

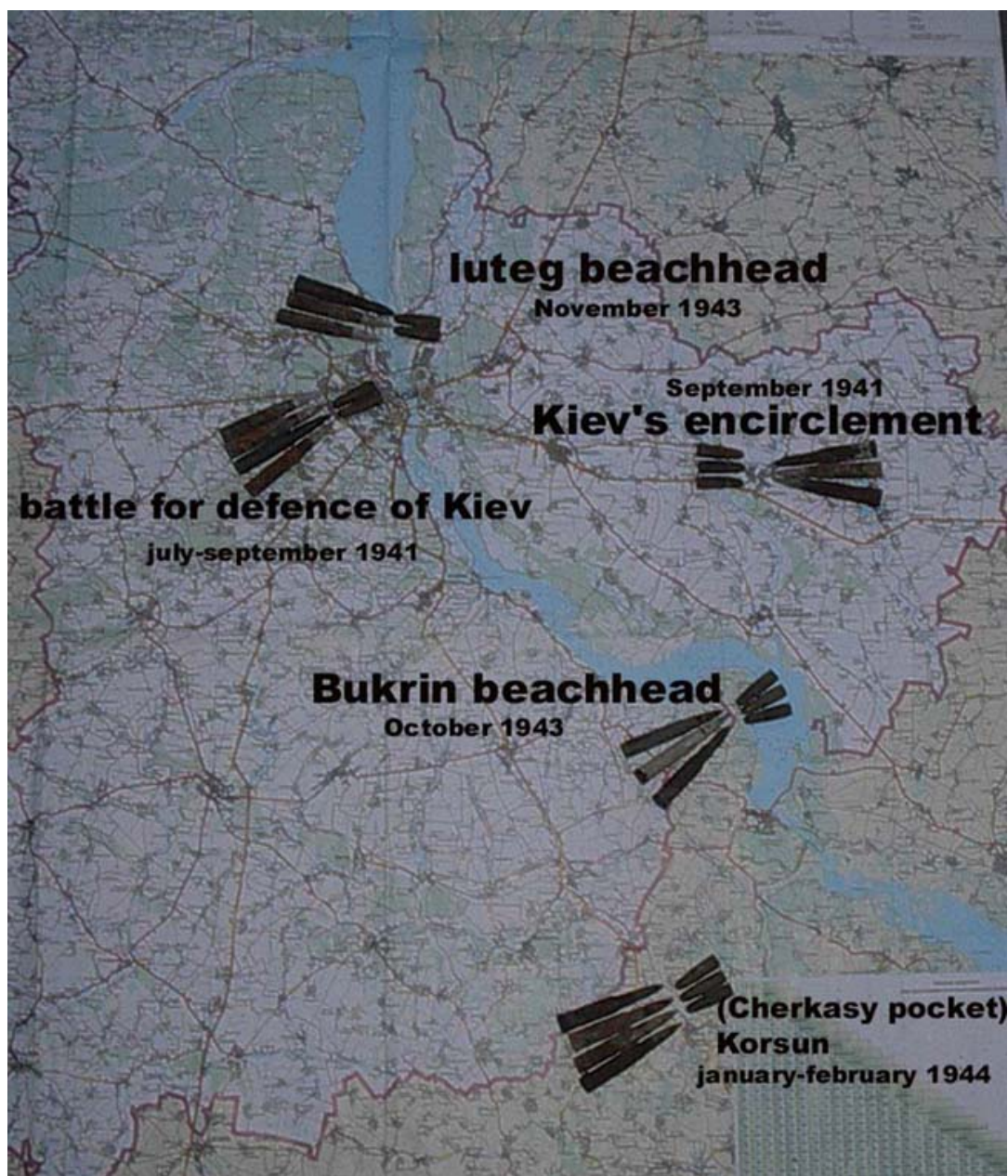
Introduction

"The Serpents Wall" is a story about the past and present of my neighborhood.

60 years ago a Kiev's area witnessed ones of the most severe battles of WW2. Covered with earth from explosions the humans, arms and ammunitions were left on battlefields.

With entering this site, you will join me and my friends for visiting historic places of battles. We don't take standard trips with their boring guides. We take shovels, detectors and plenty of water. Water because the only way to find something is to dig and when you dig, you drink, you drink a lot because once you found a relic you can't stop digging, you know, it is real, it was there in time of a great event and you know that next item can be this special one that worth you efforts...

Map for the Serpents Wall story

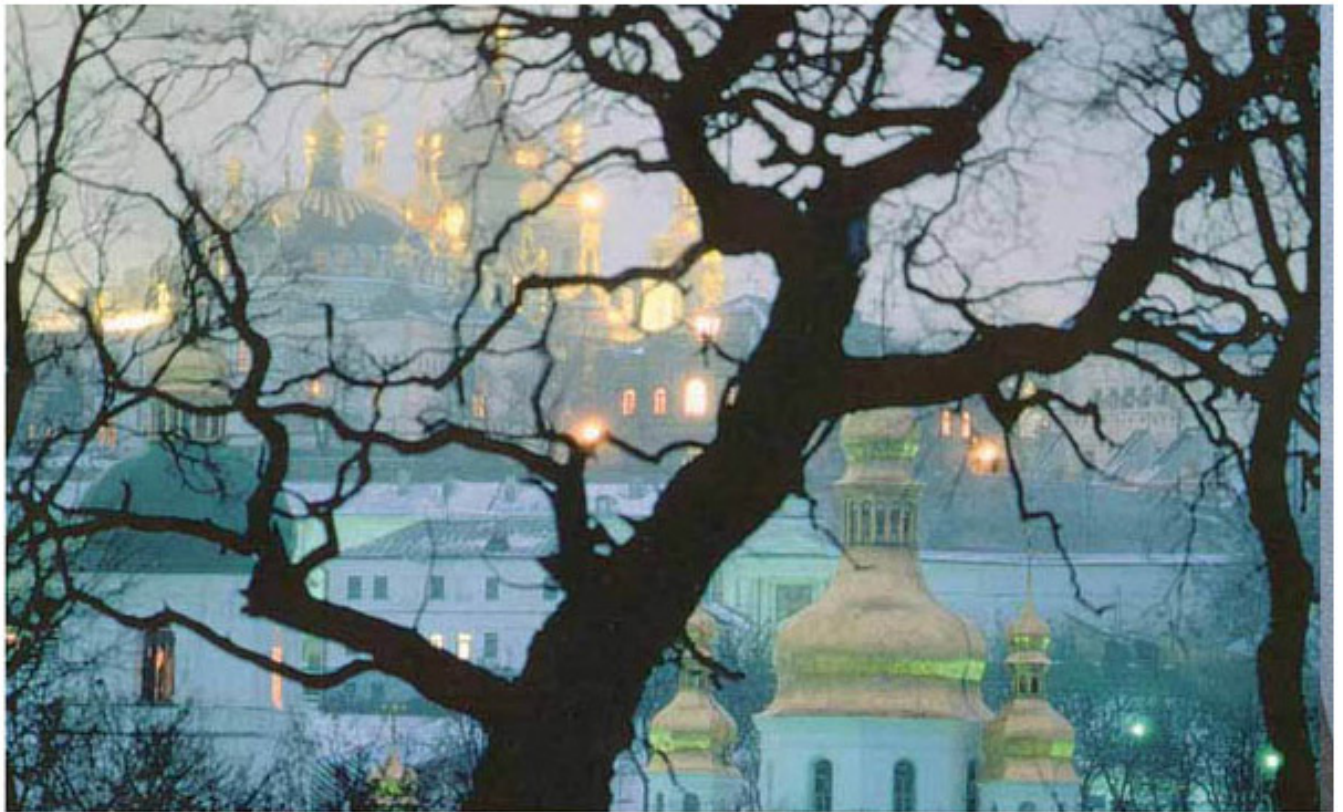


There are no records of who built the serpents wall and when, we only know they

were built in ancient times to protect my hometown from nomads tribes and some other wild folks.



Maybe those arrow-heads remember Mongols. In 13th century, Baty-Khan, the grandson of Genghis-Khan brought his army to the walls and tried to talk people of my town to surrender. The Baty-Khan was captivated with the beauty of a church and didn't want to ruin it. As Kievers refused to surrender, Mongols sieged the town.



**It is how town appeared to Mongols when they came by.
Photo from postcard.**



**Family of Kievers killed in December 1240 by Tatar-Mongols.
Archeological find. Photo from national museum.**

Siege lasted for a weeks and as nearly all male population died in defending town, some traitors opened gates and thousands of Mongols broke in. Killing people and burning houses, they surrender last defenders at this church and many climbed on the roof. Finally church fallen, burying everyone and it was the end

of the epoch of freedom and prosperity called Kievan Rus and beginning of the Tatar yoke.

Sometimes I think it was good for those people to die and not to see all rape and slavery which lasted for more then hundred years ...

Before Mongols came the people in my town had blue eyes and blond hair, now we mostly have dark haired people with hazel eyes. I am one of them and I don't mind being a brunette.



My favorite founding: an ear-ring of premongols time. It can be as old as 1000 years or even older. This reminds me of good, old times when women in my area have been blonds and I'd wear this. Unfortunately the other piece has not been found and I sent this and other items to the museum of archaeology. If I had two ear-rings or one ear, I'd wear this beautiful ear-ring.



The church buried not only last defenders, but also freedom loving spirit of our people. For the next 750 years, Ukraine has not been existed as an independent state.

It was part of Lithuania or Poland or Turkey or Russian empire.

No way to find Ukrainian coins, those are polish coins. I don't know their value in 16th century.



But I know the value of 19th century Russian coins. Before the revolution in 1917 it was a daily wage.

Set me back in time with a handful of those coins, I could buy a cart of fish or I'd rather hang in tavern all night.

These days a daily wage in Ukraine is 20 hryvnas. With 20 hryvnas I can only buy a fish's tail. Some bear, sit on the bench in some park, wondering why the hell they did this revolution and where 100 years of progress went to.



The brass buckle of Tsar Army soldier, it is left either from WW1 or revolution 1917.



The time of revolution has been a time of a complete chaos. There was a lot of fighting around my town. There was the Red Army and the White Army fighting each other, and an army of Ukrainian anarchists fighting them all.

The Red Army is rebels-communists. Anarchists wanted independence for Ukraine from anyone and they didn't care whom to fight, their motto was to beat red before they become white and to beat white until they become red...

Eventually Red army won and cheerful days of communism began. They began with the robbery of rich citizens, and expelling them from the country. As a scriptural seven skinny crows ate up a fat crow and didn't become any fatter, so is our ragged fellows robbed rich fellows and didn't become any richer. Poverty was written all over and they had nothing to do as accept it for a normal state for people to live in.

What made thing worse is that after communists finished dispossessing hard working people, they got busy with intelligent ones. Bankers, doctors, writers, philosophers ... millions of thinking people have been exiled or died in prison camps. This was the beginning of a nightmare because a brainless society is not capable for anything smart and creative.

The brass buckle was one of Tsar Army soldier and after Tsar resigned, the army got name of White army and was submitted to Provisional Government. White army associated with humanity of the 19th century. Its officers educated and noble knew what esprit de corps, soldiers loyal and obedient was ... As Tsar himself, his army appeared to be weak and vulnerable and had no chance to survive.

Burial of that time. It is engraved - "Rest in peace Maksim Semenako whom bandits killed in 1919".



In 1943 Maksim Semenako got another five bullets in backside of his tombstone.

Graveyards often located on the hills and have been good strategic places on WW2 battles. It is from modern history of our neighborhood. A while ago some guy settled on the middle of a graveyard. Every time I pass by I wonder if it is the piece of cheap land in a green and quiet place that broker told me about.

I also wonder if I'd live here. Answer is NO, let my neighbors next door to be a heavy metal band with the name of "Night Owl", I'd still prefer to listen a hard rock at nights to funeral marches in the mornings.

The soldiers graves ...

"The soldiers graves are greatest preachers of peace" written on stone at cemetery. It is the resting place for all German war-dead that took part in this battle and who are still being found in the northern part of Ukraine. The folksbund estimates roughly 40.000 victims.



Most of German war-dead have been identified and have names on their graves. It is because each German army man had a metallic tag with identification number that made of two halves. When a soldier died, one half has been sent to the death registration burro and other always remained with the body.

Soviet authorities didn't come up with this smart idea and each soldier carried a plastic tube. They were supposed to put a note in the tube with their names, but out of some reason when you find such tubes, they are mostly empty. Maybe soldiers have been superstitious or maybe just didn't care of what will become after they died.

Tubes have not been hermetically sealed and these days, if someone is lucky to find a tube with a note and will try to retrieve it, then only aches come out.



In this way, most of Soviet war-dead can not be identified. They buried on mass graves, which often located on nearest cemeteries or at the places of battles. We call them graves of unknown soldiers.



Historians believe that building each wall could take some 20 to 30 years. That's a piece of work, but it was worth the time and efforts, the walls have been used for defense of a town throughout all history.



In 1929 by Stalin's order they start building a so called defense line around western side of Kiev and some bunkers has been mounted right into the walls. Since then the embrasures, the bunker openings overlook everyone.



It is the opening of bunker N205. There were 7 embrasures. This had an underground passage and had enough room for more then 100 soldiers to stay inside. This bunker is unexplored, it stays closed since war. They closed many bunkers for people not to blow on mines.



Kiev's fortified area

Bunkers are distributed within the fortified area separated by 400 to 450 meters creating a kill zone for small arms fire from the embrasures. There are 220 land-based bunkers and countless underground bunkers standing along the ramparts. All the bunkers are connected with trenches, some with underground passages.

The serpents walls, tank ditches, natural barriers such as rivers, lakes etc, all this creates the fortified area. The defense line is located 15 km from city and was built in 1929 to 1937. It is 75 km long. In the illustration below, the wall is designated with red color and the perimeter of the city with the blue.



War between Germany and Soviet Union began in June 22, 1941.

The town starts getting prepared for attack. 200.000 people went out to help the army with preparations and on July 11th, 1941, first German troops showed up on the bridge through Irpen River.



Veterans say the battle began with fire from this bunker.



Kiev witnessed two battles, one for defense and other for liberation of a city, both were one of the biggest battles of WW2.

My friends have been thinking about the idea of making a museum out of some of the bunkers but this idea is not for our bureaucratic system. Collecting all the papers and receiving all the permissions would probably take as much time as it took for the people to build the serpents walls. At the end of all this effort, we ourselves would only be good for the museum. In any way, using internet I can create a virtual museum.



The dangerous machine gunneress is me. Dangerous because of the PPSH-41 submachine gun.

The PPSH-41 was introduced a few months before the war and it was heavy and bulky. It was the first Soviet submachine gun. It is a grandfather of the Kalashnikov. Here is how it looked at war.



**Each bunker had its own history ...
There were 14 different types of bunkers.
This one is iron "B" type, N 131.**



A crew of 11 held defended for 4 days of serious attacks and as infantry have been dislodged from the trenches, 131st was surrendered and all soldiers died in fire of flame throwers.

To me visiting this bunker is always eerie, I don't know why, maybe because all soldiers have been there for a few months before someone buried them.



**By the way, there are no excursions for a first defense line.
There are a couple of bunker-memorials, but the rest are neglected. Some out of way that not many people knows about.
Neglected, because these days the people forgotten their history.**

Ask anyone in downtown where are bunkers - they even don't have an idea what are bunkers. They can only show pubs and I can show both bunkers and pubs.



Not many know about this bunker. It is a big one, made inside of a serpents wall and located by the lake. Some equipment is still left, like holder for a large-caliber machine gun.



This is how embrasure work from inside.



There are several rooms underground and construction of this bunker had system of flooding with water from the lake. When Soviet army was leaving, they filled this bunker with water and it stands flooded ever since.



There is also an open air cafe on this lake that we hang out with my friends in the summer. Once we've been sitting up late and as we say here, a night without wine is as good as a wedding night without bride, so we've been drinking little by little and talking about this bunker. Eventually, one guy got too much of wine and decided to put end to those talks and dive inside of a bunker ...

Good, it happened on point when common sense still didn't leave the rest of us and we tied him with the rope and provided with waterproof torch.

He dived and has been quiet for a couple of minutes, then we pulled him out and it took another few minutes to bring him back to life as he gulped water.

As he went back on the world of living he said that he saw cannons.

This news puzzled us because there is no way to drag artillery down, unless it was some other room hidden in the serpents wall.

I refer this statement to ghostly, because someone drunk diving in a war cellar can see not only cannons, but can also see Stalin stand guarding them or even Devil himself may show up.

Anyway, if I happen to get aqualung or get too much wine one of the summer nights then I'll tell what in this cellar is.



Digging

The excitement of digging in the places of battles can be compared with fishing. This bit when you pull out something and anticipate what can it be ... each item tells something and history comes from the ground. The most important thing in this hobby is not to fish out an old mine. One got to be careful with rusted explosives, as they are unpredictable, a wrong move and ya sandals will fly over the Serpents Wall.



This is the place of battle for liberation of Kiev in the late of autumn 1943. The German army was leaving on the same road that they came and there were fightings all along the road.

Closer look at Mauser M-98 (1942)

Take a carabine that rested for 60 years under ground, clean it and go in attack, it works. This is German quality.



**Local boys are the best guides through the bunkers.
In each village there is someone who lost arms, hands ... by playing with the war
toys. They are invalids of war.**

Bayonet from Mosina rifle, model 1891, bayonet was found in same bunker.



More digging in the woods



The other item is German too. It is a medal for winter campaign 1941/42 on East. That winter was one of the coldest in 20 century and Germans called it "Gefrierfleischorden"- the frozen meat medal.



Finally, there is something for a lady in the woods. Cool six-shooter. Along with some other items, the revolver goes in a war museum. I really like it and I would leave it for myself, but storing fire-arms is not legal in Ukraine and I have only two choices, either gun goes in museum or I go in jail. We're on the middle of a riding season, so I prefer the first choice.



This is how embrasure look after bunker undergone the frontal attack of regular army. It was really hot here.



**Next bunker is one that stood in a marsh. There was no lake then ...
It should be a memorial telling people on the beach that these two or three bunkers hold back the German Army. Without the resistance of the soldiers in these bunkers, the Germans would have crossed the bridges at the same day. That would have caused an even earlier surrender of the Soviet Army.
On its own, Bunker N106 stopped the attacking Germans for 6 hours. The bunker finally fell, but by then Soviet reinforcements had arrived to strengthen the defense.**



This bunker was last in a row. With taking it, German army broke through defense-line. They lost few hundred troops here.



We are not going to dig in this place, after war it was a pioneer camp, every summer woods have been full of kids and nothing interesting left except for this statue.

A battle for defense of Kiev lasted for 72 days.

It was a complete defeat of Soviet Army with 611.000 being surrendered and killed.

If not for those bunkers, then casualties might be worse.



Camping

This is the German defense zone. A few lines of entrenchments and niches for tanks and cannons.

Germans trenches are deep (180cm) and they easily visible on photos.

This place is our favorite for summer camps. There is a nice beach at the bank of Dnepr River. At this place in October 1943 a few hundred thousands Soviet army troops forced a crossing over Dnepr. It was so called fictitious maneuver, because the major part of Soviet troops went to cross a river in other place.

The official statistics says that this bluff cost Soviet army 300.000 lives of their soldiers and officers.

I don't know statistics for loses on German side. I think, it shall not be many, because as soon as Germans learned it was not a major attack, they left these positions.

The historic name for this place is “The battle of Bukrin”.



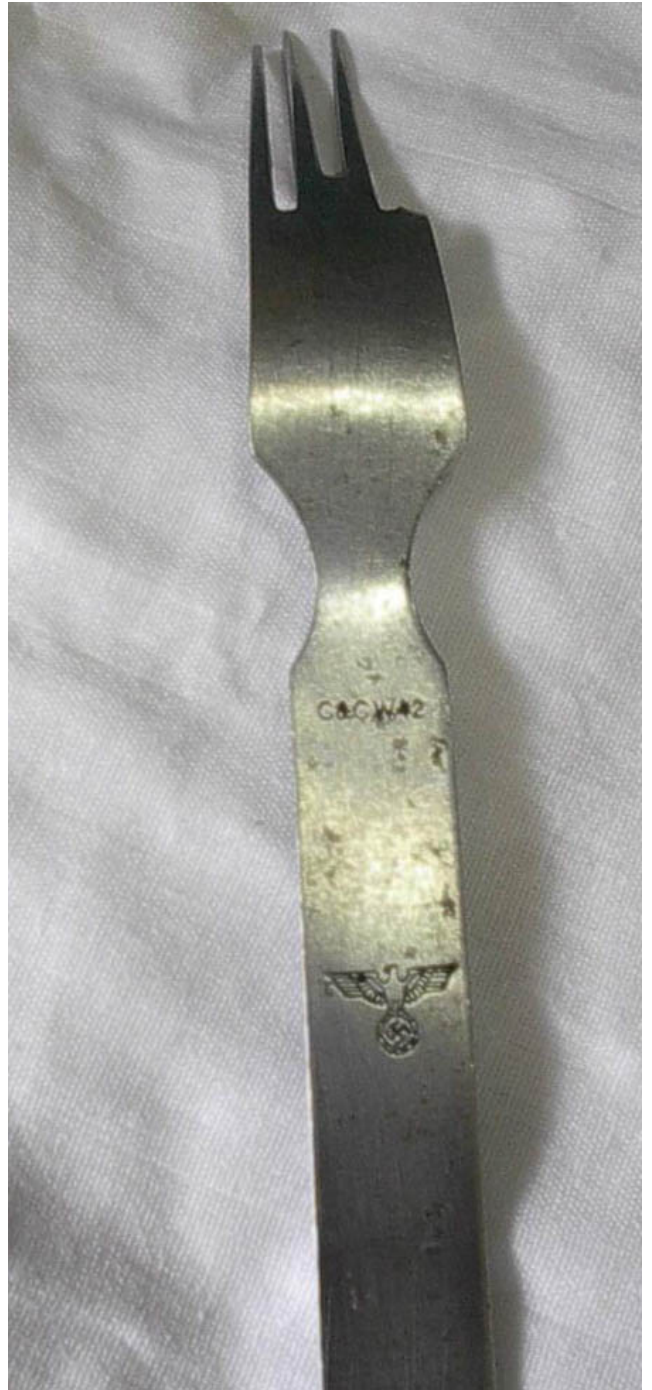
We found this garbage pit on the kitchen department of an old camp, where German soldiers have been waiting for an offensive.

Finding this place was a strange experience. If we find a gun or gas mask, it is clear they left from war, but when I saw the can of Norwegian sprats, war start looking not a very distant to me and I even thought that we've got in some regular garbage hole, where I normally wouldn't dig.



Scooturo

This subject is not from a garbage pit. It is my transportation here. I love Scooturo. Son of a ditch goes everywhere and it goes fast. Light weight, it is built from racing components. Just not about aesthetics a bit.



**This findling shows that we are on the right place.
An army fork. Must be a native inhabitant of this pit, no much need of a toothless fork and it probably went here with the other garbage.**

Tooth-brush

A thing that 60 years ago has been useless now excite me more then rusted arms, I believe it is because guns and bayonets tell about war and these foundings tell about people.



Tooth-paste on left and shoe polish on right photo.



"Blendax" is old name for a german "Blend-a-med" tooth-paste. Some left.

Bottles from Schnapps - a German Vodka. We found them empty, but local guys from another search group had more luck and dug up a sealed one. It was a real war bottle of Schnapps and as every true old bottle it was enchanted and from the moment when guys opened it everything went wrong.

Short after they emptied an enchanted bottle they have been seen at a liquor store and in evening they couldn't get out of trench. This is what we call a day went in a gutter.

We have found a few sealed bottles of wine, beer and cocktail Molotova.



This is an ambulance box with rubber plaster.
On the second photo is a box for a gas mask, some filters left with instructions of how to use them.
Maybe this box was brought here with the blast.



Here is German army cap and small tubes with ointment against louses.



Sitting in this hole for a second time in my life, I wished I could speak German. First time was when I came across a book of Arthur Schopenhauer in a bad translation. He said in this book that he was not a very concerned about his sins, because price for the sins we'll pay in the world thereafter, but he was really concerned about his mistakes, where price we got to pay already in this world ... In Soviet Union a human life didn't mean anything and they have been paying with lives of 11 Soviet army people for 1 German. It was an average death rate in WW2 battles. Eleven against one. I believe, it was hard to fight such army and it was a big mistake for Hitler to send his troops here.

Humans

I grew up on the first defense-line and as a kid we've been exploring bunkers and digging. Adults never minded us to do this, only warned of two things. If there is a mine, we should call for sappers, if human bones we should cover them with the earth.

An ancient Greek Sophocles advised the same. Bury dead, he said, if can not bury, at least throw a handful of earth.

Finally, common sense tells not to disturb peace of dead and we don't.

Here boots of soldiers, we found them in a trenches, I believe, rain washed them away, bones have been there, sticking out, white human bones and we did as Sophocles said, we buried them.



Buttons from a German uniform.



Soviet five-kopeck coin, some one might carry them for luck.

A chance to identify a Soviet dead in Bukrin almost not exist. Most part of 300.000 Soviet people who died here has been civilians. As I said, it was a fictitious attack with mock ups of tanks, dummies and even fake landing strip. It's like in a movie, all fake, only people are real and they needed a lot of people for this crowd scene. Civilians were mostly guys from liberated villages and towns. They weared black padded jackets and got a name on black shirts. Half of them had no rifles. Ones with the rifles were ahead and when they died, the other picked up their arms. The figure of 300.000 is a rough estimate, no one ever register a civilians.



Heading on the beach. It's time to have fun.

My idea of fun on the beach is to take off shoes, to set my explorer on rejecting all ferrous objects and walk the beach, searching for a lost jewelry ...

A steep hill behind me was a center of Bukrin battle. Now, there is a memorial. In ancient times it was a town on this hill with a strange name Chuchin.



Chuchin was burned down in time of Mongol invasion and these days only rampart left.



The Mongols left us more than bones and ramparts. They left us parts of their language. Not a best part, I am afraid. Those words mostly profanities. The minor part of abuse words in a Russian/Ukrainian languages respond from the names of a pagan gods, but most part of our profanities and abuse words are from Mongols.



Originally, many were nice words the Mongols said to seduce women. For most women they were hateful words and the meanings changed over centuries. If Genghis Khan could rise from the grave and join us for a drinking party, we would sound to him like a bunch of friendly Mongols who telling nice words and compliments to each other. If my literature teacher would join us for the same event, she would probably faint.

This was the highest award for soldiers and officers in Soviet Army. The star of a hero. Stalin didn't give them away for a song. One had to do something really outstanding to deserve this. Something like throwing himself under a tank with a grenade ...

I don't have this award in my museum. No way to dig and no one sell them. Only 11.270 of such medals have been issued during all years of war.

2.616 of them have been given for battle of liberation of Kiev. This is more then for Stalingrad and even more then for Moskov.

Stalin was generous for medals because he put million lives here, but mostly because he wanted Kiev to be liberated to the revolution day of November 7.



The Soviets have been crossing all along the Dnepr River in 22 different places. The battleground spread on a few hundred km. They have been climbing up and Germans held defense on the hills. Russian Katyusha rockets poured everyone with iron from the left bank.

German machine gunners had two directives:

- 1. to be able to reload cartridges**
- 2. not to go insane of all amount of people they were killing.**



No one was going on battle fields in first ten years after war. Mines have been removed from surface only in 1954, but not everywhere. In areas which are hard to access, they are still there and locals are not very enthusiastic about visiting these hills.

Soldiers are there too, under leaves, bones, skulls, jaw-bones ... teeth mostly good of young people. In Soviet army of those who were born in 1922 only 3 out of 100 came home from war, the rest 97 died on those hills. I believe, for German army statistic must be similar as young people the same everywhere, do not know the value of life, have no fear and for their regimes it was easier to fool young.

Night on the Eve of Ivan Kupala

This is me, standing on the other side of a pond, watching how young folks celebrating Ivan Kupala. It is one of the most ancient Slavic feasts. It goes back to pagan.



Kupala is a mystical, beautiful, wild and very erotic folk feast. Couples are jumping over fire, telling fortunes, girls are putting garlands on water ... at dawn they're going to swim naked and boys who already heated up with strong drinks chasing them ... and it is what Kupala is about - everyone expect to find match at this night.

Some photos taken from internet particularly in this village such formalities as telling fortunes and putting garlands were excluded from the ritual. Young folks can't wait to proceed with the sweetest, adult part. I am still on the point of age when girls run on full gear at Kupala night. I would play, but I am afraid that dressed in BDU's and armed with a grenade; the boys would be more likely to run away than to chase me.



on defence line

Here, we are in the woods on a defense line. This is a place where I grew up and where I know the story of each bunker and trench. Digging is a life time hobby for me and my friends.

Once as kids we've been digging all day on a garden of someone who told us about gold and treasures hidden there. We dug up all garden and didn't find anything. Later, we figured, they just wanted someone to plough up their garden for free and it wasn't any treasures at all.

We wouldn't be fooled so easily if we had a metal detector. These days, detectors show depth, size of object, its conductivity and have other functions.

Before we got detectors we used iron rods. One is on the photo. For detecting metal they are as helpful as walking stick for a blind and it is good metal detector that gives eyesight.



This bunker is hidden in a Serpents Wall. As well as other underground bunkers, such as flooded bunker and N205 it appeared to be effective. None of them have been taken, soldiers left when ordered to retreat.

On ground bunkers on the other hand could not resist separately for long. They have been built by out of date technology time of WW1. Germans knew how to deal with bunkers because it was their technology.

Bunkers have been destroyed either with anti-aircraft guns or with Soviet KV-2 tanks, which Germans seized in first days of war.

**This machine gun found on 30cm. This is the average depth we dig.
Rare founding, it is from a warplane and loaded.**



Comrade Scooturo wounded - crankshaft problems, waiting for the mechanic.



War began in 1939. Germans marched through Europe and invaded it pretty easily. After bombings of London everyone was expecting Germans to start war with Great Britain, but suddenly Hitler moved his forces on Soviet Union. In Soviet Union they didn't expect this and in first weeks of war Soviet Army lost 3 millions of troops.



Here, at first defense-line, German march through Europe ended. They met resistance of fanatics.

We call this bunker by name of its commander, the Kiporenko bunker. This one was never taken, soldiers were bricked up and kept resist until they all died with hunger.

While Stalin and Zhukov argued at the point if they should pull off forces from Kiev the defenders of this bunker decided to stay and not join army for retreat. It was their free will.

In old Soviet Union they loved to make a cult of a hero. Everyone knew the names of some literary characters, who may never exists ... they used to glorify some fake heroes while the real ones have been forgotten, like the soldiers of this bunker, no one knows their names, not even how many of them were inside.



General Vlasov

The Soviet propaganda created images of traitors with the same profusion as heroes. Often the person did not deserve the name of traitor.

One reason the bunkers are neglected and forgotten is the personal conflict between Stalin and the man in the picture. This is General Andrey Andreyevich Vlasov who commanded all of Kiev's fortified areas.

In Soviet times the name Vlasov was a synonym for a traitor. All Vlasov's have been unlucky people. They had to explain everywhere that they are not relatives of General Vlasov the Traitor. Even for official papers when they put their signature, they always added "not relative of General Vlasov".

To judge who was this man really was is a question history should reconsider. He was a very talented military leader, rebellion, a man with ideas. I am young and today I am permitted to question the Soviet propaganda about this man.

Vlasov observed how millions were dying for no good reason. His perception was that liberating Soviet Union from Stalin was more important than defending from Hitler's attack. With the support of the Germans he raised army of Soviet captives and dissidents. The Soviet judgment was harsh.

He was sentenced to death in 1946.



Soviet history presents the battle at Kiev's fortified area as a failure of General Vlasov. It is why later the bunkers were abandoned and their story is forgotten. From my point of view his efforts were not a failure. Germans didn't break through all the defense-lines. Here, for the first time in this war the Soviet army counter-attacked, overcoming the onslaught of Hitler's Blitzkrieg.

The Soviet Army began a retreat from the fortified area because German army kept advancing to the East. Cities and towns fell one after another and soon Kiev appeared to be in danger of capture. Stalin didn't want to retreat meanwhile all the smart military commanders in Kremlin warned him of a catastrophe. Stalin never gave the order to withdraw. The decision to retreat was taken by marshals and it was taken too late.

Everyone hoped they would break a way through, but as columns of techniques, army and civilians moved some 70 km on East, they became trapped in the so called "Kiev Encirclement" and more than 600.000 died or have been captured.



Here, we are in Borshov village.

Soviet troops intended to cross Trubeg River at this place. As they came by, they found out that there wasn't a bridge which everyone had on their maps. It was a topographic mistake. Columns stuck on the marshy bank and got under bombardment.

In this battle generals stood side by side with soldiers, fighting the way through encirclement. Commander of all Soviet South-West army Kirponos died with carbine in his hands.

The only successful escape through the encirclement was lead by General Vlasov.

Some marshes in the area are dried out. Digging is easy, like in butter, also there are no roots, no corks, nails, cans and other subjects that interfere with using a metal detector. We have delayed digging in marshy areas until October to avoid the mosquitoes.

Items recovered from a marsh are in a good condition. With cleaning this grenade would look like new. We didn't clean it. We don't mess with 1941 explosives. We buried this grenade.



First item is Soviet Vaseline. Some left and even have an original smell. Vaseline is still produced in the same packaging today.



Aluminum spoon and fork is standard German army set. The spoons are often found at Soviet positions. The Soviet soldiers were throwing their heavy spoons away and taking trophies. So did I. Now, I carry the aluminum set on camping and big soviet iron spoon that was found in Bukrin is retired.

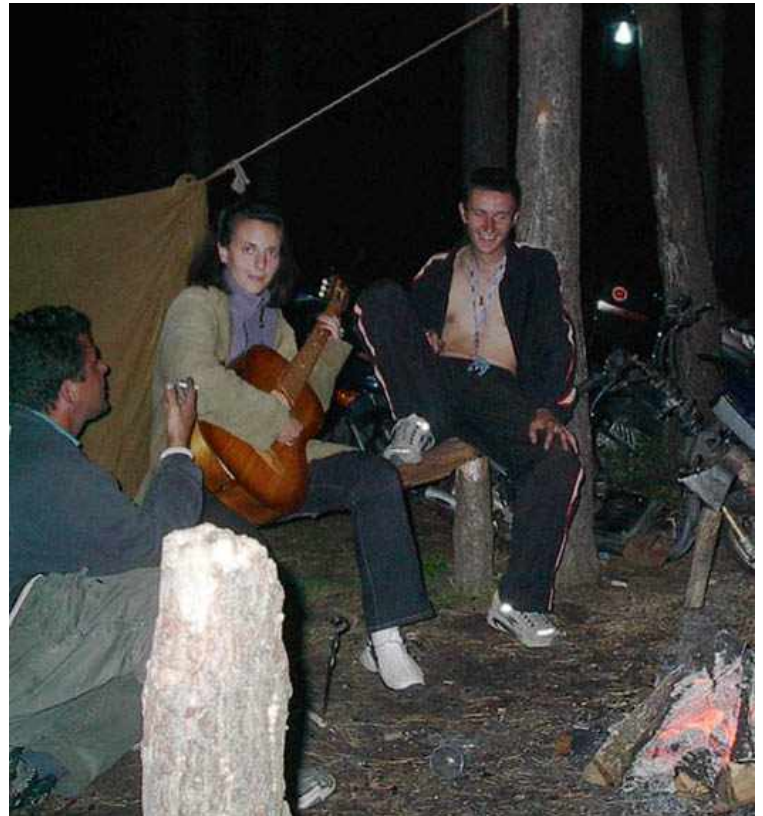
This is Bukrin, an inexhaustible source for mines, shells and the best place for camping.



Below is from modern history. In the 1990's these were the homes of rich people. Today the owners are in jail and homes are left standing unfinished. One day, their owners have been prosperous people who thought the success would last forever... but then, the politics and economic situations changed and every time when it happens the skinny crows coming to power to eat the fat ones.

We have many such houses in neighborhood, whole villages. We call them the burials of money. They are from time when Soviet Union collapsed and many became rich quick and then fell in flames...

This one located in a beautiful place, on some of the hills of Bukrin battle and look like a memorial to me. The memorial of people hopes for better life. In this country a rich people will never be safe.



That's me in the middle with the guitar, serenading my friends Alex and Max. They help me dig.

Guys love our camping trips and it is not my singing that attracts them. I'm the worst singer in the world. When it's time for late guests to leave, my kind of singing comes in handy. I believe guys love two things in our camping life. The first is digging itself and the second is my cooking. I may not be a gourmet chef, but my cooking is good. Once, someone joined us and obsessed with gluttony gained 20 kg in two weeks. He would have gained more, but our food supply was over, so I sang to him.

Me again, inspecting a new war bottle. We found it in a trench of SS division "Viking". This armored division was stationed in Bukrin area, near the town of Kanev. The bottle was designed for mint balm, unfortunately it was found empty.



Another armored SS division "Das Reich" stationed near the village of Chodorov. It was the same famous "Das Reich" that captured Belgrad in 1941 and in winter 1942 have been just a few km from Moskov. A trick about Bukrin was that Germans deployed selected forces for this battle and Soviet sent here guys in black shirts.



On last photo is Luftwaffe SS aluminum buckle. Although Luftwaffe stands for airborne, they have been taking part in a ground combat and usually haven't been good in it. Condition of the buckle shows that owner had to crawl on belly now and then. All infantry buckles are in this condition, some weared out that nothing can be seen.



Korsun encirclement (Cherkassy pocket)

After things in Bukrin went in nowhere, the SS division "Viking" re-deployed some 70 km on south and took part in the battle called Korsun, which became known as "little Stalingrad on the Dnepr River"

The name, because a strategic important and situation itself reminded a situation with 6th Army, which was surrounded and destroyed at Stalingrad.

At this point German army has been forced off from Dnepr River everywhere. Except for a Korsun region and it formed some sort of a bulge in the German line. Soviets launched attacks and closed a ring around two German army corps.

This battle was a complete disaster for a Germans resulting in their surrender. The map shows the last maneuver of SS "Viking". This division died in Korsun. I believe three dozen of Vikings got out of encirclement. They returned to Berlin, kept spirit of fighters and Hitler awarded them.



Speaking of SS awards. I don't know which one was the highest award, but I know which is the most valuable on a black market these days.

It is "Death's Head" silver SS ring, we call them a dead head rings.

Chances to find "Death's Head" are not big. Himmler himself awarded SS soldiers with them and each ring was engraved on the inside of the band with Himmlers signature and after one died the search group have been deployed to find the soldier with rings, all death's heads should be returned to Himmler. He eventually got back only 70% of rings that were given, the rest 30% lost, and many in WW2 trenches.

Himmler kept SS rings in a Wewelsburg castle which was the temple of SS order. He kept them in a special um that symbolized connection between alive and dead. I also read somewhere that Himmler was doing some other mystical manipulations with those rings, but I don't know what exactly and I doubt Himmler himself knew what he was doing.

The ring on photo is not real, it's just a copy. If I was lucky with finding a real SS "Death's Head" ring, then you wouldn't see me riding Scooturo on the trenches, I'd already ride a new ninja bike on highway. Collectors pay big bucks for original Rings. I have got a copy, because I don't want to miss a real ring when I find it.



Also, I spared a bottle of wine to celebrate it.



Battlefield

We are in Korsun. The historic name for this place is a "Boykove Pole", which in Ukrainian means a battlefield.

Second photo shows how this field looked in February 1944. Photo is from painting of a soldier. 190.000 Soviet and German army men died in Korsun and most of them on this field.



We have never been here before, so we got to find the right place to dig, but whom to ask? Who remembers this war? Trees? Old trees full of iron, they may remember, but they don't speak. The crows? By legend they live hundred years and must remember their feast in winter 1944, but they don't speak either.

Old man? He speaks, but he don't remember anything.



In this village, German tanks tried to break through encirclement ring to rescue a circled army.

There is still a war technics left in a Korsun marshes and rivers. It is one of nine "Sherman" tanks which took part in a Korsun operation.



Sherman was an American tank which Soviet Union has been receiving with other humanitarian aid. Whatever they say about Shermans thickness of the amour or gasoline engines, Soviet never looked gifted horses in the mouth, gladly received help and Shermans fought here in battles.

The body of this tank sits in marsh, while top has been pulled out. There is a shell-hole on a left side. Some day old Sherman will be dragged out, put in one piece and restored.



A small skull and bones emblem was weared on tabs, in German tank units.



Some of our findings in Korsun include a zinc box for matches. It is standard German army matches box. Now it serves its purposes in my kitchen.

The items I put inside of a box a gold tooth and a button from Russian padded jacket. There are plenty of them on hills in Bukrin. Civilians were forced to take part in the Korsun battle. 30.000 to 40.000 among the dead were civilians. No one knows for sure. They were from neighboring towns and villages where all archives destroyed.



The worst possible outcome for an army commander is to surrender. Their deeds are in shadow, names not often mentioned, their actions unexcused regardless of their guilt.

On left photo is German General Stemmerman, the commander of a surrendered army in Korsun and on right photo is Kirponos, commander of Soviet army that died in 1941 in a marsh. Both commanders have been victims of the situations which Hitlers and Stalins Headquarters created for them. They had a chance to leave on airplane, they refused this offer and both died with their soldiers.

Below is a German iron cross of second class (Eisernes Kreuz). The iron cross was only issued in time of wars. The year 1939 indicate the beginning of war, previous were 1914 and 1870.



It was Hitler's first award that he got in 1914 while being a corporal. He used to wear his second class iron cross showing everyone that no matter how high he climb he always remain a corporal in his mind, heart and decisions.

In the last century the Korsun battlefields have witnessed two battles. At time of revolution, the army of Ukrainian anarchists chased down and killed a red army troop on this field.

Exploring at a place of two battles is doubly interesting. The anarchists on the photo, they kept in terror all this region.



Graves beside a road tell us that last time the anarchists visited this town was in 1922.



Locals showing us, how they apply war items to everyday life.



Nestor Machno. The leader of Ukrainian anarchists and talented military commander, very daring himself, once a well known bandit he came on birthday party of some of magnate where police officers proposed a toast to his (Machno) capture. He threw them a grenade on the table ... many loved his spirit and joined his gang, later army. Anarchists found support among armed men. Everyone wanted to live in a country with no taxes and no bureaucrats. Very soon Machno army controlled large territories in size of a big European state. They even had own newspapers.

The other name for this place is a Bold Hill. It is my favorite for riding a small motorbike.

According to some ancient books this hill was a meeting place for witches and it is written in some books that all witches live in Kiev.

A few centuries ago, a belt of ramparts was created around this hill and since then place was closed for witches or any other visitors and was used for storing gun powder. Later it was included in Kiev's fortified area as storehouse for arms.

Now, this place is completely abandoned and everyone can look what was behind of ramparts.

Bored guards occupied themselves with scratching on bricks.



Before revolution it was an execution place. Russian prime minister, the hard liner Petr Stolypin sent many to the gallows here. We even got this saying - to put a stolypins necktie on someone.

In 1911 Stolypin was killed in Kiev's theater when young man named Bagrov shot him in during intermission. In circles of anarchists Bargov was known as Bourgeois. It is because his dad was rich property-owner. No one knows what the motivations of this murder were. Bagrov himself had no time to explain, he was brought to this yard and ended with stolypins necktie on him.

My dowry. All cleaned, painted, restored, old shells are deactivated. The stuff is mostly from war trenches, except for a couple of things of home storage. I traded them from old people, who kept relics from time of German occupation.



Occupation of Kiev lasted two years and two month. It began in September 1941. The same days when Soviet army has been trapped in a marsh German army began occupying Kiev. Germans found the town in chaos. On central market they saw how some people were selling human meat. Germans caught the human flesh sellers and strung up the enterprising gentlemen right on a spot. They left them for people to see that new authority call for order.



There are a few sources for this story, well known is a Kuznetsov book. I have a friend who live in downtown and goes shopping on this market. This and some other stories inspired her to become a vegetarian.



Baby Yar

This is my Grandmother with her friends in the photo taken about 1940. Granny was looking like a Jewish woman, but she is not Jewish, our family is Kazan Tatars.



The Nazis had no time to guess who was a Tatar and who was a Jew. If she wouldn't join the Red Army and would stay in Kiev, then she might end up in this ravine with a bullet in her head.



This is Old Woman Ravine, or Baby Yar in Russian.

It is a mass grave for more than 100.000 of victims of holocaust. All have been shot right here in 1941 to 1943. It is where boys playing football. The capacity of our central stadium is less than 100,000 and I believe, if the boys would understand the history of the site, they would move out and find some other place for football. They simply do not know.

They are unaware that their favorite soccer club Dynamo was sent here in 1942. The old name for "Dynamo" was "Start", it used to be one of the best clubs in a Soviet Union, so they won several games against German and Hungarian clubs and after defeating Flakelf the Dynamo soccer team players were arrested and sent to death at Baby Yar.



While Dynamo was the Soviet police NKVD team and would be sentenced to death one way or another, the thousands of other victims have been just a common, Jewish people, mostly women, children, their grandparents ... The most terrible part of Baby Yar tragedy happened in a first days of the occupation. People didn't know what to expect from Nazis and thousands of Jewish people gathered on the streets

of Kiev with documents as they have been directed to bring. They thought, they would be either registered or relocated or something else and on September 29, 1941 the columns moved towards Old Woman Ravine ... a big crowd have been listening music while small groups taken down and shot. Mass killing lasted 5 days, more then 30.000 of people died in first two days and then 10.000 in each of the following days ...

Everyone who visits this place and has a few minutes to think comes to the same feeling, they start losing faith in people.

Luteg beachhead

It is picnic of veterans who celebrating town liberation day.

Each year their picnics less crowded and soon it will be no one who can tell a true story of war and who can show us the places to dig.



The major crossing over Dnepr began on November 4th, 1943. The name Luteg beachhead comes from name of a village where Soviet Army first broke through German defense. The Battle spread on an area of 70 km along the bank of river North from Kiev.

Troops start coming from everywhere. In Bukrin they left dummies of planes, tanks and cannons and in one night secretly re-deployed army. There were partisans from Belorussia, there were troops and people from all part of Russia and central Asia, civilians from towns and villages of left-bank Ukraine or just anyone who could hold weapon and whom Red Army picked on their way.

Luteg beachhead was a scene that the town haven't seen since Mongols invaded it, thousands of people were crossing river on boats, horses and bags of straw. People

were coming and coming and soon Germans no longer able to hold this avalanche stood back. (Photo from painting in museum)



This was a bloody battle for both sides, more then 180.000 people died in a short period of time.



We are not going to explore this place, after war they built a hydroelectric power station and Luteg battlefield went under water. Only top sides of bunkers stand out, they are bunkers of fortified area.

Writing is just a hobby of mine. I don't have any commercial interest with this site. Neither I sell a war relics.

"The Serpent's Wall" is my summer 2004 project. I got a new toy, a cool metal detector and I spent summer in camps, visiting historic places, looking for treasures ... unfortunately, I didn't find a "Death Head" ring or anything really valuable, but with multitude of other foundings I got material for this site.

In the next summer if I have means, then I will join our Russian colleagues for couple of weeks of digging in Stalingrad. I shall bring photos.

