



# Ni Shagu Nazad! Not One Step Back! Chapter One

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Sorry for the delay, guys! There was a bit of error in the original posting, enjoy!

<https://www.storiesspace.com/stories/action/ni-shagu-nazad-not-one-step-back.aspx>

I trembled as the barge set off, all of us soldiers were packed onto it, but not one of us had a rifle. Over on the other side of the Volga River - which we were coming so perilously close to - the Germans were pushing hard to reach the riverbank, and over the gunfire and explosions, we could

hear, and see, that men were dying. Other soldiers who had made it across the river, were dying. I swallowed nervously, my stomach twisting into knots. The Commissar who was on the boat with us began his speech. "Brave soldiers of the Motherland!" He paced up and down the side of the boat as it trudged along. "Today, you fight for your mothers, your daughters, your wives and lovers! Today you will face the Fascist cancer, and deny them the land they so desperately desire!" I saw three soldiers abandon a boat, and they were shot to death. Their bodies riddled with bullets and sinking into the river. "Great comrade Stalin has issued an order, a SACRED, order!" The Commissar's grey hair hung over his face. "Stalin has ordered that no soldier of the Soviet Union is to take a single step backward! For it is the act of cowards! Traitors! There is no land beyond the Volga!" He pointed to the eastern side of the river, where we had just come from. "This, is where we break the spine of the Fascist empire! Adolf Hitler, betrayed us! And now, we will show him his error! We will defeat him here, at Stalingrad!" There was the scream of a plane's engine and we all whipped our heads around, terrified. Then someone yelled "Stukas! Take cover!" And I dropped to the floor and covered my head. Several men were not quick enough, and dropped dead as the machineguns of the German planes rattled overhead. The Commissar continued his speech. "Do not be afraid! The Fascists have stretched themselves thin in their dash to the Volga! They have not enough ammunition for their soldiers," I looked at the side of the river where the Germans had formed a wall of machineguns in the buildings at the top of the river bank and tried to count for how long those machineguns kept firing. "They have not enough food, for they thought that they could steal it from Stalingrad! And need I remind you of their brutality to the innocents who live in our glorious Motherland? As we speak, many innocent women and children are at the mercy of the Fascist assholes! You. Must. Not. Fail!" "The Stukas!" Someone cried out. "They're coming back!" I dropped to the floor again, shielding my head. More soldiers were killed, their blood spilling out and covering the floor, I backed away from the spreading pool of blood of the man in front of me. Something whistled through the air, then something else, and there were more whistles until the deafening crunching of bombs exploding barges filled our ears. "Remember Comrades!" The Commissar shouted with a finger raised. "Not. One. Step. Ba-..." A bullet tore through the back of his head and ripped itself out of his right temple and flew forward into us. His body hit the wooden floor with a heavy thud, and a sick crack accompanied it, signifying that his skull had been cracked by the impact. We stared at the Commissar's lifeless body, absolutely terrified, confused, and hopeless. A Sergeant armed with a sub-machinegun checked the body and shook his head. He stood and took the Commissar's place. "Remember Comrades! Keep moving forward! The Motherland depends on you! Do not let the blood spilled on our own soil be spilled without cause!" "The Stukas are coming back!" We instinctively hit the floor, and my face touched blood and I reeled backward when I heard the plane's machineguns. I held my breath and put my face to the blood, and the Stukas passed, and there was more whistling. I felt my heart sink. This had to be it. That bomb had to be for us. We were going to die, just like the Commissar had. We were going to die before we even had a chance. There was a ploop! And we waited, the Stukas had passed. I lifted my face from the blood and spat. I wiped my face off frantically, trying to get the blood clear from my eyes. "The bomb landed in the water," A

soldier beside me muttered. I looked at him. He had a sharp jawline, and brown hair that hung loosely just above his eyebrows under his ushunka. He looked only a portion older than me, twenty six at most, and his green eyes were waxed with the solemn realization of how close we came to death. I took a good look at him, and had the feeling that he was just like me, a young man drafted into battle. I stuck out a bloody hand, wiped it on my pant leg, then stuck it back out. "Sasha," I said with a nod. "Sasha Leonid Ivanov." He looked at my hand and then me. He took it, shook it and nodded. "Viktor Kirill Khrupinov." "Right." I said with a nod. "On your feet! We are at the docks! Move! Get off of the boat! Go! Go! Go!" The Sergeant and his comrades yelled at us. Viktor and I nodded. And we stood, and climbed up off of the barge, and ran down the docks to a stockpile of crates where a Commissar and three soldiers were handing out rifles from atop crates. There were three lines, which moved rapidly, and we joined. I did my best to ignore the chaos and bloodshed that lay ahead of us. "One man gets a rifle! The other gets ammunition! The man with the rifle shoots! The man with the bullets follows him! When the first dies, his rifle will have been left for the second, who will then take it!" There were soldiers yelling, pleading for a rifle, but were quickly pushed onto the battlefield without a weapon, forced to move forward with no means of defending themselves. And those who had rifles, were too scared to use them. Hiding behind whatever they could, until a sniper or machinegunner picked them off from an angle they could not predict. I reached up for a rifle, and yelled. "I hunted wolves! I am a good shot! Give me a rifle!" The man ignored me as I was pushed. I pushed back and cried out. "I hunted wolves! I can shoot! Please give me a rifle!" The man ignored me. "Please! I need a rifle!" I began to sweat, I looked from him to the battlefield where many Soviet soldiers lay dead or dying. I pushed back even harder, with Viktor helping me. "Please give me a rifle! I know how to shoot! I can kill many fascists! Please, just give me a rifle!" I cried out, until I was pushed forward and out of the line with Viktor. A Commissar and two soldiers stood by open crates of ammunition, handing out bullets. We looked at each other and nodded. My heart raced as we approached them, they saw us, gave us both five bullets each in a stripper clip magazine, and we looked at them baffled. "Aren't we to get more ammunition?" Viktor asked. "I am sorry friends," one of the soldiers replied. "That is all we can give you!" The Commissar turned to us. "Go! Get up the riverbank! Only cowards will refuse to do their duty for the Motherland!" We stared at him in disbelief, when he growled angrily and drew his pistol, aiming at us. We stepped back and swallowed. "Get up the riverbank! Now!" We turned and faced the battle before us, on the other side of the Volga, I had seen a line of buildings where the Germans were fighting stubbornly to push Soviet soldiers back over the Volga. But here, there were no Germans, nor were there Soviets. Here there was a spiked wall of savage, blood-thirsty machine-guns which roared hungrily at men who had been given no choice but to run right into their coffins, to have their limbs torn off of their bodies and their torsos ripped open in brutally unholy ways, to feed their innards to the worms, and to water the soils in their blood. I swallowed, now trembling, and looked at Viktor. He looked at me, terrified, and nodded. I nodded back to him. We both took another look at the death-trap before us, watched men sprint across pools of blood and mud and piles of distorted, bleeding flesh, and ran forward. We had only sprinted about twenty feet when men seemed to appear from nowhere around us, and we had only gone another ten

when those men started to drop around us. A man in front of me took a bullet to the throat and fell, clutching his bleeding throat, choking and tumbling back down the riverbank. Another to my right took a bullet to the chest and left leg, falling hard on his stomach and lay there, dead within seconds. Bullets whizzed over my ears and head, and stabbed the ground at my feet, sending dirt flying up and dirtying my legs. I ducked and headed to my right toward an overturned truck, when the tip of my boot got caught in a stone. My heart raced as I hit the ground and Viktor skidded to a stop in front of me. He turned back and looked at me, then the machine-guns. His eyes widened and he dove behind the truck, hot lead tearing angrily at the air where he had been. I shut my eyes and covered my head with my arms. I knew that those guns were going to tear into me, I just didn't want to believe it. I imagined what it would feel like to have those bullets ripping through my flesh and bone, destroying my body and leaving nothing to recognize when I felt rough hands seize my wrists and pull me through the dirt. I flinched and looked up. Viktor was dragging me to the truck, and I helped him help me. I scrambled to my feet, digging into the mud and dirt as I pushed myself up and Viktor tripped, but never fell and I crawled behind the truck as he dove back behind it. I threw myself against the truck and panted, wide-eyed and turned to Viktor. "Thank you!" I panted. "Thank you." Viktor nodded shakily. "No problem!" We sat there for a moment, panting as the machine-guns roared and men screamed out for help. I didn't even need to ask what we should do, we were perfectly fine with our position, but the Commissars probably wouldn't be, and the machine-guns were still growling and snarling so hungrily at the exposed men. We just sat there, when I remembered something . "We need a rifle."