

Rotaru Vasile Ion

— Born: May 7, 1922. Republic of Moldova, Hincesti district, Loganesti village.

— Died: February 9, 2003.

— Soldier of the Red Army. Rifleman.

1. 285th Rifle Regiment, 140th Division. 4th Ukrainian Front.

2. 113th Regiment, Rifle Reserve Army, 167th Infantry Division.

— Sent to the front: January 15, 1944.

— Released from the front: May 18, 1945.

•Honors:

1. "For Courage" Medal
2. Order "War for the Defense of the Fatherland" first degree

"May God never let even the worst man endure the nightmare we have endured. The hell, the hell on earth. Marusia, my wife... Don't let me tell the children about what I saw at the front..."

I was born in 1922, and in the '40s, I married Marusia. A year later, the war reached us. The Germans and Romanians invaded, and soon, they were stationed at every house in our village. They didn't stay with us... I don't know why... maybe because the house was too small, and, in the house, there was me, Marusia, the sick mother... she was bedridden, and my father was disabled... Forgotten veteran of the Great War... but he wasn't talking about it... he didn't talk at all. Anyway, although there were no Germans or Romanians stationed with us, they came after food. I remember, one day, two German soldiers entered unannounced. They looked around the house, rummaged for food... and when they saw my mother lying in bed, it was as if they froze. They hesitated, whispered something in German, and then left without a word. God must have protected us. The two then went on to Aunt Ileana... the neighbor. She didn't want to open the door for them, so she locked it. You know... It's all over in an instant. One of the Germans stuck his machine gun to the door and started firing... The poor woman died, riddled with bullets. I found her lying face down in a pool of blood. It was the first time I had seen death so close. And it wasn't the last time. Mother of God... look, one day two partizans were caught, Uncle Gheorghe and the son of Grandpa Cărbăț, a young boy, Ion. They were caught the same night. The next day, the Germans dragged them into the middle of the village, and in front of all the villagers, they hanged them. Gheorghe's wife came with their four children...and they were crying... and kissed his feet... as their bodies swayed in the wind. The Germans left them there for days. No one dared to take them down...

In 1944, they came after me. The Soviets took 120 of us to the battlefield...boys, barely men, handsome, strong and full of life...18, 19, 20 years... I was 21 and Marusia was carrying our baby. It was bitter cold when she led me into the center of the village, barefoot through the snow, holding my hand as if she never wanted to let me go. The army's green trucks were waiting for us. We were picked up and taken far away. There they gave us new, beautiful uniforms... It was as if we were going to the parade, not to the war. They gave us rifles. The commander lined us up, gave us a long speech, told us that we would fight in the name of the Motherland, for comrade Stalin... but it was strange. No one was fighting for Stalin's sake, but for the sake of mothers, wives, and children we might never see again.

We were taken to the North-West of Ukraine. The road was full of danger. The Germans were bombing us. When they threw bombs, we all scattered and ran away, we hid. Our men were dying, torn apart. I was hurt during the first days... A shrapnel penetrated my leg, right into my thigh. The pain was excruciating. I covered my wound with my hands, pressing it tightly to stop the bleeding. I could feel the warmth of the blood staining my pants. It was a nauseating sensation... But I got over it. What was I supposed to do?

Once, I remember, we stopped in a forest. We were in Czechoslovakia or Poland, I don't remember... but I know for sure that, after we set up camp, I, well, went to pee. I put my rifle on my back because, without a rifle, we didn't go anywhere, and I went into the forest to find a more secluded place. I found some bushes and... I started to pee. But I heard some noises behind me. To be honest, I was afraid. With trembling hands, I loaded my rifle and headed toward the place in question. I expected to come across an animal... a wolf, fox, or a wild boar... But there were two Germans. One was injured; the other was holding him in his arms. They had no weapons. When they saw me, they froze. They raised their hands and started crying. They spoke to me in German, as if I understood what they were saying. I felt sorry for them... I should have shot them. Any other soldier would have done it. I put down the rifle. Maybe what I did was an embarrassment, a betrayal, but I looked around carefully and signaled for them to leave...

Another time, I arrived with the regiment near a railway guarded by the Germans. It was night. There, close to us, was a German, he was on patrol, and he was a danger to us. If he saw us, we risked being caught and killed. Then the commander came out in front of us and said: "One must kill him! Vasile, you're going." They gave me vodka to strengthen me, that's how it was done then, and then I left. I crawled on my stomach to the German, and he was seated. He fell asleep... I was supposed to kill him, but how? I couldn't shoot him. The sound would alarm the other Germans. I walked over to him, grabbed him quickly, wrapped my arm around his neck, and squeezed him. He opened his eyes. He had beautiful blue eyes. He looked at me with so much sorrow... But what was I supposed to do? Either I died or he died. I broke his neck. He died with his eyes open. I killed a man with my bare hands. A mother was waiting for him somewhere. A wife. A child. That night, I cried like a child.

The war has left its mark on me. A bullet shattered my arm. But thank God, I came back with all my limbs, unlike others. I remember I was passing by with the regiment under a bridge. The current was strong, and the Germans were shooting from the bridge, throwing grenades. And as I walked through the water... I saw the water turn dark red... blood. One of our soldiers was crawling behind us, through the water, without an arm...

Near Berlin, an explosion buried us alive. The force of the explosion stunned me. My ears were ringing, and my head was spinning. After that, everything turned black. I suffered a concussion. From the front, I came with the second-degree of disability.

After the surrender of Germany, May 9, 1945... I was released. They sent me home. There, Marusia was waiting for me with my first daughter, Elena. I had 10 more children after that...

Hey, my children... You don't know what the real hardships are. I don't wish anyone to go through the hell we went through... war, famine, deportations. Dear God, Dear God..."





**Ротару Василий
Иванович**