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Jews at War: Diaries from the Front

Oleg Budnitskii

Translated by Dariia Kabanova

The title of this article refers to the relatively unknown bimonthly magazine of *Jews at War*, published for a short time in the beginning of World War I.² The journal narrated the military feats of Jewish soldiers in the Russian Army. Of course, according to state policy, there could be no Jewish officers in the Army at that time. The magazine grew out of the Jewish community's concerns over the fact that the military valor of Jews was underappreciated, or worse, unknown to the general public. A quarter of a century later, during World War II, the number of Jews who served in the Red Army was comparable to the number of Jews who used to serve in the Imperial Russian Army—more than four hundred thousand men. During World War II, there were thousands of officers among them, and nearly three hundred generals and admirals.³ And, again, the Soviet Jewish community was concerned that the military feats of the Jewish soldiers on the fronts of Great Patriotic War remained virtually unknown. Il'ia Ehrenburg addressed this issue at the plenary session of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in March 1943:

In order for the Jewish soldiers and officers to continue performing their duty, it is our responsibility to speak about Jews fighting at the front. Not to brag, of course, but in the interests of our common cause—in order to eradicate Fascism as soon as we can. In order to do this, it is our responsibility to create a book, and, in it, to demonstrate convincingly the role of Jews in the war. Statistics alone would not be enough. We need real stories, we need vivid portraits. We need a collection about Jewish heroes who participate in the Great Patriotic War. We must tell the truth, the whole truth. And this truth will be enough.⁴

Without dwelling on what this “whole truth” meant for Ehrenburg, especially in the context of the war, it is worth noting that the lion’s share of books and articles devoted to Jewish participation in the war deals with heroes and military valor. Thus, these publications are not much different from the rest of the post-war narratives that categorized wartime feats of arms according to the heroes’ ethnicity.

War, however, cannot be reduced to military valor only. War is never only about killing and dying. Card-playing, drinking, singing, jealousy, love, and theft are also part of war. That is, war is life. The enormous literature about the war contains very little description of the everyday life of a “Private Ivan” (or Abram).⁵

Where would we need to look for information about the everyday life of a “Private Abram” (this hypothetical Abram could, of course, be a sergeant or a junior officer) at the front? Where do we turn to learn about his frame of mind, about his feelings? The answer seems to be clear: one must consult the personal sources like diaries, letters, and memoirs. Herein, however, lies the problem. Diaries were banned at the front; letters were censored.⁶ Memories of the war were meticulously unified and leveled after 1945. The vast number of war memoirs (published in the famous “War Memoirs” series) were written by war commanders of various ranks. The texts were, of course, carefully edited and underwent scrupulous approval procedures; moreover, they were written, as a rule, not by the generals and marshals themselves, but by hack writers, who, in the majority of cases, lacked any talent whatsoever.

“War memoirs became something akin to the ‘Mémoires d’Outre-Tombe,’ composed by the Chateaubriand-aspiring generals,” former machine-gun company commander Zinovii Chernilovskii wrote:

while soldiers like Nekrasov or Bykov were focused on the artistic vision of the war.⁷ Where, one might ask, is that company commander who would be brave enough to show the greatest of all wars from the point of view of the participant. To show it in a simple, everyday way, that is, not as a “man with a gun,” but in a much simpler, straightforward way, in the spirit of a famous French saying, *à la guerre comme à la guerre*.⁸

This situation began to change in the years of *perestroika*; in post-Soviet Russia, a true “source revolution” occurred. The number of texts about the war grew exponentially, along with the degree of their sincerity. Dozens, if

not hundreds, of memoirs were published. War history enthusiasts recorded thousands of veterans' stories. It turned out that many soldiers in this Great War kept diaries despite all kinds of bans. They also wrote memoirs about their war experience without much hope of ever publishing them. They wrote for their children and their grandchildren, "to make history." Sometimes, official lies about the war and the complicity of "officially appointed" veterans in these lies stimulated the creation of those memoirs.

Vasyl' Bykov described this phenomenon as follows:

No country in the world has such remarkable veterans as our native and beloved USSR. Not only are they not promoting the truth and justice of the war, but on the contrary—they are most concerned with hiding the truth, most eager to replace it with mythologizing propaganda, in which they appear to be heroes and nothing else. They like this inflated role of theirs, and would not tolerate any attempt to challenge it.⁹

Characteristically, it was in 1996 that Bykov wrote this letter, addressed to N. N. Nikulin, the author of the fabulous *Memoirs of the War* (written in the mid-1970s and published in 2008). For Bykov, the USSR continued to exist as far as social attitudes towards the war were concerned.

Of course, one has to be very careful analyzing memoirs written forty or fifty years after the events took place. The same caution needs to be applied to oral histories and interviews. The problem is not just the weakness of human memory. The very people who write and narrate these stories have changed: they are different people and not who they were during the war. Personal experiences, the social environment, books read and films seen, decades of propaganda—all of this undoubtedly influences the content of written or spoken texts. Sometimes the veterans unconsciously insert certain stories from films they have seen into their own narratives; sometimes they polemicize with what they have read or seen. Without going into too much detail about source study here, I must note that, while it is possible to use these "new memoirs," it is hardly productive to give too much credence to them.

Among the authors of the "new memoirs" there are many Jews. The memoirs of Jewish veterans have been published not just in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Several individual memoirs and collections were published in Vancouver, Tel Aviv, Netanya, Detroit, Palo Alto, and other plac-

es where émigré veterans have settled. Hundreds of interviews with Jewish veterans have been recorded. The specific mission of the Blavatnik Archive Foundation in New York is to interview veterans who live in different countries of the world. At present, more than eight hundred interviews have been recorded. Many narratives by the Jewish veterans can be found on the website “Ia pomniu” (“I remember”), www.iremember.ru.

Yet, diaries remain the most valuable—and the rarest—of the “personal sources” about the war. Jews comprise a surprisingly large percentage of authors of the few diaries available to us now. Statistically, the reasons for this are quite clear. Data suggests that 430,000 to 450,000 Jews served in the Red Army and Navy during the war. Of these, 142,500 died in the war.¹⁰ According to the 1939 census, Jews comprised 1.78% of the USSR’s population. At the same time, they comprised 15.5% of Soviet citizens with post-secondary education (in absolute numbers [171,000], Jews with post-secondary education were second to only Russians [620,209], leaving behind Ukrainians [147,645]). As much as 26.5% of Jews had a secondary education.¹¹ The majority of Jewish soldiers in the Red Army, then, were educated people, more likely to keep a diary.

Diaries, as we remember, were banned on the front lines. The commissar of Chernilovskii’s company, upon seeing a notebook in Chernilovskii’s possession, confiscated and burned it: “Remember, commander, comrade Stalin’s orders: everyone found to keep a diary will be executed ... I do not know whether such order truly existed, but I have not kept a diary since. Just like everyone else,” Chernilovskii wrote more than half a century later.¹²

Yet, historians are lucky because orders were made to be broken in the USSR. While a formal order prohibiting keeping a diary does not seem to have been ever issued (at least, I was not able to identify it), keeping a diary was prohibited in the context of the general rules of secrecy; as it will become evident below, these rules were quite open to interpretation.

In this article, I will attempt to answer the question of who kept war diaries and why. I will also analyze several common themes in the diaries. It is impossible, of course, to give a comprehensive analysis of even a limited number of war diaries within a single article. This is why, along with several plots concerning the authors’ combat experience, I will discuss the Soviet Jews’ perception of Jewishness as it emerges from the war diaries. I will also analyze the attitude towards Jews in the Red Army, in the measure that it is reflected in the diaries of Jewish soldiers.

Private Mark Shumelishskii wrote on separate sheets of paper, sometimes omitting the date. He understood that recording his impressions (and especially his opinions) was dangerous. "Much of what I would like to record and then ponder later using these concrete examples, I cannot record ... I cannot record everything. What has been written down can get into the hands of the enemy, and harm will be done." The problem was not that Shumelishskii was afraid that he would be reported to the authorities. He was afraid that the enemy could use some dissenting passages from the diary to their advantage. Criticism of the war, he thought, was for the future. "It is more like potential criticism."¹³

In contrast, Sergeant (later, Lieutenant) Vladimir Gel'fand openly kept a diary and sometimes read fragments of it to his comrades-in-arms. His immediate superior even advised him to use a lead pencil instead of ink to better preserve the writing.¹⁴ In a separate instance, Gel'fand received instructions from his political instructor:

My political instructor told me how to keep a diary. After he discovered, incidentally, the silly things I wrote in the diary, I now write just like he suggested. He says the diary should be only about what work the company does, about how the battles go, about our skillful commanders, about the political instructors' talks with the soldiers, about the Red Army men's reaction to these talks, etc. This is the way I will write from now on.¹⁵

In two days, an even more surprising entry appears in the diary:

This night, the political instructor slept here by my side. Today, too. I am now at the mortar's firing position and not in the trench anymore. I am much more comfortable now. I am excited! If not for the political instructor, who would have coached me?¹⁶

Gel'fand's seemingly excessive enthusiasm for his writing coach has an explanation. The reason for the sharp contrast in content and tone of the diary is clarified by an entry Gel'fand made two weeks later: "For the first time I can write here openly again, because I got rid of the political instructor who instructed me how to write a diary and what to write in it!"¹⁷ It need hardly be mentioned that Gel'fand returned to writing "silly things" (sometimes even without quotation marks), which are the most valuable part of this voluminous text.

Military interpreter Junior Lieutenant Irina Dunaevskaia was interrogated by the officers of military counterintelligence, SMERSH (an abbreviation of *Smert' Shpionam*, Death to Spies). Having ascertained, however, that her nearly stenographic notes contained no information about military units or about their location, they warned her, in language that left no doubt, about the necessity of keeping military secrets, but did not explicitly prohibit her from keeping a diary.¹⁸

Why did Red Army soldiers keep diaries? Many of the authors were not without literary aspirations, and possibly planned to use the diaries for their potential books: secondary school graduates Vladimir Gel'fand and Boris Komskaa wrote poetry and dreamed of literary careers. "I will not ever cease the study of literature and literary work, this is my life," Gel'fand wrote on June 6, 1942.

Private David Kaufman was a student at the Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature and History (IFLI), training to become a professional author; he even published his first poem in a "thick journal." Later, Kaufman would go on to become a prominent poet. He published under his nom-de-plume, David Samoilov.

Mark Shumelishskii, an engineer, kept asking himself "again and again:"

Why the hell am I always trying to keep this diary? I am obsessed with the idea of collecting enough material and, in time, writing a good, truthful book, which would reflect the true mindsets of certain groups of people on the home front at this important time. The book can be written many years later, of course, when everything can be assessed properly. But now, it is imperative that I write down as many minutiae as I can.¹⁹

Senior Lieutenant Boris Suris notes down the last names of the Germans, from the personnel list of one platoon that ended up in his hands: Nittel, Liebold, Wagner, Winkler, Wolf—so that "[I] wouldn't have to rack [my] brains over Kraut last names when I write my super novel."²⁰ The Odessa native mocks his own literary ambitions, and writes the word "novel" (*roman*) with three *r*'s. Yet, Suris's ambitions were very real: later, the diary features several entries about stylistic peculiarities of J. B. Priestley, Dos Passos, and Hemingway, naturally his greatest favorite (Suris read them in translation). Suris, the future art scholar, did not end up writing a novel, but he did

produce several short stories, published twenty years after his death, in the twenty-first century.

Of course it was not necessary to be a Jew to aspire to be a writer. Similar ambitions are exhibited in the voluminous diary by Sergeant Nikolai Inozemtsev, the future Soviet academician and economist and Leonid Brezhnev's speechwriter.²¹ Writerly ambitions are also apparent in the diary by Private Vassily Tsymbal, a former instructor of literature at Yeisk Pedagogical College, whose pre-war literary exercises failed to gain approval of Maxim Gorky.²²

Irina Dunaevskaia kept her diary since childhood (she destroyed it when she joined the People's Volunteer Corps in July 1941). She was sent back to Leningrad very soon, together with other women who joined the Volunteer Corps. She resumed her diary, which became a diary of the Leningrad Blockade. This diary, too, was destroyed in April 1942 when Dunaevskaia joined the regular army. In the army, however, she could not let go of her habit and continued to write down her impressions of her "works and days," of her emotions and surroundings.²³ She was not entirely devoid of literary ambitions either: "If I am mutilated, and not able to work, I will write a book about myself—about an ordinary girl who grew up in between the two wars and who fought in the Great Patriotic War. I know I can do it." The "girl," however, was far from being "ordinary": Dunaevskaia, a student of philology at Leningrad State University, read Chateaubriand before bedtime, vexed at the necessity of reading the French author in Russian, because "nowhere could [Chateaubriand] be found in French."²⁴

Sergeant Pavel El'kinson, on the other hand, did not plan to write a novel. He began his diary for a very particular reason. On August 28, 1944, El'kinson wrote:

Finally, the long-awaited day came: the Germans are expelled from our land at this sector of the front. Here it is, the river Prut, the border is right there. Only six days since we commenced our advance, and so much has been already done. Bessarabia is now completely cleared. A peace treaty with Romania is signed. Tomorrow, we cross the border. Could I have ever thought that I would have a chance to go abroad? It turns out that I have this chance. I very much want to remember all that I have seen, and to note it down. Because this is a once-in-a-lifetime thing.²⁵

El'kinson, who served as a scout in an artillery unit, had a chance to "travel" quite a lot all over Europe: between August 1944 and May 1945, he went through Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Austria.

While working on this article, I consciously tried to limit the sources I used to diaries. Though not all of the sources conform to the "genre conventions" of a diary, all of them reflect the impressions of those who participated in the war and who wrote down their impressions at the time the events occurred, or several days afterwards. I also include a "diary *ex post*," by Sergeant Viktor Zalgaller, who after the war, went on to become a mathematician. In 1972, when leaving his wartime letters to his mother in the care of his grandson, Zalgaller wrote a commentary to the letters, often inserting the dates and restoring, from memory, the bits and pieces that were either censored by the military officials, or simply not written down because of Zalgaller's "inner censor." This "memoir-commentary," of course, was not meant to be published at that time. The author found a very precise title for his memoir: "The Everyday Life of War."²⁶

How representative are these texts? Can one assess the war experience of hundreds of thousands of Jewish Red Army soldiers from only a small number of diaries? This is, again, an eternal question for a historian. How many sources have to be analyzed in order to be able to ascertain that something is typical, while something else is not? It is clear that these particular texts do not reflect the experience of *all* Jews who served in the Red Army. At the same time, there is no doubt, in my opinion, that these young men and women (who, as the fates decreed, became participants in the Great War and recorded their experiences right away) are sociologically representative of many of their peers. All of them, just like nearly half of the Soviet Jews immediately before the war, lived in large cities (Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Zaporozh'e, Dnepropetrovsk, and Odessa). All of them either graduated from high school, or were students, or had a college degree, which was also quite typical: in 1939, there were 98,216 Jewish post-secondary students in the USSR (11.1% of all such students). In Moscow, 17.1% of all post-secondary students were Jewish; in Leningrad, the number was 19%, in Kharkov—24.6%. 35.6% of all students were Jewish in Kiev, and 45.8% in Odessa.²⁷ While relatively typical, the war and life experience of every author of the diary was, of course, unique and interesting in and of itself.

All of them were hardcore Soviet patriots. The oldest of this cohort joined the People's Volunteer Corps, or joined the Army as volunteers. High

school graduates, who also were eager to get into the battle as soon as they could, were normally drafted according to official schedules.

Viktor Zalgaller, a student of Leningrad University's Department of Mathematics, transferred to Leningrad Institute of Aviation in December 1940, responding to the Komsomol's call. The meaning of the "call" was evident: the war was imminent, and the Air Force needed specialists. However, Zalgaller did not get a chance to join the Air Force. Soon after the war began, he entered an artillery school, and on July 4, 1941, a day after Stalin's radio address to the nation, he joined the Volunteer Corps. He was not alone: four hundred people from the Institute of Aviation joined the Volunteer Corps at that time. The image that stuck in his memory was this: "We march in formation, in civilian clothes. The wives walk along the sidewalk. While marching, I eat fresh, tasty sour cream from a paper cone."²⁸

In hindsight, the short-sightedness of Zalgaller's superiors (in allowing 400 future aviation specialists to go to the front as Privates) can hardly be overestimated, especially if one considers the monstrous casualties sustained in the war by Soviet aviation. Almost half of the losses were the so-called "non-combat casualties."²⁹ Of course, 400 men would have hardly changed the fate of Soviet aviation in any radical way, but there is no doubt they were not the only ones not used effectively. Zalgaller was offered a chance to study at an artillery school, but he considered accepting the offer an act of cowardice. This potential aviation specialist first served in the artillery, then became a signaler.

One of the most representative cases of true Soviet patriotism is the story of Mark Shumelishskii. In 1941, he turned 31. A "self-made man," in 1922, at the age of 12, he began to work, because his mother lost her income and his family was on the brink of starvation. He worked for more than 12 years at the State Bank: first as a messenger, then as a clerk, then as an accountant, and later as a senior accountant. He did not attend school and was largely an autodidact. In 1932, he began to take evening classes at the Moscow Bauman State Technical University, then became a full-time student and received his diploma in Mechanical Engineering in 1938. The same year, he began to work at the "Kompressor" factory in Moscow. During the first year of the war, he was a deputy shop superintendent in the department that produced chassis for the rocket launchers (the ones that would be soon known as the "Katyusha").³⁰

This job was of crucial importance for the military, and thus he was exempt from the draft. Moreover, he had severe myopia. Yet, Shumelishskii

was bursting to go to the front: he was a frequent visitor to his local Military Registration and Enlistment Office, where he insisted that he be drafted. One has to have in mind that this was not during the first days of war, when many naïve “enthusiasts” were afraid to be “late” for the war.

After another unsuccessful attempt to join the army, on October 11, 1941, Shumelishskii wrote: “In general, a person who wants to join the army when he has an opportunity to avoid it, is considered an idiot, even by the Military Registration Office officials.”³¹ In May 1942, Shumelishskii finally got what he wanted and joined the army as a volunteer. For Irina Dunaevskaia, who was quite critical of the Red Army policies, Communist ideals were, nonetheless, as indisputable as they were for Shumelishskii. She submitted her Party application just before the offensive that aimed to break the Leningrad Blockade.³²

Was there a difference between “Abram’s war” and “Ivan’s war”? Not really. Death did not distinguish between a Hellene and an Israelite. That is, of course, if the Israelite did not become a prisoner of war. Life at war was always marked by death, and this death was as diverse as the soldiers themselves. Seldom was this death heroic: often, it was a dull, everyday kind of death; at times, it was stupid. And, death was always disgusting. To the contrary of what contemporary films about the war would have one believe, this death was far from being “aesthetic.” Viktor Zalgaller’s diary entry for July 14, 1941, makes this point clearly:

The front. It smells nasty here. Flies swarm around. In the ground, I can see the nose and the lips of a carelessly buried corpse. The nose and the lips are black. It is hot. Artillery fire. Something flew from afar and is swinging from a tree branch. It is a piece of human intestine.³³

Death could catch up with anyone anywhere: a group of officers from the infantry regiment (where Dunaevskaia served) was directly hit by a shell at their command post. Their mutilated corpses were brought, on a wood sledge, to the regiment’s dressing station (as if they needed dressings):

Somebody took [Major] Begul’s felt boots in no time. [Senior Lieutenant] Vogel had his pants down—I could see his yellow body and sparse hairs on his lower abdomen. Horror! Someone tried to cover his nakedness with a sheepskin coat, but the flap was iced over

and would not lie flat. And the eyes of the dead man, black, unusually large, scary, were watching and not seeing us.³⁴

It has to be noted that diaries were also kept by people not on the front lines, who had no immediate contact with the enemy. Boris Suris and Irina Dunaevskaia were military interpreters; Boris Tartakovskii was a political worker; Boris Komskaa, too, went on to become a political worker. Mark Shumelishskii served as a technician in an artillery unit. Of course, these people also found themselves in unanticipated situations. Suris went on a reconnaissance mission with the scouts, aiming to capture a prisoner for interrogation, only to receive a missile wound. Tartakovskii had to fight at the front lines during the bloody battle of Kuban', when every man capable of holding a weapon was fighting. Dunaevskaia was wounded several times—luckily, never seriously.

All the more valuable, then, are the diary entries which pertain to the battles themselves. Among the diaries available to us, the texts by Boris Komskaa and Pavel El'kinson stand out in this respect. These texts are lapidary, devoid of any stylistic extravagances, and they accurately reflect the atmosphere (I am compelled to say, the fever) of battle. The quotes from Komskaa and El'kinson's concise diary entries feel documentary, authentic.

Boris Komskaa began his war in July 1943. He, together with his classmates from the Orel Infantry School (which at that time was evacuated to Chimkent, in Central Asia), was never given either a chance to take his final examinations, or his officer rank. Instead, they were sent into the heart of the Battle of Kursk.³⁵ At first, Komskaa was assigned to a mortar crew; then, after his mortar was destroyed by a German shell, he ended up in infantry. Komskaa's concise entries, made from July to August 1943, at the height of one of the bloodiest battles in world history, are in essence a chronicle of the demise of his detachment and his regiment as a whole.

July 22:

We took a firing position in a deep hollow. Every unit fired at least a dozen mortar shells. The Germans keep us under artillery fire all the time. Sasha Ogloblin has a head wound. He went to the medical battalion. Yesterday, the commander of regiment headquarters was killed. This day, my mortar fired 45 shells. So far, this is a record. They just brought the body of a junior lieutenant who burned alive when he got surrounded together with 12 wounded soldiers.

July 23:

A difficult day today. The Germans broke away, and it seems like they dug in and pulled the forces together. We covered around 15 kilometers. They are constantly slamming us with artillery and mortar fire. My company lost just three men during the march—one dead.

July 26:

We have an important railway station ahead of us, 12 kilometers from Orel. We must take it. The battalion is thinned out. Not more than two platoons are left. The battalion commander lost both legs and died. The headquarters commander is wounded. In the evening, the sergeants carried thermoses with lunch to the front lines. One of them played a harmonica, another one complained that they soon would have to carry dinner. Both were killed.³⁶

The thinned-out regiment was consolidated to form one battalion. Yet, even this battalion did not last long:

August 3:

A hard day. Sergeant Tyrkalev was blown up by a mine. For two years he fought in this war. He supported my Party application, and yesterday wrote me a reference letter for my medal “For Courage.” Three men are wounded. The battalion commander, Cap[tain] Fornel’, while drunk, led the battalion under crazy fire, without any preparatory bombardment; only memories remained of the battalion, though this battalion was what was left of the whole regiment. Fornel’ himself was killed.

On August 6, Komskii got lucky (as it will turn out)—he was wounded. Later, he wrote about the circumstances of this battle, in the vicinity of some village in the Orel region that was burned to the ground:

People become casualties one by one. Our troops have fallen behind, again. Oshkov crawled to join them, he promised to come back for us: just five people are left. My machine gun is a target for the German ones. They see us, and spray us with bullets when we dare to move. My second gunner, Grinshpun, has a serious leg wound. The “Vanyusha”³⁷ started “talking.” There is nowhere to carry Grinshpun and nobody

to do it. Oshkov is not back. I raised myself a little for a moment and saw our guys follow the hollow on the left, about 700 meters from my position. It was very hard to reach them—the rye field that could give us cover didn't go that far. Still, I ordered the two men who were left to crawl away and drag Grinshpun with them on canvas. I myself wanted to crawl towards our rear, and that's where my turn came: a shell splinter hit me in my right arm; the medic dressed the wound. I was very calm, even my heart did not pound too much, and I waited for all of this to end. I was not really worried about the wound, though I saw the splinter tear out a piece of my flesh together with my shirt. I crawled back through the rye field. He keeps pounding me with machine gun fire, I can't even get up to my knees. Somehow I got to the other side of the hill and was able to stand up. By the evening, I was at the aid station.

Komskii ended up in a hospital. It was there that he learned that all of his comrades-in-arms perished:

August 19:

A hard day. Godik Kravets came to visit me. He was also brought to this hospital. His leg was wounded by a shell splinter on August 9, three days after I was wounded. It was a fatal day for our company. At the whim of the battalion headquarters commander, who is a total idiot, they began to "better" our positions and caught the suppr[essive] fire of the German mortars. Yasha Maliiev, Islamov, Oshkov, Mikhailov and J[unior] Leut[enant] Kushnerev were killed. Only five men are left from the whole company, no one from our platoon. This news devastated me. My main cause of grief is Yasha Maliiev, a dear comrade, a great guy. In the evening, the divisions were led out to rest and regroup. So many men lost in vain, because of the commanders' sluggishness and stupidity.

The Battle of Kursk was, of course, a real meat-grinder. Yet, the Red Army continued to sustain heavy casualties even after this battle. The enemy kept fighting till the very end: some remarkably heavy battles occurred in Hungary. Pavel El'kinson wrote on November 11, 1944:

The battles are very violent. Every day is harder than the last one. The enemy does not surrender an inch of their soil without a fight. Almost

every day we lose the best of our men. On the night of November 4, we were the first to enter the town of Tsegled. Here, our reconnaissance comm[ander] was killed. Such is human fate. Just one minute before, I stood next to him. I just moved away, and the shell exploded next to him.³⁸

Death could have been waiting even when the enemy did not put up much resistance. Three men from El'kinson's unit died upon touching a hot wire that the enemy left along the bank of the Danube on November 23, 1944.

El'kinson's unit moved in the direction of Budapest. "Beautiful place, here. Like a resort. Many gardens, vineyards too. We drink wine and march forward," El'kinson wrote on November 24.

This idyll did not last long, however. Though Sergeant El'kinson, judging by his brief notes, was not disposed towards despondency or reflection, on the next day a distinct note of despair appears, for the first time, in his diary:

Again, the heavy, violent battle is underway. Will it ever end? The damned Krauts don't want to retreat. All day, with no interruption, we are being bombarded. Not really a pleasant thing, this. By the end of the day, we were attacked by tank units. The weather is bad, foggy, so they were able to creep up to us at the distance of 350 meters—only then did we notice. It was hard to make them fall back. Again, one man was killed today, two were wounded. What nerve should one have to watch and experience this every day for three years without a break. I can hear it in my head, against my will: when is your turn?

The characters in our story, unlike Babel's alter-ego Liutov, did master "the simplest skill—the skill of killing a human being." At war, murder may seem not like murder at all, it becomes more akin to a job. Moreover, one has a choice to kill or be killed. And yet, reading the diaries and the memoirs one begins to feel, at times, that the soldiers are ill at ease performing this job. To be more precise, one feels that the soldiers cannot forget that the Germans are people, too, no matter how much both the war experience and propaganda claimed the contrary. One is reminded of Ehrenburg's adage: "We know now: Germans are not human beings."³⁹

Sometimes, the diaries represent Germans as stick figures: "At the hill, two Germans with a mortar brazenly attempt to shoot us. But we shoot them

down with a volley from our carbines” (Zalgaller, September 4, 1941). At other times, soldiers could see faces of those who they wounded or killed: this happened to Boris Komskii during a battle on August 5, 1943:

We charged on. The Germans ran. Our platoon charged forward, ahead of the rest—there were eight people in the platoon. We went through the village. The Germans now retreat through a rye field. We run after them. I went down on one knee, shot my rifle. One Kraut fell down. I’m excited. I run forward. I see two of them falling behind. I order my men to surround them. One raised his hands, surrendering. I ran up to the second one, he turned out to be the man who I had shot. He has a head wound. He shoves a package of bandages into my hands. I didn’t dress the wound. A burly Kraut with an order and a ribbon. I took his automatic rifle and searched him. Somebody shouts at me: “Take his watch—what are you waiting for!” And I’m thinking, really, what am I waiting for, and I take his watch.

Sergeant Komskii will make a good use of this watch, and not to keep track of time, either. Less than ten days after the battle described above, Komskii exchanged the watch for lard, canned meat and bread at hospital where he was a patient. “I feed myself,” he wrote. The exchange points to the fact that the hospital personnel stole food and supplies from the wounded: it is hard to imagine that the senior hospital nurse (who took Komskii’s watch) would have had a personal source of extra food in the middle of a destroyed Orel village.

According to Komskii, the wounded were not fed well, and the mess hall (where one could not sit down to eat) was “a terrible mess.” The wounded had to sleep on the floor in a hut with broken windows; four people shared two mattresses that had to be padded with straw. “My soul burns—is this no way to treat wounded soldiers,” Komskii wrote.⁴⁰ Without going into a detailed discussion of this topic here, it has to be noted that other servicemen’s diaries are also peppered by multiple testimonies of theft and corruption in the army. While soldiers were appalled by theft and corruption, they also perceived it as an inevitable, even historically given, evil. In the words of one of David Kaufman’s comrades-in-arms, the fact that the sergeant stole sugar was, of course, not too pleasant. Yet, “this is the original sin; nothing can be done about it.”⁴¹

Let us return to the servicemen's attitudes towards their enemy, not to the Germans *en masse* but to the individual Germans, including those who had to be killed. Pavel El'kinson wrote down on November 11, 1944: "Bumped off another one today. This one is the fourth. No compassion whatsoever."⁴² Boris Suris, on the other hand, felt compassion for a German who he interrogated in late January 1943, when the battles of Don were underway:

He was a handsome, plump young guy of about twenty. He had fair hair and a pleasant baritone. He was seriously wounded in the chest; he sat stooping and coughed a lot. He told us that he was expelled from the Hitlerjugend organization: he and his friends tore down and burned a banner with a swastika, and they were sent to a concentration camp for three months. I had a lot of compassion for him, but nothing could be done: he was seriously wounded and we had no resources to take care of him. I took him to a gully not far from the quarters... Next morning I went to have a look at him: somebody has already taken his shoes off and cleaned out his pockets. He lay on his back on a little mound of dirt, his head thrown back, and he didn't look like himself. His hair fell back and froze into the snow, and the blood around his head was very bright red. For him, I had a lot of compassion, but nothing could be done.⁴³

Perhaps it was under the strong impression of the shoeless, plundered corpse of a prisoner, who he himself had executed, that Suris ironically "amends Ehrenburg": "Kill the German and clean out his pockets!"⁴⁴

Irina Dunaevskaia, who witnessed her immediate superior, Major Reznik, beating a German prisoner (Dunaevskaia was the interrogator), wrote: "Very disgusting." This particular beating does not seem to be a unique case; soon another entry appears in Dunaevskaia's diary: "Major Reznik's beatings of POWs are disgusting. I have no pity for the prisoners, but this is loathsome."⁴⁵ This was not just an emotional reaction to a beating of a disarmed enemy soldier: the spirit of internationalism, an integral part of the mindset of a Soviet intellectual, proved very enduring. While at the hospital, Dunaevskaia had an argument with the head doctor, Chechelashvili, who despised the "Krauts" "as such." Dunaevskaia tried to convince the doctor that, "their nationality does not matter as much as their notions and actions, imposed on them by their Führer after he did away with the dissidents!"⁴⁶

Zalgaller, who shot the German mortar men in cold blood, heard a radio exchange between two Soviet tank crew members on July 20, 1942.

The terrifying words remain in my memory:

—Two of them are surrendering here.

—We have no time. Run them over.

And then I hear the driver breathing as he is murdering those people.

Zalgaller does not use the word “Germans” here. He writes “people.”

The same Zalgaller, in a suburb of Danzig in 1945, saw a wounded German soldier at the crossroads: “There is no face, he breathes through foaming blood. It looks like there are people in the house nearby, they are just afraid to go outside. I tap on the door with my pistol grip and tell them to help the wounded.”⁴⁷ What was that wounded German to Zalgaller? To Zalgaller who saw the corpses of those who perished from hunger in the blockaded Leningrad; to Zalgaller who saw people frying human meat cutlets in a pan and showing no remorse? Why did Sergeant El’kinson write that he had no compassion for the German he killed? Why would he even mention compassion at all, as if he had to feel it? After all, his family, with the exception of a brother (who was in the army and was seriously wounded during the first days of war) was executed by the Germans in Zaporozh’e. It seems that humanity did not leave those people easily, even when the conditions were inhuman.

Speaking about the Soviet Jews at war, it is impossible to ignore the question of what kind of Jews they were, just as it is impossible to ignore the issue of antisemitism, which flourished in the Soviet Union during the war years. The Soviet Jews—those who grew up during the years of Soviet rule—were Soviet people first and foremost. They might have been “the most Soviet” of all Soviet people. They were able to formulate the differences between themselves and other Jews in precise terms, after they finally met these formerly Western Jews who became Soviet citizens in 1939.

Boris Tartakovskii, struck by the crowds of evacuees in Stalingrad, wrote on October 31, 1941:

Who of this mass of people, filling up the street, crowding near the store entrances, pushing and shoving to get a place in line to the soda fountain—who of them is an actual Stalingrad native? I saw women

wearing once-fashionable coats with wide shoulders, colorful dirty caps or headscarves, brown ski boots. Where have I seen them?

Tartakovskii saw them in the beginning of the same year 1941 in Lvov, where he was on university business, and repeated almost verbatim his previous observation about the evacuee women:

February of this year. Cold, biting wind. The wind throws dry sleet into my face, blows little snow snakes along the streets of this strange city, the likes of which I have never seen. There is a little snow twister next to the Mickiewicz monument. The marble, mediaeval magnitude of Polish Catholic churches. The Gothic, fifteenth century. Narrow, four-story houses, three windows on the façade. Blackened statues of saints, cramped stone courtyards. Suddenly, just around the corner, a huge gray building, with a cupola and statues, reveals itself. The Diet of Galicia—"Lviv derzhavnyi universitet" [Ukrainian: Lvov State University.—translator's note.] And the Biblical-looking Jews, with their sidelocks and gray beards, and those women in fashionable coats with broad shoulders, wearing bright colorful headscarves, brown ski boots... Alienated and exhausted, they now stroll around the market of a huge city on the Volga. Why and how did they end here, so far from home? All the time, one can hear the sharp sounds of Jewish speech. Against one's will, one is reminded of Khurenito⁴⁸ and his opinions about the fate of the Jewish people. Indeed, fate of this unlucky, talented people, fate itself pushes to mysticism, to Zionism. Yet, the future of this people lies in assimilation. Having no land of one's own, it is impossible to attempt to preserve all the national habits, customs and prejudices. It is reactionary and utopian to try.⁴⁹

Mark Shumelishskii, too, met Western Jews in some hamlet on the Volga. He calls them "the Jews from Lvov." It is possible that they were indeed from Lvov, yet it is far more likely that "Lvov" stood for Shumelishskii for something "Western." "The Jews from Lvov" worked as loggers. Several families lived in a barracks-type room:

In the past they likely were petty merchants or owners of small craft shops. They are typical Polish Jews, yet untouched by the Soviet

culture's assimilating influence. They keep together, but do not seem to be living in accord with each other. Everyone looks for the best piece of pie. They deal in second-hand items. It is their main source of income. They work as loggers only because it is the only way to obtain rights and benefits. They have no other option. This entire house, swarming with its lively and loud population, produces a distinctly unpleasant impression. These people have not realized yet that Jews can and even need to be loggers.⁵⁰

Yet, the young Soviet intellectuals failed to find kindred spirit not only in the "Western" Jews, but even in the Soviet Jews of the provincial mindset, in the "old-regime" Jews. Grigorii Pomerants, for example, confessed that he did not take to heart the information about the Nazi extermination of Jews. He was too "Russian" and too much of a big-city dweller for that:

The Russian army's "us" crept up in my first impression of the genocide. We talked of it as of someone else's grief. And this was how I took it in—as someone else's grief. I thought of the dead as of those "shtetl Jews," that is, Jews so unlike me. And I felt compassion for them, but this compassion was an alienated one.

Pomerants hoped that the majority of Jewish intellectuals had a chance to evacuate from big cities. And, he thought, at war, where millions of people perish, it is no use to sort the dead according to their ethnic origin.⁵¹

Yet, whether the Soviet internationalist Jews wanted it or not, in the Soviet Union not just the dead, but the living, too, were sorted according to their ethnic origin. The Jews felt it more acutely than the other peoples of the Soviet Union. The majority of Jewish veterans who reminisced about their combat experience spoke of battlefield camaraderie and believed that antisemitism flourished in the rear, not on the front. Even considering that the veterans tend to idealize the past as they juxtapose this glorious war past to the following years of pervasive state-level antisemitic policies (compared to which the antisemitic incidents at the front may seem insignificant), it is hard to imagine that *all* of the veterans tend to color the truth of war to such an extent. It is clear, on the other hand, that the antisemitic sentiment in the rear does not quite fit with the "brotherhood of the nations" on the front. The rear and the front were not separated from one another by an impenetrable

wall; they were more like communicating vessels. From the rear, came reinforcements and letters; to the rear, went the wounded, who then went back to the front.

Many veterans tell other stories of the front-line inter-ethnic relations; those stories do not resemble at all the conventional narratives of war camaraderie and “the friendship of the peoples of USSR.” In the words of infantry Private Viktor Granovskii, “if anyone in my company knew I was Jewish, I’d get a bullet in my back during the first engagement... I am not exaggerating... I would have been shot in the back.”

Granovskii was lucky: a captain in the Military Registration Office in Gomel, processing his paperwork (at that moment, in 1943, Granovskii was just sixteen), entered his nationality as “Belorussian” instead of “Jew,” and his patronymic as “Mikhailovich,” not “Moiseievich”. Thus, Granovskii became “Vitia, a Belorussian from Gomel”; he spoke Russian with a Belorussian accent, having studied in a school in Belorussia for six years. He wrote:

I was amazed at how vehemently my fellow company men hated Jews. I get it, a good part of the soldiers were criminals, many others had to spend two or three years on the occupied territories, and maybe the German propaganda influenced them, but the rest of them, the “regular Soviet citizens,” where did their hate come from? At the halts, in the dugouts, I heard only, “kikes did this, kikes did that,” “we’re fighting and these Jewish lice fatten themselves in the rear.” It was painful for me to hear that, I was all shaking with indignation on the inside, but I kept silent.⁵²

It is safe to assume that the degree of Jewish servicemen’s assimilation into Soviet Russian culture played a large role in their experience, as did their ranks, positions and the people in their immediate milieu. According to the front diaries, Jewish soldiers’ relationships with their comrades-at-arms differed from those of the Jewish commanders. Lieutenant Vladimir Gel’fand constantly lamented the insults and harassment he sustained as a Jew. He felt completely alone, and sometimes shared his feelings with his comrades, which only exacerbated the situation and sometimes even brought real suffering. On the other hand, Senior Lieutenant Boris Suris, who believes he has a “rotten” disposition, wonders: “I do not understand why I have so many

friends, why everybody treats me well, why complete strangers say hello to me and ask me about how things are.”⁵³ He never mentions any problems in connection with his Jewishness.

Sergeant Pavel El'kinson's diary does not feature the word “Jew” at all. More than sixty years after the war ended, El'kinson told the interviewer that during the war “there were no open manifestations of antisemitism.” In his view:

The people from Central Asia had it worse. Take nutrition, for example. They did not eat pork. It was a tragedy for them. They would go hungry, well, some of them would adjust to the diet in the end, but many would not... I do not know, maybe I was lucky, but I never felt I was treated badly in the army. Maybe it is because I never was in any position to feel it, I was a private all the way.⁵⁴

El'kinson himself had no problems eating pork, just as other Soviet Jews. Lieutenant Boris Itenberg wrote to his wife that, to celebrate the Red Army Day, they were served “red wine and roasted *pork* [italics mine—OB] (which I'm very fond of).” And, a month later: “We are very well fed. Roasted *pork* with potatoes prevails, and I wouldn't want anything else.”⁵⁵ David Kaufman entered a memory of a simple wartime pleasure into his diary: “We are staying the night ... having gorged ourselves on *pork* and milk.”⁵⁶ Kaufman's grandfather and especially his great-grandfather (who was very religious and even abandoned his family in order to go to Palestine before his death) would surely turn over in their graves if they knew how loosely their good-for-nothing progeny interpreted the tradition.

It has to be noted that no matter how soldiers treated the Jews,⁵⁷ their treatment of the people from Central Asia and Caucasus was much worse. Suris, who found himself in a hospital as a result of his wound, noted the persistent hatred and contempt exhibited towards “national minority soldiers, [called derisively] the *'ioldash*.”⁵⁸

Sergeant Boris Komskaa encountered no ethnic conflicts either. His diary features interesting details. One bit is about the peasants' dark, mediaeval antisemitism: “the Germans cannot shut up about the Yido-Bolsheviks, and the women call the Germans ‘the mute Yids,’” he writes in the town of Trubchevsk on October 11, 1943. The peasants' mediaeval consciousness is not a rhetorical figure here: the Russian word for “German” is *nemets*, mean-

ing “the mute one.” The word appears in Rus’ in the Middle Ages upon the first encounter with the Germans, whose speech was incomprehensible to the Russians: thus, they became “mute” for all practical purposes. “Mute Yids” comes from the times of Muscovite Rus’: it seems that some Soviet peasants failed to notice that the times had changed. It is characteristic that the Germans, who inflicted real suffering on the peasants, are conflated here with the Jews, who were never a staple of the Orel backwoods.

Another entry in Komskii’s diary explicitly discusses the attitudes towards Jews in the army. Once, an aged soldier who recognized Komskii as a Jew told him that he conceals his nationality because of the “horrendous antisemitism” reigning supreme in the army. Komskii, who told the soldier that he was wrong to do this, wrote his story down:

His name is Il’ia Cherepakha, he is from Belorussia. It was there that he first encountered the Germans. All of his family, 35 people, were killed. He himself was executed two times, but he stayed alive and had to crawl from under the corpses at night. His wife is a Ukrainian, she married a Vlasovite, she wandered around with this Vlasovite, and then she left for Germany. He was in the partisan detachment: “We drank their blood. I avenged my family in full.” There was a lot of antisemitism among the partisans, too. A Jew who happened to be a commissioned officer still could not occupy a command position. Only when the front came nearer did the situation begin to change. He told me a lot of stories about his life as a partisan and about his life here, in the army, and I regretted that I said he was wrong [to conceal his Jewishness]. What moral right do I have to judge a person who has seen and experienced a thousand times more than I did? I cannot justify a person who abandoned his nationality. But man’s dearest possession is life. It is given to him but once,⁵⁹ and he lost it twice already.⁶⁰

Incidental entries in the soldiers’ diaries convincingly demonstrate that antisemitism was not a thing of the past in the country of internationalists. It was evident from the first days of war at different levels, at first—primarily at the basic level of social organization.

In early September 1941, near Leningrad, Viktor Zalgaller realized that the lieutenant who led the group of soldiers (in an attempt to avoid being surrounded by the Germans) did not know his way. Zalgaller, who

did, attempted to lead the group, and very soon heard one of the soldiers uttering: "Why would we follow a kike?" In the end, the group did follow Zalgaller, and managed to reach the Soviet positions. Another episode concerns Zalgaller's first acquaintance with Nikolai Tikhonov, who "answered my orders to move with 'I'm not going with a kike.' Then he became my best friend and [I even remember him saying to me], 'Viktor, we're not taking this scumbag with us.'"⁶¹

Irina Dunaevskaia, too, had encountered antisemitism. Once, she accidentally overheard a phone conversation of an officer who she refused to date, with another "military girl." The officer was mocking her burr, implying her nationality. No mistake could be made: the officer was using a well-known shibboleth, *kukuruza* (corn). Offended, Dunaevskaia slapped him. Another episode, when Dunaevskaia was already in Germany, was not as harmless: at the central square of the town of Puschendorf, Dunaevskaia wrote, a blind-drunk major, "looking at me with his mad white eyes, started shouting some nasty antisemitic words and raised his hand against me, trying to hit me in the face." Dunaevskaia, who recalls she could not think straight at the moment, pulled out her gun and shot. Luckily for her, the bullet went above the major (Dunaevskaia did not have many chances to shoot during the war), and a captain accompanying her quickly led her away from the scene of the incident.⁶² The authors of the diaries, nevertheless, did not draw any far-reaching conclusions from such unpleasant incidents.

The Soviet government persistently battled antisemitism, especially in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In the war years, fighting antisemitism was out of the question: any such government effort would effectively support the basic thesis of the Nazi propaganda, which stated that the Soviet rule is the rule of Jews. This thesis, however, was taken in approvingly by a significant part of the Soviet population.

The war influenced the Soviet soldiers' and officers' perception of their own Jewishness in very different ways. There is no data to measure the growth or decline in the Jewish identity of Soviet servicemen during the war, of course. Yet, it is evident that for some, Jewish identity was perceived as a peculiarity inherited by birth, which may not have precisely hindered their existence but did not add much to it, either.

In January 1945, in Poland, Viktor Zalgaller's platoon had to sleep in the forest, on the fir twigs, at -13°F. Zalgaller went up to the river, where he discovered several dugouts built by another unit (there was no space for

Zalgaller's platoon) and a makeshift bathhouse. An old Jew was in charge of the bathhouse. Zalgaller recollects,

He asked me, "Yid?"—"Yes." He started mumbling something in Yiddish. And I couldn't understand. "Never mind," he said, "You go to sleep, and I'll sing over you." And then I go to sleep on the damp plank bed ... For the first time in my life, my *odd* [italics mine—OB] national identity helped me.⁶³

Others, while remaining internationalists, may have first felt the sense of belonging to Jewry. Boris Tartakovskii wrote down, on May 10, 1944, his impressions of the last several days. The unit where he served was in Ukraine, liberating it from occupation. In Kamenets-Podolsk, the Old Town became a town of death:

At one time, these districts were populated, for the most part, by Jews. The Germans first turned the Old Town into a real ghetto, and then destroyed all its inhabitants and the district itself. The steps ring hollow in the city squares overgrown by grass, the broken windows watch you silently, scraps of wallpaper can still be seen on the remnants of wrecked walls. Only seldom can one see a man pass by, or a stray dog run through. Silence.⁶⁴

The Jews who were assembled in the Zhmerinka ghetto (included in the Romanian Transnistria), were lucky: the Germans, who replaced the Romanians, did not have time to shoot them. In the morning when Tartakovskii came to Zhmerinka,

the town was full of people who came back to life. For the first time in two-and-a-half years they could walk the streets with their head raised high, freely and independently, without the degrading yellow star on their chests. The pickets with barbed wire are demolished, the horrifying border is no more. It was a moving sight ... And for the first time in my life I regretted that I do not know the Jewish language.⁶⁵

Grigorii Pomerants was "moved" on the way back from Germany, at Majdanek, when he saw "children's shoes piled together": he "felt as if the

dead were [his] own children, and for the first time [he] could relate to the words of Ivan Karamazov about little children who are completely innocent.”⁶⁶ This response is very characteristic for a Russian-Jewish intellectual: the tragedy of the Jewish people allows him to “fully” comprehend an idea of a Russian writer, an idea that is one of the most humanistic in Russian literature, even though it belongs to a character in Dostoevsky’s most anti-semitic novel.

On the other hand, the tragedy of the Jewish people and their personal war experience did not seem to affect the identity and the course of life of these diarists in any great measure. All of them survived the war and had relatively successful careers. Boris Komskaa became a war reporter; when he retired, he moved to Lvov. Until recently, he was an editor of a local Jewish newspaper. He still laments the “misfortune”—the fall of the Soviet Union. Pavel El’kinson became an engineer, and was a shop superintendent at a large factory in his native Zaporozh’e. He lived in Israel for several years, raising his granddaughter together with his wife. He then came back to Zaporozh’e—the climate of Israel proved too harsh for an aging man. The granddaughter, of course, stayed in Israel. Viktor Zalgaller became a scientist and obtained a doctorate in Physics and Mathematics. In 1990s, his “odd” national identity allowed him to immigrate to Israel. Irina Dunaevskaia received her degree in Hittitology and worked at the Leningrad branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences Institute of Eastern Studies. She lives in St. Petersburg. Boris Suris graduated from the Academy of Arts in Leningrad and became an art scholar. Unfortunately, his war diary was not published until nearly twenty years after his death. Boris Tartakovskii worked at the holy of holies—the Institute of Marxism and Leninism, a department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. His war diaries, too, were published posthumously.

A direct opposite was the course of life of Grigorii Pomerants, who spent three years in the labor camp in the later years of Stalin’s rule and went on to become a famous scholar of culture and a dissident. Vladimir Gel’fand’s career was not exceptional—he taught history and political science at a vocational school in Dnepropetrovsk. He died in 1983, and his voluminous diary was published by his heirs who moved to Germany. It is noteworthy that Gel’fand’s diary was never published in Russian as a book.

All in all, even after the war, these diarists remained Soviet Jews (with the exception of the “antisoviet” Pomerants). More *Soviets* than Jews, that is.

Notes

- 1 The study was implemented in the framework of the Basic Research Program of the National Research University Higher School of Economics in 2012. This article was written, in part, during the time of the Ina Levine Invitational Fellowship at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in academic year 2009-2010. The author wishes to thank the staff of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies for their invaluable help.
- 2 *Evreii na voine: Dvukhnedel'nyi illustrirovannyi zhurnal* (Moscow, 1915).
- 3 A. L. Abramovich, *V reshaiushchei voine: Uchastie i rol' evreev SSSR v voine protiv natsizma* (St. Petersburg: DEAN, 1999); F. D. Sverdlov, *V stroiu otvazhnykh: ocherki o evreiaikh—geroiakh Sovetskogo Soiuzu* (Moscow: Kniga i biznes, 1992); F. D. Sverdlov, *Evreii—general'no vooruzhennykh sil SSSR* (Moscow, 1993); F. D. Sverdlov, *Voiny-evreii na frontakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi* (Moscow: Kholokost, 1999); F. D. Sverdlov, *Entsiklopediia evreiskogo geroizma* (Moscow: Dograf, 2002).
- 4 *Eynikayt* (1943), March 15. Cited from F. D. Sverdlov, *Entsiklopediia evreiskogo geroizma*, 10. For more on Ehrenburg, see Chapter 2 of the present volume.
- 5 For more on this topic, see Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (NY: Picador/Metropolitan Book, 2006).
- 6 For a discussion of available letters and diaries, see Chapter 1 of the present volume.
- 7 Viktor Nekrasov (1911-87) and Vasil' Bykov (1924-2003) became known as writers of realistic, "trench truth" prose about the war.
- 8 Z. M. Chernilovskii, *Zapiski komandira roty* (Moscow: Prospekt, 2002), 83.
- 9 "Vasyl' Bykov – N. N. Nikulinu, 25 March 1996," in N. N. Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Gos. Ermitazha, 2008), 236.
- 10 G. F. Krivosheiev, ed., *Rossiia i SSSR v voynakh XX veka. Poteri vooruzhennykh sil* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001), table 121. Also see Sverdlov, *Entsiklopediia evreiskogo geroizma*, 11-12. The total loss of the Jewish population (including those who resided in the territories annexed by the USSR in 1939-1940) was 2733 thousand people, or 55% of the total Jewish population of the Soviet Union in June 1941. This is more than 10% of all human losses in the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War. See M. Kupovetskii, "Liudskie poteri evreiskogo naseleniia v poslevoennykh granitsakh SSSR v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny," in *Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve* 2.9 (1995): 152, Table 9.
- 11 M. Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve on the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile* (Jerusalem: The Centre for Research of East European Jewry, 1998), 125; Yuri Slezkine, *Era Merkurii: Evrei v sovremennom mire* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie 2005), 288.
- 12 Chernilovskii, *Zapiski komandira roty*, 16.
- 13 M. G. Shumelishkii, *Dnevnik soldata* (Moskva: Kolos, 2000), 37.
- 14 V. N. Gel'fand, *Dnevniki 1941-1946*, entry on June 28, 1942. Online version at http://militera.lib.ru/db/gelfand_vn/05.html (accessed October 30, 2013).
- 15 Gel'fand, entry on September 10, 1942.
- 16 Gel'fand, entry on September 12, 1942.

- 17 Gel'fand, entry on September 27, 1942.
- 18 Irina Dunaevskaia/Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga: Dnevnik voennoi perevodchitsy (1942-1945)* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2010), 8.
- 19 Shumelishskii, *Dnevnik soldata*, 19. Entry in March 1942.
- 20 Boris Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2010), 85.
- 21 N. Inozemtsev, *Tsena pobedy v toi samoi voine: Frontovoi dnevnik* (Moscow: Nauka, 1995); *Frontovoi Dnevnik* (2nd edition) (Moscow: Nauka, 2005).
- 22 V. Tsymbal's detailed diary consists of twelve notebooks in his small handwriting and covers the years 1942-45. The diary is used courtesy of V. Tsymbal's son, Yevgenii, a film director.
- 23 Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, 5-7.
- 24 Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, 123, entry on January 1, 1943; *ibid.*, 76, entry on October 30, 1942.
- 25 P. El'kinson. *Diary* (Blavatnik Archive, New York). I would like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to the Blavatnik Archive and its Head, Iuliia Chervinskaia, for letting me use the scans of Pavel El'kinson and Boris Komskaa's diaries. Both diaries will be published in full in Volume 6 of the *Archive of Jewish History*.
- 26 V. Zalgaller. "Byt voiny," in *Vestnik* (Baltimore) 11.270 (2001): May 22. Online version at <http://www.vestnik.com/issues/2001/0522/win/zalgaller.htm> (accessed October 30, 2013).
- 27 M. Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve on the Holocaust*, 34-35, 120, 308.
- 28 Zalgaller, "Byt voiny."
- 29 More than 43 thousand planes were lost in the war as a direct result of combat operations; 45 thousand more were lost as a result of accidents (*Rossia i SSSR v voynakh XX veka*, 479-80 [Table 186], and 482-83 [Table 187, 188]).
- 30 Shumelishskii, *Dnevnik soldata*, 5.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 32 Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, 129, entry on January 8, 1943.
- 33 Zalgaller, "Byt voiny."
- 34 Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, 166, entry on February 22, 1943.
- 35 Interview given by Boris Komskaa to Leonid Reines, Lvov, June 27, 2009. The text of the interview courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive.
- 36 Here and later, Boris Komskaa's diary is cited from a scan courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive.
- 37 "Vanyusha" is a colloquial name given by the Red Army soldiers to the German rocker mortar *Nebelwerfer*.
- 38 Here and later Pavel El'kinson's diary is cited from a scan courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive.
- 39 Il'a Erenburg, "Ubei," in *Krasnaia zvezda*, July 24, 1942.
- 40 Komskaa, entries on August 9 and 10, 1943.
- 41 David Samoilov, *Podennye zapisi* (Moscow: Vremya, 2002), Vol. 1, 164. Entry on June 16, 1943.

- 42 El'kinson.
- 43 Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, 80, entry on January 22, 1943.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, 281-82, 283. Entries on January 14 и 15-23, 1944.
- 46 Ibid., 193, entry on April 20, 1943.
- 47 Zalgaller, "Byt voiny."
- 48 The reference is to a character in Il'ia Ehrenburg's 1922 novel, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurenito and his Disciples*.
- 49 B. G. Tartakovskii, *Iz dnevnikov voennykh let* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2005), 32-33.
- 50 Shumelishskii, *Dnevnik soldata*, 37.
- 51 G. Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2003), 86.
- 52 <http://www.iremember.ru/content/view/735/2/lang,ru/> (May 16, 2010).
- 53 Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, 136.
- 54 Interview given to Leonid Reines, Zaporozh'e, June 13, 2009.
- 55 B. S. Itenberg, letters to his wife from February 26 and March 16, 1945 (B. S. Itenberg's personal archive).
- 56 David Samoilov, *Podennye zapisi*, Vol. 1, 208 (February 4, 1945).
- 57 On Soviet Jewish intellectuals' national identity, as well as on Red Army's attitudes towards Jews, see: Oleg Budnitskii, "The Intelligentsia Meets the Enemy: Educated Soviet Officers in Defeated Germany, 1945," *Kritika* 10.3 (Summer 2009): 647-56.
- 58 Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, 128. Entry on June 16, 1943. For more on the non-Russians in the Red Army, see: Leo J. Daugherty III, "The Reluctant Warriors: The Non-Russian Nationalities in Service of the Red Army During the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 6.3 (September 1993): 426-45.
- 59 Translator's note: Komskii quotes from Nikolai Ostrovskii's 1932 novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered*, a Soviet classic.
- 60 Komskii, entries on January 7, 1945, Novo-Malinowo, Poland.
- 61 Zalgaller, "Byt voiny."
- 62 Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, 328, 370-371. Entries on July 29, 1944, and February 1, 1945.
- 63 Zalgaller, "Byt voiny."
- 64 Tartakovskii, *Iz dnevnikov voennykh let*, 176.
- 65 Ibid., 171.
- 66 Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 158.