack bar in East Berlin where the currywurst was introduced in 1960.

The snack stand is around 50 meters south of the intersection of Schönhauser- , Kastanien- and Pappelallee as well as Danziger and Eberswalder Straße. It is located under the elevated railway bridge of the U2 line on Schönhauser Allee, immediately south of the Eberswalder Straße U-Bahn station .

On October 4, 1930, Max Konnopke (1901-1986) and his wife Charlotte Konnopke (1910-2009) founded the company as a vendor's tray on the corner of Schönhauser and Danziger Straße, where the snack bar still exists today. Initially, sausages could only be sold at night, but from 1939 they were no longer sold at all due to the shortage of meat. Potato pancakes were temporarily sold until Max Konnopke was drafted into the Wehrmacht in 1941. After the Second World War , in 1947, they acquired a sausage truck. It wasn't until 1960 that a snack bar was built at the current location. Since that time, the most famous Konnopke product, the currywurst with ketchup sold according to a family recipe. The reason for this in-house development was that ketchup was initially not available in East Berlin after the Wall was built. Due to its size (less than ten employees), the wave of family businesses in 1972 was not affected by the wave of nationalization. In 1976, the daughter Waltraud Ziervogel (* 1936) took over the business. In 1983, she had the former wooden booth replaced by a metal snack bar.



(17): The **currywurst** is a dish of fried or other boiled sausage , served whole or sliced with a tomato-based sauce and curry powder , or with a curry ketchup . It is attributed to the German cuisine . The sausages are usually fine, pre-cooked boiled sausages with or without casing . The dish , which has been known since the post-war period , is mainly served in the snack bar . It is also a popular offer in German Company canteens and also available as a ready meal for private households.

In Germany, more than 800 million currywurst are consumed every year. Independently of this, currywurst also refers to sausages in which curry powder is included as an additive in the sausage meat .

Currywurst (in combination with French fries) was the most popular canteen food in Germany in 2020 for the 28th time in a row, but was replaced by spaghetti bolognese in 2021 .

In the 1960s, the currywurst became known in East Berlin - among other things through Konnopke's Imbiß . In GDR times, only currywurst without casings was offered , bratwurst had already been made without casings. The sausage was served uncut in one piece with curry powder and cold, runny ketchup (or cold, runny tomato sauce). One end of the sausage was left without sauce for consumption with the fingers.



(18): **Lichtenberg** is the eleventh borough of Berlin, Germany. In Berlin's 2001 administrative reform it absorbed the former borough of Hohenschönhausen. The district contains the Tierpark Berlin in Friedrichsfelde, the larger of Berlin's two zoological gardens. During the period of Berlin's partition between West and East, Lichtenberg was the location of the **headquarters of the Stasi**, the East German state security service. Prior to the establishment of the GDR it housed the main office of the Soviet Military Administration in Berlin, and before that it was an officers' mess of the Wehrmacht. The complex is now the location of the Stasi Museum. The **Berlin-Hohenschönhausen** Memorial is on the site of the main remand prison of the Stasi. Additionally, Lichtenberg is the location of the German-Russian Museum, the historical venue of the unconditional surrender of the German armed forces (Wehrmacht) on 8 May 1945.

Alt-Hohenschönhausen , literally Old Hohenschönhausen) is a quarter (Ortsteil) in the borough (Bezirk) of Lichtenberg, Berlin. Known also as Hohenschönhausen it was, until 2001, the main and the eponymous locality of the former **Hohenschönhausen** ([Pictures](#)) borough. In 2008 the population was in excess of 41,000.

Hohenschönhausen is the location of the “**Stasi Prison**”, literally called Hohenschönhausen prison. Thousands of people were once held there between the end of World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was run first by the Russians, then the East German Secret Police – the Stasi.

At the end of World War II, Germany was divided into four occupation zones governed by France, Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1949, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), also referred to as East Germany, was formed as a communist state in the Soviet territory. The most notorious apparatus of the GDR's repressive government was the Ministry for State Security, aka the Stasi. The Stasi was the government's intelligence division/secret police, and throughout the GDR's 41 years of existence, it was known for its surveillance, torture and murder of dissidents (and suspected dissidents).

In 1951, the Stasi took ownership of a building in northeastern Berlin that had previously served as a Soviet detainment facility and began to use it as a prison for their purposes. In Jennifer Hofmann's novel *The Standardization of Demoralization Procedures*, the protagonist, a Stasi agent, recalls witnessing the brutal beating of a suspected dissident in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Prison, an incident that stayed with him for years and caused him to question his loyalty to the GDR cause. Over the course of the 1950s, over 11,000 people were remanded to Berlin-Hohenschönhausen by the Stasi, where they were subjected to all manner of human rights abuses, including **brutal interrogation techniques**. Many were imprisoned for the crime of trying to make their way past the Berlin Wall or otherwise escape the GDR. Sources: [Here](#), Further Reading: [Here](#).

Prisoners at Berlin-Hohenschönhausen were kept in solitary confinement 24/7, and were deprived of sleep, showers and medical care. There were some two-person cells, but the prisoners understood that any cellmate could potentially be a Stasi plant, adding another layer of psychological unease. One former prisoner, who broke both legs after falling off a train attempting to flee the country, recalls being tossed into a cell that was three-quarters full of water and left there for three days, unable to sleep or even sit down. He was beaten and told his execution was imminent. While in operation, the prison was kept secret; it was located in a restricted military area and it was not marked on maps. The prisoner cells were

predominantly in the building's basement, and lights were kept on constantly so that the inmates never knew if it was day or night.

(19): At night prisoners had to sleep on their backs with their hands turned upward, visible on top of the blanket. This was ostensibly for their own **safety** and for **suicide prevention**, according to a guide at the Hohenschönhausen site. [Source](#)

(20): During the day, they were not allowed to sit on the beds – only on their stools (Chairs). The frosted glass bricks in the window prevented a clear view of the yard outside – all that's visible is a blue and green blur. The **toilet** was right next to the door, under the constant eye of a guard. [Source](#)

(21): 衰弱死 **Suijakushi** is complete physical or mental debilitation , resulting in death. Debilitating death is, as the word says, "debilitating and dying", but in reality, the body is rarely debilitated and dying. Debilitating death is almost always a death that occurs in combination with illness

Death due to illness is caused by respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumonia , and worsening of cancer . In addition, even if the disease should be cured by taking the drug, it may not be cured due to lack of physical strength, inability to take the drug due to age, or the terminal stage, and the patient may die. Death due to side effects is part of that.

Debilitating death can be fundamentally divided into two types: debilitating death due to deterioration of physical ability and death due to deterioration of mental strength .

Physical (muscle and immunity) abilities are reduced, and as a result, people die of illness. It can be said that one of the debilitating deaths is that natural illnesses such as " muscular dystrophy disease " and " muscular apathy " worsen due to weakened immunity and die. Most of the physically debilitating deaths are due to the inability to give strong drugs due to weakness and eventually death, and even if the surgery is successful, the death due to illness due to the weakness due to rejection , and the worsening of cancer . Most of them die from illness, such as death. Death due to weakened immunity due to aging is the most typical debilitating death.

Spiritual Weakness and Death: In addition to daily stress such as work conditions and school life, stress caused by bullying , violence , low evaluation, etc. contributes to mental weakness. The process involves mental disorders such as depression. Death due to mental weakness does not officially mean "death due to mental illness", but there are cases in which people commit suicide when they are brought into a state of extreme mental illness due to depression . Other examples include accidents caused by the inability to concentrate on things, death caused by apathy, illness caused by severe mental damage and weakened immunity.

(22): **Water torture** is an [enhanced interrogation technique](#) that encompasses a variety of techniques using water to inflict physical or psychological harm on a victim as a form of torture or execution. The stasi used Waterboarding, simulated drowning, interrupted drowning, and controlled drowning, method of torture in which water is poured into the nose and mouth of a victim who lies on his back on an inclined platform, with his feet above his head. As the victim's sinus cavities and mouth fill with water, his gag reflex causes him to expel air from his lungs, leaving him unable to exhale and unable to inhale without aspirating water. Although water usually enters the lungs, it does not immediately fill them, owing to their elevated position with respect to the head and neck. In this way the victim can be made to drown for short periods without suffering asphyxiation. The victim's mouth and nose are often covered with a cloth, which allows water to enter but prevents it from being expelled; alternatively, his mouth may be covered with cellophane or held shut for this purpose. The torture is eventually halted and the victim put in an upright position to allow him to cough and vomit (water usually enters the esophagus and stomach) or to revive him if he has become unconscious, after which the torture may be resumed. Waterboarding produces extreme physical suffering and an uncontrollable feeling of panic and terror, usually within seconds. The story includes a variation of this technique in combination with sleep deprivation.



(23): **Neubrandenburg** (lit. New Brandenburg, IPA: [nɔʏˈbʁandɐnbʊʁk]) is a city in the southeast of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany. It is located on the shore of a lake called Tollensesee and forms the urban centre of the Mecklenburg Lakeland.

The city is famous for its rich medieval heritage of Brick Gothic architecture, including the world's best preserved defensive wall of this style as well as a Concert Church (Saint Mary), the home venue of the Neubrandenburg Philharmonic. It is part of the European Route of Brick Gothic, a route which leads through seven countries along the Baltic Sea coast. Neubrandenburg is nicknamed for its four medieval city gates - "Stadt der Vier Tore" ("City of Four Gates").



(24): In Slavic folklore, Baba Yaga, also spelled Baba Jaga (from Polish) is a supernatural being (or one of a trio of sisters of the same name) who appears as a deformed and/or ferocious-looking woman. In fairy tales Baba Yaga flies around in a mortar, wields a pestle, and dwells deep in the forest in a hut usually described as standing on chicken legs. Baba Yaga may help or hinder those that encounter or seek her out and may play a maternal role; she has associations with forest wildlife. According to Vladimir Propp's folktale morphology, Baba Yaga commonly appears as either a **donor (character who tests the hero or provides magical assistance)** or a **villain**, or may be altogether **ambiguous**.

Andreas Johns identifies Baba Yaga as "one of the most memorable and distinctive figures in eastern European folklore", and observes that she is "enigmatic" and often exhibits "striking ambiguity".[1] Johns summarizes Baba Yaga as "a many-faceted figure, capable of inspiring researchers to see her as a Cloud, Moon, Death, Winter, Snake, Bird, Pelican or Earth Goddess, totemic matriarchal ancestress, female initiator, phallic mother, or archetypal image".

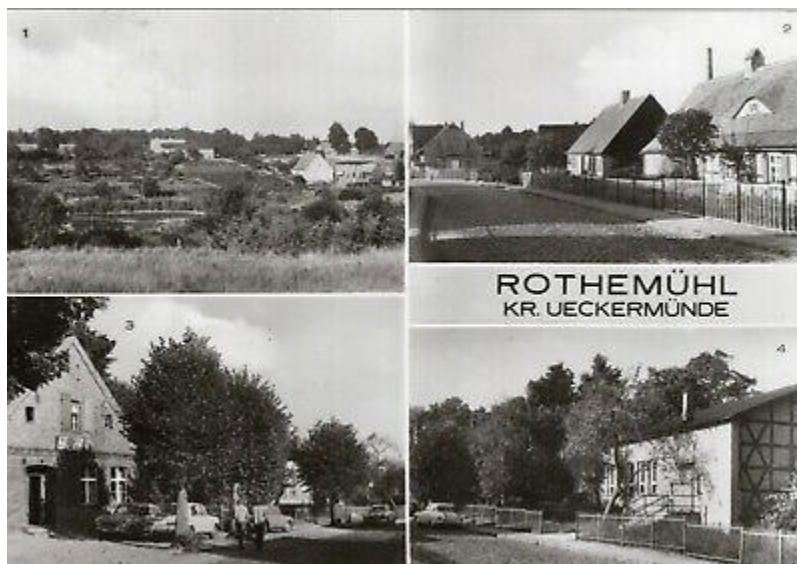


(25): **Quisling** is a term originating in Norway, which is used in Scandinavian languages and in English for a citizen or politician of an occupied country who collaborates with an enemy occupying force – or more generally as a synonym for **traitor**. The word originates from the surname of the Norwegian war-time leader Vidkun Quisling, who headed a domestic Nazi collaborationist regime during World War II.

(26): **Pasewalk** is a town in the Vorpommern-Greifswald district, in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Germany. Located on the Uecker river, it is the capital of the former Uecker-Randow district, and the seat of the Uecker-Randow-Tal Amt, of which it is not part. Pasewalk became a town during the 12th century and was soon a member of the Hanseatic League. In 1359 it passed to the Duke of Pomerania. Frequently ravaged during the wars which devastated the district, it was plundered several times by Imperial troops during the Thirty Years' War. In 1657 it was burned down by the Poles and in 1713 by the Russians. In the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 it was given to Sweden, but in 1676 it was conquered by Brandenburg. In 1720, in the Peace of Stockholm, it was finally assigned to Brandenburg-Prussia. The town is famous for having been surrendered to the **French without a fight during the War of the Fourth Coalition**, despite them being way less numerous than the defenders of the city. On the day World War I ended, the future dictator of Germany **Adolf Hitler** was being treated here after being wounded by a gas attack. During the Battle of Berlin, part of World War II, Pasewalk was captured by troops of the 2nd Belorussian Front of the Red Army on 28 April 1945.



(27): **Rothemühl** is a municipality in the district of Vorpommern-Greifswald , in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania . It is administered by the Torgelow-Ferdinandshof office based in the town of Torgelow. It has a [long history](#) related to the Thirty years war.



(28): **Thirty**

Years' War

(Part of the [European wars of religion](#)) was a conflict fought largely within the Holy Roman Empire from 1618 to 1648. Considered one of the most destructive wars in European history, estimates of total deaths caused by the conflict range from 4.5 to 8 million, while some areas of Germany experienced population declines of over 50%. Related conflicts include the Eighty Years' War, the War of the Mantuan Succession, the Franco-Spanish War, and the Portuguese Restoration War. Until the 20th century, historians considered it a continuation of the German religious struggle initiated by the Reformation and ended by the 1555 Peace of Augsburg. This divided the Empire into Lutheran and Catholic states, but over the next 50 years the expansion of Protestantism beyond these boundaries gradually destabilised Imperial authority. While religion was a significant factor in starting the war, scholars generally agree that its scope and extent was driven by the contest for European dominance between Habsburgs in Austria and Spain, and the French House of Bourbon.

[\(29\)](#): Although Mielke(Head of Stasi)'s Stasi was superficially granted independence in 1957, until 1990 the KGB continued to maintain liaison officers in all eight main Stasi directorates, each with his own office inside the Stasi's Berlin compound, and in each of the fifteen Stasi district headquarters around East Germany. Collaboration was so close that the KGB invited the Stasi to establish operational bases in **Moscow** and Leningrad to monitor visiting East German tourists and Mielke referred to the Stasi officers as "[Chekists](#) of the Soviet Union". In 1978, Mielke formally granted KGB officers in East Germany the same rights and powers that they enjoyed in the Soviet Union. **Source:** Koehler, John O. (2000). Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police. Westview Press. ISBN 978-0-8133-3744-9.

According to declassified documents, the KGB aggressively recruited former German (mostly Abwehr) intelligence officers after the war. The KGB used them to penetrate the West German intelligence service. [Source](#).

[\(30\)](#): **Honey trapping** is an investigative practice involving the use of romantic or sexual relationships for interpersonal, political (including state espionage), or monetary purpose. The honey pot or trap involves making contact with an individual who has information or resources required by a group or individual; the trapper will then seek to entice the target into a false relationship (which may or may not include actual physical involvement) in which they can glean information or influence over the target. Spies for East Germany were called "Romeos" created by Markus Wolf, the former head of East Germany's foreign intelligence service the Stasi. Around 40 women were prosecuted for espionage in the Federal Republic of Germany. More on the subject [here](#).

(31): **Szczecin** is the capital and largest city of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship in northwestern Poland. Located near the Baltic Sea and the German border, it is a major seaport and Poland's seventh-largest city. As of December 2020, the population was 398,255.

While in 1945 the number of pre-war inhabitants dropped to 57,215 on 31 October 1945, the systematic expulsion of Germans started on 22 February 1946 and continued until late 1947, in accordance with the Potsdam Agreement. In December 1946 about 17,000 German inhabitants remained, while the number of Poles living in the city reached 100,000. To ease the tensions between settlers from different regions, and help overcome fear caused by the continued presence of the Soviet troops, a special event was organized in April 1946 with 50,000 visitors in the partly destroyed city center. Settlers from Central Poland made up about 70% of Szczecin's new population. In addition to Poles, Ukrainians from Polish areas annexed by the Soviet Union settled there. Also Poles repatriated from Harbin, China and Greeks, refugees of the Greek Civil War, settled in Szczecin in the following years. In 1945 and 1946, the city was the starting point of the northern route used by the Jewish underground organization Brichah to channel Jewish displaced persons from Central and Eastern Europe to the American occupation zone.

Szczecin was rebuilt, and the city's industry was expanded. At the same time, Szczecin became a major Polish industrial center and an important seaport (particularly for Silesian coal) for Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. Cultural expansion was accompanied by a campaign resulting in the "removal of all German traces". In 1946, Winston Churchill prominently mentioned the city in his Iron Curtain speech: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent".

The city witnessed anti-communist revolts in 1970 and 1980. On August 30, 1980, first of the four August Agreements, which led to the first legalisation of the trade union Solidarity, was signed in Szczecin.[109] The introduction of martial law in December 1981 met with a strike by the dockworkers of Szczecin shipyard, joined by other factories and workplaces in a general strike. All these were suppressed by the authorities. Pope John Paul II visited the city on 11 June 1987. Another wave of strikes in Szczecin broke out in 1988 and 1989, which eventually led to the Round Table Agreement and first semi-free elections in post-war Poland.

Szczecin has been the capital of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship since 1999.



(32): **Meritocracy** is a political system in which economic goods and/or political power are vested in individual people based on talent, effort, and achievement, rather than wealth or social class. Advancement in such a system is based on performance, as measured through examination or demonstrated achievement. Although the concept of meritocracy has existed for centuries, the term itself was coined in 1958 by the sociologist Michael Dunlop Young in his dystopian political and satirical book *The Rise of the Meritocracy*.

(33): The textbook definition of a **frequency band** is an interval in the frequency domain, delimited by a lower frequency and upper frequency. The International Telecommunication Union has assigned designations to these intervals. More on the subject [here](#).

(34): **Sectionalism** is an exclusive tendency for each department within a group or organization to stick to the authority and interests they hold and to eliminate external interference without cooperating with each other. say. It was pointed out as one of the reverse functions in the bureaucracy, and it is a dysfunction that occurs as a result of pursuing too much expertise within the organization . It may be translated as a departmental division principle. A prominent example of this tendency is " territorial consciousness " and "factionism ", which dislikes the involvement of people from other departments in the duties they are in charge of, ignoring the interests and efficiencies of the entire organization. It is to give priority only to their own convenience. Another characteristic is that he has little interest in other than the duties he is in charge of, tries to avoid non-specialties, and knows little about non-specialties.

Recently, in order to eliminate sectionalism within an organization, a method has been adopted in which members are selected from each department across the organization and a project is launched to cooperate with each other. However, it should be noted that such a project also has the negative side that it often imposes an excessive burden on the participating members due to the burden on the regular work.

Sectionalism in a broad sense includes things that are not originally unrelated to you, but if there is another person in charge, you will not be involved, and yet you will be irresponsibly blamed for what the person in charge does. ..

German (including former Nazi Germany)

Example: Former OKH (Army General Headquarters) and Former OKW (Defense Forces High Command) – Originally , the former organization should have been placed under the latter organization, but Hitler, who lost confidence in the OKW leaders, greatly strengthened the authority of the former as a show of force, making both organizations of equal rank.

Example: Former SS (Schutzstaffel) and former Gestapo — The major factor was the power struggle between the ministers who headed each organization, rather than overlap or competition for jobs or authority.

Ukraine/Russia

Example: After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine became its own unitary state, however, also containing regions heavily populated by Russians. This caused a few rebellions throughout the eastern parts of the nation, taking place in the self-declared republics of the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic, and the peninsula of Crimea. Crimea is disputed by both Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Many nations oppose Russia's annexation of Crimea.

(35): **Misanthropy** is the general hatred, dislike, distrust or contempt of the human species, human behavior or human nature. A misanthrope or misanthropist is someone who holds such views or feelings. Misanthropy involves a negative evaluative attitude towards humanity that is based on a negative judgment concerning mankind's flaws. These flaws are seen as ubiquitous, i.e. possessed by almost everyone to a serious degree and not just by a few extreme cases. They are also held to be entrenched, meaning that there is either no or no easy way to rectify them short of a complete transformation of the dominant way of life.

The major flaws pointed out by misanthropes include intellectual flaws, moral flaws and aesthetic flaws. Intellectual flaws, like wishful thinking, dogmatism, stupidity and cognitive biases, are what leads to false beliefs, what obstructs knowledge, or what violates the demands of rationality. Moral flaws, like cruelty, indifference to the suffering of others, selfishness and cowardice, are often identified with tendencies to promote what is bad or with inappropriate attitudes towards values. Aesthetic flaws concern ugliness and include ugly aspects of human life, ugliness caused by human activities, and lack of sensitivity to beauty. Proponents of misanthropy often focus on moral flaws and provide various examples of their manifestations, like mass killings, factory farming of livestock and pollution of the environment. Opponents respond to this by pointing out that serious moral flaws are only manifested by a few mentally ill people or under extreme circumstances, which is denied by misanthropes. Another important consideration for arguments based on flaws is that they highlight only one side of humanity while evaluative attitudes should take all sides into account. Other arguments against misanthropy are based not on whether this attitude appropriately reflects the negative value of humanity but on the costs of accepting a position associated with hatred, for the individual and for society at large. Defenders have responded to this by showing how a misanthropic perspective can lead to various different forms of life. While some of them are based on hatred and may lead to violence, others focus more on fear and withdrawing oneself from the negative influence. Further alternatives include resignation and activism fueled by the hope of bringing about radical transformation.

Misanthropy figures in various works of art and philosophy. It is closely related to but not identical with philosophical pessimism, which involves a negative attitude not just to humankind but to life as a whole. Misanthropic considerations have been used as an argument for antinatalism, the view that coming into existence is bad and that humans, therefore, have a duty to abstain from procreation. More resources on how Misanthropy can also lead to activism and different outcomes: [here](#). According to the article: Misanthropes of the activist kind are motivated by hope. They see the entrenched moral failings of the world, and respond with determined commitment to change this. Their sense of hope shows itself in ambitious large-scale efforts aimed at reconstructing our collective condition. This may include moral teaching, religious preaching, or socio-political activism, or some combination of these.

(36): A **variable-sweep wing**, colloquially known as a "swing wing", is an airplane wing, or set of wings, that may be swept back and then returned to its original straight position during flight. It allows the aircraft's shape to be modified in flight, and is therefore an example of a variable-geometry aircraft.

A straight wing is most efficient for low-speed flight, but for an aircraft designed for transonic or supersonic flight it is essential that the wing is swept. Most aircraft that travel at those speeds usually have wings (either swept wing or delta wing) with a fixed sweep angle. These are simple and efficient wing designs for **high speed flight**, but there are performance tradeoffs. One is that the stalling speed becomes rather high, necessitating long runways (unless complex high-lift wing devices are built in). Another is that the aircraft's fuel consumption during subsonic cruise is higher than that of an unswept wing. These tradeoffs are particularly acute for naval carrier-based aircraft. A variable-sweep wing allows the pilot to use the optimum sweep angle for the aircraft's current speed, slow or fast. The more efficient sweep angles available offset the weight and volume penalties imposed by the wing's mechanical sweep mechanisms. Its greater complexity and cost make it practical mostly for military aircraft.

A number of aircraft, both experimental and production, were introduced between the 1940s and the 1970s. The majority of production aircraft to be furnished with variable-sweep wings have been strike-oriented aircraft, such as the **Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-27**, Tupolev Tu-22M, and Panavia Tornado. The configuration was also used for a few fighter/interceptor aircraft, including the Grumman F-14 Tomcat and the Panavia Tornado ADV. From the 1980s onwards, the development of such aircraft were curtailed by advances in flight control technology and structural materials which have allowed designers to closely tailor the aerodynamics and structure of aircraft, removing the need for variable sweep angle to achieve the required performance; instead, wings are given computer-controlled flaps on both leading and trailing edges that increase or decrease the camber or chord of the wing automatically to adjust to the flight regime; this technique is another form of variable geometry.

Soviet Union: 1st Generation Tactical Surface Fighter MiG-23 Cheburashka

The MiG-23 Cheburashka is a 1st generation TSF developed by Mikoyan Gurevich, and was deployed in the Soviet Army in 1980.

The MiG-21 Balalaika was claimed to have been the first domestically produced craft in the Soviet Union, but Western military sources identify it as simply being a refurbished F-4R. Therefore, the MiG-23 Cheburashka is internationally recognized as the Soviet Union's first purely domestic TSF.

As it was developed from the MiG-21 Balalaika, its basic structure such as its airframe and layout are not dissimilar to the F-4 Phantom. However, as it has actively introduced the design concepts of F-5 series crafts, which displayed high close quarters dogfighting capabilities on the European front, its appearance gives an impression of an F-5, but one size larger.

Its design adds additional emphasis to its mobile dogfighting abilities, by reducing the weight of its components and adopting a variable mechanism on the jump unit's aileron. From these, it has reached quasi-2nd generation capabilities, though it is still considered a 1st generation craft by much of the West. Even though it was an imitation of technologies originating from the US(※), it was a historical achievement in that all of its components were sourced domestically. This was what had truly launched independent TSF developments in the Soviet Union.

However, on the exhausted front lines of the Soviet Armed Forces, its ambitions ultimately backfired. Initially, it had been deployed to much fanfare. As a domestic craft optimized for dogfighting, it surpassed the success story of refurbishing the MiG-21 from the F-4R. Unfortunately, its ability to remain operational vastly underperformed that of the MiG-21 Balalaika, and it had become a nuisance, unnecessarily occupying the hangars.

At the time, the Soviet Armed Forces sorely lacked the systems, facilities, or skilled engineers to adequately conduct maintenance on the craft, with its complex variable mechanism. Additionally, the prolonged lack of resources would act as the final nail in the coffin, painting it with a further negative image.

Many front line forces could not overcome the disappointment of having their high expectations of the craft being left unmet. However, since they could not speak ill of a craft that had been given to them by the Party, it was only a cold comfort for frontline officers and personnel to grant the craft its nickname 'Cheburashka', which is a slow and clumsy character from a Soviet children's show.

The cutting edge craft, developed with the Soviet Union's prestige on the line, ended up hindering the front line. The Soviet Armed Forces Headquarters could not tolerate this, and so they ordered maintenance and supply systems to be quickly prepared for the craft. They also ordered Mikoyan Gulyevich to simplify the craft's maintenance routine so it could be more suited to circumstances on the front line.

(37): **Attitude control** is the process of controlling the orientation of an aerospace vehicle with respect to an inertial frame of reference or another entity such as the celestial sphere, certain fields, and nearby objects, etc. Controlling vehicle attitude requires sensors to measure vehicle orientation, actuators to apply the torques needed to orient the vehicle to a desired attitude, and algorithms to command the actuators based on sensor measurements of the current attitude and specification of a desired attitude. The integrated field that studies the combination of sensors, actuators and algorithms is called guidance, navigation and control (GNC).

(38): ヴェアヴォルフ literally **Werwolf** or **Wehrwolf**. Could refer to more than one thing:

Note: I decided to use Wehrwolf after reading this [thread](#) and verifying some official documents there.

1- [Werwolf](#) (German for "werewolf") a Nazi plan which began development in 1944, to create a resistance force which would operate behind enemy lines as the Allies advanced through Germany, in parallel with the Wehrmacht fighting in front of the lines. It is widely misconstrued as having been intended to be a guerrilla force to harass Allied forces after the defeat of Germany, but this misconception was created by Joseph Goebbels through propaganda disseminated through his "Radio Werwolf", which was not actually connected in any way with the military unit.

2- How and by whom the name was chosen is unknown, but it may have alluded to the title of Hermann Löns' novel, [Der Wehrwolf](#), first published in 1910. Set in the Celle region (Lower Saxony) during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), the novel concerns a peasant named Harm Wulf. After marauding soldiers kill his family, Wulf organizes his neighbors into a militia who pursue the soldiers and mercilessly execute any they capture, while referring to themselves as Wehrwölfe. Löns wrote that the title was a dual reference to the fact that the peasants put up a fighting defense and to the protagonist's surname of Wulf, but it also had obvious parallels with the word Werwölfe in that Wulf's men came to enjoy killing. While Löns was not himself a Nazi (he died in 1914), his work became popular with the German far right, and the Nazis celebrated it. Indeed, Celle's local newspaper began serialising *Der Wehrwolf* in January 1945.

3- In 1942, Adolf Hitler named the OKW and OKH field headquarters, at Vinnytsia in Ukraine, "[Werwolf](#)", and Hitler on a number of occasions had used "Wolf" as a pseudonym for himself. (The etymology of the name "Adolf" itself carries connotations of noble (adal; Modern German Adel) wolf, while Hitler referred to his first World War II Eastern Front military headquarters as Wolfsschanze, commonly rendered in English as "Wolf's Lair" (literally "Wolf's Sconce").)

4- An archaic spelling of [werewolf](#), a human with the ability to shapeshift into a wolf

(39): Miwokogasu 身を焦がす: feelings of suffering due to intense love. From such a strong love, he/she suffers from burning pain. The feelings of liking the other person are rather painful in the love that cannot be met. It is an idiom that expresses these complex emotions about love. Keep in mind that it's a feeling of love.

(40): **Saalfeld** (German: Saalfeld/Saale) is a town in Germany, capital of the Saalfeld-Rudolstadt district of Thuringia. It is best known internationally as the ancestral seat of the Saxe-Coburg and Gotha branch of the Saxon House of Wettin, which was renamed the House of Windsor during their British reign in 1917. Upon the post-World War II division of Germany, Saalfeld was an Inner-German border station on the Saal Railway—one of two routes that could be taken by trains between Leipzig/Halle and Nuremberg. As a border station its steam locomotive shed assumed extra importance as Saalfeld essentially became the southern terminus of GDR train services. Due to the continued use of steam locomotives in East Germany after the end of steam working in West Germany, the area became a mecca for railway enthusiasts for some years. However, despite being very close to the Inner German border to the south, it was only accessible by a very roundabout route.



(41): A **demilitarized zone** (DMZ or DZ) is an area in which treaties or agreements between nations, military powers or contending groups forbid military installations, activities, or personnel. A DMZ often lies along an established frontier or boundary between two or more military powers or alliances. A DMZ may sometimes form a de facto international border, such as the Korean Demilitarized Zone. Other examples of demilitarized zones are a 9-mile wide area between Iraq and Kuwait; Antarctica (preserved for scientific exploration and study); and outer space (space more than 100 km or 62 mi from the earth's surface).

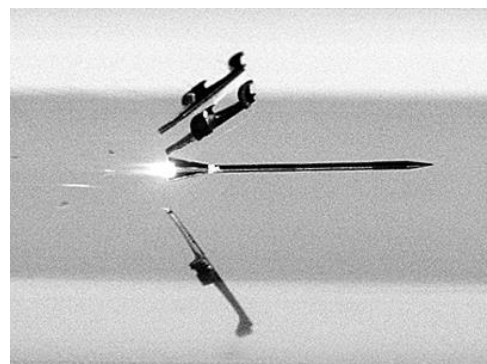
(42): The action of intercepting and **preventing** the movement of a prohibited commodity or person. I.e. "the interdiction of arms shipments"

(43): After consultation, it is strongly hinted that the gun that was used was the [Walther PPK](#) from the shape and historical fact check.



(44): Armor-piercing fin-stabilized discarding sabot (**APFSDS**), long dart penetrator, or simply dart ammunition, is a type of kinetic energy penetrator ammunition used to attack modern vehicle armor. As an armament for main battle tanks, it succeeds Armor-Piercing Discarding Sabot (APDS) ammunition, which is still used in small or medium caliber weapon systems.

The difference between APFSDS and HE is that it does not have any explosive material. Think of it as a giant dart. Hence the need to evade the HE explosive projectiles with their greater area of effect. As this story also [portrays](#).



(45): **Kindertagesstätte** or Kita in short, is a German preschool daycare service for children between three and five/six. Depending on their birthday, children move onto full-time primary school education while they're six-years-old. A guide on German preschools can be found [here](#).

(46): **Nước chấm** is a common name for a variety of Vietnamese "dipping sauces" that are served quite frequently as condiments. It is commonly a sweet, sour, salty, savory and/or spicy sauce. **Nước mắm pha** (mixed fish sauce) is the most well known dipping sauce made from fish sauce.



(47): Thai **prik nam pla** is a similar sauce made with the same ingredients as nuoc cham, but instead of Vietnamese fish sauce, it uses Thai fish sauce. Thai fish sauce is known as nam pla, which means "fish water" in English. Thailand's fish sauce is saltier than other fish sauces. Nuoc mam is the Vietnamese term for fish sauce. The quality of fish sauce produced on the island of Ph Quoc is well-known, and it is protected in Vietnam and Europe. Vietnamese fish sauce has a milder flavor than Thai fish sauce, and the best quality sauce is transparent and light amber in color, with a delicate aroma. Like olive oil, fish sauce is graded in terms of quality and price.



(48): Vietnamese personal names generally consist of three parts: a family name (normally patrilineal, may be combined with the mother's family name to become a compound family name), a middle name (normally a single name, but sometimes no name), and a given name (normally single name, but sometimes a multiple name), used in that order, but not every name is conformant. For example:

- Nguyễn Trãi has his family name Nguyễn and his given name is Trãi. He does not have any middle name.
- Phạm Bình Minh has his family name **Phạm** and his given name is Bình Minh (lit. 'dawn'). He does not have any middle name.
- Nguyễn Văn Quyết has his family name Nguyễn, his middle name is Văn (lit. 'literature') and his given name is Quyết (lit. 'decide').
- Nguyễn Ngọc Trường Sơn has his family name Nguyễn, his middle name is Ngọc (lit. 'pearl') and his given name is Trường Sơn (lit. 'long mountain').

(49): **Yomi** or Yomi-no-kuni (黄泉, 黄泉の国, or 黄泉ノ国) is the Japanese word for the land of the dead (World of Darkness). According to Shinto mythology as related in Kojiki, this is where the dead go in the afterlife. Once one has eaten at the hearth of Yomi it is (mostly) impossible to return to the land of the living. Yomi in Japanese mythology is comparable to Hades or Sheol and is most commonly known for Izanami's retreat to that place after her death. Izanagi followed her there and upon his return he washed himself, creating Amaterasu, Susanoo, and Tsukuyomi-no-Mikoto in the process.

(50): **Shi no Rindō** 死の林道, or forest road of death is a reference to the third escape attempt in the Battle of Halbe, a battle that occurred in the Forest Zone in southeastern Berlin. The 9th Army, led by Theodor Busse, who was besieged by the Soviet Red Army and the US Army, was defeated and joined the 12th Army. The one who coined the term was actually Hiroki Uchida himself in an earlier work: Dokusosen, according to the Japanese [wikipedia](#) page of the battle.

Another reason to call it so is that Czersk forest was the location of many PoW (Prisoners of War) Camps



Fig. 3 Czersk: camp's landscape between social oblivion and material memory. Photo by Dawid Kobińska

held by the Germans during the first world war. According to a free research paper online [here](#).

(51): **Kutsume- Mono** 食い詰め者 or 食詰者, means literally a person who is stuck in life due to poverty or misconduct, or more figuratively, someone who has lost credit with everybody; a ruined person whom nobody will trust

(52): The 120mm M1028 [Canister](#) Cartridge was developed for close-in defense of tanks against massed assaulting infantry attack and to break up infantry concentrations, between a range of 200-500 meters, by discharging large numbers of tungsten balls from the main cannon.

(53): **Gook** (guk) is a derogatory term for people of Asian descent. Its origin is unclear, but it may have originated among the U.S. Marines during the Philippine–American War (1899–1902). Historically, U.S. military personnel used the word to refer to non-Americans of various races. The earliest published example is dated 1920 and notes that U.S. Marines then in Haiti used the term to refer to Haitians. It acquired its current racial meaning as a result of the Vietnam War. That "[gook](#)" could also have come from the Korean word "국" (guk), meaning "country", "한국" (hanguk), meaning "Korea", or "미국" (miguk), meaning "America". For example, U.S. soldiers might have heard locals saying miguk (미국), referring to Americans, and misinterpreted this as "Me gook."

(54): A [fire-control system](#) (sometimes called **FCS**) is a number of components working together, usually a gun data computer, a director, and radar, which is designed to assist a ranged weapon system in targeting, tracking and hitting its target. It performs the same task as a human gunner firing a weapon, but attempts to do so faster and more accurately.

(55): **Gastarbeiter** (both singular and plural; lit. German for 'guest worker') are foreign or migrant workers, particularly those who had moved to West Germany between 1955 and 1973, seeking work as part of a formal guest worker program (Gastarbeiterprogramm). Other countries had similar programs: in the Netherlands and Belgium it was called the gastarbeider program; in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland it was called arbetskraftsinvandring (workforce-immigration); and in East Germany such workers were called Vertragsarbeiter. The term was used during the Nazi era as was Fremdarbeiter (German for 'foreign worker'). However, the latter term had negative connotations, and was no longer used after World War II.

After the division of Germany into East and West in 1949, East Germany faced an acute labour shortage, mainly because of East Germans fleeing into the western zones occupied by the Allies; in 1966 the GDR (German Democratic Republic) signed its first guest worker contract with Poland. In contrast to the guest workers in West Germany, the guest workers that arrived in East Germany came mainly from Communist countries allied with the Soviets and the SED used its guest worker programme to build international solidarity among fellow communist governments.

The guest workers in East Germany came mainly from the Eastern Bloc, Hungary, Poland, Algeria, **Vietnam**, North Korea, Angola, Mozambique, and Cuba. Residency was typically limited to only three years. The conditions East German Gastarbeiter had to live in were much harsher than the living conditions of the Gastarbeiter in West Germany; accommodation was mainly in single-sex dormitories. In addition, contact between guest workers and East German citizens was extremely limited; Gastarbeiter were usually restricted to their dormitory or an area of the city which Germans were not allowed to enter - furthermore sexual relations with a German led to deportation. Female Vertragsarbeiter were not allowed to become pregnant during their stay. If they did, they were forced to have an abortion.

(56): A **miser** is a person who hoards wealth and spends as little money as possible. **Yellow Monkey** is a derogatory term for yellow people (Orientals) in the Western world, but it is an old discriminatory term used before and during the war, and in fact, today, more Westerners are unaware of the term itself. In short, it is almost a dead term, but for some reason, Japanese people still prefer to use this derogatory term. Incidentally, derogatory terms for the Japanese that are still used by a wide generation in the U.S. include "Jap" and "Nip. On the other hand, Japanese people have created derogatory terms for Caucasians based on the color of their skin, such as "Moutang" and "Kohairin". Blacks are called "niggers" and so on.

(57): **Shorinji Kempo** (少林寺拳法, Shōrin-ji kempō, meaning "Shaolin Temple Boxing") is a Japanese martial art considered to be a modified version of Shaolin Kung Fu. The name Shōrinji Kempo is the Japanese reading of Shàolín sì Quánfǎ. It was established in 1947 by Doshin So (宗道臣, Sō Dōshin), a Japanese martial artist and former military intelligence agent who lived in China for many years before and during World War II.

(58): A **gag order** (also known as a gagging order or suppression order) is an order, typically a legal order by a court or government, restricting information or comment from being made public or passed onto any unauthorized third party. The phrase may sometimes be used of a private order by an employer or other institution. Uses of gag orders include keeping trade secrets of a company, protecting the integrity of ongoing police or military operations, and protecting the privacy of victims or minors. Conversely, as their downside, they may be abused as a useful tool for those of financial means to intimidate witnesses and prevent release of information, using the legal system rather than other methods of intimidation. Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) orders may potentially be abused in this way. In a similar manner, a "gag law" may limit freedom of the press, by instituting censorship or restricting access to information.

(59): A **non-commissioned officer** (NCO) is a military officer who has not pursued a commission. Non-commissioned officers usually earn their position of authority by promotion through the enlisted ranks. (Non-officers, which includes most or all enlisted personnel, are of lower rank than any officer.) In contrast, commissioned officers usually enter directly from a military academy, officer candidate school (OCS), or officer training school (OTS) after receiving a post-secondary degree.

In Germany and German-speaking countries like Austria, the term **Unteroffizier** (with the quite literal translation into English as "under"(unter) "officer"(offizier), thus "under officer", with both words being the progenitors of their English equivalents, and, in use, having the meaning of "lower officer" or sub-officer) describes a class of ranks between normal enlisted personnel (Mannschaften or in Austria Chargen) and officers (Offiziere). In this group of ranks there are, in Germany, two other classes: Unteroffiziere mit Portepee (with sword-knot) and Unteroffiziere ohne Portepee (without swordknot), both containing several ranks, which in Austria would be Unteroffiziere (NCOs) and Höhere Unteroffiziere (senior NCOs or literally translated as "higher under officers").

In the German military, Unteroffizier ("subordinate officer") is both a specific military rank as well as a generic term for any non-commissioned officer (NCO) in the army and air force, while in the navy the term Deckoffizier is used. It has existed since the 17th century. The Japanese word is 下士官 kashikan, which literally means non-commissioned officer.

(60): The man **Lan** is written with the Katakana Ran ラン, and the Kanji 蘭 for Orchid, which is pronounced also Ran, just like her flowery hair ornaments.

(61): An **unmanned aerial vehicle** (UAV), commonly known as a drone, is an aircraft without any human pilot, crew, or passengers on board. UAVs are a component of an unmanned aircraft system (UAS), which includes adding a ground-based controller and a system of communications with the UAV. The flight of UAVs may operate under remote control by a human operator, as remotely-piloted aircraft (RPA), or with various degrees of autonomy, such as autopilot assistance, up to fully autonomous aircraft that have no provision for human intervention. In 1940 Denny started the [Radioplane Company](#) and more models emerged during World War II – used both to train anti aircraft gunners and to fly attack-missions. Nazi Germany produced and used various UAV aircraft during the war, like the Argus As 292 and the V-1 flying bomb with a jet engine.

(62): **Interdiction** is a military term for the act of delaying, disrupting, or destroying enemy forces or supplies en route to the battle area. A distinction is often made between strategic and tactical interdiction. The former refers to operations whose effects are broad and long-term; tactical operations are designed to affect events rapidly and in a localized area.

(63): **Untermensch** is a person considered racially or socially inferior. Plural: Untermenschen. Means also subhuman. It is a Nazi term for non-Aryan "inferior people" often referred to as "the masses from the East", that is Jews, Roma, and Slavs (Poles, Serbs, Ukrainians, and later also Russians). The term was also applied to Mixed race and Black people. Jewish, Polish and Romani people, along with the physically, and mentally disabled, as well as homosexuals and political dissidents were to be exterminated in the Holocaust. According to the Generalplan Ost (Nazi government plan for genocide and ethnic cleansing), the Slavic population of East-Central Europe was to be reduced in part through mass murder in the Holocaust, with a majority expelled to Asia and used as slave labor in the Reich. These concepts were an important part of the Nazi racial policy.

(64): **Fräulein** is the German language honorific for unmarried women, comparable to Miss in English and Mademoiselle in French. Its use as an everyday honorific declined sharply beginning with the 1960s, because it came to be seen as sexist. It was banned from official use in West Germany in 1972.

(65): The original word is Shooting Down King 撃墜王/gekitsui ō, which is equivalent Fliegerass or Flying ace: an aviation slang term for a fighter pilot who has shot down at least five enemy military aircraft during fighter missions. By a convention established in World War I a fighter pilot with five kills became an ace. In World War II the same standard was used by the Allies, while the Luftwaffe adopted the term **Experte**. **Experten** had to demonstrate overall proficiency in combat rather than attain a set number of victories. It's important to notice the difference between Fliegerass or Ace and Experten, because The nomenclature of the Luftwaffe system allowed comparative awards to be made to airmen flying different types, in different roles and operating in differing theaters, and not only grading them by amassing kills. In fact a quote from Steinhoff himself says: 'No kill was worth the life of a wingman.'. More on the subject here: [Strategic Culture in the Luftwaffe – Did it Exist in World War II and Has it Transitioned into the Air Force?](#)

(66): The **Oktoberfest** is the world's largest Volksfest, featuring a beer festival and a traveling funfair. It is held annually in Munich, Bavaria, Germany. It is a 16- to 18-day folk festival running from mid- or late-September to around the first Sunday in October, with more than six million people from around the world attending the event every year. Locally, it is called d'Wiesn, after the colloquial name for the fairgrounds, Theresienwiese. The Oktoberfest is an important part of Bavarian culture, having been held since the year 1810. Other cities across the world also hold Oktoberfest celebrations that are modeled after the original Munich event.

The Munich Oktoberfest originally took place in the 16-day period leading up to the first Sunday in **October**. In 1994, this longstanding schedule was modified in response to German reunification. As such, if the first Sunday in October falls on the 1st or the 2nd, then the festival would run until 3 October (German Unity Day). Thus, the festival now runs for 17 days when the first Sunday is 2 October and 18 days when it is 1 October. In 2010, the festival lasted until the first Monday in October (4 October), to mark the event's bicentennial.



(67): **Circe** (pronounced [kírkeː]) is an enchantress and a minor goddess in Greek mythology. She is either a daughter of the god Helios and the Oceanid nymph Perse or the goddess Hecate and Aeëtes. Circe was renowned for her vast knowledge of potions and herbs. Through the use of these and a magic wand or staff, she would transform her enemies, or those who offended her, into animals. The best known of her legends is told in Homer's *Odyssey* when Odysseus visits her island of Aeaea on the way back from the Trojan War and she changes most of his crew into swine. He manages to persuade her to return them to human shape, lives with her for a year and has sons by her, including Latinus and Telegonus. Her ability to change others into animals is further highlighted by the story of Picus, an Italian king whom she turns into a woodpecker for resisting her advances. Another story tells of her falling in love with the sea-god Glaucus, who prefers the nymph Scylla to her. In revenge, Circe poisoned the water where her rival bathed and turned her into a dreadful monster.



(68): **Krombacher** or **Krombacher** is a brewery located in Kreuztal , North Rhine-Westphalia , Germany. Currently, it has a diverse lineup of not only Pilsner but also Weizen (white beer), Dunkel (dark), and Radler (beer with lemonade), but it was originally a brewery specializing in Pilsner. It is said to be "drinking bread" because the flavor of wheat stands out. One out of every ten pilsners in Germany is one of the best-selling beers in the world, as it is said that Krombacher Braues is drunk.



(69): The **Federal Intelligence Service** (German: Bundesnachrichtendienst; **BND**) is the foreign intelligence agency of Germany, directly subordinate to the Chancellor's Office. The BND headquarters is located in central Berlin and is the world's largest intelligence headquarters. The BND has 300 locations in Germany and foreign countries. In 2016, it employed around 6,500 people; 10% of them are military personnel who are formally employed by the Office for Military Sciences. The BND is the largest agency of the German Intelligence Community.

The BND was founded during the Cold War in 1956 as the official foreign intelligence agency of West Germany, which had recently joined NATO, and in close cooperation with the CIA. It was the successor to the earlier Gehlen Organization, often known simply as "The Organization" or "The Org", a West German intelligence organization affiliated with the CIA whose existence had not been officially acknowledged. The most central figure in the BND's history was former Wehrmacht general Reinhard Gehlen, the leader of the Gehlen Organization and later the founding president of the BND, who was regarded as "one of the most legendary Cold War spymasters." From the early days of the Cold War the Gehlen Organization and later the BND had an intimate cooperation with the CIA, and often was the western intelligence community's only eyes and ears on the ground in the eastern bloc. The BND is also regarded as one of the best informed intelligence services in regards to the Middle East from the 1960s. The BND was quickly established as the western world's second largest intelligence agency, second only to the CIA. Both Russia and the Middle East remain important focuses of the BND's activities, in addition to violent non-state actors.

The BND today acts as an early warning system to alert the German government to threats to German interests from abroad. It depends heavily on wiretapping and electronic surveillance of international communications. It collects and evaluates information on a variety of areas such as international non-state terrorism, weapons of mass destruction proliferation and illegal transfer of technology, organized crime, weapons and drug trafficking, money laundering, illegal migration and information warfare. As Germany's only overseas intelligence service, the BND gathers both military and civil intelligence. While the Strategic Reconnaissance Command (KSA) of the Bundeswehr also fulfills this mission, it is not an intelligence service. There is close cooperation between the BND and the KSA.

(70): Atodashi: Waiting to see one's opponent's move before doing anything (e.g. as a disallowed act in rock, paper, scissors)

(71): Military theory is a field of study that seeks to understand the phenomena of war and its links to wider conflict; and provides a framework for the valid creation and dissemination of the knowledge of war and warfare. In other words, military theory is the epistemology of war. This definition highlights that research into military theory is grounded in the philosophy of scientific inquiry and, much like applied history, must use broad scientific methods – using hypothesis and empirical data based in history; not just a single incident, war or technological advancement – to develop its concepts. Understanding this also provides a guide to test whether a new or modern idea is effective ‘military theory’, or merely ‘military notion’. The definition also indicates that the focus of military theory is the development of first principles knowledge about war and warfare. It is this knowledge that allows planners, commanders and senior decision makers to adapt their know-how of war fighting to changing situations, environments and political objectives. It is also this knowledge that can be enhanced through wider study. Examples of Military theory: https://history.army.mil/html/books/105/105-1-1/CMH_Pub_105-5-1_2013.pdf