

Chernenky Sergey Andreevich, Russia

Sergey served in the Russian military and when the accident in Chernobyl happened he was sent there as a liquidator. He was 25 years old, married and had two children. Today, he is disabled, receives a pension from the state, and is surprised to be still alive, writes Nadya Sporysheva who interviewed Sergey.

Interviewing Sergey has revealed to me some secrets of the Chernobyl catastrophe. Although he signed a nondisclosure agreement he still shared some information with me.

Personal background. Life before Chernobyl.

Sergey was born on 7th of April, 1961 in Smolensk (Russia). His mother was a maths teacher, his father was a shop superintendent on the aircraft plant. Sergey had attended comprehensive school and after finishing it in 1978 he entered the Smolensk Higher Anti-aircraft Command Military School where he studied for 4 years. In 1981 he got married. After his graduation from the Military School, Sergey was assigned to a military service in Kiev for two years. In 1984 he started to serve in the armed forces in Afghanistan. In 1986 Sergey returned to the Ukraine. When the explosion in the Chernobyl NPP occurred he lived in the settlement Vita-Pochtovaya near Kiev.

During Chernobyl

On 26th of April at 3 a.m. the military unit he served in received a telephone message about the accident in Chernobyl. When Sergey got to know about it he didn't pay much attention to the fact. He thought the accident was not serious as he hadn't heard about the Chernobyl NPP before. Still, he saw one of his mates blanching with terror and almost falling. It turned out that his friend was living in the area and he said that the NPP was located there. Sergey understood that something terrible had occurred. According to the military law one had to call back after receiving a telephone message to make sure the information was correct. It was confirmed.

On the 28th of April, panic began in Kiev. Everybody wanted to go away from the city. Ticket offices in the railway station stopped working because all tickets were sold. People packed into trains without tickets, collectors were not able to control them (the situation was similar to that during the Second World War). Before the 28th of April the entrance to the Chernobyl area was prohibited, military forces waited for the government to order mobilization. Sergey entered the town of Pripyat on 28th of April. The inhabitants were evacuated. People were allowed to take only their passports and savings books with them. Soldiers destroyed houses, cut trees and buried these deep in the ground.

Sergey served as a liquidator and was responsible for catching looters, who were quite numerous. Such people wanted to make money selling contaminated goods in the marketplace in Kiev. As Sergey told me, two people once tried to steal a car which was contaminated. They were able to drive just a little bit before dying. The level of radiation was 6000 roentgen (in this case iron turns into dust). Coniferous forests turned yellow. The 30-kilometer area was created in 2 or 3 weeks. Soldiers under 40 years old stayed in the area to the order and 2 elder people could do it at will. Everybody had to wear general protective

kits which were a finger thick. It was very hot to wear those kits; that is why soldiers often put them off together with respirators.

At the time Sergey had two children - a son and a daughter – who stayed in Kiev together with his wife. The city became almost deserted. During the holidays at the beginning of May Sergey called his father to the town of Smolensk and asked him to take the relatives from Kiev without explaining the reason to avoid panic. In Russia people didn't know about the catastrophe. Sergey's father picked up the family using his car. Sergey himself still stayed in Pripyat. Gorbachev ordered to hoist a flag above the town to show that everything was all right. Two men did it but very soon they died (skin was coming off from bones).

Sergey recommended me to watch the documentary about the accident, where one can see small white dots on the film – the result of radiation.

After Chernobyl.

Sergey is not allowed to say how long he stayed in Chernobyl. I guess his trip was long enough because he wonders he «is still alive». After his return to Smolensk he served in the police force for two years and in 1995 he retired. In 1994 his third child - a daughter - was born. Sergey himself is a disabled person – his brain is affected. He cannot bathe in the sun because his skin becomes covered with ulcers. In 2005 his wife died from cerebral hemorrhage being 44 years old.

Nowadays Sergey lives with his younger daughter. His older daughter has got her own family and his son is a senior lieutenant in the Marine Force serving in Kaliningrad. Nowadays he receives a pension amounting to about 1000 euro and his daughter who also has some problems with her health receives only 20 euro from the government. Sergey says that the third generation (e.g. his great grandchildren) is likely to suffer the most from his exposure to radiation. If now a new trip to Chernobyl is offered to Sergey he would reject this offer anyway as he realizes the consequences of the accident for his family, and that time he was a brave young soldier and performed his duty.

Attitude towards nuclear power.

Despite the tragedy, Sergey has never been against NPPs and nuclear power as he believes that people are to blame for the accident. He says that if one runs a red light and provokes an accident it doesn't make sense to blame a car for it. The situation in Chernobyl was in his view similar to this. But he will be very glad if once alternative energy is able to replace conventional, especially nuclear, energy. He does not think that the issue of the Chernobyl accident is covered enough in the Russian media. He supposes that if the government had no secrets about the Chernobyl accident, he wouldn't have signed a nondisclosure agreement.

Attitude towards the Soviet regime.

Although Sergey has been the member of the Communist party for 12 years he believes that «good communist is dead communist». Sergey is against any kind of fanaticism. He is the supporter of the strong state power which still tries to solve all problems in a peaceful way.