

A Letter from the Front

Asiya Wolf

Among the letters I brought with me when I recently immigrated to Israel from Vilnius was one that was published in the journal *The Soviet Homeland*. The letter was written fifty years ago on 5th June 1943, by my close friend and fellow soldier in the Lithuanian Division, Zenya Saposhnikov-Shmushkevitz. On the evening before one of the battles from which she did not expect to return alive, Zenya wrote to her mother, father and little sisters who had not managed to escape from Kaunas which had been captured by the Germans.



She delivered the letter to her battalion headquarters with a request attached that they send it to Lithuania after it had been liberated. She did not know then that all her family had been cruelly murdered in Stutthof concentration camp. After the war Zenya let me read her letter.

Zenya and I were young women then and had volunteered to join the Lithuanian Division in order to fight. I spent the war years as a signaller, and Zenya conducted a brave struggle against the fascists as a medical orderly. Day after day she risked her own life in order to rescue badly wounded soldiers from areas under fire. Often she fought against the enemy with a machine gun in her hands. And here is what that young woman whose fate had brought to the Red Army in her 16th year of life wrote:

Often I am bothered by the thought that my loved ones may need my help. Unfortunately I am far away from them. And here my loved ones I know about your lives in the Ghetto, I know about the *Actzias*, about the mass murder. My heart is torn and looks for revenge. In March 1943 I wanted to be accepted into a partisans' parachute group which was going to drop into Lithuania so that I could meet you and ease your sufferings. Of course this was a childish plan. Because of my black eyes I wasn't accepted for the parachute brigade, and so I found a different way for myself. If I cannot help those I love, I will at least try to exterminate their executioners. In earlier battles I was active at the first aid stations, and now I am doing everything - exchanging fire as a soldier, signaller and nurse-medical orderly. Today for the first time I am going off on attack.

Dear mommy, daddy, Etale and Masha, do not think that I consider you dead, no! You are alive, you are alive, and you are destined to live! Forever you are engraved in my heart. Today I hope you will help me in hard moments. Do not cry for me! Be happy! I give my life for a great purpose. I am writing this letter in the trench, in a raging moment, under a hail of bullets and shells. I am writing out of bloody-hatred for our murderers.

Zenya's letter never reached its destination but she kept her promise and played her part in the war against fascism.

Asiya Wolf, Acco, June 1993



Zenya Saposhnikov with one of her letters.