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**LIBERATION OF POLACK IN THE SUMMER OF 1944
AS REFLECTED IN THE MEMORIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THESE EVENTS****IRYNA MALEI, ALESJA KORSAK**
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This research studies of process of liberation of Polack (other names are Polotsk, Polatsk) in the summer of 1944 as reflected in the memories of the participants of these events. For the first time the researcher reviews and introduces for scientific use the materials of the funds of Museum of Military Glory which is situated in Secondary school No. 2 of Novopolack. These materials of the funds of Museum of Military Glory which encompass questionnaires, letters and photos of participants of those events.

Introduction. Polack is and was located on the major roads and railway communications, and it was an extremely important geographical point having paramount value in the system of defense of the enemy, providing if needed replacement of forces from the north and south, keeping a continuous contact with the Army support structures of the German troops.

One of the factors of a successful encirclement of a large group of the enemy was to break the communication between the groups of "South" and "Centre" armies. It was on the 28 June 1944, when General Headquarters clarified the further tasks for the Soviet troops and ordered to the 1st Baltic frontline command of the main forces to continue approach in the western direction, and to strike with a part of forces to Polack, to seize the basic base of group of Sever armies created there and to step on Glubokoe. German fascist troops tried to delay offensive of the Soviet troops at lines of the Polack defensive strengthening's where heavy fighting was started [20, p. 212].

The commander of the 1st Baltic frontline general I.H. Bagramyan decided to employ two armies to liberate the military outpost in Polack. Bodies of the troops of the 4th Attack Army came bypassing Polack from the North and sought to provide the encirclement of the Polack's garrison of fascist troops, and the 22nd and 23rd Guards shooting buildings of the 6th Guards army closed encirclement of Polack from the East and the South [15, p. 213].

Main part. According to operational report No. 183 (1221) of the General Staff of the Red Army at 8 am on 1st July 44. *"The troops of the 1st Baltic frontline, approaching direction of Polack, moved at the rate 6-20 km per day, tank parts forced the Dzisna River and had battles to kick the enemy out of Dzisna."* [16, p. 149].

The wireman of the 332th Ivanovskaya Division V.I. Anisimov describes approaching the troops from the North of Polack in the evening on July 1 and 2 in the following way: *"Bombs exploding in the town were like festive fireworks. I approached the railway Polack – Polota. Fighting started. Unrolled ammunition suppressed several weapon emplacements of the enemy and under the enemy's fire together with shooting divisions crossed the road and restricting the enemy entered a pine forest. There came night. In the dark moved ahead. In the forest there were many different warehouses of fascists: ammunition, combustible, different property. Understand there was no time. By the morning were hardly selected from the wood to some lakes. The enemy fired at us from artillery. My splinter broke radio station what did not know radio about, long configured it, and communication with a firing position was not. And when examined the station outside, saw a small opening from a splinter. It was necessary to direct telephone communication, it demanded time"* [1].

Also at the beginning of July the 47th Division moved ahead along the railway, from the East in the direction to Polack, and approached closely the city. The sapper 353 rifle regiment G.I. Volyachny noted in memories this event: *"Having forced the small river at the most railway bridge (the bridge was blown up) and moved the coast of the Dvina River. with fight reached the church (one shell got into the bell tower and broke pass between windows) fight went in airfield. Having passed churches the small rivulet or a stream are lower and run on airfield fight was going on that end of a runway and occupied defense."* [4]. G.A. Daneka who was also serving in the 47th Division describes offensives at Polack: *"The battalion in which I participated storm rushed into Polack and generally took Kirov St. with a task not to allow fascists to blow up the bridge through the river. The battalion carried out a task, very much in difficult conditions, there were losses..."* [6].

Thus, during the period from on June 29 and July 1, 1944 the Soviet troops persistently made the way to Polack. The closer they approached the city, the more fiercely there was resistance of Nazis. T.A. Rovensky stated in memories serving in the 214th separate tank signal battalion: *"At capture of Polack I adjusted on the radio set fire of heavy artillery from the German back"* [9].

Linguistics, literature, philology

The 4th strike army provided with a city round from the North an encirclement of the Polack garrison. As a result of the input transferred to army from a reserve of the Rate of the 100th rifle corps (major general D.V. Mikhaylov) left-flank connections of army promoted to Polack and started fights on its outskirts. The enemy tried to hold the positions within two days and daily undertook counterattacks [12, p. 334 – 335].

Further events are mentioned on 1 and 2 July, and the second lieutenant of the 47th Division B.B. Vartapetyan wrote: *"I went by the railway Vitebsk – Polack, it is destroyed and - with the German accuracy - each 2 – 3 meters some part is blown up! At the left there is the Dvina River, we came at the river. The divisional commander ordered the major to make the infantry [the 148th shooting regiment] attack ... We are near Polack, still yesterday in the field-glass I looked at the bridges in the city, at the church, and now we are 1 - 1.5 km far from the city. Two bridges from three over the Dvina were blown up. The Germans are burning Polack down and blowing it up. Occasionally we came across some civil people who were able to escape, the enemy stole the others, burnt villages, we entered some villages where houses are still on fire"* [21, p. 7]. According to the above written passage from the diary, we learn about existence of three bridges in Polack, one of which was not destroyed when the Soviet troops came.

At the nightfall on 2 July the 67th Guard Rifle Division (of the major general A.I. Baksov) of the 23rd Guard Rifle Corps were at the Dvina River to the northwest of Polack, the 71st Guard Rifle Division and the 51st Guard division from the South and the southwest, broke through the 15-km defence line of the Nazis, forced the Turaulianka River, and came closely to the defence line of the enemy in Polack and began their attack.

Victories of the German command were won at the price of big losses. So, on July 2 the general of infantry Hilpert ordered to stop the attack at 12:55, without any negotiations with the chief command. Thus, the commander not only stopped the attack, but also ordered to leave Polack: *"Hitler gave up. At midnight he backdated the order!"* [22, p. 129].

On the following day the situation radically changed in favor of the Soviet troops. On the night of July 3 the 154, 156, 158 regiments 51 Guard Divisions attacked the southern outskirts of the city. Heavy fighting continued all night long, and only by the dawn one part of divisions broke to the Dvina River. By this time the 71st Guard Division storm seized the western outskirts of Polack [18, p. 166]. *"In the night of July 3 the staff of the division were on full combat alert, both themselves and their weapons ... Regrouping of fire weapons took place, and in the morning on July 3, after a short artillery attack on east and northeast outskirts of Polack being made, a full attack on Polack was resumed. The enemy resisted with even big exasperation. Parts of the division sustained losses, but moved ahead to the outskirts of the city. Here the enemy had especially powerful strengthening ..."* [14, p. 81 – 94].

The 22nd Guards rifle corps fought a battle on the break of the defensive boundary of the enemy on northeast and east outskirts of Polack. The enemy using the stone buildings adapted for installation of heavy infantry weapon showed strong fire resistance, with shooting approaching the city and streets [15, p. 27]. The radio operator of the 47th Rifle Division T.A. Rovensky took part in liberation of Polack, adjusting on the radio set fire of heavy artillery from the German back [9].

For a successful completion of crashing the garrison of the enemy it was necessary to force the parts of the 51st rifle division to the Dvina River. It was obvious that if the division did not do it in due time, the enemy would regroup and would be able to counterattack our parts. Several attempts to achieve this goal were made, but they were not success. The tipper of the regimental weapon of the 158th Rifle Regiment V.M. Litvinov described one of these episodes: *"... during the liberation of Polack the enemy did not give the chance to force the Dvina River near the bridge, as there were two enemy points there. It was ordered to us to destroy the two points and to get the two enemy weapons and to drag them under fire of machine guns, we did that and gave our infantry the chance to move ahead "* [8].

The soldier of 47 Rifle Division N.S. Sak performed a task which he described in the memories: *"... the bridge through the Dvina River was mined in Polack, at night I and my 3 companions by the boat went to save the bridge which was lit and was guarded by the Germans. Mina and a top we removed a part, but Germans found us and opened fire from machine guns, the boat sank also in it one my companion"* [10].

In this situation the commander of the 6th Guards Army colonel general I.M. Chistyakov ordered to the commander of the 158th Guards shooting regiment lieutenant colonel M.K. Belov to occupy the railway wooden bridge of the station which remained to the south which the Nazis mined and were going to destroy [20, p. 217]. From the 158th regiment it was ordered to platoon of submachine gunners of the second lieutenant A.M. Grigoriev to occupy this bridge and the base on the enemy coast. Having divided into two groups, Soviet

guardsmen took the German positions on flanks, and for the Germans it was out of the blue. Having reached the middle of the bridge, they lay down under strong machine-gun fire. The lieutenant gave the order: *"Follow me! Forward!"* At this time the guardsman Mikhail Kozhevnikov, wounded in a hand, noticed a box with tolite (TNT), managed to cut the wire reaching for explosive and to push off killing freight in water. Our soldiers beat out Germans from entrenchments and lay down in them. In a few minutes the enemy rushed to the attack again, but they did not manage to push A.M. Grigoriev's platoon backwards. Moreover, the guardsmen moved ahead, having occupied the base on the northern river bank in the city. After the attack of the enemy tanks and infantry against the Soviet platoon only Mikhail Kozhevnikov survived [20, p. 212].

"I was one of the first soldiers who had honor to come to the opposite bank of the bridge which was exposed to strong fire, both artillery and machine-gun fire" – it was noted in the memoirs of the soldier of the 51st Rifle Division E.G. Gekhtman [5]. The main forces of the 51st Guard Rifle Division completed crossing the river by midnight on July 3. Its regiments, fighting severe battles, moved ahead to the downtown. One of soldiers of the 51st Guard Rifle Division V.N. Vinogradov during this forced crossing of the Dvina River and the liberation of Polack was seriously injured and contused [3].

At the same time the 47th Rifle Division of the general P.V. Chernous, having broken the enemy's resistance, rushed into the city from the East, and the other Soviet troops of the 22nd case came from the north-east [18, p. 168]. On the same day - on July 3, 1944 troops of the 4th Attack Army bypassed Polack and barred ways of withdrawal of the enemy from the city in the northwest direction [13].

On July 4 up to 3 am the enemy showed persistent resistance to the attack of the 51st rifle division which, having broken it, began at 3:30 its attack again. In the first echelon the 23rd and 287th shooting regiments moved ahead. Thanks to the fact that the territory of the convent of Saint Euphrosyne was quickly liberated, it was stopped from being exploded as it was planned by the Germans [15, p. 30]. However one fact which was specified in the letter by P.V. Malykhin is interesting: *"During their step-back the fascists made a large number of our prisoners of war go in the church building, poured fuel over church and set fire. It was terrible, it is even terrible to mention to this day"* [17]. Presumably, that the author meant Holy Cross Cathedral in which during the Nazi occupation there was a prisoner-of-war camp. Therefore it is possible to make a hypothesis that during their step-back the German troops purposely set the cathedral on fire, for the purpose of extermination of the Soviet soldiers.

The staff sergeant of the 47th Rifle Division M.A. Tarushkin describes one of episodes: *"... especially for me remained memorable the night from July 3 to July 4 when I got a task to reach Polack. At sunrise I with group of submachine gunners reached the Square on which the cathedral was situated and on the opposite side there was the German hospital with one German soldier left - who knows for which reason - he was without his leg. Of course we did not touch him. In the cathedral there were lots of citizens locked, around 1,500 people. They were people of all age, to me it was necessary to unlock the citizens with the companions, so we asked if it was possible to move farther from the door which we had to blow up."* [11]. It should be noted that during the war in Polack really there was Saint Nikolay Cathedral located at the Square of Liberty, and the hospital in the buildings of the former military school was placed.

Thus all night long for July 4 in Polack heavy fighting was going, the Soviet soldiers stormed the streets and houses, smashing strong points of the enemy. To 6 o'clock in the morning the city was completely freed from fascist aggressors [13].

"During their step-back the enemy destroyed all settlements, destroyed the cities, the city of Polack is remembered with everything burned down together with losses of human lives, there was difficult to breathe..." – it is mentioned in the memoirs the soldiers of the 47th Rifle Division I.D. Anokhin [2]. The radio operator of the 51st Guard Rifle Division P.V. Malykhin also mentions this fact: *"When we entered in city that to me the most terrible was remembering that the city was completely destroyed, burned"* [17].

Conclusion. Thus, fighting for liberating Polack by the main forces of the 4th Strike Army and the 6th Guard Army of the 1st Baltic frontline took place from July 1 to July 4, 1944. This operation completed, the Red Army went to liberate of the Baltic Soviet Republics.

During the conducted research the following conclusions were drawn: first, Polack was one of strong points in the system of defense of the enemy, the proof of what is persistent resistance of the German troops; second, from the memoirs of the second lieutenant B.B. Vartapetyan the fact about existence of three bridges in Polack, one of which remained unruined at the time of attack of the Soviet troops, becomes known; thirdly, thanks to the sources of personal origin, we know about the circumstances of imprisonment of Polack citizens in Saint Nikolay Cathedral and also about the arson of Holy Cross Cathedral with Soviet prisoners of war.

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