

An Unlikely Refuge: Latvia's Women Volunteers in the Red Army in World War II

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This article examines women's wartime experiences with a focus on Latvia's women volunteers in the Red Army in World War II. An estimated 8 percent of the Red Army was composed of women, who played a wide array of roles, including as snipers, combat engineers, medics, and frontline journalists. This level of female participation was unique in World War II, but a close examination of the phenomenon shows that motives and means for entry into the Red Army at the beginning of the war were not uniform. Our examination of the case of women volunteers from the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic reveals key factors that fed women's fervent desire to "get to the front." It shows particular ways in which the Red Army functioned as an unlikely refuge, sheltering women from some of the hardships and threats of life in the Soviet Russian interior, including hunger, loneliness, and a lack of warm clothing, while providing a means of exacting revenge against a mortal enemy. At the same time, it exposed women to extremes of violence and conflict. Dominant Soviet narratives of women in war have presented them in largely marginal roles or have silenced stories that failed to comport with triumphalist and masculine representations of World War II. This work uses the voices of women volunteers in the Latvian Riflemen's Divisions of the Red Army to construct an agent-centered history of motives, experiences, and memories.

Keywords: *Latvia; Red Army; World War II; Women Volunteers*

Introduction

Narratives of women's wartime experiences have historically been articulated primarily in terms of their victimhood. As a significant part of civilian populations starved, abused, deprived of shelter and family, and sometimes murdered by enemy forces, women have indeed suffered myriad brutalities and indignities in war. This article examines women's experiences of war from a different angle: It looks at women in the Red Army in World War II. Specifically, it examines the motivations and experiences of Latvian and Jewish women volunteers in the two Latvian Riflemen's Divisions of the Red Army and offers the opportunity to develop an alternative narrative of women in war.

Zenta Ozola, born in Riga, Latvia, in 1923, was seventeen years old when World War II came to her country. Ozola, an ethnic Latvian, had joined the Communist Youth organization (*Komsomol*) in 1941, the year after the Soviet occupation of independent Latvia. When Germany attacked the USSR in June 1941, she followed her Communist Youth group into evacuation, ending her month-long journey on a collective farm in the Chuvash republic, deep in Soviet Russia's interior. She wrote to a friend, "I had nothing, not a *santīms* [Latvian coin], no acquaintances, no clothing, and I did not know Russian . . . I started learning to drive a tractor, but all the time held on to the desire to get to the front." Ozola ran away from the farm and sought out the Latvian National Division training camp at Gorhovets in the Gorky province. She was turned away three times before the division accepted her as a medic, though she had no training. By early December 1941, Ozola was on her way to the front with the Red Army's 201st Latvian Riflemen's Division. She later became a correspondent for the division newspaper, *Latvia's Rifleman* [*Latvijas Strēlnieks*]. Ozola was killed at the front late in 1942.¹ In the wake of her death, Ozola was elevated as a hero: Among other things, her courage in gathering unused German munitions at the front when division soldiers suffered deficits became a legend, and the snipers of the 125th Regiment vowed to avenge her death by killing twice as many Germans. She was immortalized in Soviet Latvia in history books, and a school and Pioneer units took her name.²

Eva Vater (Ieva Vātere) was born in 1922. She was a Jewish high school student in Riga when she evacuated to the Chuvash republic. She completed training courses and became a medic with the 201st and later 43rd Guard Latvian Riflemen's Divisions. Vater survived the intense fighting at fronts like Staraja Rusa and Nasva and participated in the Red Army's 1944 return to Latvia as the German army was in retreat. In August of 1942, she wrote a letter to a school friend from Riga seeking information on her parents, Lazar and Gita Helena Vater. She learned only later that both had been sent to the Riga ghetto and were murdered by Nazis and their local collaborators in a mass killing of Latvian Jews at Rumbula.³ Vater's brother Yurii fell in battle in February 1944. After the war, Vater returned to Latvia and became a physician. When Latvia regained independence in 1991, Vater emigrated to Israel. As of this writing, she continues to collect materials and publish books on Latvian Jews who fought against Nazism, as well as Jews in the medical profession.⁴

An estimated 800,000 women served in the Soviet Red Army in World War II across the war years.⁵ According to official data from the Soviet Ministry of Defense, 490,235 women were called into the Soviet army and navy during the years of war. In 1942, the peak number of women was 234,025. On 1 January 1945, the Red Army had 463,503 women, of whom 318,980 were on the active front. Women in the Red Army were also involved as contract workers. However, there is no data on their numbers in official statistics.⁶ Official statistics also did not record specific data on women killed in war.⁷

Ozola and Vater were among the women volunteers from Latvia, or from ethnically Latvian communities within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR), who served in the Red Army in World War II, many of them in the Latvian Riflemen's Divisions. Official data on the demobilization of women from the Soviet Army in the Latvian SSR in December 1945 allows one to calculate that there were about 1,700–2,000 women in Latvian military formations at the end of the war.⁸ Across the war years, however, the number of women could have been twice as high. Certainly, many did not make it to demobilization. Some were killed in battle, disabled by hunger and disease, or repressed by Soviet authorities, while others became pregnant or were sent to training courses for Communist Party functionaries.

Literature and articles about the war published during the Soviet era presented an “army of women” as an inviolable component of the Latvian Riflemen's Divisions.⁹ The women occupied a variety of positions. Medical instructor Alīda Austers wrote that women

don't want to be passive observers behind the lines. Women, just like men, experience the destruction, misfortune and terror of this war. She may even experience it more sharply and deeply as a mother, wife, or girlfriend. A woman, the giver of life, sees [the war] destroying life. . . . We see in the army [female] nurses, medics, machine gunners, snipers, radio operators, kitchen and office workers, all of whom fulfill their missions with dignity.¹⁰

This work addresses key questions about this group: Who were the women volunteers in the Latvian divisions of the Red Army in World War II? How are motives for volunteering articulated in their words and writings? What were their wartime experiences? We use these questions, and materials from and about these social actors, to build an argument that the Red Army functioned as an *unlikely refuge* for women volunteers of the Latvian Riflemen's Divisions, enabling both survival and revenge after Nazi Germany occupied the Baltic republics in the summer of 1941 but, at the same time, placing the women in situations characterized by extreme violence and risk.

While there is a small but growing body of academic literature on the motivations and experiences of Russian women in the Red Army, little attention has been paid in the post-Soviet period to non-Russian women volunteers in the Soviet military.¹¹ This case is an opportunity to tell a significant and compelling story about the Red Army as an *unlikely refuge* for women volunteers, offering a vehicle for both survival and revenge in the chaos of conflict.¹²

Feminist writers have long “sought to recover the repressed history of women that has been left out of ‘official histories.’”¹³ A key goal of this article is to highlight the agency of actors who have been denied a historical voice either by their marginal status in society or by the attribution of ideological motives ascribed by more powerful actors. This may be particularly salient in the case of women in wartime: as Jennifer Mittelstadt notes, the “continued emphasis on recovering women participants

in armed conflict reflects the staggering degree to which women's participation in war and violence has been systematically overlooked.¹⁴ It also recognizes, following sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, that knowledge created by outside (and more powerful) agents about a marginal group can be disempowering, whereas knowledge created by a group about its own characteristics, motivations, and experiences is critical to the development of a comprehensive picture of a historical or contemporary event.¹⁵

This work uses a spectrum of source materials to build an account that returns agency to these actors and re-situates them in the social context that gave them the motivation and means to volunteer for service in the Red Army.¹⁶ A key source that enables us to put women's voices at the center of this account is material from the National Archives of Latvia (NAL) that offers detailed information about a Latvian-language school established in 1941 in the village of Tirylyani in the Bashkir ASSR to prepare women to be war medics.¹⁷ This material contains information on many of the 360 young women (eighteen to thirty years of age) who passed through this school in 1942–1943, and includes seventy handwritten autobiographical statements of various length and detail. From these writings, we can glean insights into the backgrounds of this group of volunteers, as well as the motivations that brought them to a place far from home to prepare for battle.¹⁸ Post-Soviet materials, including oral histories and materials drawn from archives opened after the collapse of communism, complement Soviet-era materials and offer fuller perspectives on these social actors.¹⁹

The work proceeds as follows. We begin with a brief historical background. We then develop an agent-centered narrative of motivations that highlights the story of the Red Army as an unlikely refuge and focuses in particular on motivations of survival and revenge. Finally, we consider the significance of this case as a means of illuminating little-recognized dimensions of women's participation in World War II, as well as the importance of agent-centered histories for the construction of a comprehensive account of the past.

Case Background

In the autumn of 1941, when the Soviet Union was facing a military onslaught from German forces, the National Defence Committee moved to create national military divisions within the Red Army. This was a reversal of the Soviet army's pre-war policy, which in the late 1930s had been to disband nationality-based territorial units.²⁰ At the end of the 1930s, the Soviet state identified ethnic groups who should not be called into the Red Army because of "political-moral considerations." These were nationalities that had been categorized during the period of the Great Terror as disloyal; many suffered repression. Among the groups on this list were Germans, Poles, Latvians, Estonians, Turks, and Greeks.²¹

On 3 August 1941, leaders of the Latvian Communist Party and the Council of People's Commissars, who had evacuated to Soviet Russia after German occupation,

entreated the authorities to allow them to set up a national division. National formations were rapidly assembled in late 1941 and 1942, largely in the Central and North Caucasus and the autonomous Soviet republics around the Volga River. The Red Army had twenty-one national Riflemen's Divisions, including eight from Georgia, five from Armenia, three from Azerbaijan, two from Latvia, two from Estonia, and one from Lithuania.²² Dov Levin points out that "because of the difficult military situation at that time, dozens of divisions were formed hastily throughout the Soviet Union, and after a brief training period, nearly all of them, even before reaching full strength, were sent to the front to fill a dangerous breach."²³ Further, national divisions grew out of a need to manage the problem that soldiers from many regions did not speak Russian: within the national divisions, the ethnic tongue was often used.²⁴

Ilze Jermacāne estimates that between eighty and one hundred thousand ethnic Latvians and other ethnic groups from Latvia served in the Red Army.²⁵ About half of these were Latvians who had evacuated to the Russian interior in 1941, as well as ethnic Latvians living in the USSR during the interwar period; the other half was composed of those who were mobilized late in the war, between 1944 and 1945, when Soviet forces reoccupied Latvia. Most served in Latvian military formations.²⁶

It is estimated that the 201st Latvian Rifleman's Division, which was established in 1941, had the following ethnic breakdown at inception: 51 percent Latvian, 26 percent Russian, 17 percent Jewish, 3 percent Polish, and 3 percent other nationalities.²⁷ Of these, about 70 percent were volunteers.²⁸ The division became more ethnically heterogeneous as the military toll of World War II rose. Indeed, "six months into the conflict, the Red Army had lost four and a half million men [*sic*]."²⁹

While women constituted a significant proportion of the Soviet fighting force at and behind the front, their public recognition during and after the war was circumscribed: "judging by their [women's] representation in contemporary print media or on stamps, for example, the Soviet state never considered combat women a desirable mass movement or an integral part of the Red Army. Instead, such women were depicted as isolated cases, however numerous they might have been."³⁰ Only some individual heroes were praised in the Soviet media, such as sniper Liudmila Pavlichenko, machine-gunner Mariia Baida, aviator Polina Gel'man, and partisan Zoia Kosmodemiankaia, who became cult figures in Soviet propaganda.³¹ Arguably, the women of the front were pushed aside so that images of battlefield (male) heroism would remain untainted, a process consistent with a general tendency in wartime historical narratives to cast women as victims of events rather than autonomous actors.

Discussions about women on the front lines began anew during the Brezhnev era. Victory in the Great Patriotic War became a celebration of national importance, highlighting a culture of honoring veterans.³² Praise for the heroism of women became part of a carefully ordered depiction of the war, though its scope was circumscribed and women's stories were nested in the ideological narrative shaped by the state rather than veterans.³³ In the early 1980s, a television documentary series based on a

screenplay by Belarusian journalist Svetlana Aleksievich titled *The Unwomanly Face of War* was released. In 1985, after years of battles with Soviet censors, Aleksievich published a book under the same title. It told the stories of women who had gone to war. Aleksievich writes that it was difficult to convince women to tell their authentic stories, as opposed to reiterating rote phrases about heroism that characterized the vocabulary cultivated by Soviet propaganda.³⁴

Below we endeavour to develop a microhistory of the women volunteers of the Latvian Riflemen's Divisions of the Red Army, highlighting their motivations and experiences. Our goal is to present a story of the past rooted in women's words and recollections and to illuminate aspects of the phenomenon of female participation in the Red Army that official histories have largely failed to document.

Girls at the Front: Women Volunteers in the Latvian Divisions

In August 1941, shortly after the start of the war in the USSR, the Soviet State Defense Committee accepted a resolution to create a Latvian Riflemen's Division. The first volunteers began to arrive in Gorhovets in the Gorky region of the Russian SSR in that same month. The division was formally established on 12 September 1941. It was composed largely of volunteers from Soviet Latvia—in the words of a Soviet historical account: “Workers defense committee members, city and country Soviet and Party activists, militia, workers and farmers, who had left their homes to flee from the fascist occupier.”³⁵ Indeed, party workers and sympathizers were among those the Nazis had in their sights as they entered the Baltics. Notably, the author does not include the Jewish population of Latvia as a particular victim group, a practice common in Soviet accounts of the war.

Retired Soviet Army colonel Igors Briēžkalns wrote that many evacuees from Latvia were motivated to join the division: “We dreamed of getting back to our homeland, we had left behind our loved ones. . . . There was one chance—not looking at the deadly threat, to destroy that which stood in our way—Hitler's military force.”³⁶ Numerous women sought out the training camp, though few arrived with advance training, as a Latvian soldier, Roberts Reinholds, noted in a letter from Gorhovets dated 18 August 1941: “Quite a lot of women have arrived here, mostly the wives of militia members. They are being trained to be medics and they will accompany us [to the front]. Tell our strong *komjaunietes* [female Communist Youth members] who volunteer for duty to try to get to our camp. . . . They will probably be accepted.”³⁷

Other women got to the camp at Gorhovets on their own, arriving from communities of evacuees across Soviet Russia and from the Latvian-language medic training school in Tirlyanyi. Many were turned away. The first commander of the 201st Latvian Riflemen's Division, Colonel Jānis Veikins, remembered that more women sought to join the division than they could accommodate and some were sent away.³⁸ Alīda

Austers wrote that “very young girls were coming, who knew war only from literature and their fathers’ stories of the First World War. . . [But there were also] serious, experienced women who had carried the burdens of that war.”³⁹ Ieva Pliesmane remembered that

one young woman, wanting to get to the front . . . had cut her hair and clothed herself in men’s clothing. When her ruse was uncovered, she was put off the train at Perm, but she arrived at the camp anyway—she walked. . . . And there were thousands of such [women]. It is therefore no wonder that there were ten times more women volunteers than the medic corps could accommodate.⁴⁰

Because of the large number of women in the Latvian division, a women’s company of machine gunners was organized that received special instruction. They were used mostly for guard duties rather than being sent to forward positions.⁴¹

A commitment to the front and the task of “liberation of the homeland” characterized letters sent by many women volunteers, like that of junior nurse and sniper Ērika Hermīne Gaile, who wrote from her hospital bed at the rear to Ieva Sikсна, a nurse at the Moscow front, “You have no idea how much strength I have. Only now am I beginning to live. . . . I feel that my place is only there, with them [the other soldiers], in the snow-covered woods and trenches.”⁴²

Soviet-era accounts, both historical and fictional, are permeated by a prosaic romanticization of the war and front. Writer Vilis Lācis, a winner of the Stalin Prize in literature, wrote of the women of the 201st Division in a novel, *Vētra* [*Hurricane*]: “There came girls in long overcoats. Their thick locks peeked out from the bottoms of their masculine winter caps, and so hardy and precise were their steps, just like real soldiers. How brutal, fresh, and beautiful is life.”⁴³ In a fictionalized account of the medic school, *Tirleānas meitenes* [*The girls of Tirlyanyi*], written by veteran Velta Spāre, the young narrator exclaimed, “The front—that is a holy word!”⁴⁴ The writings of the real “girls of Tirlyanyi” reiterated this romantic sentiment. Helēna Aleksejeva, a member of the Communist Youth organization in the Latvian SSR, wrote that at age seventeen she learned of the coming of the war and

Now there arose the question, what to do? What will be my obligations in a time of war? . . . leaving my place of birth, home, and loved ones, my only wish was to go to the front! . . .

[In evacuation] . . . we got word of the Latvian nursing school. What a joy to be able to study in the Latvian language. . . . On June 5 [1942], our lessons began. . . . Now we each know our responsibility in wartime. We know that in wartime there can be no difference between a man and a woman! . . . Soon the day will come that we will exchange our pens for a medic’s bag and a weapon.⁴⁵

A number of the Tirlyanyi autobiographies used language that characterized Soviet wartime propaganda. It is difficult to discern whether it was used out of

authentic ideological commitment or a desire to comport to ideological norms. Herta Vasks, for instance, wrote, “These hands will not tire until Latvia is again Soviet Latvia and we will be able to live and build culture and life higher and higher.”⁴⁶ Ance Lacmane wrote, “The entire time in evacuation I was overcome by the thought of going to the front. To be one of the active fighters in the Fatherland war. I wanted to realize these thoughts, with which I left my parents, to be realized. . . . The only road to the front is the nursing school in the Bashkir SSR, Tirlyanyi, where I am now.”⁴⁷ Her classmate Tamāra Viļčinskis noted, “Life here [at the school] is very interesting because there are Latvian girls who have spent a year in various parts of the USSR and experienced all kinds of joys and sadness. There are those who have toughened up in Siberia’s cold and those who have seen the fire of war. Such girls, I think, will be strong nurses and also guardians of the homeland.”⁴⁸

While romanticized drama appeared prominently in Soviet-era letters and literature, the themes of survival and revenge were also present and have been brought into sharper focus by historical materials that became available in the quarter century after communism. We examine these themes and link them to our argument that the Red Army functioned as an unlikely refuge for women volunteers of the Latvian National Divisions.

Motivation: Survival

The Soviet Army, which lost an estimated 11,444,100 members in the course of World War II was, perhaps paradoxically, widely perceived by women volunteers from Latvia and Latvian women living in Soviet Russia to be a vehicle for survival.⁴⁹ First, it represented an opportunity for women from the Latvian SSR who found themselves in the Russian interior after the German occupation, and some of whom were young and alone without families, to restore ties to their ethnic communities and gain a modicum of security through these ties. Second, the Red Army offered access to basic necessities in a time of dramatic cold and hunger. We discuss each of these below.

The German attack on the USSR in late June of 1941 set off a chaotic process of flight from the Latvian SSR that lasted until Latvia was fully occupied by Nazi forces in early July. The Red Army fled on all possible roads, leaving no gasoline-fueled cars or weapons behind. Soldiers requisitioned local farmers’ horses, wheels, bicycles, and food. While characterized in Soviet literature as an evacuation, the mass movement into the interior was only nominally organized.⁵⁰ Among those who sought to leave were a segment of Latvia’s Jewish community, which numbered about seventy thousand at the time Germany attacked the USSR, and Communist Party functionaries and sympathizers, including members of the Communist Youth organization. Indeed, when German occupation was complete, those groups quickly fell victim to Nazis and local collaborators.⁵¹

The writings of nursing students at Tirlyanyi, many of whom hailed from Latvia, show that the women evacuated in some cases with their workplace or Communist

Youth organization, in other cases as medics or in other roles together with the retreating Workers' Guard. Some left with husbands or fiancés who were heading for the front. Interestingly, the words of veterans convey a sense that their absence from home would be brief: Soviet propaganda had widely propagated the idea that the mighty Soviet military would rapidly repel the advancing German army. Many women wrote that they left home in summer dresses and stockings, never anticipating that they would spend the coming winter, one of the coldest of the century, in the same clothing with which they left home in the summer of 1941.

The Latvian Riflemen's Division offered a means for women from Latvia, some of whom had left home alone, to re-establish ties to home. Among those who found themselves in Russia at the beginning of the war, news of the Latvian Riflemen's Division was received positively. Some evacuees in the interior of Soviet Russia saw it as an extension of Latvia, not just a military unit. Vera Kacena characterized her first day with the division with the words, "We are in our place."⁵² It was also a place where members could talk about their home, Latvia, a practice that would not have been safe in other Soviet environs.⁵³ Inese Spura remembered that "throughout the war, there was not a day that we did not think of home. In breaks from battle, in moments of relaxation by a campfire, we spoke of home, of the lives that the war deprived us of. And we knew one thing—the road home passed through this war."⁵⁴

Notably as well, the establishment of a national division offered an opportunity for ethnic Latvians born in the USSR to establish links to other Latvians and, to some degree, to cast off the ethnic stigma imposed by Stalin's repressions of the community in the 1930s, when many Latvians in the USSR were arrested or murdered. A 2005 newspaper article profiled Rūdolfs Čakars, an ethnic Latvian born in Soviet Russia whose father was killed during the repressions and whose brothers had not initially been mobilized because of the leadership's hesitation to call up groups perceived as politically unreliable.⁵⁵ At the same time, the dramatic losses in the first year of the war opened the opportunity for the men in Čakars's family to join the newly formed Latvian Riflemen's Division. An example of this also appeared in an autobiographical novel by veteran Vera Kacena. The protagonist, Alīse, was a Latvian living in Soviet Russia. Her father, a political officer in the Soviet Army had been shot in the Great Terror and her mother imprisoned. Alīse was offered the opportunity to denounce her parents and continue her university studies, but declined, ending up exiled in Kazakhstan. Later, she was able to join the 201st Latvian Riflemen's Division. On arrival, Alīse exclaimed, "I cannot believe how lucky I am to be in the Latvian division . . . ! I no longer feel as if I am on a fragment of ice in a fierce ocean."⁵⁶

Writings and interviews also show that women in evacuation were seeking refuge from the brutal conditions of daily life in the Russian interior. Some memoirs reflected a sense of shock among evacuees: Soviet Russia, which had been portrayed in the Soviet Latvian press as a workers' paradise, was rife with poverty, shortages of food and clothing, poor medical care, and repression against the population. In 2003,

Dr. Aina Muceniece talked about her desperation in Russia at the beginning of the war:

When I got to Russia, all the men at the kolkhoz had already been mobilised. There was just one crippled brigadier who pestered all of the Latvian girls. I didn't speak Russian. I was standing there in my little summer dress, which was partly in rags. I had chiffon stockings with countless holes. He wanted to rape me, he said that I would be shot as a German spy, and I was so desperately homesick. In October I went into a stand of aspen trees, where the leaves were fluttering. I was preparing to hang myself. But then a little voice spoke up in my head: 'Your mamma is waiting for you at home. What are you doing?'⁵⁷

The stories recorded by young women at the school in Tirlyanyi recalled the savagely difficult work they had to do on collective farms, repairing railroad tracks, and chopping trees. Women wrote about being hungry and cold, their inability to find winter clothing, and failing health. The situation of evacuees was dramatic in the Russian interior: Josifs Ročko noted, "The greatest curse of the refugees was hunger. . . . At least 32% of those interviewed [in a study with residents of southeastern Latvia who returned after the war] indicated that at least one family member had died in evacuation from hunger, illness, or the dire conditions of work."⁵⁸ In a retrospective published by the magazine *Soviet Latvian Woman* in 1985, Tirlyanyi student Zenta Zēberga wrote of her early months in evacuation, "[My] hunger [was] like a lost dog, hunting for its master, always chasing me."⁵⁹

Poor hygienic conditions also contributed to the distress of evacuees. Tirlyanyi student D. Klekers wrote of her time in evacuation: "We had such circumstances that we could not even get a kettle in which to boil water. So we [thirty-two Latvians at the collective farm] started to become ill with diarrhoea, until at last dysentery [also] appeared."⁶⁰ Women who were pregnant in evacuation wrote of the loss of infants. Mirdza Freivalds, whose child died shortly after birth in Urzhum, saw the school as a salvation after her loss: "I impatiently awaited news from Kirov about the nursing courses. That was my only goal that I sought to realize."⁶¹

The winter of 1941–1942 was brutally cold. Women who left Soviet Latvia in the summer of 1941 were woefully unprepared for the hardships winter would bring. Many had only the clothing on their backs. Tamara Vilčinskis, a Tirlyanyi student, wrote, "Our group of evacuees had left completely abruptly . . . so most of us had worn out our clothing and shoes very quickly and one could not buy new ones, so when the cold set in, we worked in bare feet until the snow came down. In the winter, of course, the shortage of shoes and clothing meant that we could not work."⁶²

There was little access to clothing in Soviet Russia, even with the assistance of kolkhoz or factory colleagues, and the lack of apparel and shoes foreclosed opportunities to earn money for survival. As Vera Vilčinskis noted, "A big part of the evacuated Latvians did not work because they lacked clothing and shoes. The situation was very difficult."⁶³ Some evacuees headed for the warmer climates of Central Asia,

most often to Tashkent. That city, however, was overflowing with evacuees and there was an acute shortage of work, which meant diminished access to necessities.⁶⁴

Another challenge to evacuees from Latvia was a widespread lack of Russian knowledge. While Latvia's Russians and some Jewish evacuees knew Russian, most Latvians and some of the Jews did not. In interwar Latvia, the dominant second language taught in schools was German and much of the Jewish population used German or Yiddish at home. Without Russian knowledge, many women had difficulties securing work. Riva Meilach wrote that after evacuation with the Red Army to Kirova district, she was "without money, without goods. Already the second day I was offered a position as a bookkeeper . . . but I was afraid to take the position because of my lack of Russian language skills." Meilach took the position, but eventually left the village to attend school at Tirlyanyi "in order devote all my strength to the fight against the occupiers."⁶⁵

Many women who had evacuated with husbands were left behind when the Soviet state mobilized men for military duty, putting them at risk of hardship, hunger, and violence. Others were alone or nearly so: As men from Latvia were mobilized from evacuated communities, women lost even the few acquaintances or friends they had in exile. V. Grīslis, who was one of the last to arrive at the school in Tirlyanyi, wrote,

I lived on a collective farm with 9 Latvians [8 men and 2 women]. . . . Then the voluntary registration for the Latvian division began. All 10 of us in our collective signed on with great excitement un waited impatiently for our order to arrive. At last, on August 21, the day arrived, but only for the men. . . . But then one day we learned that somewhere in the far Urals medic courses to which we could apply had been organized. Our burning desire to get into the Red Army, which had been diminished over the long winter, was awakened again.⁶⁶

In the context of acute hardship, the school at Tirlyanyi offered relief, and many women wrote in their autobiographical statements of the joyous day they learned of the school and found out they had been accepted for training. Vera Vilčinskis noted, "Nine girls left from Dalmatova, all Communist Youth members with a desire to 'get to the front,' to help our homeland free itself from the fascist aggressor. And now in school we are studying and feel fortunate and satisfied."⁶⁷

The situation at the school was difficult, however. Rogulis, the director of the school, wrote in a report that the school lacked water, forcing some girls to eat snow to satisfy their thirst, and had too little food. The conditions of living were primitive and inimical to basic hygiene. Many women suffered illnesses and lice were a chronic problem. In spite of this, Red Army veterans who finished the school remembered it fondly. Many graduates of Tirlyanyi continued on to serve in Latvian formations in the Red Army, some as medics, others in roles that included a company of machine gunners with the 43rd Latvian Guard division.

Seeking to escape the dramatic cold and destitution of life in the Russian interior, the Latvian divisions offered the opportunity to secure clothing and food and to assist

family members who were struggling to survive.⁶⁸ Letters from members of the Latvian divisions to family members, some of whom had evacuated to the Russian interior, show that while there were hardships, trainees in camps like Gorhovets were supplied with warm clothing and were sometimes recipients of care packages sent from across the USSR.⁶⁹

Enormous casualties were sustained by Red Army fighters, as well as those in the rear of battle. For some, however, the Red Army functioned as a vehicle for survival, removing them from the threat of Nazi occupation in Latvia; offering food, clothing, and companionship; and giving them hope and a means to reach home. In November 1944, as the war was ending in Europe, Judite Freidmane wrote to Elza Mūrniece, who was a medic in the 43rd Guard Division, “Now you are already proudly marching down Riga’s wide sidewalks, and I am . . . dreaming of doing that!”⁷⁰

Survival entailed securing basic needs in a chaotic and violent time. At the same time, those who had lost family, friends, homes, and their country were also motivated by revenge to become part of the battle against Nazi Germany. Women were no exception.

Motivation: Revenge

The revenge motive can be divided into two overlapping categories: revenge for the Nazi destruction of families and communities, and revenge for the destruction of the Latvian homeland. Indeed, once the front was reached, the motivations that drove millions of volunteers, conscripts, and officers of the Red Army melded together into a driving front-line motivation of revenge against the Germans. In her autobiography, Zenta Zēbergs wrote, “I forgot myself, I forgot my mother, I forgot my aunt. There was a greater goal—the front. We walked hundreds of kilometers. . . . Though I was not a trained nurse, the feelings of revenge and hatred led me to help our wounded.”⁷¹

The revenge motive that one finds in wartime writings was often framed in the language of Soviet propaganda, both in terms of description of the “fascist aggressor” and the conviction that the Soviet army would exact revenge and triumph over the “brown plague.”⁷² Indeed, the USSR launched a powerful campaign of hate aimed at dehumanizing the enemy in 1942.⁷³ Writer Ilya Ehrenburg suggests in his memoir that it was indispensable in the particular historical situation: Soviet propaganda had to deconstruct the previous image of the Germans as a nation of high culture and an ally, one that had been disseminated in school textbooks and mass media in the 1930s.⁷⁴ Jeffrey Burds describes the process of putting vengeance at the center of Soviet propaganda as an evolution of what writer Mikhail Sholokhov called the “school of hate”: that is, a potent amalgamation of Soviet propaganda and the personal experiences of troops who, by 1944, “were fighting their own personal wars of vengeance against an enemy that had affected them all directly.”⁷⁵

There is ample reason to believe that the sentiment in the women's writings, if not the linguistic formulation, was authentic. This is particularly true where women wrote of their desire to avenge the loss of loved ones. Monika Meikšāne, who began her service as a medic and later became a renowned sniper, wrote in a November 1944 letter to the orphaned child of a friend, "Going into battle, I saw in front of my eyes the train with which you left Latvia, and I went forth filled with rage to avenge your murdered mother and you."⁷⁶ The theme appears in various guises, including a letter sent to a fellow medic, Neonilla Čaplinska, by Sofija Berga, who served with both Latvian Divisions. Berga congratulated Čaplinska on the birth of her son and wished that he "grows up healthy and strong and [able to] avenge the damned Germans for his [murdered] father." Berga lost her own son, who was a partisan behind the lines in German-occupied Latvia.⁷⁷

The desire to avenge the loss of loved ones was particularly salient for Jewish fighters, who had experienced or become aware of mass atrocities against Jews in and outside of Soviet territories. In the preface to a volume on Jewish veterans of the Red Army, Zvi Gitelman posits that

those coming from the pre-1939 Soviet areas were most often motivated to fight by Soviet patriotism and the knowledge that defeat would mean unimaginable catastrophe for the state that had offered them so much. . . . Jews from what had been Eastern Poland and the Baltics were more aware of Nazi atrocities against Jews, and some had witnessed them before fleeing across the Soviet border. They may have been more motivated to fight by revenge and the fight for Jewish survival than by Soviet patriotism.⁷⁸

Indeed, veteran Eva Vater noted in a post-Soviet interview that for her, the war meant to "fight AGAINST." She added, "I was fighting those who murdered Jews."⁷⁹

A powerful theme of revenge permeated the frontline publication of the Latvian Division, *The Latvian Rifleman*. The publication's slogan, emblazoned above the newspaper's name, was "Death to the occupants!" In a 1942 issue dedicated to International Women's Day (8 March), the publication featured photos and poetry, including items devoted to women medics at the front and women factory workers assembling anti-tank grenades. In an article titled "Women-Fighters," a handful of individual women earned accolades, though their names were offered in a larger context of sharp language highlighting the victimization of women:

Cannibalistic fascists wipe out Soviet women and young children, even infants. There are uncountable examples of fascists raping and shooting women, of mothers watching as their children's heads are crushed, [the children] are immersed in boiling water, or they are buried alive.⁸⁰

The dissemination of wrenching images of victimization was a routine part of the newspaper's content. The 27 August 1942, issue, for instance, featured a dramatic drawing of a woman surrounded by dead children. Her arms were spread, her eyes

closed, and her torso bound; in the left corner, fingers clasped a weapon pointed at her head. The picture was accompanied by a poem: “Fighter, do not forgive!/Let your heart cultivate deep hatred!/See and know the suffering of women./Annihilate the fascist killers!” The language echoed in the words of nurse Velta Kūkoja (Orupe), who remembered her first battle with the words, “I threw myself into battle with burning hatred, that was holy hatred that did not permit me to tire.”⁸¹

The revenge motive permeated Soviet propaganda, but its relationship to women—who were more likely to be presented as victims than fighters—was less well defined. The writings and recollections of women volunteers point to their frontline service as a vehicle for revenge, alas, not an ideologically homogenized revenge, but, oftentimes, revenge for lost families, friends, and communities and a desire to return to and restore their homeland.

Conclusion

This work has examined the historical case of a group of little-known historical actors, Latvian and Jewish women volunteers in the Red Army in World War II. The significance of this work, we believe, lies in two key areas. First, we suggest that actors who occupy marginal spaces in dominant narratives of history may offer perspectives on motives and experiences of a historical event that differ—sometimes significantly—from those of better-known actors. In this instance, we argue that the Red Army functioned in tangible ways as an *unlikely refuge* for our group of actors, a position that differs from dominant accounts and perspectives, which highlight Soviet patriotic duty (at least in Soviet-era literature) or compulsory service. The motivations that brought women volunteers into the Latvian Divisions of the Red Army were often nuanced and pragmatic, though their pursuit of revenge against the German occupier overlaps with a common theme in Soviet and Russian accounts of the war. No less importantly, women’s experiences were often brutal—as Eva Vater writes, “It is not possible to comprehend what women went through.”⁸² The chronic lack of hygiene, threat of sexual violence from Soviet troops and deadly violence from the German Army, dramatic cold in winter and heat in summer, were part of a quotidian experience that is not captured in war narratives of patriotism and glory.

Second, our work underscores the point, widely recognized in collective memory literature, that representation in historical narratives is often contingent on who has the power to tell the story of the past. Some voices take precedence over others and the voices of women and ethnic, racial, religious, or other minority communities are among those that have often remained marginal. This work is an effort to recover the voices of non-Russian women volunteers of the Red Army, all of whom suffered and struggled in a long war and some of whom perished in their fight, in order to build a broader and more complex picture of women’s experiences of World War II and the motivations that brought women, in significant numbers, to the fronts of battle.

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Notes

1. Aurora Ūdre, ed., *Vēstules no frontes: Padomju Armijas latviešu vienību karavīru vēstules Lielā Tēvijas kara laikā* (Riga: Zinātne, 1975), 226–27.

2. See Vilis Samsons, ed., *Latvijas PSR mazā enciklopēdija*, 2 sēj (Riga: Zinātne, 1968), 680; Pēteris Bondarevs, ed., *Latvijas Ļeņina Komunistiskās jaunatnes savienības vēstures apcerējumi* (Riga: Avots, 1987), 128–29; Ilze Bernsone, ed., *Latvijas jūrniecības vesture: enciklopēdija. 1950–2000* (Riga: Rīgas vēstures un kuģniecības muzejs, 2003), 255–56.

3. The mass killings at Rumbula, located just outside of Riga, took place on 30 November and 8 December 1941. An estimated twenty-six thousand victims, most of them Latvian Jews who had been in the Riga ghetto since October, were murdered. Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941–1944: The Missing Center* (Washington, DC: The Historical Institute of Latvia/United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996)

4. Ieva Vātere, *Ebreji—mediķi Latvijā (1918–1996): enciklopēdija* (Riga: [S. n.], 1997); Eva Vater, *Evreiskie zhenshchiny i devushki Latvii na frontah bor'by s natsizmom* (Tel Aviv: Tirosh, 1998); Eva Vater, *Evrei Latvii v bor'be s natsizmom: Latvian Jews in Fight Against Nazism* (Tel Aviv: [E. Vater], 2004).

5. Anna Krylova writes, “[during] the war, 520,000 Soviet women had served in the Red Army’s regular troops and another 300,000 in combat and home front antiaircraft formations.” *Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

6. Grigorii Krivosheev, Vladimir Andronikov, Petr Burikov, and Vladimir Gurkin, *Velikaia Otechestvennaia bez grifa sekretnosti. Noveishee spravochnoe izdanie* (Moskva: Veche, 2010), 38.

7. *Ibid.*, 53.

8. National Archives of Latvia (NAL), State Archive of Latvia, 270/1c/113(1945), 56.

9. See, for instance, Arvīds Grigulis, *Caur uguni un ūdeni* (Riga: VAPP, 1945); Vilis Lācis, *Vētra* (Riga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1947–1948); Anna Sakse, *Māra* (Riga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1951); Vilis Lācis, *Uz jauno krastu* (Riga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1952); Hugo Rukšāns, *Mazliet šaipus frontes* (Riga: Avots, 1980); Igors Brižkalns, *No Narofominskas līdz Imulai* (Talsi: Latviešu strēlnieku apvienība, 2009).

10. Alīda Austers, *Karš*. . . NAL, PA-301/1/365/4-14 (1943), 2–3.

11. Susanne Conze and Beate Fiesler, “Soviet Women as Comrades-in-Arms: A Blind Spot in the History of the War,” in *The People’s War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, ed. Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Kazimiera Janina Cottam, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat in World War II* (Manhattan, KS: Military Affairs/Aerospace Historian Publishing, 1983); Krylova, *Women in Combat*, 2010; Reina Pennington, “Offensive Women: Women in Combat in the Red Army,” in *Time to Kill: The Soldier’s Experience of War in the West, 1939–1945*, ed. Paul Addison and Angus Calder (London: Pimlico, 1997); Rodger D. Markwick and Elizabeth Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Front Line in the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Historical literature on women in the Red Army World War II is mainly published in the West; it is still a little-researched theme in Russia. See Natalia Pushkareva and Maria Zolotukhina, “Women’s and Gender Studies of the Russian Past: Two Contemporary Trends,” *Women’s History Review* 27, no. 1 (2018): 71–87.

12. The paths of Latvia’s men into the Red Army varied: Some volunteered for service, others became part of the Red Army when the interwar independent Latvian Army was reorganized into the 24th Territorial Riflemen’s Corps. This unit was disbanded before the war began, but some soldiers stayed in the military when the regime changed and ended up fighting with the Red Army, largely with the Latvian

divisions. The 76th Special Latvian Riflemen Regiment, formed in Estonia in August 1941, also included Workers' Guard Battalions, which were established by the Soviet Latvian occupation regime and included women. Over the course of the war, most male soldiers, regardless of ethnicity, were conscripts.

13. Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, no. 1 (1998): 126.

14. "Women Participants in Armed Violence," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no. 3 (2011): 173.

15. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

16. Primary materials include letters written by women at the front, some of which were published in abridged form during the Soviet period, and some of which are available only in the National Archives of Latvia (NAL). Letters from this period were collected in the early 1980s, as the USSR prepared to mark the fortieth anniversary of victory in World War II, and sought items like letters for publications and commemorations. Materials in the "Historical Commission of the Great Patriotic War" (F PA-301) at the NAL include documents or copies of documents related to Latvian military structures in the Red Army (including orders; field reports; lists of personnel and participants in battles; lists of those who were killed, injured, or lost in battle; information about awards and punishments). There are also characterizations of soldiers written by unit commanders and political officers, along with diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, drawings, photographs, and letters. NAL includes special collections like "Personal Documents of Participants of the Great Patriotic War" (F 185). The archive has several personal collections of women volunteers, such as Leja Novožņeca (F 2307), Ieva Paldiņa (F 909), and Vera Kacena (F 1895).

17. NAL, PA-301/1/122. About Tiryany school, see Aurora Udris, "Latviiskaya shkola medsester v Tirlyanskom (1942 g.)," in *V dni voiny (Iz istorii Latvii perioda Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny 1941–1945 gg.)*, ed. Arvid Drizul (Riga: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Latviskoi SSR, 1964), 253–67.

18. In using Soviet-era materials, we have sought to read them as written, while recognizing the pressures of an authoritarian state on individual expression. Neither published materials nor unpublished materials like letters written from the front were immune from a censor's gaze. Soviet-era memoirs published by women veterans, some of whom offered autobiographical accounts and some of whom cloaked their young selves in autobiographical fiction, present an important, if somewhat problematic, source of information. Roger D. Markwick points out that the post-Stalin era "saw a flood of military memoirs, including some of the first women veterans' memoirs, which quickened under Brezhnev with the onslaught of the 'cult' of the Great Patriotic War." See Markwick's "'A Sacred Duty': Red Army Women Veterans Remembering the Great Fatherland War, 1941–1945," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 54, no. 3 (2008), 404–5.

19. See Vita Zelče and Uldis Neiburgs, eds., *(Two) Sides. Diaries of the Latvian Soldiers in WWII* (Riga: Zelta Grauds); Ilze Jermacāne, "Dezertēšana Sarkanās armijas 201. latviešu strēlnieku divīzijā 1941. gada augustā–1942. gada oktobrī," *Vēsture: Avoti un cilvēki. Daugavpils Universitātes Humanitārās fakultātes XX starptautisko zinātnisko lasījumu materiāli. Vēsture XIV*, ed. Irēna Saleniece (Daugavpils: Saule, 2011), 159–66; Ilze Jermacāne, "Sarkanās armijas 201. latviešu strēlnieku divīzijas apgāde ar pārtiku un apģērbu 1941.–1942. gadā," *Latvijas Vēsture* 3 (2010): 46–55; I. Jermacāne, "Latvijas iedzīvotāji Sarkanajā armijā: 1942. gada oktobris–1945. gada maijs karavīru rakstītajās vēstulēs," *Latvijas Arhīvi* 1 (2007): 95–138; Ilze Jermacāne, "Latvijas iedzīvotāji Sarkanajā armijā: 1941. gada 22. jūnijs–1942. gada 5. oktobris karavīru rakstītajās vēstulēs," *Latvijas Arhīvi* 4 (2006): 78–116.

20. Roger R. Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought: The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 146.

21. Aleksei Bezugol'nyi, "Istochnik dopolnitel'noi moshchi Krasnoi armii . . ." *Natsional'nyi vopros v voennom stroitel'stve v SSSR. 1922–1945* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2016), 95–97.

22. Vasilii Savchenko, *Latyshskie formirovaniia Sovetskoii armii na frontah Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* (Riga: Zinātne, 1975), 10–11.

23. Dov Levin, *Fighting Back: Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941–1945* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985).

24. In the Latvian divisions, the languages commonly used were Latvian, Russian, and Yiddish.

25. Ilze Jermacāne, *Sarkanās armijas 201. (43. gvardes) latviešu strēlnieku divīzija: sociālpolitiskie procesi, 1941. gada augusts–1943. gada aprīlis. Promocijas darbs* (Rīga: University of Latvia, 2014), 7.

26. Daina Eglīte, Vita Zelče, and Kaspars Zellis, “130. latviešu strēlnieku korpusa kolektīvās biogrāfijas mets,” *Vera Kacena: Kājāmgājējs karā*, ed. Vita Zelče and Kaspars Zellis (Rīga: Mansards, 2012), 575–614; Ilze Jermacāne, “Sociāli politiskie procesi Sarkanās armijas 201. latviešu strēlnieku divīzijā (1941. gada augusts–1942. gada oktobris): politiskās un militārās vadības loma un realizētie pasākumi,” *Latvijas Vēsture* 3 (2009): 53–55.

27. Estimates vary. A Russian source quoted by Y. Arad suggests that in December 1941, a third of the total number of members of the 201st Division (about three thousand personnel) were Jews. *In the Shadow of the Red Banner: Soviet Jews in the War Against Nazi Germany* (New York: Gefen, 2010), 7.

28. Arturs Žvinklis, “Latvijas iedzīvotāji Sarkanajā armijā (1940. gada septembris–1944. gada jūnijs),” *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls* 4 (2005): 77–105.

29. Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Picador, 2006), 3.

30. Conze and Fiesler, “Soviet Women as Comrades-in-Arms,” 222.

31. Oleg Budnitskii, “Muzhchiny i zhenshchiny v Krasnoi armii,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 52, nos. 2/3 (2011): 422; Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 230–33.

32. Nikonova “Zhenshchinyi, voina i “figuryi umolchaniia,” 571; Budnitskii, “Muzhchiny i zhenshchiny v Krasnoi armii,” 422.

33. Nikonova, “Zhenshchinyi, voina i “figuryi umolchaniia,” 572. Some writers suggest that films played a role in changing the attitudes of the population toward women veterans. See Budnitskii, “Muzhchiny i zhenshchiny v Krasnoi armii.”

34. Svetlana Aleksievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War* (New York: Random House, 2018), xxiii.

35. Ūdre, *Vēstules no frontes*, 47

36. Viktors Avotiņš, “Visgudrākie tagad tie, kas nav oduši pulveri [Interview with Igors Briežkalns],” *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, May 9 (2009), 2.

37. Ūdre, *Vēstules no frontes*, 48.

38. JānisVeikins, “201. Latviešu strēlnieku divīzijas izveidošana,” in *Reiz cēlās strēlnieks sarkanais. Atmiņu un dokumentu krājums par latviešu tautas bruņoto cīņu pret fašistiskajiem iebrucējiem*, ed. Alfrēds Raškevics (Rīga: Liesma, 1965), 105–6.

39. Austers, *Karš*, 5.

40. Ieva Pliemane, “Dzīvības vārdā,” in *Reiz cēlās strēlnieks sarkanais*, 124.

41. Kacena, 339.

42. Quoted in Ūdre, *Vēstules no frontes*, 209–10.

43. *Vētra*, 244.

44. Velta Spāre. *Tirleānas meitenes*. (Rīga: Liesma, 1968), 119.

45. LNA, 301/1/122.1, 10–11.

46. *Ibid.*, 10–11.

47. *Ibid.*, 36–37.

48. LNA, 301/1/122.1, 15–16.

49. Krivosheev et al., *Velikaia Otechestvennaia bez grifa sekretnosti*, 376.

50. The term “evacuation” [*evakuatsiia* in Russian] is widely used in Soviet-era literature to describe the movement of people out of zones where they faced danger from Nazi occupation and into the relative safety of the Russian interior. The term implies an organized movement facilitated by regional or national authorities. An evacuee is not synonymous with a refugee, who flees threats without assistance from authorities and, in some instances, against the wishes of authorities. In fact, the thousands who left Latvia in the early days of the war were composed of evacuees and refugees, though the latter term was not used officially. Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

51. On the mass killing of Jews in Latvia, see *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941–1944* and Aivars Stranga, “The Holocaust in Occupied Latvia,” in *Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of*

Latvia, vol. 14, *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations, 1940–1991*, ed. Valters Nollendorfs and Erwin Oberländer (Riga: Institute of the History of Latvia, 2005), 161–74. On the extermination of Soviet activists in Latvia in 1941, see Heinrihs Strods, “Pirmā boļševiku okupācijas gada darbinieku un padomju varas atbalstītāju liktenis 1941–1945. gadā,” in *Latvijas vēsturnieku komisijas raksti*, 11. sēj., *Latvija nacistiskās Vācijas okupācijas varā. 1941–1945*, ed. Dzintars Ērglis (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2004), 72–82.

52. Kacena, 236.

53. Josif Ročko estimates that more than 7 percent of the Jewish evacuees from Latgale (Southeast Latvia) were repressed in the USSR during the war. Among their crimes were talking about life in “bourgeois Latvia.” See “Atmiņas par Latgales ebreju bēgļu likteni, 1941–1945” in *Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti*, 23 sēj., *Holokausta pētniecības problēmas Latvijā*, ed. Dzintars Ērglis (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2008), 369.

54. Inese Spura, *Ceļš uz mājām* [Unpublished memories] (Archives of Inese Spura, 1984), 10.

55. Gunita Nagle, “Viņi karoja ar sapni atgriezties Latvijā,” *Diena*, 9 May 2005, 5.

56. Kājāmgājējs karā, 127.

57. Anija Pelūde, “Viņa, kas radījusi zāles pret vēzi” [Interview with Dr. Aina Muceniece], *Ieva* 41 (2003): 11.

58. Ročko, “Atmiņas par Latgales ebreju bēgļu likteni,” 369.

59. “Nepasacītais paldies,” *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete* 2 (February), 1985, 7.

60. NAL, 301/1/122.1, 26–28.

61. *Ibid.*, 79.

62. *Ibid.*, 15.

63. *Ibid.*, 17.

64. Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 164–72.

65. NAL, 301/1/122.1: 38–39.

66. *Ibid.*, 19.

67. *Ibid.*, 18.

68. Jermacāne, “Latvijas iedzīvotāji Sarkanajā armijā: 1941. gada 22. jūnijs–1942. gada 5. oktobris karavīru rakstītajās vēstulēs,” 80.

69. See letters 28 (57), 29 (58), and 43 (75), which were written from Gorhovets, in Ūdre, *Vēstules no frontes*.

70. Quoted in Ūdre, *Vēstules no frontes*, 216–17.

71. NAL, 301/1/122.1, 24–25.

72. Jermacāne, “Latvijas iedzīvotāji Sarkanajā armijā: 1942. gada oktobris–1945. gada maijs karavīru rakstītajās vēstulēs.”

73. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 173–79; Aleksandr Seniavskii and Elena Seniavskaia, “Ideoloģija voiny i psiholoģija naroda,” in *Narod i voina: Očerki istorii Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny 1941–1945 gg.*, ed. Andrei Saharov and Aleksandr Seniavskii (Moscow: Grif i K, 2010), 181–99.

74. Ilya Ehrenburg, *Lyudi, gody, zhizn'. Knigi chetvertaia, piataia* (Moscow: Tekst, 2005), 300–301.

75. “Sexual Violence in Europe in World War II, 1939–1945,” *Politics & Society* 37, no. 1 (2009): 50.

76. Ūdre, *Vēstules no frontes*, 276.

77. *Ibid.*, 317.

78. Gitelman, “Soviet Jews in World War II,” 8. See Gitelman for a discussion of Soviet patriotism as a motive for pre-1939 Soviet Jews and the fight against Nazism as salvation for Jews as a motive for Jewish fighters from the territories, like the Baltics, occupied by the Soviets in the 1939–1940 period.

79. Ineta Meimane, “Ellīgā kundzīte. Intervija ar Evu Ievu Vateri,” *Santa* 11 (2012), 47.

80. “Sievietes-cīnītājas,” *Latvijas Strēlnieks* 19, no. 53 (1942).

81. Alberts Ločmelis, “Jo cilvēks kļūst stiprāks,” in *Cīņā gāja liels un mazs*, ed. Ērika Podkalne (Riga: Liesma, 1982), 84.

82. *Ibid.*, 46.

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