

## **The war that I used to know**

From the history, we know about quite a few wars, which had been waged all over the world. The Great Patriotic War is of special significance for the nations of the Soviet Union. People remember names who gave their lives for their country. The country, whose people had endured all toils of war, should never undergo that ordeal again.

Veterans of the Great Patriotic War took no notice as their grandchildren and great-grandchildren move to another war in the eighties: in the end of 1979 political bureau of the Communist Party made a decision about bringing of Soviet troops into Afghanistan in the guise of “protection of Southern borders”.

At the time of the USA and Soviet Union was strained relations, the “Cold War” was going between these states. In order to exert influence on Afghanistan, the United States together with its NATO allies and the USSR together with the Warsaw Pact came into conflict with each other, which eventually resulted in introduction of Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

Civilian population was not aware of that decision’s true causes. Thousands of soldiers left for Afghanistan to protect the Saur Revolution. The real situation was being suppressed by the Soviet mass media. The truth was not available to anyone except the Communist Party.

In fact, from the first days of their deployment in Afghanistan, Soviet troops got engaged in hostilities with local armed groups, i.e. adversaries of the Saur Revolution. Soon, soldiers started coming home in zinc caskets, wrapped in paper with the inscription “died, protecting southern borders of the country”...

Years were passing away. Soldiers were dying for the sake of a strange country... This “mysterious war” lasted 10 years and ended with the withdrawal of our forces from Afghanistan.

On 15 February, 1989 by resolution of General Secretary of the Central committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev, the forces were withdrawn. That day lives of many young men were spared. Now this date is commemorated as the “Soldiers-Internationalists Day”.

In April 2001 in an interview with a reporter of the “Independent newspaper”, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbayev noted that “The result of this policy has far-reaching repercussions. If limited contingent of Soviet troops had not entered Afghanistan territory, the economic relations of Middle Asian countries with Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan would have developed an absolutely different kind of level. Kazakhstan energy resources would have had an outlet to the Karachi port, the Pacific Ocean, India; they could have got access to highways and railways, oil and gas pipelines”.

Afghani people suffer from political volatility, poverty, extremism and terrorism. It is an open secret that drug and arms traffic raise difficulties in the country.

About 22 000 Kazakhstani people took part in that undeclared war, 761 of them died and 21 soldiers were missed in action. There has been no news about them so far.

About 10-15 years ago, soldiers who returned home from Afghanistan were perceived as enemies, who had broken peace in an independent country. Peacekeeping soldiers had to excuse themselves: “We remained true to the oath of allegiance”. This is exactly how it was: soldiers, fighting in Afghanistan, had been unquestioningly executing orders of the USSR troops.

We proved that we have been true to the oath of allegiance. It has been 25 years since the end of the war. We appreciate the title “peacekeeping soldier”. Veterans unions function in all regions of our country.

There is one truth I know: if a soldier dies in battle, his memory will live forever. In 2000, a monument to soldiers, who died in the Afghan war, was erected in Astana; it bears names of all deceased Kazakhstani soldiers.

Similar monuments have been erected in Almaty, Kyzylorda, Karaganda, Petropavlovsk, Kokshetau, Aktobe, Ust-Kamenogorsk, etc.

A draft law “On veterans” is being considered in the Republic of Kazakhstan Parliament for several years. A suggestion to equate the Afghan veterans with veterans of the Great Patriotic war was submitted. There are no lesser or greater wars. It was the war intended at salvation of the whole epoch’s problems, which started due to of a clash between two world political blocs, which ruined thousands of lives. It would be fair to regard soldiers, who fought in Afghanistan in 1979-1989, as Veterans of War.

A whole generation has been lost somewhere in between the Great Victory and the Afghan war.

The war that I knew is continued to kill thousands of peacekeeping soldiers slowly and painfully. Because as thousands of questions with no answers to them, keep on churning in our minds.

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