

A HERO OF OUR TIME¹

“I see you’re having doubts. I’ll have to explain. Who, in your opinion is, for example, Tref . . .”

“A hero”

“A hero, a hero, that’s right, and who else? I’ll tell you. A son of alcoholics, a loser. At school, he engaged in pickpocketing. Unsuccessfully though. Grabbed inside of a bag of some aunty on the bus, yet there turned out to be not a purse, but a little dog. Which, out of fear, bit the fool by the finger. He screamed in surprise, so he got caught. Spent half a year in a juvie. Then decided to get into some more serious business. Rob a bank. Studied different banks for a long time. Finally he found one where there are fewer guards. Took a couple of degenerates as accomplices, climbed into the vault at night. Broke into several safety deposit boxes, grabbed some locked metal containers. Back home, they opened the containers, yet they didn’t contain any money or jewelry, but you know what? Plugged test tubes. Do you know what was in the test tubes? Sperm. This bank, as it turned out, was not a financial institution, but a medical one. A sperm bank. The funny thing is that Tref paid some wannabe gangster for the tip. Then he rushed the tipster, all like, return the money. But this guy flat-out refused. He asked for a bank, he got a bank. Where’s the issue?”

Anyway, Tref did not manage to have a career in civilian life. So he went and joined the war. Well, here he flourished. A hero of our time, a legend. You can say a celebrity. Why? After all, he was as dim as they get, and then suddenly he’s a shining beacon! Did he wise up? No at all! But why then? Because war is a foolish business. At times cunning, but never smart. Just for people like Tref. A perfect fit. What am I getting at? You need to be simpler, stupider. Print poems for Tref, not for Lorenzo the Magnificent. You understand;’

”Yes sir. However, allow me to object. How is war a foolish business? What about high technology? The Pentagon came up with the Internet. And GPS. And consider all the brilliant commanders there were: Caesar, Napoleon, Zhukov. . . You too. . . “

”Cut it out. Have you read Tolstoy? Leo? ‘War and Peace’;’

“Of course,” Windbreaker lied.

“He, by the way, went to war himself. And he correctly noted that there is and can be nothing genius in sending the cavalry to the right, the infantry to the left and making sure the army gets their biscuits delivered in time. About the hi-tech. . . what’s the difference whether you get a foolish task done with a stone axe, a Maxim machine gun or a cyber weapon? That doesn’t make it any smarter.”

“Napoleon was also a legislator, Caesar. . .”

“Napoleon, well, maybe he was. Tref, however, isn’t a Napoleon. And Caesar isn’t a Radiola. I took some looks at your book. It is stupid enough to be popular, but it’s clearly lacking a genuine, non-commercial nationality, that is, not popularity, but precisely nationality. It needs to be even more simple, more direct. . . What are you, for example, ready to sacrifice for the sake of the

¹cf. Lermontov’s homonymous novel

fatherland?”

“O-o-o-o... E-e-e-e... E-evvv... ev-everything...” the writer perplexedly missed a beat.

“Well, certainly not everything, of course, you’re going too far there. Doesn’t even have to be everything. Just sacrifice your brain, without this you can’t succeed in our business. And when it comes to this you can’t hesitate, you have to go all the way - whatever brain you have, big or small, give it all up, give it up completely.”

“Yes, sir!”

“After all, people are evolutionarily unfinished and are therefore imperfectly arranged. They have two whole cavities inside - the stomach and the brain. And nature, as you know, does not tolerate emptiness. Therefore it is necessary to artificially fill these two cavities in the human body: the stomach with food, the brain with information. The necessity to plug these two holes in Homo sapiens at all times with something is precisely what determines the development of civilization. And if a person is hungry with his head or his stomach, if there’s emptiness in his brain or in his belly, he will not forgive this to his master. When you have thousands under your command, you shouldn’t try to be clever. Our personnel are mostly simpletons - they’re not exactly accustomed to squid ink ravioli with truffle flakes. A soldier’s stomach rather needs some more gruel, for other delights we don’t have any time, money, customs, cooks. The same goes for the brain - more gruel. The words need to be rounded, solid, vigorous, like groats...

“And peas,” Dancer brown-nosely expanded the idea.

“Peas? Peas will do, too” - Fraiser faltered slightly. - “Take short thoughts, preferably locally produced, overseas exoticism might cause brain disorder and head swelling in the lower ranks. Therefore, more simplicity, less complexity. Simpler, thicker, faster - that’s how it should be! Now get to it!”

“Yes, sir!”

“By the way, will the text of my speech be ready tomorrow?”

“Yes sir, tomorrow, as ordered.”

“When will we record it?”

“Whenever you give the orders.”

“Okay. You can go now.”

“Yes, sir.”

When Dancer departed, the commander called Sickle-and-Hammer:

“Mark it down. A tanker. Call sign Track. Unstatutory thoughts. Keep an eye on him. No, no... For now, just keep an eye on him.”

WAR

Then, having signed several orders and instructions, he happily decided to call it a day. He went down the stairs to the street and walked along the wide sidewalk, greeting the passers-by and shop clerks. As usual, Gaff and three bodyguard sergeants followed him. Fraiser always went home on foot, although he knew that enemy sabotage groups were after him. He did so not out of empty bravado,

but to instill vigor in the fighters and local residents. He always walked in an emphasizedly unhurried manner, stopping to buy sunflower seeds², to read a poster, or to talk to civilians about the prices and the weather. Let everyone see and understand: the city is calm, everything is under control.

It was ten o'clock, in former times it would have already begun to get dark, but since the Earth had slightly left its orbit and began to fly around the Sun according to the, as the scientists called it, "pre-chaotic trajectory", the days dragged on beyond the norm, then suddenly ended giving way to equally abnormal nights. The weather was also strange, the seasons became indefinitely many, they did not alternate predictably, but changed and flickered completely haphazardly.

The war didn't graze the city too badly, only gripped it's the north-western side, smoking and whistling at it's edge. Here, where the industrial zone converged with a one-to-two-storied residential suburb, inside former factory headquarters, one of Fraiser's command posts was located.

The factories didn't operate and were gradually disappearing. Sam assured that the locals are in collusion with the enemy, they order him to shell industrial facilities, then draw up acts on the impossibility of their restoration, cut the ruins into scrap metal, which they then sell "to the other side" to businessmen sponsoring the opposition. Sam also noted that without accomplices in the People's Army such fraud would not be possible and that there is evidence of a certain proximity of Stern and Minus to this rotten case. The commander did not react. He did not forgive the failure to comply with his orders, gossip, untidy appearance and lies, but he was surprisingly lenient towards theft. Of course, blatant robbery, conspicuous looting were punished mercilessly. But those fighters who robbed modestly, without daring, without flaunting, Fraiser left alone. From personal experience and from history books, and even more from his own instincts and the ability to guess the most important thing about different types of people, he knew that a warrior, not one accidentally drafted, but a real, natural warrior is always a bandit at heart. His best, most ideological soldiers, who sincerely considered themselves selfless patriots, even they actually began to get bored if for a long time there was nothing to requisition, expropriate, or even plainly steal from anybody. Therefore, the commander, detecting with his sharp ears some profit-oriented bustling in the depths of the army, did not interfere with this natural process, but listened carefully and made sure that it did not grow out of proportions, so that there would be no trespasses or excesses. The fighters understood that their fuss was audible to him, and, out of respect, not wanting to offend his ears, they rustled carefully, not stepping over the red lines, mentally drawn by him and mentally guessed by them.

The war went its course. If there were no major operations, the losses of the parties were approximately equal. In a month it usually amounted to a total of twenty 200s and fifty 300s³. Moreover, the Ukrs in their pig-like fashion

²Usually roasted and salted, sunflower seeds are a popular snack in Russia and Ukraine

³Russian military slang, Cargo 200 (or 200 for short) refers to a dead casualty, while 300

loved to shoot at residential areas, so about six peaceful inhabitants were also added to the count. These losses, insignificant in comparison with the many thousands of the first stage of the conflict, had long become commonplace and did not interest anyone. And if for some reason a month was out of the ordinary and the losses suddenly became considerably larger or, on the contrary, significantly less, terrible noise arose, international observers and journalists started clamoring, the authorities fussed, everyone tried to understand what had gone wrong. Doves arrived from the verification and commission center, organized hearings, scoldings, or just intimate conversations full of prophanities, then they put things in order, that is, commanders, units, words in instructions, warehouses and fortifications were moved from one place to another, and the situation returned to normal, the war returned to its previous course and went on in the same old way: twenty 200s, fifty 300s, six civilians, twenty 200s, fifty 300s, six civilians. . .

At first the war was young, hot. It was beautiful and careless. The opponents were irresistibly attracted to each other, they longed for closeness and more than once, having forgotten everything, they locked each other in the passionate embrace of close combat. But years passed, the war grew old, ugly and slow. The former passion was no longer there, and as the elderly spouses in a protracted marriage, the warring parties, although they did not disperse, no longer really wanted to get close to each other, they kept their distance. Maneuvering from a long way, increasingly turning over the military business to drones, shooting from afar and without aiming too precisely, everyone had long secretly dreamed of a different enemy and a different war.

Fraiser, like everyone here, was also fed up with this dull rigamarole, he did not want to win on points, he had a good plan for a final big and decisive battle. Resources were accumulated and distributed so that at any moment it would be possible to perform an unexpected chokehold, to drown almost the entire (and with some luck, even the whole entire) enemy army in a cauldron worse than that of Ilovaisk⁴. But restraining directives came from the Center, some unfamiliar people in suits at some unintelligible negotiations made some inexplicable ceasefire, in which it became stuck and stalled, and the odious war just would not end.

refers to wounded, read more: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cargo_200_\(code_name\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cargo_200_(code_name))

⁴A main battle in the War in Donbass during which the Ukrainian forces were encircled for days in the city of Ilovaisk, read more: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Ilovaisk