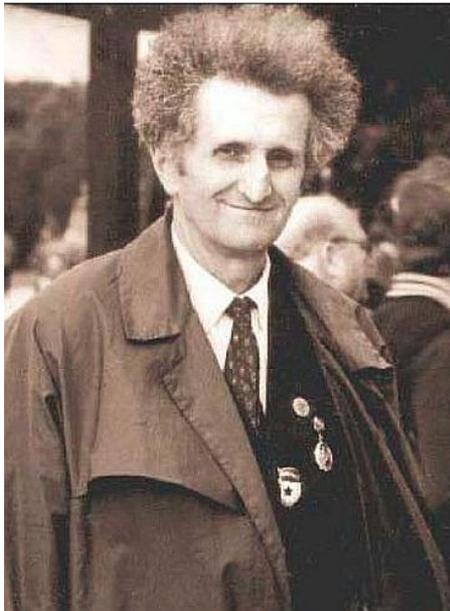


FIMA'S WAR

The following letter was written by my cousin, Fima Zaidelson, to an American journalist friend who was planning to write an article about her visit to Estonia. In transcribing the hand-written letter, I have tidied it up a little, to make it read more fluently.

Esther Menell*

. . . I want to point out to you once more that the article about me published in the "Daily Mail"¹ bears a lot of misrepresentations which, on the whole, give a false impression of me as a particular martyr. I didn't suffer more from the Soviet totalitarian regime than most of my countrymen and even less than



many of them. I haven't been deported from Estonia as a civil person and haven't been accused by the Soviets of being a German spy -- my father was accused of that, but not me - - or sent by them to a Labour camp in the Arctic. I don't really know if it was because of my poor English that the lady journalist who interviewed me didn't understand some of my explanations, or she just wanted to make story about me sound more sensational.

Actually I shared the fate of many thousands of Estonians who were mobilised into the Red Army shortly after the outbreak of the War between the Soviet Union and the Nazi Germany. On the 3rd July 1941, just on the eleventh day of the war, I was with other mobilised and conscripted Estonians (there were about 20,000 of us) brought by ship to Leningrad and from there by rail to the city of Kazan on Volga where we get some military training, but only for a very short time. One day, all our equipment and military

* Book editor and writer. Daughter of Alex Menell/Grozinski and Zosia Menell (née Gutkin) both from Tallinn. Her memoir *Loose Connections: from Narva Maantee to Great Russell Street* tells the story of her long career as a book editor in London, and her no less fascinating family story, set in Estonia, South Africa and the U.K. In the words of *The Jewish Chronicle*: "No Jewish book lover of a certain age and Mittel European extraction, should miss out on Esther Menell's memoir . . ."
The book can be ordered direct from the publisher westhillbooks@yahoo.com>

¹ 4.7.1998, thus the letter was written in 1999 (see later in the text). [M.R.]

uniforms were taken away from us and we were sent by rail to the Urals -- the city of Tselyabinsk where all of us were placed in Labour camps, officially named Labour battalions or columns.

We were lodged in dug-outs. The conditions were appalling. Hard labour had to be done, many of us not used to it, with very miserable portions of food. If you got ill and exhausted, as I did -- 15 ounces of black bread and two plates of watery soup, with two or three small pieces of potatoes in it. That was a day's ration. Those who commanded us -- mostly Tatars and Russians, sergeants and corporals -- didn't even seem to know who actually we were and took us for captured "fascists" and treated us accordingly.

And I must say that the conditions of the German prisoners-of-war were much better than ours. Many thousands of mobilised Estonians who were kept in the Labour Battalions died from illnesses and starvation. After two months in the Labour Battalion, I was near to death -- exhausted with open sores on my legs. I was too weak to move about and couldn't attend the bath-house, and get rid of the lice who crawled on my body. In the middle of January 1942 a medical commission examined me. The doctors didn't know that I understood Russian and I heard them saying that they would let me free but there are practically no chances that I will stay alive. I asked them, nevertheless, to let me go to my father who was evacuated from Estonia to the city of Saratov on the Volga.

By the decision of the Medical Commission I was released (officially demobilised) from the Labour battalion and given a document confirming it, so I exerted every effort to reach my father who lived in Saratov with his sister, from Leningrad/Petersburg, who was also evacuated there.

I was a walking skeleton in rags with bast-shoes on my feet and as I limped to the Tselyabinsk Railway Station the Russian women who saw me passing by crossed themselves and tried to reach me some food. At the Railway station militiamen (policemen) didn't want to let me in. They didn't believe that a tramp like me could be a demobilised Red Army soldier and as I was repeating him again and again that I was "released", he thought that I was a criminal from the jail and threw me out. When I came again up to him and showed him my documents, he let me in. I was directed to the "lice boiling" camera, an institution which in these times was in every Railway Station of the USSR. You had to take off your clothes and hand them over to be boiled in the camera. When the lice on the clothes got annihilated the clothes were given back. But I was too weak to take my rags off and one man, under the pretext of helping me to take them off, has stolen from me all the money I had to buy my tickets to Saratov with.

I was in a state of a full nervous collapse. I sat and wept as a small child. A doctor who talked to me after hearing my story told me that he believes me, despite my appearance, but said that he has to be frank with me -- it won't be possible for me to reach Saratov alive with my state of health. He added that he would put me into a hospital but that is quite impossible, as all the hospitals in Saratov are filled with wounded soldiers brought from the front-line, and there are no places for me at all. A good-hearted medical nurse brought me a railway ticket to Saratov and helped me on to the train. It took two nights and days to reach Saratov and all this time lay on the upper berth of this railway carriage. How I managed to reach my father's home in Saratov is a miracle. Again Russian women crossed themselves as I passed by and someone showed me the way to get to the street and the house where my father lived. But when I arrived there my aunt didn't recognise me and slammed the door before me, saying she had nothing to give for me. When I knocked on the door again and tell her that I am her nephew she fainted.

My father who worked in Tallinn before the war as a chemical engineer, on one of the enterprises, had to accompany equipment of a laboratory evacuated to Russia and had to go separately from my mother, in the middle of July 1941, and meet her with her mother (my grandmother) and my aunts, next day in Leningrad. There are places booked for them on the train to Russia. To evacuate to Russia was the only possible way for them and all the Estonian Jews to escape being murdered by the Nazis if they capture Tallinn. By that time, Wehrmacht reached already the southern borders of Estonia. Their further advance was slowed down by the resistance of the Red Army. There was heavy fighting and Tallinn was captured by the Nazis only on the last day of August.

My father waited for my mother for several weeks in Leningrad but neither my mother, grandmother and aunts didn't come to Russia. Having lost all the hope of them coming he joined his sister who lived in Leningrad and evacuated with her to Saratov.

When my father saw me in such an awful state it was a great shock for him. He did all he could to put me back on my feet. In Saratov he was placed to work as an engineer on a big enterprise where the food-supply for the employees was on a higher grade. He managed to get a very good doctor to treat me and tried to put everything in to me, but the recovery went slowly. A few weeks passed since my return when one of the February nights in 1942 secret police burst in to our room, made a search, arrested my father and took him away. My aunt who lived through the Stalin purges in the thirties in Leningrad told me that I would never see my father again.

Fortunately, her words didn't come true. We got to know later, that my father was accused ridiculously of being a German spy. He was brought to Moscow and confined in the main prison for political "criminals" --- Lubyanka. When my father protested: I am a Jew, why would I spy for Germany? They answered that Trotsky was also a German spy. He resisted months of questioning although he was starving. They were telling him that he would get a good meal if he would admit he was a spy. He refused and eventually -- after 8 months in the prison cell -- he was released and acquitted. In prison he lost more than half of his weight but was lucky to be left alive.

But for the time being I and my old aunt didn't know anything about my father's fate and we led a miserable life in Saratov. When I started feeling better I went to the recruiting office to enlist myself into the Red Army. I was eager to fight the Nazis, as for me as a Jew, they were most hated enemies. It was also humiliating for me to stay in the far rear when all the young people of my age fought on the front-line. But they refused my pleas when they heard from me that I was from Estonia. Next time when I went after some time again to the conscription office I omitted my Estonian roots and as -- on my passport, was marked that I was born in Petrograd (Leningrad, Petersburg) and that I was a Jew -- everything went smoothly and I was taken to serve in the Red Army.

I fought in an infantry mortars detachment and was for the first time wounded when the Red Army advanced pushing the Nazis out of Smolensk district of Russia in August 1943. I must say that men with whom I served and fought together in the regiment, and there were representatives of many nationalities of the former Soviet Union -- Russians and Ukrainians, Belorussians and Tatars, Uzbeks and Jews, were friendly to each other and there was no bad feeling at all based on national or racial ground. Relations between soldiers, NCO's and officers were also good. The spirit of the Red Army at that time was high. The wish to achieve victory over the Nazi Germany was great and they fought bravely.

We went through many miles of burned out land and saw what sufferings brought the Nazi aggressors to the people. And whatever foul plans Stalin might have had about the future of Europe -- the Red Army soldiers didn't sense anything about it, and they knew that they are fighting for the liberation of their mother-land from the Nazi yoke and were full of will to help the nations of Europe occupied by the Nazi Germany to regain their freedom. If it didn't happen just this way, and one totalitarian regime had to replace another, it wasn't their fault.

The thought that I was fighting on one side of the line with my British school pals inspired me. The help of the British and America allies was felt by the Red Army materially. The cans, with American braised beef, carried it personally to every Red Army soldier, as they were the part of their daily ration. I keep in my memory a New Year's eve in a military hospital with parcels from the United States with presents for the wounded Red Army soldiers were distributed among us. They were sent by American families with candies, chocolates, hand-knitted woollen socks and gloves and many other lovely things. Every parcel had a letter in it. They were written by American men, women and children with moving words of thanks to the wounded soldiers for their contribution in the common cause of the Allies and with good wishes. As I was the only one who knew English I translated to them these letters and I saw how moved they were. All of them hoped then that they hearty friendly relations between the Allies will last for many, many years after the end of the war. Who of them knew that a short time after the victory of the Anti-Hitler Coalition over Nazi Germany was achieved the Cold War began.

After leaving hospital, where I have spent some four months healing my wound, I had to follow the Division in which I served and which fought by that time in Beloruss. But on the way there I got to know of the existence of the Estonian Rifle Corps of the Red Army and asked the Command to direct me there. The story of its formation is as follows:

In the autumn of 1941, some Estonian top communists petitioned Stalin to form Estonian national units of the Red Army where all mobilised and conscripted Estonians, including those Russian Jews and people of other nationalities who lived in Estonia and were its citizens before the annexation and were kept in Labour Battalions, as well as all ethnic Estonians who permanently lived in Russia and other parts of the Soviet Union, would be directed. The formation of Estonian national units was approved and in February 1942 the formation started. In September 1942 in the Urals was formed the Estonian Rifle Corps of the Red Army consisting of two divisions.

The formation of the Estonian Rifle Corps had its positive meaning as it has saved thousands of men from slow death owing to hunger, cold, illness and hard exhausting physical labour. It is reckoned that if Estonians had stayed in the Labour Battalion for another four to five months, no one of them would survive. But, even having reached the locality of the Estonian divisions of the Red Army, some of those who served before in the Labour Battalions were already in such a critical state of health that doctors couldn't save them and they met their death in the hospitals of the Estonian Corps.

The kit and outfit in the Estonian Rifle Corps was normal as in any decent Army unit and the food rations as well. But there was something special what distinguished Estonian Rifle Corps from other units of the Red Army. All of them were multi-national. But in the Estonian Corps, commands, field manuals, exercises, lectures, etc. were given in Estonian. It was very good, as most Estonians didn't know any Russian and even many of them didn't learn during all the war years spent in Russia. On the opposite, some of the Russians from Estonia, who didn't know Estonian well, learned it perfectly during the service in Estonian Corps as well as those ethnic Estonians from Russia who knew it badly or didn't know it at all.

The officers in the ERC were mostly Estonians. Some of them officers of the Independent Estonia who survived the repressions, or shared the fate of others in the Labour Battalions. Some of them were of higher rank, even one General and some Colonels. Some officers in Estonian Corps were out of ethnic Estonians who lived in Russia and who served as officers in the other units of the Red Army and who after the formation of ERC were called up from their former units to serve in the ERC. The Commander of the ERC was appointed General-Lieutenant Pärn, an Estonian from Caucasus, whose parents moved there, as did many other Estonian peasants -- colonists in the eighties and nineties of the 19th century. Estonian was always spoken in his family. It was his mother language and he knew it perfectly.

He got his higher education in the Soviet Military Academy. He was very popular among the officers and soldiers of the Estonian Corps. Simple in his manner, he liked to chat with soldiers and sometimes sang together with them Estonian folk-songs. It was mainly thanks to him that ERC wasn't sent to the Stalingrad front, which would have meant great losses among Estonians, and persuaded the High Command to preserve the ERC against irretrievable losses, which would actually lead to the abolishment of Estonian national units of the Red Army, as there would be no more Estonians left to make up the losses.

He persuaded the High Command to preserve the ERC mainly for the military actions against the Nazis in the Balti region which had to follow in due course. And even now when all the names given to the streets in Tallinn in commemoration of the battles fought by the Estonian Rifle Corps and of the some of its participants are abolished and replaced by others -- the modest monument to the Commander of the ERC Lembit Pärn, erected in Tallinn soon after his death in the seventies, in front of one of the Tallinn High schools, is preserved and not torn down as many others were after the restoration of Estonian independence.

The first battle fought by the ERC was for the Russian town of Veliki Luki in December 1942 to January 1943. At that time grave memories of the Labour

Battalions were still fresh in mind and some soldiers and officers of the Estonian Corps ran over to the Germans. The rest fought bravely despite the fierce resistance of the enemy. There were significant losses in the ranks of the Estonian Corps but Veliki Luki was liberated from the Nazis. I missed the battle as at that time I didn't know anything of the existence of the Estonian national units of the Red Army.

When I eventually joined the ERC in the March 1944, I hardly recognised the young men with whom I departed from Tallinn in July 1941 and with whom I shared horrible months spent in the Labour Battalion. They all looked now fat and in good mood. Many of them by that time were awarded decorations and medals for bravery. It was not that bitter of times of Labour Battalions were forgotten. But the rumours were spread that those responsible for sending the Estonians to the Labour Battalions in 1941 and for the dreadful conditions there were severely punished. I still don't know if it was true or not. Anyhow, in that spring of 1944, when I joined the ERC, the spirits of the "boys from the Corps", as they call themselves even now, when they are old and grey, were high. And not only owing to the feeling of belonging to the victorious side in the war against Nazi Germany, although that also played its part on the minds and the mood of those who served and fought in the ERC. The Red Army was rapidly advancing and the Western Allies USA and Britain preparing for the Operation of "Overlord". The district where the units of the ERC were located in the spring of 1944 were in the neighbourhood of Leningrad, which was now free from the siege and blockade. Estonia from where they were forced to depart as mobilised and conscripts nearly three years ago -- was now so near, only about some dozen of miles away from them. And that was the main reason for their good mood. They hadn't been home and hadn't seen their relations and dear ones for all these hard long years, and haven't heard of them either. The "boys from the Corps" knew well that the only way to return home to Estonia is to break through the German defences, and they were ready to do it. And they did it!

When, on 22nd September 1944, the Red Army reached Tallinn, I suppose that for the most of Estonians it was just a replacement of one occupation by another, but there were also some for whom it was a big day of liberation from the Nazi yoke, as during the three years of Nazi occupation of Estonia about 10-thousand Estonian citizens were slaughtered and a lot sent to prison and concentration camps. But there were a lot of Estonian families for whom it was a happy day, not for any political reasons, but because they met their dear ones, who returned with the ERC, and whom they had thought to be dead.

For the Nazi propaganda proclaimed that all those who were mobilised and conscripted by the Soviets in 1941 perished in Siberia. And of course what a joy it was for the "boys of the Corps" to meet their parents, brothers, sisters and beloved ones after all the ordeals they had to go through.

There was no one to meet me with joy in Tallinn. I was ready for it since I got to know that my mother, grandmother and aunts didn't evacuate to Russia. But there was still a slight hope. It vanished on the day I returned to Tallinn. I got to know from the neighbours, in the house in which we lived before the war, that a few days after Germans occupied Tallinn armed men, accomplices of the Nazis, came and brought my mother, grandmother and aunts out of the flats where they lived and shifted them to a lorry and conveyed them to jail.

What an irony of fate that exactly a week before the war between the Soviet Union and Germany, began my uncle -- mother's elder brother who was richest in the family -- was taken out of the same house with his wife and also shifted on the lorry and taken to be deported, amongst the 10-thousand Estonians mostly rich people, politicians, policemen and officers of the Estonian Army, to Siberia. Maybe just because of that my mother and her relations didn't want to evacuate to Russia. Maybe they feared the Bolsheviks more than the Nazis. In relation to the Jews, it was a great blunder. The Nazis didn't make any difference between the rich and the poor, between their political orientation, between the old and young, men and women, children and grown ups. For them all the Jews were objects of annihilation. I know that my mother was aware of that, but I suppose my grandmother considered Germans to be very cultured people who were not capable to commit such crimes. And my mother and my aunts, who were very devoted to their mother (my grandmother), didn't want to leave her alone when she decided to stay.

What happened eventually to all the 1,000 Jews (out of 4,800 who lived in Estonia before the war and were Estonian citizens) who stayed in Estonia and didn't evacuate to Russia, I got to know out of the documents of the Security Police and SD forces in the occupied Estonia, which Nazis before they left Tallinn, escaping from the advancing Red Army, had no time to take with them and destroy. They are all in the Estonian archives.

After the occupation of Estonia had been completed the Germans began immediately to "solve the Jewish problem". The Germans systematically organised and implemented anti-Semite pogroms in the occupied countries after Wehrmacht had marched in. However, they failed in their attempts to organize a pogrom in Estonia. There have never been any anti-Semite pogroms in Estonia. The commander of the Security Police and SD in Estonia, Martin Sandberger, stated in his annual report that the racists' point of view of

the Estonians is "very poorly developed". In spite of the attitude of the Estonian people, the Nazis succeeded in murdering nearly all the Jews of Estonia (except for perhaps 3 to 5 people) during course of four months -- from the end of August until December 1941. No exceptions were made, even for the babies and the very old. Even those Jews who were baptised and half Jews were also murdered by the Nazis. In the Annual Report/Jahresbericht by Martin Sandberger, covering the period from July 1941 till June 30, 1942, M Sandberger writes: When war broke out most of the Jews evacuated to Russia . . . so that after the liberation of Estonia only 921 Jews (468 men and 453 women) stayed here and were all subjected to special treatment. Today Estonia is Judenfrei ("free of Jews").

The "special treatment" was an equivalent to "execution" in the terminology of the Nazi Security police and SD forces. The number of the Jews who stayed in Estonia and were executed was greater than stated by Sandberger, but I suppose it was asserted later. There were about 1,000 of them. Beginning in 1942, Jews were brought to Estonia from most of the European countries occupied by the Germans -- Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, France and Germany itself. Most of them were murdered in Estonia and they were buried in Estonia. On the site of one of the biggest concentration camps where Jews were kept, in Klooga, a monument in the commemoration of Estonian Jews and Jews from other countries who were murdered by the Nazis, was erected sponsored by the Estonian government in 1994.

With the growing feelings of anger and hatred of the Nazis, I took part in the following battles against them in Estonia and later in Latvia. Driving the Nazis out of the island of Saaremaa, the last stronghold of the German army in Estonia, I was wounded for the second time in November 1944; and wounded for the third time, when ERC fought against a strong German forces grouping in Latvia in March 1945. The Victory day I met in a military hospital in Riga.

There was a great jubilation in the hospital when the news of the Unconditional capitulation of the German Forces came. The wounded soldiers who could stand on their feet danced with the medical nurses and the doctors (there were a lot of female medics in the Red Army). Schoolchildren brought us flowers. The Victory over the Nazi Germany -- the Nazis who wanted to exterminate my nation, and who did so much evil to all the Europe -- was and still is one of the happiest events in my life, and I keep the Victory Day as one of my dearest holidays, though it isn't celebrated in Estonia nowadays.

I understand their feelings, but for me as a Jew it is a holy day. My thoughts, at that day in the Riga hospital, were also with my English friends of

my schooldays who fought with us that war against a common enemy. Now, after my visit to England, I got to know that many of my school pals in Bedford Modern School gave their lives in that war for our common cause.

Soon after, before my demobilisation from the Red Army in November 1945, I entered -- as did many of those who fought in ERC -- the Communist Party. I started to write as a journalist in the news department of one of the newspapers in Tallinn. But in Stalinist purge of 1949, I was accused of having concealed my bourgeois origins. The war record saved me from anything worse, but I was expelled from the party. I was also accused of having "contacts with the capitalist world". The reason for such accusations was the two letters sent by me to England. The first, written to my Headmaster in Bedford, when I was in hospital with my first wound. It was written about battles against the Nazis in which I took part and about our common cause with Britain to win the war against Nazi Germany. This letter even went through the Soviet military censorship without being detained and reached England. I got to know during my visit to England last year and even saw a copy of it from the School Archives. Another letter was purely formal. I asked the School management in Bedford to send me a copy of my School Certificate, which was lost during the war, as I wanted to enter externally the historical faculty of Tartu University, and it was needed. Both these letters, sent by me to England, qualified as a signal sent by me to the World bourgeoisie.

It would sound funny and ridiculous if it wouldn't be so tragic for me. I was sacked from the newspaper where I worked and was not allowed longer to work as a journalist or at any other intellectual work, or as they called it ideological job, not even as a librarian. A person expelled from the party was an outcast. My old colleagues -- journalists turned their back on me. But



there was one bright spot for me at that time what gave me power to overcome all the difficulties I had to go through. I fall in love with Lena, my present wife, when I still worked in the newspaper, and now when I was sacked from my work and was placed on the lowest grade of the soviet society, Lena agreed to marry me.

I still think of her as being a heroine of doing so. The only work I could get was of unskilled labourer in a

furniture factory. I pushed wheel-barrow with sawdust from the shop in the factory to the boiler-room to be burned. I was not used to physical work and the wages I got were very low. Lena worked in a radio factory. We shared a three-room flat with another family, with a common bathroom and kitchen. A year after we married, a daughter was born, and seven years later a son. Life was not easy for us, of course it was nothing as bad as it was in the Labour Battalion during the war, or what people had to live over who were deported to Siberia. After three years working in the factory as an unskilled worker, a friend of mine, a musical and dramatic critic, helped me of getting a job as a librarian in the theatrical society. But I had to work there illegally. As I was not allowed to work on intellectual or ideological work, they registered me there as a "workman in the storehouse" of the Theatrical society..

The wages were low as before, but I got to know there some interesting people, many Estonian artists, dramatic critics and other Estonian intellectuals who also went through the Stalinist purges. As the years went, something changed in the attitude to me. Stalin died and in the beginning of the sixties,



after Khrushchev's expose of some of the Stalin's crimes, the atmosphere in the Soviet Union was getting a bit softer, a brief period of "thawing" has started. I could again do my journalistic work, but there was no place for me on the newspaper. I went to work as an archivist in the State Archives of Estonia and

step by step regained my positions. In the archives were kept among other documents, documents regarding the period of the Nazi occupation of Estonia, among them documents of the Germany Security police and SD, which the Nazis hadn't time left to take with them or destroy before they fled from Tallinn.

I did some research with these documents and took part of compiling a collection of documents of the Nazi terror in Estonia, a part of which was compiled out of the documents concerned the Holocaust. This collection was published under the title of "Brown plague" by our Archives. The study of all

the documents, especially the documents of Holocaust, was morally a very hard work for me to do as every document concerning the terrible fate of the Jews who stayed in Estonia in the time of the Nazi occupation, among whom were my mother and other relations, broke my heart. But I was glad that this collection of documents was made so widely known.

In 1994, already in the time of Estonian Independence, a more completed collection of documents concerning the Holocaust in Estonia was published in Tallinn by the Jewish Community of Estonia, the compiler was Mrs Eugenia Gurin-Loov, one of the leading figures of the Jewish Community of Estonia. The collection titled "Shoah -- Holocaust" was published in Estonian with the subtitles of the documents, introduction and the synopsis in English.

In the Archives, I also did some research work about the fate of some soldiers and officers of the Red Army who were taken prisoners-of-war by the Germans and shot by them after their attempts to escape, and of those who organised resistance to the Nazis in the camps of the Soviet prisoners-of-war. The prisoners-of-war captured by the Germans were kept in appalling conditions. The international rules of handing the prisoners-of-war didn't apply for the Red Army officers and soldiers by the Nazis. I wrote freelance articles for the newspapers and, through them, many relations of the perished Red Army prisoners-of-war got to know about the fate of their dear ones.

Step by step I regained my old positions as a journalist and became a member of the Union of Journalists of Estonia and the Soviet Union. I also wrote some articles about the resistance movement to the Nazi occupation regime in Estonia. There were many young men and girls, among them Estonians and local Russians. Most of them were executed by the Nazis. As these resistance movements were led and organised mostly by the communists it is naturally that at present time they are not mentioned. It is just that much is written about the resistance of the Estonians to the Soviet regime which lasted 50 years. In those times any resistance to the regime could cost lives or years in the Gulag camps of Siberia. But I think, as years will pass, everything will find its place in history of Estonia and the resistance to the Nazi occupation regime as well.

At this point Fima addresses the person to whom he is writing and apologises for the letter being so long but repeats that he wants to correct the version of events that was published in some English newspaper that she may have seen. And he continues:

I decided that everything will be more clear to you about me if I write my story myself. I didn't even think it will be so long. I didn't want to bore you with it. And of course it is not thought by me for publication. I thought that if I will open to you my soul, you will better understand me. I wanted to point out to you that with all my love and devotion to Estonia, my homeland -- to her regained independence, and my pride for her achievements -- I don't fit properly to be mentioned in your article about Estonia.

I am sure that it will be a very interesting article which will introduce Estonia more closely to Americans. But having different historical memory of the events of World War Two from many of my countrymen, and even going in contradiction with some of them, I cannot be an example of the true Estonian of today. Concerning all what I lived through during the Soviet regime -- it is nothing to be compared with what many thousands of Estonians lived through who were deported to Siberia or put in the Gulag concentration camps. And, to be frank with you, mentioning me in the article dedicated to contemporary Estonia, I might annoy some of the Estonian readers specially. Some of them could remember me as the author of the articles of the World War 2 from the Russian side. They are not able do me any harm as we live in a democratic land, but they might cause me some emotional disturbance and I am an old man who wants to live in peace and rest . . .

And the letter ends with greetings to her family and hopes to see them all again. It also gives his address as : Raua 32-27 Tallinn 10152 and has this postscript after signing himself as JEFIM SAIDELSON.

P.S. Please excuse me for my spelling mistakes and blots.