

## The dental service of the Red Army during World War II

by

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According to Alex Peregudov (2009), « By 1940, all the country's population received free dental help thanks to the permanent development of Soviet dentistry. World War II put a complete end to this development. During the war, the Bolshevik public health service lost 6,000 hospitals, 33,000 private general hospitals, 655 convalescent homes, 976 sanatoriums, 60 factories of the medical industry. During the conflict, dental help was particularly given to wounded soldiers. More than 200,000 doctors, 976 sanatoriums, 60 factories and medical industries. During the conflict, dental help particularly focuses on the treatment of casualties. More than 200,000 doctors worked on the front and to the back of the front with devotion. The specialists helped more than 10 million of casualties. » The same author (2009) added : « According to the data of Professor D.A. Entine, one of the founders and the head of the department of military stomatology, 63 % of soldiers with maxillofacial wounds received expert assistance at the front. During the hostilities, the dental surgeons worked out scientific bases of the treatment of maxillofacial wounds by using different frameworks of devices and prostheses to immobilize mandible fractures improving prevention methods against such wounds. From 1943, the number of new dental institutions as well as that of restored institutions previously destroyed during the war increased relentlessly. »

In their work, Peregudov and Borissenko (2010) notably told the story of Kurljandsky, a dentist who was concerned about dental prosthesis and maxillofacial reconstruction of damaged faces during the war. « In June 1941, he was enlisted as the head of oral and maxillofacial surgery in a hospital. He crossed the whole country with his service even though he was first summoned to stay in Moscow. When, one day, a hospital train arrived from the front with casualties, Kurljandsky was reported to have stayed in the operation room during days and nights and to have only slept from fifteen to twenty minutes between the operations. When there was little respite in the hospital and when he could sleep at home, Kurljandsky worked during the night, wrote articles and his Phd thesis. » The two authors (2011) went on saying : « There was no electricity and no heating, he wrote with his gas lamp and got warm with his great-coat. One of his main topics at that time was « The scientific argumentation of treatment methods of maxillofacial wounds with firearm. » Kurljandsky proved that once the maxillary fractures caused by firearm were fixated thanks to an old method of binding together the two bones of the maxilla, the jaw contracted and developed arthrosis due to the length of immobilization of the temporomandibular joint. While treating such casualties, Kurljandsky concluded that it was necessary to cure the lesions with monomaxillary bindings and an early physical therapy. In May 1942, Kurljandsky gave three talks to the assembly of the Directorate General of Military Hospitals : « Experimentation of the application of rigid monomaxillary dental bindings », « Fixation by wiring jaw fragments on plaster headcap », « Indication and deadline of the application of restorative prostheses ». Peregudov and Borissenko (2010) added that: « After the assembly, the Directorate General of Military Hospitals gave the order to publish these works in three days and to pass them on to every hospitals. In 1943, Kurljandsky defended his thesis on « The functional method of treating maxillary fractures caused by firearm ». According to Kurljandsky's data, 70% of the time the treatment of these fractures with monomaxillary bindings on the lower jaw is necessary and 100% of the time on the upper jaw. On one hand, monomaxillary binding ensures the immobilization of fragments.

In 1944, he published his book « The functional method of treating maxillary fractures caused by firearm ». In 1945, « Myogym and massage after lesions of the face and jaws » came out. Still in 1945, he became Doctor of medicine and in 1947, tenured professor ». One of

Kurljandsky's masters, his PhD dissertation advisor, the tenured professor Lukomsky became in 1947 the chief dental officer of the USSR Ministry of Health. This is what he wrote on Kurljandsky : « *Kurljandsky is someone that we can call a « universal » specialist. Not only he received medical training but he also got dental one due to new notions. During the war, he implemented his knowledge* » (Peregudov & Borissenko, 2010).

This is what Peregudov (2009) went on saying regarding his country's health : « *By 1945, there was 92% [of newly-created or restored dental institutions after the war] in the cities and 80% in the countryside. After the war, the USSR Ministry of Health passed many decrees and orders to organize and improve the dental service in the country. (...) There is only three factories to make capital good and dental devices of which technology stays the same. Dental assistance remains free thanks to cheap devices and equipment. (...) The USSR Ministry of Health introduced standards regarding the length of visits to dental surgeons, 20 minutes for conservative treatments, 30 minutes for prosthetic treatment.* »

This lasted until the 1990s. With the Cold War, the Soviet Regime implemented absolute autarky on new technologies which did not succeed in reaching the Russian territory, contributing in curbing the evolution of dentistry in the country. It was obvious that the Stalinian regime favoured the development of dentistry during the Second World War exclusively at the benefit of soldiers and the army and at the expense of civilian populations which were neglected. It was indisputable that many previously-mentioned organizations only concerned great Soviet cities and that, for instance, the peasants from the Urals barely had access to dental care, even to dental extractions which were often carried out in appalling conditions. Finally, it is unquestionable that no reachable dental hygiene existed for those same peasants who could see their mouths deteriorating over time, not to mention the irreversible consequences caused by scurvy (avitaminosis C) affecting their dentition due to nutrition disorder. Similarly to Western countries which could launch reforms if soldiers' dental health was catastrophic or could at least command their functional reinstatement as soldiers could not be operational if they suffered from their teeth or if they could not eat, the Russians never troubled themselves with such scruples. Their army which was famous for having an inexhaustible quantity of soldiers sending their men on the front without caring about human life, their soldiers being referred to as real cannon fodder.

We also ought to say a word on the General of the Army Constantin Rokossovski (1896-1968), who was a hero and a marshal of the soviet Union. He was said to be a dentist in his early youth before enlisting in the Red Army and becoming a soldier who shined in the Battle of Kursk (1943). During the Stalinian purges, he was imprisoned and tortured in 1937. He lost nine teeth during his detention (<http://fr.wikipedia.org>, 2010).

Finally, when Hitler's Nazis invaded Poland, the German and Russian army boards discussed about science and war. They exchanged ideas, plans and men. The plan to control the mass through water contamination with fluorine particularly interested the Russian communists who saw in it an ideal way to impose communism worldwide. This was what they applied themselves to doing in prison camps.

Indeed, the regular intake of infinitesimal quantities of fluorine reduces a person's capacity to resist domination. Consequently, this person becomes submissive to the will of those who thrive to govern him. The company I.G. Farben was in charge of contaminating German waters. The Russians did the same with their prisoners (U.S. Public Health Service, 1997).



Professor David Abramovitch Entine, Chief of the Department of Military Stomatology, from 1940 to 1946. (Archives of the Museum of History Moscow State University of Medicine and Dentistry).



Marshal Constantin Rokossovski (public domain).



Pern's department of prosthetic dentistry in 1939 (Kurljandsky is sitting in the middle).



Kurliandsky surrounded by wounded soldiers in his hospital in 1943.

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