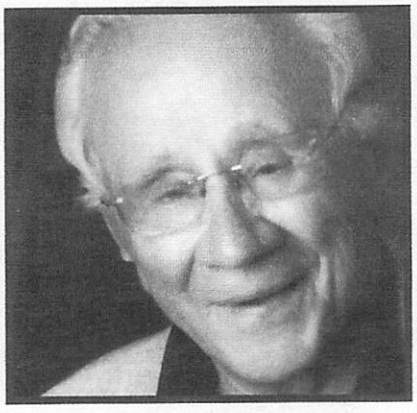
THE STORY OF JOHN KONTEK

RECENT ACCESS TO THE KONTEK FAMILY'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE SHEDS NEW LIGHT ONTO A FASCINATED LIFE STORY. FOR THE FIRST TIME, WE CAN SEE AT CLOSE HAND THE LIFE AND WORK OF A PROMINENT UKRAINIAN PATRIOT AND BENEFACTOR, WITHIN THE WIDER AUSTRALIAN QUEST TO BUILD SOCIAL COHESION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY.

THE STORY OF



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JOHN KONTEK

John Kontek believes in preserving Ukrainian historical and cultural values for the future generations. One way of doing that, in his opinion, is to support publications about Ukraine, the country, where Russian and Polish occupiers banned the language, precious books were burnt and people who dared to stand against this horror were killed or exiled. Knowing these historical moments too well, John Kontek always supported the Ukrainian printed word. One of the publishing houses that received John Kontek's support is Litopys UPA *(Engl.* - Chronicle of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army*). Here is an extract from their letter, dated 26 March 2013.*

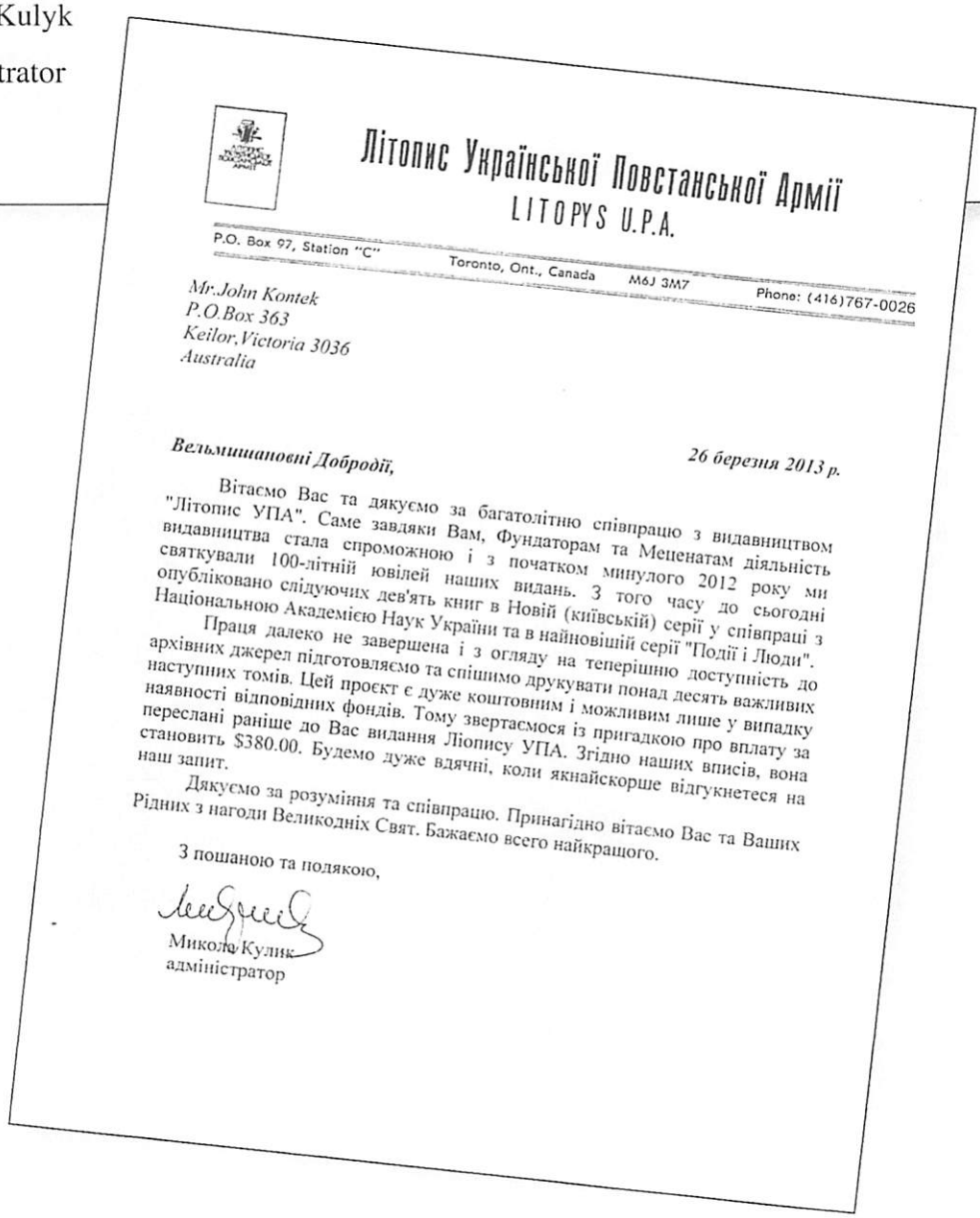
We thank you for your longstanding cooperation with the publishing house Litopys UPA. Thanks to you, the founders and patrons, our publishing activities were realised and in 2012 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of our publications. Since that time nine more books were published in a new (Kyiv) series in collaboration with the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and in the newest series *Events and People*.

Thank you for your understanding and co-operation. We wish all the best to you and your family on the occasion of Easter.

Respectfully yours,

Mykola Kulyk

Administrator



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Вельмишановні Добродії, ***26 березня 2013 р.***

Вітаємо Вас та дякуємо за багатолітню співпрацю з видавництвом "Літопис УПА". Саме завдяки Вам, Фундаторам та Меценатам діяльність видавництва стала спроможною і з початком минулого 2012 року ми святкували 100-літній ювілей наших видань. З того часу до сьогодні опубліковано слідуючих дев'ять книг в Новій (київській) серії у співпраці з Національною Академією Наук України та в найновішій серії "Події і Люди".

Праця далеко не завершена і з огляду на теперішню доступність до архівних джерел підготовляємо та спішимо друкувати понад десять важливих наступних томів. Цей проєкт є дуже коштовним і можливим лише у випадку наявності відповідних фондів. Тому звертаємося із пригадкою про вплату за пересланні раніше до Вас видання Літопису УПА. Згідно наших вписів, вона становить $380.00. Будемо дуже вдячні, коли якнайскорше відгукнетеся на наш запит.

Дякуємо за розуміння та співпрацю. Принагідно вітаємо Вас та Ваших Рідних з нагоди Великодніх Свят. Бажаємо всего найкращого.

З пошаною та подякою,

Миколо Кулик
адміністратор

John Kontek JP. CEA. REIV. AREI. FREI., Germany, 1950.

'Sketches of My Youth's Journey'

(Extracts from John Kontek's Memoirs)

I was born in Makovysko village, which is located seven kilometres from Yaroslav. Fate has sent me to distant Australia, but my motherland is always in my thoughts. In 2000, my wife Natalia, son Taras and I travelled to Ukraine. We visited Makovysko and other places where my life's journey had taken me. We also went to Czechoslovakia, where years before, with a group of comrades, I helped refugees cross the border to Germany to flee from the Soviets.

My village has changed. There are new roads, buildings several storeys high, and my school has been remodelled. Everything has changed. White painted houses and the old school remain only in my recollection, and yet it is still my land and my home, as such sweet memory it will live in my heart.

There were almost four hundred houses in our village. Makovysko, although not prosperous, was a beautiful village. Simple, yet deeply loved by its inhabitants. And the extraordinary nature, fields and forests around it were like a song for my soul. Our house, at number 27, was located at the corner of the village, just at the edge of it. It was my mother's house, built by her father and my grandfather. My grandfather's surname was Wityk. The block was split into four parts, we lived in one part and my mother's sister, who later moved to Volyn, occupied the second part. Mother's brother Ivan lived on the third part, and the fourth part was occupied by another sister.

Our house was very old, but how dear it was to all of us. There was nothing extraordinary about this wooden building except maybe that the front was rebuilt with bricks. It was a typical Ukrainian cottage: tiny windows, a roof covered with hay and walls painted white. I see it clearly. Inside there are four rooms. As soon as you come in, there is a pantry, where we kept all the grain. Stairs lead to the cellar, where our food was stored. No refrigerators then; the cellar always stayed cool, and it preserved our food very well. Next is the kitchen. We cooked and ate there together with the whole family. In a large oven mother baked bread. In a smaller room we had a sofa, table and chairs, it was where I did my homework. The last was a tiny room, where we kept our everyday, Sunday and school clothes. There I used to keep my books. It was a small cottage. But at the time almost all the houses in our village were like this one.

We had stables for the cattle. The stables were divided into two, in one part we kept two cows, in the other were two horses. Separately, there was a barn with pigs. On top of the barn, we had a henhouse with chickens, geese and ducks. We had beehives. We were blessed to have a well, because not all the families in our village had them, and as such they had to go to neighbours for water. People would come to us for water, when they were going to work in the fields, and all of them said that our water was delicious.

Our allotment of land was quite large. Our garden was so big that it provided our whole family and with food for most of the year. Tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, potatoes, carrots - in a word, everything that we needed was grown there. We also grew flax for clothes. At the end of the garden was the barn, where we kept and threshed grain: rye, oats and wheat. The barn became a home for a pair of storks. They always arrived there in the spring and flew away in autumn. Each time the male stork came first and prepared the nest, and then his partner arrived. And in the stables, where the cattle were kept, swallows built their nests. They, too, flew away each year to spend winter in warmer climes.

The land fed and clothed us. We also had spare produce to sell, and could earn a bit of money. All the people in the village lived in much the same way...

Church in Makovysko village.

The village had two churches, an old and a new one. Opposite the church they built a new school. I was a pupil there and it was a good school. All the village children studied there until the sixth year. Then, some went to high schools in the city and some remained and worked in the village. Most young people remained in the village.

My classes started at nine o'clock, but I got up much earlier, because at seven o'clock I already took the cows to pasture. We did not take our cows to the common pasture, like many other people, we took them to a separate field and as a result their milk tasted better. After taking care of the cows I ran to school. After three o'clock, as I returned from school, I took the cows back to the field and this time they could graze for longer.

Our horses worked in the field, ploughing and carrying the wood and hay. The same horses helped my father to earn extra cash as they brought the wood to the mills, where it was cut into boards. He also distributed bricks from the brickworks. The rest of the time, he was engaged in ordinary farm work.

I had a dog and a cat. They were dear to me. The dog was called Bobik. It lived with us for a while, about fifteen years. As I left home, Bobik was still alive, but could barely walk. As a child I took him with me wherever I went. As for the cat, I found it. One evening I was bringing the cows home from the field. It was raining terribly. I passed by someone else's barn and heard something meowing. When I came closer I saw a little kitten, which was all wet and trembling from the cold. I felt sorry for it. I hid it under my shirt and brought it home. My parents did not really like the idea of having a cat at home. I begged them: "I will give it half of my portion of the milk." Finally, they agreed: "Let it stay for a week or two. But when it gets older, you have to give it to somebody else." But the cat and I got so used to each other, that it stayed with us to live. He always slept with me. I called the cat Myhasko. Every time Mum was milking the cows, I asked for a bit of milk for him. Myhasko grew as big as a dog and probably was the biggest cat in the village.

Myhasko became so used to me that he followed me around. He was naughty, but my parents warmed to him with time. He loved to lie on the windowsills to bask in the sun. But that was only half the trouble, for on those windowsills were Mum's potted flowers, and when Myhasko stretched out his paws, the flowers fell.

Once a pot of flowers fell and broke just before Mum came home from work. Myhasko was not stupid, he knew that he had caused some damage. As soon as he noticed my mother he jumped from the window. Mother was angry so I said that I accidentally broke the pot. However she guessed what had really happened and told me: "You are telling me fantasies, son." When I left the village, I had to leave Myhasko behind.

In summer as a child I often went mushroom gathering. The mushrooms came in many delicious and highly prized varieties. I had to get up early for mushrooms, but for me it was not a problem. I never liked to sleep a lot. Even now in my senior years, I like to wake up early. After gathering mushrooms, we cleaned them, pierced holes through them and hung them on a string to dry. In winter, my mother made a fantastic sauce from those mushrooms to go with the potato and meat. Often we had so many mushrooms that we shared them with other people.

Back then children in the village did not have such toys as they do today. The villagers were poor, yet the boys in the village kept rabbits and doves. We exchanged and sold them to each other. Often, the doves escaped from the new owners and came back home to us. We entertained ourselves in simple, fun ways. The villagers called me 'Ivas with the golden hair'. My friends and I really did have a lot of fun. Next door were two boys of my age. We were close friends. We had a game that we called 'Heroes'. Each of us would choose a name of a Ukrainian hero and pretend to be him. Later, when we were teenagers, the village youths picked me to be their leader and to organise various events. I could play the violin a little and my sisters sang beautifully, that is why young people often gathered at our home to spend evenings. I had lots of friends in the neighbouring villages and in Yaroslav as well, when I lived there with my sister.

They taught us sports in school: volleyball, soccer, chess and dominoes. Also, at the school we had music lessons and a choir. Even though our parents were poor, they tried to give their children a good education.

In the village we celebrated many holidays. Often, during special occasions, families invited guests from other villages. After the church services, they all gathered together for dinners organised in the village hall. Each village had a local hall. Our Makovysko village hall was a neighbourhood hub. We had our own orchestra and people danced and sang. Even though we were poor, we were able to celebrate and enjoy each other's company. People were kind and when neighbours gathered in someone's house and started to sing so loud, it felt like that the house itself could dance.

At school, we had three Ukrainian and six Polish teachers. Two or three of them were local, while others came from neighbouring places. Only sadness came out of those studies. The teachers did not like us, nor we them. They taught us all subjects in the Polish language: history, mathematics and so on. Only one hour per week, on Thursdays, was dedicated to Ukrainian reading. Although it was called reading, in that hour a teacher tried to teach us both reading and writing in Ukrainian. Everything else was in Polish. This annoyed us the most. Only in the hiatus of the war between the Poles and the Germans, when the Germans reached us, were classes conducted in Ukrainian.

During my service in the Ukrainian Police.

We did not want to learn in Polish. Our girls and boys were very patriotic, because our families brought us up to be loyal to our own heritage. And when the Poles called us Rusyns, we felt insulted. We rebelled. Now, remembering all that, I understand that we impaired ourselves: when the teachers asked us something in Polish, we said that we did not understand. This was our way or protesting, but as a result, we were not given graduation certificates and were made to repeat the same year. Once my friend and I formed a small gang at school and I was elected its chief. We caused some mischief at school! On the portraits of prominent Poles displayed at school, we drew moustaches and below we inscribed 'Taras Shevchenko'. Each time when teachers called me into the office, I already knew what was happening and would say: "Should I come back with my father or mother, or with the both of them?"

We had one really good teacher. His last name was Terebenets. He was not from our village, but from a neighbouring village. His wife was Polish, but spoke Ukrainian language perfectly. They had two children: a daughter Dzidzya and son Slavko. Slavko moved to Yaroslav, and after his studies in Vienna, he fought in the Ukrainian Army.

Our village had a choir and a theatre group. My two sisters sang in the choir. I wanted to join them as well, but I did not have a good singing voice. Yet my love for music found its outlet. One of our relatives, Radawets, who visited us often, was a choir director and played the violin. His love for the violin inspired me. I gladly became his student. I first played in the school orchestra, and later began to perform at the village theatre plays. We took these plays to other villages and to the city every year. Our choir also went to the city to take part in competitions. We won first place. I loved playing the violin, which I much preferred to working in the field.

My sisters helped in the household as well. The older sister, Stefka, was the principal in a rural dairy plant, which was called Maslosoyuz. From the milk that people brought there, they made sour cream. Our Maslosoyuz was smaller than the one in Yaroslav, where they also made butter. I often went there with my sister.

Makovysko village choir. My sisters Olga and Stefania were members of the choir, circa 1941.

Later Stefka worked for two years in Yaroslav Maslosoyuz. They also had a commercial shop, where villagers were able to buy necessary farm equipment cheaper than elsewhere. They sold everything you need for the farm: sickles, ploughs, scythes, etc. Also there was rye, oats, wheat – everything that people might need in the village. This way the Maslosoyuz helped the farmers.

When my sister moved to Yaroslav, she lived in the suburbs, not far from our church and Maslosoyuz. When I visited Ukraine in 2000, I visited Yaroslav and I visited the old neighbourhood, including my former school.

My second sister, Olga, moved to Volyn to stay with our aunt. Olga graduated there as a nurse and worked at the hospital. Mostly, she worked in major cities, far away from us. She could earn at least some money there, because it was very difficult to obtain a job at home. Olga visited us only on holidays, so she was very rarely at home.

Men who wanted to work had to seek jobs as well. But our men, compared with women, were lazy. Women worked much more. They had to wash, cook, go to work, bring up the family, work in the fields and so on. I hated that situation terribly. I even told my dad that men should do more and help women instead of playing cards, drinking and sitting in the inns talking nonsense. Nonetheless, despite all the negative features, all kept farms. Back then it was not as it is now: take some money and go to the butcher to buy some meat. Many had at least a pig and a cow. Good farmers slaughtered pigs each year and made various sausages, saltseson and ham. Smoked meat could be kept much longer - it could last for a year. I do not recall anyone in the village going hungry. There were richer families, there were poorer, but most made ends meet, helping each other when needed.

We always stored up wood for winter. We tried to have a lot of wood for the fire to keep our house warm, as there was no electricity. We used kerosene lamps. There was a lot of snow in winter, sometimes it reached a metre high. Usually we cooked potatoes, rabbit meat, chicken and dove eggs, baked bread, pickled cucumbers and cabbage. There was enough food preserved to last the whole winter. Other families lived the same way. Though it was a little easier for us, because my sisters helped us with money they earnt away from the farm.

My parents' relatives lived similarly to us. My dad's brother, Mykolay, had a smaller field then ours, so he helped us to plough and mow. Both my dad and his brother worked as hard as horses. They knew their job very well.

Our people were very nationalistic, because we lived in the region that is known as Lemkivschyna. We treated Poles in the same way as they treated us. When I was only ten years old, 'Sich' was established. Sich was an organisation similar to CYM (Ukrainian Youth Alliance), which united the nationalist-conscious youth. It later became to be know as OUN/UPA. I joined OUN (the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists), and along with my sister we took the oath. Our leaders, the Sich seniors, taught us 'Sichovyky' to keep everything a secret. We could not even say anything to our parents or brothers and sisters: "Confide only in me, for I am your senior, I am your teacher."

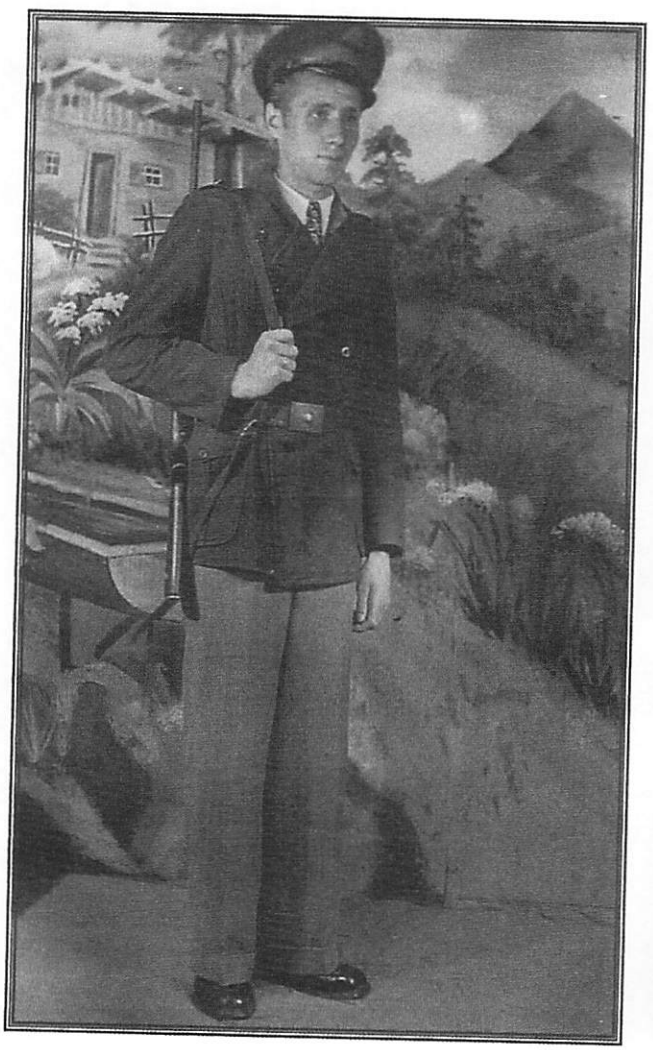
My parents wanted me to become a tailor or carpenter, but I was not fond of these trades and could not force myself to study them. My parents tried to warn me: "You will have no livelihood and die penniless. You will not survive playing the violin. Study something useful." My reply was: "Mother, Dad, do not worry. I will be fine and help you as well. One day I'll become rich. I will have plenty and will share with you. When our country becomes independent, I'll become a chief of police and arrest all the invaders."

My parents were scared that police who supported the Poles would arrest and imprison me for my ideas. And when such things were said during the Russian occupation, they feared that the Communists would send me to Siberia. My parents kept discussing the subject and gave examples of how the other boys became drivers or carpenters. My answer was always: "Do not preach at me. I know better." Somehow, thank God, my life has been easier than the fate of many of my fellow travellers.

Our priest, Dorotsky, was from Zakarpattia (Transcarpathia). He had two children: daughter Slavka and son Romko. His children went to school in the city. When the Russians invaded, they too fled abroad. They studied in Vienna. Romko also served in the Ukrainian Army. I know about their fate, because I had an opportunity to speak with them when they were living in America. That priest, like my family, was transferred to Semenivka, near Lviv. There he buried my mother. When I visited Ukraine in 2000, Mr Salapak, who was also from Makovysko, drove my family to visit all those places from my past and we visited the Church in Yaroslav. There the local priest served us tea.

The people from our village were scattered all over Ukraine. The fact is that when the Poles were approaching our village, the Ukrainian partisans and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) burnt our houses, so that the Poles could not have them. Consequently our village's people were moved away by the Poles: some closer to Lviv, others to Ternopil. Thus, my family found itself near Lviv.

In 1939 war erupted in Zakarpattia. Hungarians attacked and massacred Ukrainians. In Zakarpattia, the Ukrainian population was less than a million. The OUN/UPA seniors explained to us, the younger nationalists, what was happening. We knew that we had to fight for our homeland. And we, children, took rifles into our hands and were prepared to fight the enemies of our people. I was quickly growing up in those eventful times. My memory served me well. I would read something once and remember everything precisely. So I did not carry letters, as I had all the necessary information memorised and could pass it on verbatim.



During my service in the Ukrainian Police in Pilzen, Czechoslovakia, under the leadership of Colonel Wsiutinskij, 1946.

During my service in the Ukrainian Police in Nuremburg under the leadership of Colonel Pobihuschyj, 1947.

Licence Photo (Germany).

The OUN/UPA seniors valued my aptitude. I was recruited into intelligence. Commanders sent me to various villages and towns. With those tasks I visited Yaroslav, Tarnov, Rzeszow and Krakow and many others. My assignments varied. Sometimes I had to convey vital information and sometimes I had to collect secret intelligence. I also knew Polish and German. The OUN/UPA leadership decided to send me to Czechoslovakia and to Vienna and Linz in Austria. There were many OUN/UPA senior officers there and we needed also to maintain contact with the universities in Vienna and Prague from where our nationalists were co-ordinated. Therefore I moved from one section to another.

In Pilzen we had a small cell. After the war, our task, which we successfully completed, was to secretly transport Ukrainians over the border to Germany. At night we transported people through Passau, across the Danube. We helped all who asked us. Later, when I reached Germany, which was now divided into American, English, French and Russian administrative zones, I met many of those we helped to save from the Communists. Most of them went to the American zone. Now, only a few of them survive - a lot of time has passed since then. We helped each other, and most importantly trusted each other. We all believed that the Americans would fight the Soviets, and hoped to return home to Ukraine. We believed that we would see our Ukraine independent. But, as so history often shows, fate can be fickle. Many years were to pass before our motherland, Ukraine, would at last be free.