



I, Balashov Mikhail Alekseyevich, was born on June 29, 1982 in Monastirshina village in Tula district of Kimovsk region. Lived there for 8 years. After I graduated first year of school we moved to the Lejayka village in Tombov district of Michurin region. After finishing 11 years of schooling I entered the higher education institution to study for a degree in "Professional of Dairy Production". Graduated in 2002 and was drafted into the army. I went there voluntarily because I wanted to experience myself what it is.



I was sent to serve in the division 3335 in the city of Tula. As put on the soldier's uniform I started to understand what it means to serve in the Russian Army. During the first 6 months I was trained to be a sharpshooter. They would take us to the shooting range twice a week, hence I learnt to shoot very well. Also we learnt to camouflage well in any surroundings, take rings off the grenade, to storm buildings under different circumstances, to hide, and also were tout marshal arts. First 6 months I was preparing for my future service in Chechen Republic. And then I got into Kursk, where I served as a sniper.



After serving 12 months I learnt that the drafting for the service in Chechnya was under way, and soon enough I voluntarily got there. As soon as I saw Grozdnii city I understood what kind of a place this is. There were ruins all around. I was surprised how anyone can live in such ruins and such conditions? And only then I understood what I have gotten into and what the war means, how much pain and sorrow a war can bring. Our division was quartered in Old-Promislow district, one of the most beautiful places in Grozdnii before the war. In Grozdnii I was serving as a sniper in the assault squadron. Our task was to get to the battle ground the first. Also we did de-mining and the defusing the bombs.

I participated in my first raid on the 10th day that I was in the Grozdnij because a Field Command Center (FCC) of the SWAT was under the enemy fire in Old-Promislow highway. Everyone in the FCC of the SWAT was killed while we were getting there. We found out later that they were fired at by militants with grenade launchers. We got an order to secure all pathways into and out of the mountains. Thereafter we started combing the place in order to capture militants. After a short while we calculated their location and only thing remaining was to de-capacitate them, dead or alive. It so happened that we had to capture them dead. And after this I knew what the fear and death are. This was my first raid.

We also used to go for the cleansing, meaning de-capacitating, of militants that would gather into groups of several people. Also we often went to de-mine and defuse bombs that were the main reason of deaths of Russian soldiers and even innocent civilians. But afterwards the militants came up with clever devices such as cell phones, lighters packed with explosives. If one uses them they lose hands, legs and so on. Also \$100 notes lying on the side of the road. As one lifts it a light reaches a light activated trigger thus activating a big explosion. These kind of innocent objects serve as a bait and are the main reasons for huge casualties. They are considered to be foremost dangerous weapon beside sniper bullets and armed militants. These kinds of innocent objects were dropped into the areas where Russian soldiers were stationed and on the roadsides where the advance units pass. Now the war there turned into a guerrilla war, and because of that the everyday situation there is very tense.



On the Sunday of September 27, 2003 I went on scouting with the unit of spy patrol. We were supposed to find and defuse bombs mines on the Old-Proislow highway. When we got to the FCC of the the SWAT we sat down to have a smoke. After I set up the cover for the mine sweeper and officers I sat down next to Armored Assault Vehicle the on the side of the road 30 meters from the FCC. And suddenly in 1.5-2 meters from us there was a very loud explosion of the radio controlled pipe bomb packed with nuts and nail, bolts and glass and etc. My gun and bullet proof helmet blew off of me at the moment of the blast. I heard deafening blast and I lost my vision, sense of time and space, and later problems with my memory developed. I checked myself with my hands and I understood I was covered in blood. I was sent to the field hospital and later to Rostov, where I gained my consciousness after being out for 3 days.

I never thought this could happen to me. One starts to comprehend the gravity of it only after something like this happens. In Chechnya I understood what fraternity, army service and Russia means.





This is the mask that was made on me and that I designed and painted.