

Note: This site is now defunct.



[About Us](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Newsletter](#)

American Meets Kalashnikov

- **By:** Michael Shipley
- **Date:** 2000-06-19

The first stage of our adventure involved Volker and Helge flying to Germany. There they purchased five vehicles—from a mothballed East German army truck to a sporty BMW—hired drivers, and drove toward our designated meeting place at the border of Poland and Belarus.

I waited on the eastern side of the border for their arrival, together with the two native Siberians, Sergei and Oleg. However, something seemed to have gone wrong; Volker and Helge were more than a day late in arriving. The long hours spent lingering at the border passed slowly, but Sergei and Oleg wasted no time in enjoying the local booze and barbecue. I declined such diversions, preferring to take a short exploratory walk in the woods. After a leisurely stroll, I chanced upon the border fence itself, demarcating the Eastern limit of Poland. There I stood for a few minutes, looking out across two opposing barbed-wire fences flanking a wide strip of sand about six meters across. The sand was scraped smooth by tractors to record the footprints of anyone desperate enough to attempt such a crossing.

At that moment I heard a sound. A soldier whom I had noticed earlier as he patrolled the no-man's-land, caught sight of me and dived behind a bush, thinking himself undetected. As I turned to leave, he jumped out once again and leveled his Kalashnikov rifle at my chest, shouting out questions in Russian. I thanked God I knew enough Russian to declare my nationality and intentions. Soon a second soldier approached with an over-sized German Shepherd. Their quarry in hand—a genuine American—they led me to their commander. After enduring a few minutes of questions and threats to put me in prison I countered that no signs were posted declaring the woods off-limits, and that simply standing at the fence violated no international laws. Undeterred, and perhaps further enraged, he insisted that I pay a hefty fine to purchase my freedom.

"A fine! For what!?" I retorted in amazement.

"For our time and trouble. I had to drive here; somebody has to pay for the gasoline—and to feed these guard dogs." Two German shepherds now stood close at hand, held fast by machine gun-toting soldiers.

Dumbfounded by the man's audacity, I stood speechless for a moment. Here providence intervened, as Sergei at that moment noticed the commotion and hurried over. He engaged the commander in a typical Russian banter, the end result of which was my release.

Minutes later Volker and Helge crossed the border with their cars, and we were on our way. It was, indeed, an auspicious beginning to our drive across Russia. ☺