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STATIONED IN AFGHANISTAN: ROAD TO THE PASS

STATIONED IN AFGHANISTAN: ROAD TO THE PASS. (By Special Correspondent V. Snegirev. *Komsomolskaya pravda*, Feb. 5, 1983. Abstract:) Afghanistan — At the garrison of a unit of motor transport troops, a formation of soldiers stood before a modest obelisk. A lieutenant read the oath: “On behalf of all the troops, I assure the command that we will justify the trust placed in us and do everything in our power to deliver the freight to its destination promptly and in full. We swear to act with courage, skill and honor. Nothing will prevent us from carrying out our orders.” “We swear, we swear, we swear!” the soldiers joined in. The ceremony is held before every convoy’s departure.

I climbed into a KamAZ with driver Nikolai Semko, and the truck column set off. Kolya drove his truck with great skill. But his fingers, gripping the steering wheel, grew white with tension when the truck came upon ruts and potholes: That’s when you have to be on the lookout for surprises. The bandits plant their mines with great cunning, sometimes with delayed action mechanisms: One truck drives over it, a second, and only when a third rolls over it does it explode. The basmachi [a term applied to members of an armed anti-Soviet movement operating in Central Asia in 1918-1924 — Trans.] couldn’t care less who gets blown up by a mine: our truck, or a civilian bus jammed with peasants. Just so blood is shed.

The road is guarded: Along the side one continually sees the turrets of camouflaged combat vehicles dug into the ground and Afghan Army posts. The highway is one of the principal targets of the bandits’ terrorist activities. Now and then we pass signs of their evil deeds: burnedout truck bodies, scorched asphalt, shards of glass.

Nikolai spoke of the strain that the steep mountain roads and the thin air put on the trucks and their motors. But he did not speak of his own adversity, because it is not a Soviet soldier’s habit to complain about difficulties.

As the column climbed toward a mountain pass, Kolya grew somber. “This is where they staged a masquerade: Wearing Soviet and Afghan Army uniforms, they attacked the trucks.”

I had heard about this. Wearing our uniforms, the basmachi had looted their fellow citizens’ cars and trucks and killed women and children. What a vile, inhuman provocation! And I also knew why Nikolai Semko had suddenly grown somber. Not far from there, his comrades Nikolai Yakshov, Rais Vakasov and Yury Galkin had died. Wearing Afghan Air Force uniforms, basmachi had opened fire point-blank on the soldiers’ truck, which was loaded with TNT for an Afghan opencut mine. The vehicle had caught fire, threatening the entire column. Then Yakshov, Vakasov and Galkin had pulled the blazing truck off the road, to a safe distance away from their

comrades, the others trucks and their valuable cargo. At that moment there was a terrible explosion.

Back at the garrison I saw a letter from a group of Young Pioneers in the Mari Autonomous Republic who had named their detachment after the hero Yakshov. They wrote: “We have given our word to be like Nikolai and, if necessary, to give our lives too for peace and justice.”