

Edited and collected by
Vakhtang Kipiani

World War II, Uncontrived and Unredacted Testimonies from Ukraine

Translated from Ukrainian by
Zenja Tompkins and Daisy Gibbons

Vakhtang Kipiani (ed.)

World War II, Uncontrived and Unredacted

Testimonies from Ukraine

Translated by Zenia Tompkins and Daisy Gibbons

UKRAINIAN VOICES

Collected by Andreas Umland

- 18 *Mykola Davydiuk*
Wie funktioniert Putins Propaganda?
Anmerkungen zum Informationskrieg des Kremls
Aus dem Ukrainischen übersetzt von Christian Weise
ISBN 978-3-8382-1628-7
- 19 *Olesya Yaremchuk*
Unsere Anderen
Geschichten ukrainischer Vielfalt
Aus dem Ukrainischen übersetzt von Christian Weise
ISBN 978-3-8382-1635-5
- 20 *Oleksandr Mykhed*
„Dein Blut wird die Kohle tränken!“
Über die Ost-Ukraine
Aus dem Ukrainischen übersetzt von Simon Muschick
und Dario Planert
ISBN 978-3-8382-1648-5
- 21 *Vakhtang Kipiani (Hg.)*
Der Zweite Weltkrieg in der Ukraine
Geschichte und Lebensgeschichten
Aus dem Ukrainischen übersetzt von Margarita Grinko
ISBN 978-3-8382-1622-5

The book series “Ukrainian Voices” publishes English- and German-language monographs, edited volumes, document collections, and anthologies of articles authored and composed by Ukrainian politicians, intellectuals, activists, officials, researchers, and diplomats. The series’ aim is to introduce Western and other audiences to Ukrainian explorations, deliberations and interpretations of historic and current, domestic, and international affairs. The purpose of these books is to make non-Ukrainian readers familiar with how some prominent Ukrainians approach, view and assess their country’s development and position in the world. The series was founded and the volumes are collected by Andreas Umland, Dr. phil. (FU Berlin), Ph. D. (Cambridge), Associate Professor of Politics at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and Senior Expert at the Ukrainian Institute for the Future in Kyiv.

Vakhtang Kipiani (ed.)

**WORLD WAR II, UNCONTRIVED
AND UNREDACTED**

Testimonies from Ukraine

Translated by Zenia Tompkins and Daisy Gibbons

ibidem
Verlag

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

**УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ
ІНСТИТУТ
//ІІІКНИГИ**

Dieses Buch wurde mit Unterstützung des Translate Ukraine Translation Program veröffentlicht.

This book has been published with the support of the Translate Ukraine Translation Program.

© Vivat Publishing Ltd, 2018

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-7621-2

© *ibidem* Press, Stuttgart 2021

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und elektronische Speicherformen sowie die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

Contents

<i>Vakhtang Kipiani</i> The Truth About War	9
<i>Romko Malko</i> My Family's War Began in 1939	12
<i>Oleh Kotsarev</i> How My Great-Grandfather Helped Establish the Third Reich in Kharkiv	19
<i>Pavlo Solodko</i> Over the Course of Their Wartime Separation, My Grandma and Grandpa Wrote Two Hundred and Fifty Letters to One Another	24
<i>Dmytro Krapyvenko</i> "The Infantry Had Deserted Us, but We Had Already Taken Our Positions, So We Weren't about to Retreat."	37
<i>Taras Shamaida</i> A German Tried Persuading My Grandfather to Marry His Daughter—So That the Red Army Wouldn't Touch Her.	41
<i>Serhii Taran</i> "One Grandfather Went to Fight in Bessarabia in 1940, While the Other Joined Stepan Bandera's Insurgent Army."	47
<i>Taras Antypovych</i> A Life Bought with Milk and Cheese	54
<i>Oleh Pokalchuk</i> "The Officer Showed My Mother How Germany Planned to Expand Its <i>Lebensraum</i> ."	58
<i>Iryna Slavinska</i> They Used Girls to Help "Get the German Tongues" or Obtain Information.	65
<i>Elina Slobodianiuik</i> A Wartime Fairytale: "Cinderella? That's My Grandma."	73
<i>Sevhil Musaieva</i> My Crimea: "They Can't Really Want to Take Our Homeland Again, Can They?"	76

<i>Ihor Shchupak</i> Why a Nazi Officer's Daughter Would Visit Ukraine to Investigate Her Father's past Crimes	81
<i>Oleksandr Zinchenko</i> Petro Movchan, a Man Who Won Us the War	86
<i>Sviatoslav Lypovetskyi</i> "The Most Terrifying Moment Was When They Bombed Their Own Artillery"	91
<i>Valentyn Stetsiuk</i> War, Occupation, and Evacuation	95
<i>Eleonora Koval</i> A Potato on a Tree: Happy New Year 1942!	111
<i>Yurii Kolomyiets</i> War Has Broken Out! Alas, War Has Broken Out!	114
<i>Anastasia Lebid</i> When Bolshevik Rule Was First Installed, It Was Initially Quite Benign	124
<i>Nataliia Popovych (Natalka Talanchuk-Hrebinska)</i> "Oh Mama, Life Is So Hard without You ..."	134
<i>Oles Kulchynskyi</i> As She Watched the News Years Later, My Grandma Used to Say, "I'm Stupid for Not Having Grabbed a Revolver after the War!"	143
<i>Stepan Semeniuk</i> Seventy-Nine Days in a Death Cell	147
<i>Yevhen Klimakin</i> "My Grandfather Was in the SS." "And Mine Was Killed in Auschwitz."	157
<i>Volodymyr Parkhomenko</i> Surviving Fire and Water: My Father, Who Escaped Bombing and Drowning in the Dnipro	170
<i>Boris Artemov</i> The Two Lives and One Victory of Yukhym Eisenberg	178
<i>Danuta Kostura</i> "My Father Carried His Rifle in the Red Army the Way He Had Learned to in the Galician Division of the German Armed Forces."	186

<i>Maria Matios</i> Peace, War, and People	195
<i>Dmytro Stembkovskiy</i> “My Grandpa Was in the Underground Resistance in Kyiv and Blew up a Dnipro River Bridge.”	203
<i>Ihor Lubkivskiy</i> My Grandfather Fought in Both the First and Second World Wars	210
<i>Iryna Yatsyshyn</i> “Many Families Were Deported to Siberia. Some People Were Punished by Their Own Families for Their Alleged Cooperation with the NKVD.”	219
<i>Volodymyr Ushenko</i> Three Stories about My Family: An Officer, a Partisan, and a Murdered Teacher	229
<i>Liudmyla Taran</i> Vasyl Taran: “How I Made It through the War”	232
<i>Eduard Zub</i> The German Attack Wasn’t Unexpected: “We All Knew That There Would Be a War. How Did Stalin Not Know?”	244
<i>Vladyslav Faraponov</i> My Family’s War: Their Unheard Memories and Their Heroic Deeds Have Now Been Uncovered.	249
<i>Bohdan Ivchenko</i> The History of Victory Day in the Soviet Union (1947 – 1965)	253
Contributing Authors	261

The Truth About War

When I was a child of about seven, I would find myself feeling rather awkward on May 9 and June 22. Over thirty years had passed since the end of “the most terrible war in human history,” as we were taught at the time. All of my classmates had grandmothers and grandfathers that had fought on the front. Some of these veterans were still coming to school for the ceremonial assemblies in honor of the war, while others were already long dead and buried. But they had once existed, these heroes of the Great Patriotic War; yet my grandmothers and grandfathers had not fought. Three of them were too young to be sent to the front, and one of my grandfathers was exempted from service as an energy specialist and head of a strategic state facility. I was very jealous that everyone had someone in their family who had fought, whereas I did not.

Only many years later did I come to appreciate what a blessing it is when an all-encompassing catastrophe bypasses your family; when your loved ones are all still alive and your grandparents can share with you their own version of what transpired and what they witnessed and lived through. This very human truth about the war that was void of lofty epithets often didn’t match up with what they said on TV, what was being shown in movies, and the stories we were spun at school as the only possible version of events.

Naturally, there were films and books that contradicted the fabrications of the Soviet General Staff’s propagandists and their “parrots” among the Soviet General Staff—but these ideas were merely a drop in the ocean. It felt as if most people born in the USSR only knew what the party allowed them to know and remember. Fortunately, this was indeed not the case. At home, parents and elders would share stories with their children that didn’t make it into the official canon—often accompanied by the proviso, “But don’t tell anyone outside of this house or at school!” Later, these uncontrived and unredacted stories would act as the yeast that gave rise to freedom of thought, speech, and action.

Obviously, in order to fully comprehend World War II, one must read a multitude of academic monographs, as well as the memoirs of Winston Churchill, Erich von Manstein, Gregory Zhukov, and so on. But not everyone has time for that. Sometimes a brief paragraph will suffice to entice someone into reflection and research. A photo story by the renowned journalist and photographer Yuri Rost, which appeared in the pages of the then very popular Russian *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (“Literary Newspaper”), once made an incredible impression on me. In the Cherkasy region of

Ukraine, he had met a certain Lysenko family: the mother Yevdokiia and her ten sons Andrii, Pavlo, Mykhailo, Todos, Mykola, Petro, Oleksandr, Ivan, Stepan, and Vasyl. When the war began, all ten—Andrii, Pavlo, Mykhailo, Todos, Mykola, Petro, Oleksandr, Ivan, Stepan, and Vasyl—went off to fight. And when the war ended, all ten—Andrii, Pavlo, Mykhailo, Todos, Mykola, Petro, Oleksandr, Ivan, Stepan, and Vasyl—returned home, to the house they had grown up in, where their mother was waiting for them. Some time after the war, a memorial to the mother was constructed in the village of Brovakhly in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiyi District. Ten poplars were also planted there in honor of her ten sons, and five willows in honor of the daughters she raised (this woman gave birth to seventeen children in total). Unfortunately, I haven't had the opportunity to travel to those places and bow my head before this symbolic memorial to all the mothers who bore children for love and happiness and, as it turned out, for war as well. We are not the ones to choose the times we live in.

The Ukrainian edition of this book went to print in April 2018. Yet back in the spring of 2010, an announcement appeared on the pages of several popular websites and newspapers about the start of the project "1939 – 1949: Unwritten Stories: Share Your Family's Story of World War II." It was a short and very simple text:

World War II left its mark on every Ukrainian family. As a general rule, those who participated in these events, regardless of which side they fought on, do not want to share the details till this day. Only on occasion would they entrust their truth of the war to their closest relatives.

On the eve of the national celebration of Victory Day, we encourage Ukrainian journalists to publish their family stories and lore about what their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents lived through during the war.

We also encourage our readers to participate in this project.

The idea resulted in over one hundred publications. The voices of both the living and of those who are now long gone were heard. Eyewitnesses to the war's events—soldiers of the various armies (the Red Army, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the German Army's "Galician Division"); residents of the territories occupied by the Nazis, their allies, and the Bolsheviks; *Ostarbeiters*; children; women—all spoke up. And, very importantly, people's children and grandchildren finally found the time to sit down and listen to their loved ones, and to write down the testimonies of a time that seemed so far away, yet one that is somehow still close at hand. Because Ukrainians argue till this day about whether it should be called World War II or the Great Patriotic War; Ukrainians are still divided, as a quarter of Ukraine's citizens still consider Stalin to have been an effective leader and inspirer of "the victory of the peo-

ple.” At the same time, many people recall the other dimensions of this tragedy – from the heroism of some to the baseness of others. Yet others continue to remain silent about what they saw – about the death and the fear and the tears. Such things are not forgotten, even if they are not spoken of out loud.

The stories published in this collection are just a portion of the texts published on the popular-history websites *Ukrainska Pravda* (“Ukrainian Truth”), *Teksty* (“Texts”), and *Istorychna Pravda* (“Historical Truth”). In reality, there are many more such texts that can, if the opportunity presents itself, be published in a second and third volume. If you haven’t yet shared your loved ones’ stories of World War II in Ukraine, you can always do so by emailing istpravda@gmail.com.

Vakhtang Kipiani
Editor-in-Chief, *Istorychna Pravda*
www.istpravda.com.ua

My Family's War Began in 1939

The war encountered my Grandma Vira's family in Ternopil, in their new house. And this didn't happen in June 1941, but in September 1939. One night there was a banging on the door. "Open up! You've got half an hour to get ready. Take only what you need," someone yelled in Russian.

World War II arrived in Ukraine not in June 1941, but in September 1939. Western Ukrainians, at the very least, whose lands were a part of Poland at the time, would remember this date very distinctly. The Polish army was ineffectual and demoralized, so there was no point in fighting two million-strong armies, the German and the Soviet ones. "The Polish army rides around on bicycles," Ukrainians used to joke, and that was an almost wholly accurate depiction of the real situation.

The Germans were the first to start pressing down on Poland, and due to the fact that there was no particular opposition, they managed to advance pretty far—farther than had been previously agreed to with the Soviets in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. However, the "valiant" Red Army appeared rather quickly, and the Germans were forced to retreat.

The claims that either the Germans or Bolsheviks were met with particular joy by some are untrue. Their respective appearances were generally received as that of an ordinary change of occupier, no more. It's possible that some Ukrainians greeted some with the traditional welcome of bread and salt, but these were sooner exceptions than the rule. Uncertainty and alarm reigned in society. People knew perfectly well who the Bolsheviks were; they remembered the recent Holodomor in Central and Eastern Ukraine and the thousands of swollen Ukrainians from beyond the Zbruch River, who were lucky enough to make it to Halychyna (Galicia) for a hunk of bread. They had no delusions. The attitude toward the Germans was somewhat better. After all, European Germany and the tattered Bolsheviks weren't quite on the same level. Nonetheless, an overall bad premonition of impending grave events hung in the air, and people simply focused on surviving. Very quickly that which had been foreboded would surpass all fears and expectations ...

My Grandma Vira's family was living in Ternopil. The war encountered them in their new house, which her parents had just built after many years of moving from one village in Halychyna to another. Prior to that my great-grandfather—a man who knew seven languages fluently—had been a teacher, but he had been unable to find a job in Ternopil because he didn't want to switch to using Polish and become a Pole.

At the time my grandma was in the lower gymnasium, and her brother Rodio (Rodion) was close to graduating. But when the Bolsheviks arrived, the gymnasium was immediately turned into an ordinary ten-year school, and the former gymnasium students were given the opportunity to study there for an additional year—probably to firmly master the new lessons of Soviet life.

At first the Soviets' arrival didn't bring any particular changes, and people even began to think that their apprehension had been in vain. There were, of course, certain misunderstandings and occasionally even bizarre behavior on the part of the foreign Soviet occupiers, but people didn't attach any particular significance to any of this. They didn't marvel at the ragged-looking Soviet soldiers, who, against the backdrop of German and Polish ones, looked like beggars: the officers' wives would attend the theater in the nightgowns of Polish ladies that they had found in their abandoned estates, they would use chamber pots as vases for flowers ... There were all kinds of strange things going on, but none of it was life-threatening. Yet the reality of life changed very rapidly. The nuts and bolts were slowly being tightened. Rumors were already spreading about people disappearing and being deported to Siberia.

Sometime in the spring of 1941, after the annual school celebration of Taras Shevchenko's birthday, weird things started occurring with the students. One student was summoned to the director's office and didn't return; another was shoved into a black car out in the street and disappeared; yet another simply vanished without a trace. A boy with the last name of Hrynkiv, whose family lodged at my great-grandfather's farmstead, went similarly missing. Agitated parents searched for their children, but no one at either the prison or the police station could offer any advice. Little by little, fear crept under people's skins.

One morning Rodio refused to go to school. "Something's wrong. I don't feel all that well." His mother—that is, my great-grandmother—was empathetic toward her son and let him stay at home. Then at lunchtime a flustered classmate came running over and shared the news that Rodio and some other boys had been called to the director's office. Those of the summoned boys that had been in school never returned to class from the director's

office. They were put in a black car and driven off to who knows where. Understandably, after that news no one was about to send anyone else off to school anymore. Rodio stayed at home for a little while longer and then one evening went to our relatives' house in a neighboring town, to hide. I don't know for a fact whether Great-Grandma Maria suspected that she was seeing her son for the last time that night, but she probably did suspect it.

A few weeks passed, then one night, on May 21, there was a banging on the door: "Open up! You've got half an hour to get ready. Take only what you need." Great-Grandpa Prokip, the one that spoke seven languages—a refined intellectual very well versed in law and legal matters, who addressed every last one of his students with the formal You—on principle couldn't believe that something like that could be happening to him. As if nailed to the ground, he stood with two brushes in his hands and kept repeating, "But this can't be ... We're not guilty of anything ..." If not for my great-grandma, who, having soberly assessed the situation, set

about quickly packing up, they would've ended up heading to Siberia in the clothes they had slept in, with two fabric brushes as an added bonus.

Grandma Vira was supposed to have stayed behind. She had been sleeping in the attic alongside the family's student lodger, and no one was even looking for her. Great-Grandma, as she packed, consciously spoke loudly so that Vira would hear what was going on in the house—that they were being deported—and would stay quiet. She didn't even take Vira's things, expecting that Vira would stay behind. But my grandma couldn't stay put. At the last moment, as the car was already pulling out, she leapt down from her hid-



The Tkachuk family. Parents Prokip and Mariia (née Korduba), their son Rodio (Rodion), and their daughter Vira. Ternopil, 1929 or 1930

ing place and rushed to her parents. The soldiers didn't want to let her in because they thought she was someone else's child, but she nonetheless managed to clamber into the vehicle and grasped her mother's hand. There was horrible lamentation in the street: several families were being taken off at the same time. People were wailing as if at a funeral. Those who weren't being taken came out of their homes and escorted their neighbors off to the unknown.

The deportees were brought to the train station in Ternopil and locked into boxcars designated for cattle transport. They kept them there for a few days until a whole train-full had been rounded up, then drove them off.

It was spring of 1941. The endpoint of my grandma's, great-grandma's, and great-grandpa's land travels became Salekhard. Then came a journey by barge somewhere in the Gulf of Ob, an existence marked by cold and hunger, long years of felling two cubic meters of forest a day (my grandma was thirteen at the time), my great-grandma's imprisonment for stealing a single fish (in order to not starve to death), and many other things — all of it for the sake of the heroic victory of the "great Stalin" and the no less "great Soviet people" over the evil fascists.

In the meantime, Germany attacked the USSR. The Germans entered Ternopil and opened up the prison. Neither the residents of Ternopil, nor even the Germans themselves had ever experienced such horror before. The prison was literally chock-full of corpses. Congealed blood pooled on the floor. Here and there the corpses had been sprinkled with lime, but for the most part they had simply been dumped in heaps. The "valiant" Soviet apparatus, not wanting to bother deporting prisoners, had simply shot them down in packs in the prison. More accurately, they didn't simply shoot them down but did so with a particular method. They tortured them, abused them, cut off pieces of their bodies, and only after all that finished them off. Among the thousands of bodies, the remains of some of Rodio's friends, fellow students from the Ternopil Gymnasium, were also found. Today a plaque hangs on the wall of the gymnasium with their last names and the date of their deaths: June 21 - 26, 1941.

Relatives of the disappeared and arrested came flocking from throughout the Ternopil region in order to identify and humanely bury the remains. There was no limit to the curses and tears. The same thing was transpiring in all the cities and towns of Western Ukraine. This region hadn't sustained such anguish since the time of the Tatar invasion.

Immediately after the German attack and the announcement of the restoration of the Ukrainian State in Lviv on June 30, 1941, Grandma's brother Rodio traveled to Lviv and, already as a mem-

ber of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationals (OUN), volunteered into the administration of the Ukrainian government. But a Ukrainian state didn't figure into Hitler's plans, so everyone involved in its formation very soon started getting arrested. Rodio too was arrested. The fate of many Ukrainian patriots could have befallen him and he would've gotten his bullet back in the first days of the war, but Providence had prepared a different mission for him. The young man somehow managed to escape from custody and return to Ternopil. Unfortunately, the details of his escape will continue to remain a mystery because there's no one left to tell them today. In Ternopil, Rodio settled semi-legally in his parents' house, which had been looted by Soviet police, and set about building up an organizational network. His mother's sister, Aunt Stefa, who lived not far away, helped him considerably in this endeavor. She had no children of her own, so Rodio was like a son to her. Her house was constantly being frequented by someone or other. These people would eat, rest or spend the night, then leave. The woman prepared meals for them and, as the need arose, carried out the duties of a courier, obtaining information, purchasing train tickets, and fetching parcels from drop-off points. According to family



Rodion Tkachuk. Ternopil, 1942

lore, Rodio was the organization's district leader for the Skalat area. Even people who crossed paths with him during the war period confirm this information, but, unfortunately, nothing resembling documents from that time has been located: the underground movement barely pretended to bureaucracy and through the end of 1943—namely, the time of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army's emergence—few matters went documented.

Sometime in late 1942 the Gestapo publicly hanged several OUN members in Ternopil. The organization decided to avenge their members' deaths and planned a bold operation. At the time there was a

restaurant named Polonia in the center of Ternopil, frequented mostly by senior German officials and Volksdeutsche. An "Only for Germans" plaque hung proudly on the door of the establishment, so mere mortals were prohibited from setting foot in there.

One beautiful day two Wehrmacht officers entered the Polonia restaurant. Glancing around the dining hall, they wordlessly discharged a few magazines and—leaving in their wake a true mishmash of posh dishes, drinks, and soldiers of the Führer—exited out into the street just as calmly. To say that such a brazen stunt was a complete shock for the occupiers is to say nothing. A manhunt was immediately orchestrated in the city: all the entrances and exits were blocked off, and all the nooks and crannies were searched, but the two subversives in Wehrmacht officer uniforms were never found. Meanwhile, the two "officers" were having a leisurely repose a few blocks away at my great-grandmother's house. One of them was Rodio, but the name of the second, unfortunately, will remain unknown.

Active subversive involvement right under the Gestapo's nose couldn't remain unnoticed, and not long after Rodio was declared a wanted man.

He was forced to leave the city and switched jobs to one in the district he supervised. One night, as he was walking from one village to another, he came across a German patrol. The Germans were riding in the back of a wagon driven by a Pole he knew from Ternopil and, upon spotting the man out on the road at night, demanded his documents. The man seemed to resemble the one the Gestapo had been fruitlessly hunting for several months already. Rodio reached into his pocket for his documents, but in lieu of them pulled out a pistol and knocked the Germans off on the spot. The Polish driver he left untouched. After exchanging a few words with him, Rodio bid the man goodnight and went about his business. However, the Pole turned out to be less amicable and magnanimous. He picked up his rifle and shot Rodio in the back.

Back in Ternopil, Aunt Stefa was immediately arrested and taken off for further interrogation. Interestingly, they didn't even permit Rodio's body to be cleared off the road. They just placed a guard next to it. When the on-site investigation was completed, the body was left lying on the side of the road, and Aunt Stefa was locked up in a Gestapo jail. Somehow the OUN boys managed to get her out of there, and a few weeks later she returned home, where she resumed her old activities assisting the underground.

Meanwhile, some villagers from a neighboring village orchestrated a solemn nighttime burial for Rodion in their local cemetery. Per the organization's orders, the following day, in all the churches

throughout the Ternopil region, memorial services were held for Rodio's soul and bells tolled dolefully.

When my grandmother, great-grandmother, and great-grandfather returned from Siberia, a Soviet civil servant was already living in their house with his family, so they were forced to seek shelter among their kin. Thankfully, Aunt Stefa was still alive, and she described to them what had happened with Rodio. My great-grandmother spent a long time walking from village to village, asking people where her son's grave was. People were scared to talk about that sort of thing: those were frightening times. But my great-grandmother kept searching nonetheless. One day fate brought her together with a woman whose father had organized the funeral back then, and the woman showed her where Rodio's grave was. My great-grandmother had a cross placed for her son, but up until the collapse of the Soviet Union no one ever did find the courage to write his name on the headstone.

And that's the whole story. It would be nice to fill in some more of the details, but, unfortunately, there's no one left to do so.

How My Great-Grandfather Helped Establish the Third Reich in Kharkiv

Of course, like many of this book's readers, I have a grandfather who was a veteran, and he marched with the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army from Stalingrad to Vienna (which I'll talk about some other time). Similarly, it's probable that many of you also had a grandfather who dodged the draft. It's also no surprise that some of my great-uncles became members of the *Hilfspolizei*, the Ukrainian auxiliary police service set up by the Nazis in occupied Ukraine. But we have an exclusive story in our family history: my great-grandfather was the mayor of Kharkiv during the German occupation. He was Mayor Oleksii Kramarenko, the one whose order banning the Russian language in the city's state institutions is quoted from time to time in pro-Russian publications.

Oleksii Ivanovych Kramarenko was born on March 17, 1882 in Yelysavethrad (present-day Kropyvnytskyi) as the son of a railway worker. He studied to be a chemist at the Kharkiv Technological Institute (now the Polytechnic) and then worked as chief engineer in many factories across Ukraine; for example, he helped launch production at the Budiansk faience pottery factory and the Chasivoiarsk refractory plant.

He was highly regarded as a specialist and was given the equivalent of a knighthood. He was constantly travelling abroad, even under Soviet rule. He taught at universities in Kamianets-Podilskyi and Kharkiv, and served as head of the glass materials department at Kharkiv's Technological Institute.

Oleksii Kramarenko did not take part in any fighting in the Civil War between 1917 and 1920, and only vague information about his political sympathies remains: there are hints about his commitment to the Ukrainian People's Republic, his declarative Russophobia, and his contempt toward Lenin combined with an admiration for Trotsky.

His descendants claim that the two armies—the Red and the White—both wanted to expropriate Oleksii's and his wife Mariia Leonidivna's beautiful Art Nouveau-style piano (which my mother now plays), but both times Kramarenko managed to get it back.



My great-grandfather (second on the left) with some acquaintances, 1930s

He declared to the Whites as they departed that he “did not sympathize with their movement,” and only the intervention of his wife’s influential relatives could save him after that remark.

Kramarenko had an “Englishman’s disposition,” and his tastes were typical of the old-guard intelligentsia of the time: the authors Hoffman, Blok, and Vynnychenko (he also wrote poetry himself, and on occasion could even quote the poet Vasyl Chumak), as well as reciting poetry to music, the theatre, cards, alcohol, and adultery.

This latter passion resulted in a divorce between him and my great-grandmother and a subsequent marriage to fellow chemist Nataliia Bershadskyi. Perhaps this is what later saved our family.

The Nazis occupied Kharkiv on October 21, 1941. Out of Ukraine’s major cities, life in Kharkiv was perhaps the hardest. The Nazis deliberately restricted access to supplies and introduced extremely brutal repressions for the city’s residents.

However, they had to form a local Ukrainian self-governing body for show. As historian Anatolii Skorobohatov recounts, the Germans appointed Oleksii Kramarenko as mayor after consultations with teachers at the Technological Institute— which may have been where the Nazis’ residence was.

What were the functions and capabilities of the then “mayor” of Kharkiv (considering that Kharkiv didn’t belong to the civil administration of *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* but to frontline territory)?



Oleksii Kramarenko

They were quite limited.

In theory, he should have been organizing the regeneration of the city's industry, which had been destroyed by the Bolsheviks during their retreat, as well as ensuring the provision of supplies for the population. He also should have been monitoring the proper execution of the German authorities' orders.

There was no opportunity to perform these tasks, however, as the real power was in the hands of the Germans. Kramarenko was left to "shake up" his cumbersome and corrupt administrative apparatus and record the number of residential spaces "liberated from the Jews" (in fact, he offered to give one of these "liberated" apartments to his ex-wife, my great-grandmother; had she agreed, one can only imagine the Bolsheviks' reaction to this when they arrived back in Kharkiv in 1943). He also had to create soup kitchens for "his people," and take care of humanitarian activity.

This humanitarian work was the only place where Kramarenko left a noticeable mark. He contributed to restoring Kharkiv's churches. Before the war, there was only one functioning cathedral left in Kharkiv, but with the mayor's assistance many were returned to the city's faithful. Churches belonging to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Autonomous Church—the analogue of today's Moscow Patriarchate—were restored (but both churches were forced to run services in honour of the "liberator" Hitler).

Oleksii Ivanonovych was not religious, but he assisted in the restoration of Kharkiv's churches and was very happy to hear the sound of church bells once again ringing over the city.

Kramarenko's most famous "act" was his decree on language:

This is the fifth month that our native, yellow-and-blue Ukrainian flag has been flying over the free city next to the victorious German flag as a symbol of our new life, of the revival of our Motherland.

But, to all us Ukrainians' great misfortune and disgrace, our shameful Bolshevik legacy remains in some places.

A source of great disgrace to all of us and of quite understandable anger to the Ukrainian people, conversations in Russian, held by government officials who are apparently ashamed of their native language, can be heard in some institutions and even in local district administrations.

This is a disgrace for those who have become free citizens of their liberated homeland. Those who shun their native language will only meet shame and they have no place among us. We cannot accept this, for this cannot go on. That is why I order a categorical ban for any government official to speak in Russian during office hours at their institution.

It is precisely thanks to this order that, even today, my great-grandfather's surname can be found from time to time in all sorts of propaganda articles by pro-Russian trolls.

The mayor helped his former family, and at times came by for a visit.

At that time, his new wife had fallen pregnant, and in August 1942 Oleksii Kramarenko was arrested by the Gestapo.

They say that as he was walking along the street with the Gestapo officers, he saw an acquaintance.

"Where are you off to, Oleksii Ivanovych?"

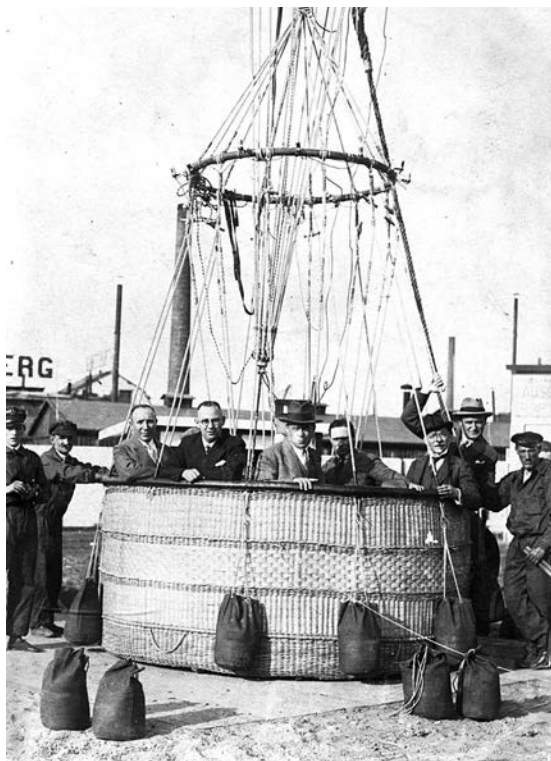
"Well, I'm rather like Dickens' parrot."

For litterateurs of the time, it was a rather simple allusion; the quote was: "I suppose I'll go then, as the parrot said when the cat got his tail."

One version of the story claims that my great-grandfather was arrested for selling food and other supplies illicitly. According to another, he was too active in helping to free prisoners of the Kholodna Hora concentration camp, which counted partisan fighters and Jews among its captives.

In addition, a family friend named Ivantsova passed him a proposal for cooperation with the Soviet intelligence services, which Kramarenko refused. It's possible that because of this the Reds may have "slipped" information about him to their Nazi colleagues. Or, to the contrary, perhaps he really did collaborate with the Soviet intelligence or with the Resistance.

In any case, we only know that the Gestapo told my grandmother, Valeriia: "Your father will be detained until the end of the war".



Oleksii Kramarenko on a business trip to the United States

While he was in prison, his second wife gave birth to a son, Oleksii, who only survived for a few years and died of meningitis. The subsequent fate of Kramarenko himself is shrouded in mystery.

Some said that the Germans shot him; others said that he was freed and taken to Poland during the German retreat. Another acquaintance in our family allegedly saw Oleksii Kramarenko in London after the war, where he was living under a different name. Then again, these

are probably just whimsical fabrications ...

After the Soviets' return to power, my grandmother, Kramarenko's daughter, was interrogated several times before being left in peace. Nataliia Bershadska also escaped severe persecution by the looks of it. Mariia Leonidivna, his ex-wife, died.

For a long time, my family avoided spreading this story about, although they didn't hide it either. After all, it is a very symbolic one that shows that collaboration during the twentieth century's most disastrous war in Europe was not reserved for the great powers.

It fell upon some to partition Czechoslovakia, others to arm and teach the Reich, and others still to claim "national independence" or a "people's democracy," while ordinary people "took notes" from the geopolitics of the time, from which they could only rarely deviate completely.

Pavlo Solodko

Over the Course of Their Wartime Separation, My Grandma and Grandpa Wrote Two Hundred and Fifty Letters to One Another

My paternal grandma, Nadiia Oleksiivna Neizzhala, met my grandpa, Pavlo Andriiovych Solodko, during the occupation. I asked her to tell me about this romantic story that unfolded against the backdrop of a bloody World War in greater detail. When he passed, my late grandpa left behind memoirs from the front: I've interwoven them with my grandma's story.

Grandma Nadia finished school in June 1941 in Bakhmach in the Chernihiv region. Grandpa Pavlo finished school then as well, in Kurin, a village outside Bakhmach, and his graduation was on June 22. They hadn't met yet, and in August Grandpa was drafted into the army. He was nineteen.

* * *

In September 1941 we were retreating from the Luhansk region to Stalin-grad Oblast (present-day Volgograd Oblast in the Russian Federation).

We moved mainly at night and on foot. Sometimes we covered up to sixty kilometers a night, sleeping on the move. We were carrying duffel bags on our backs. It was pouring rain and our field cloaks, which doubled as tents, did little to help. When daybreak brought with it frost, the cloak served as a shell.

Our cannons were horse drawn. You could barely put one foot ahead of the other, when, as luck would have it, a cannon would get stuck. We'd cluster around it, some pulling it by the wheels, others by its traces.

We made it to a village, and the staff sergeant with the wagons and food was nowhere to be seen. But the potatoes hadn't been harvested in all of the collective farms: that saved us.

We traveled close to seven hundred and fifty kilometers like that – though we rode back later by train. On May 12, 1942 we went on the offensive: that was the Kharkiv Offensive Operation. To my soldier's mind, our command didn't organize it in the best way possible.

No one talked about the fact that we were under threat of being encircled by the enemy. When on May 22 we were issued four days' worth



In the years 1941 and 1943, over 1500 people left Kurin for the front. Of those, 867 did not return.

of food rations and were immediately warned to stretch it out over eight days, we started to surmise that we had been cut off into a pocket.

On one of the final days of May, at noon, I noticed a flight unit of Junkers coming in on our position. I dropped into a ditch. The Germans had even turned on their sirens to mess with our heads. Suddenly there was a terrible explosion; the air was squeezed out of my lungs. I thought to myself, "Maybe I've been killed. That's the end of that."

What happened next and how long it lasted – I don't remember. My consciousness returned for a brief time: I was lying in the body of a vehicle, it was night, there were flames, crossfire ... I couldn't hear any shots: I had lost my hearing and my ability to speak.

I was probably in an ambulance. How many nights I rode in it – I don't know, even till this day. I finally came to. I opened my eyes: it was a bright, sunny day. There was a horrible pain and noise in my head and ears. I turned my head: alongside me, on top of some sort of rags, wounded men were lying and moaning. All around me were carts, vehicles, a lot of wounded, blood-stained bandages ... Germans were walking around with machine guns.

I pulled my duffel bag out from under my back: it was covered in bits of shrapnel. Sometime later I found holes in my overcoat too, made by shrapnel.

In early June I ended up in Uman, in a POW camp – the well-known “Uman pit.” Later we were transferred to a camp in the village of Ivanhorod, not far from Khrystynivka. There I ran into Ivan Tsybulka, who I had once fought with.

Ivan and I got to know two other young men of about our age, from Siberia, who had been taken into captivity outside Kerch. The four of us started to prepare for escape.

The place was surrounded by two rows of barbed wire, with more barbed wire crisscrossed over the ground and watchtowers in the corners. Some prisoners tried to run away while on work details, but they’d leave tracks in the field: the guard would get on his horse and chase them down. In the evening the poor wretches would be shot near the camp. They’d bury them outside the wire fence and, without fail, would put up a birch cross (the Germans required this). There were already a good many such crosses surrounding the camp.

Our pit-house was located in the far row. At night we dug out an opening up to the barbed wire. We took off our shoes and left behind our overcoats. I crawled through the fencing last.

After I made it through the first row of fencing, I heard footsteps. There were three meters between the two rows of barbed wire. A guard was walking the length of the fence, and my heart was pounding as if ready to leap out of my chest. My hair was standing on end, and I thought to myself: “Pavlo, you’re nineteen, but it’s time to say goodbye to life.” I flattened myself against the ground as the guard’s footsteps grew closer and closer. He would be alongside me at any moment, he would fire off a round from his machine gun ... That minute felt like an eternity.

And then the guard walked up alongside me – and walked right past. Maybe he didn’t notice me, or maybe a good man was walking past me (we were guarded by Latvians) and took pity on me.

* * *

The war began with horrible bombardments. A host of troop trains had crammed into the Bakhmach-Kyivskiy Railway Station (they later said that it was a diversion), and on July 14 they were bombed so hard that scraps of metal, charred wood, and military overcoats had ended up all the way over where we lived, which was several kilometers away.

There were awful fires: on the street that leads to the Bakhmach-Homelskiy Station, ten houses were blazing at once.

The Germans dropped these types of cluster bombs – two metal casings closed together, with a load of incendiary bombs inside. People later used these receptacles as water troughs for cattle. And after the war, it was fashionable to feed dogs out of German helmets.