

Letter from the Wives of the Officers and Men of the Russian “Liberation Army” to Lieutenant General Shilenkoff (May 6, 1944)

Abstract

During the Second World War, a number of volunteers from the Soviet Union fought alongside German soldiers for National Socialist Germany and against Bolshevism on the Eastern Front. As this document shows, however, their wives, who were brought to Germany, were treated just as inhumanely as the numerous women from the occupied territories in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union who were deported for forced labor, referred to as “Ostarbeiterinnen.” In this case, the women had to work at the Siemens glassworks in Freital (Saxony).

Source

Dresden, the 6th of May, [19]44.

Letter from the Wives of the Officers and Men of the Russian “Liberation Army” to Lieutenant General Shilenkoff.

Dear Lieutenant General,

All of us wives turn to you personally with a great request and an account of our lives at present. Lieutenant General, for six months now, we have been working at a paper mill and have suffered and continue to suffer great hunger. To be sure, there was a small exception to this situation in which we received food for 14 days, albeit in small quantities, but now all we get is 200 g. of bread, 50 g. of margarine and 1 liter of turnip soup once a day. With this amount of nourishment, we work 11 ½ hours daily and many of us have fallen ill, including the children. The factory management treats us very poorly. When our women faint from hunger, instead of being taken to the doctor, they are beaten. This embitters us greatly. Why were we and our husbands betrayed by the military leadership, i.e., by our regiment Koretti [sic]? When we were taken along with our husbands the leadership promised that we would have the same rights as the families of German soldiers and would receive the ration cards that all are due. But here we saw only 200 grams of bread and 1 liter of wretched watery soup daily, despite the fact that we work 11 ½ hours. Some of us have two babies and must also work in the factory. The children remain alone in the camp without supervision or food.

Our Colonel Koretti [sic] does not feel our hunger or answer our letters, and our husbands also receive no explanation. Our husbands visited us here and saw our lives for themselves, but they cannot help us because the leadership is unwilling to help. Even though, we would like to stress again, we were told that we would live well when we came here. Lieutenant General, all of us women implore you to please help us unfortunates in some way.

We are prepared to work day and night if only we do not die of starvation. Russian women fear no hardships whatsoever.

Lieutenant General, many of us helped our husbands and also the entire German Army, which has become like a

family to us. Together with our husbands we fought the bandits at night and participated in the elimination of the gangs. Now, however, nobody can help us, neither our husbands nor the German leadership. For this reason, we beg you to assist us in our lives so that we do not starve, or to take us somewhere where we could buy something to eat for our money.

We entreat you with hope,

The wives of the "Russ. Liberation Army"

Freital i. Sa. near Dresden

Obere Dresdenerstr. 26

Siemens-Glss [Glassworks]

F.d.R.d.A

Sdf.

Source: "Schreiben der Ehefrauen der Offiziere und Soldaten der russischen 'Befreiungsarmee' an Herrn Generalleutnant Shilenkoff"; in BArch, R 55 / 21347.

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