

# The Soviet Sniper

## Sevastopol, Soviet Union- February, 1942

I could feel the cool breeze rushing over my bones, as pulsing adrenaline rushed through my veins. I could start to feel my brain pounding against my skull wanting to break free. My heart wanted to escape from my chest and dart to shelter. With each beat of my heart and each bang in my head, I realized that I had no idea why I was here. Why was I in this rocky and cool terrain with nowhere to go?

*This is a death trap.*

Images flood my mind, like a flooded river taking over a city. Fire adorns the rocky plains and trees. Blood decorates arrays of medals and cloth. Bodies of comrades and enemies alike, dead. Death and destruction everywhere.

All my thoughts faded to nothing as I felt a warm, familiar hand grasp at my shoulder.

“Easy, Lyudmila,” whispered the man beside me, “or should I say Senior Sergeant Pavlichenko of the 25th Rifle Division.”

“Maybe you should shut up or I’ll smack you with the butt of my rifle,” I say with a snarky tone.

“300 kills and you haven’t changed a bit.”

“Don’t remind me, or you will be next.”

“Fine,” he says as he pecks a kiss on my cheek.

“I hate you, Leonid,” I say with a growl.

“Love you, too.”

The sarcastic fellow is my rifle partner and now husband, Leonid Kitsenko, who I married sometimes in the past couple of weeks. Even though we have lost track in the everlasting winter days.

I scan the rocky cliffs surrounding the seaport of Sevastopol below. Colorful houses decorated the landscape which made it almost look like a war was not even happening. Until you saw the large battleship guns on the port aiming at war planes in the sky that are dropping bombs and the soldiers decorating the snow covered fields.

I aim my gun at the small bobbing head far away-German-and loaded. I feel sweat starting to drip down my head.

“Don’t miss,” said the man.

“Oh shut up, Leonid,” I mumble.

I aim at their bobbing heads dancing though the white fields on my left. I fire. *Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom.* A fatal, bone chilling scream echos through the canyon. I look through the scope again to see five men lying on the ground holding rifle trying to find me before their life was abruptly taken away.

A tune seemed to float through the sky as each bullet hits the ground.

*She was walking, singing a song*

*About a grey steppe eagle,*

*About her true love,*

*Whose letters she was keeping.*

“Stop singing that song, Leonid” I say as I punch him in the arm.

I look at the men. No, not men. Nazis, monsters and Fascists. I think of all the pain they have caused me.

I think of my son, Rostislav, who I left with my grandmother, so he could live his life and I could live mine. He is only 15 currently and filled with innocence.

I think of my ex-husband, Alexi, who I tried to erase from my mind, so he could live his life and I could live mine. I was only 15 then and he stole my innocence.

I think back to Alexi. I was a young, clueless girl with my head filled with hopes and dreams. Alexi had a face of an movie star and I fell for it. Married, then divorced just like that. I had to take care of my son. I had to go to college. I had to work in a factory. I had to preserve.

I got a scholarship to Kiev University and left my job at the factory to pursue my dream of becoming a scholar. I turned to pole vaulting, sprinting and a sniper school as a source of athleticism. It was bombed not much later.

The war was starting and I had to help. I presented the enrollment center with my medals from the OSOAVIAKhIM shooting range. I had earned every badge available. And even when I enrolled, they said I should be a nurse or factory worker. I ignored them.

I was sent to a base to train with the Red Army. I was then sent to Odessa to fight. I saw the humane side in everyone though. I did not shoot. Till Andrei, the boy next to me, was shot. He was a kind man, so I started to shoot back. I shot back 187 times.

“Lyudmila, you ok?”

“Yeah, I was just thinking.”

“About them?”

“Yeah,” I say with a sigh.

He puts his arm over my shoulder. All seems to be at peace, but only for a second. Then mayhem starts, again.

Birds soar everywhere. Rubble ricochets up like bullets. Echoing snaps from the twigs on the ground. Then, a shape appeared, climbing up the canyons slope far away from the seaport. It was far away so it would not hit me, but still close enough to hear the faint whisper of someone speaking. No shouting. I try to make out the words and it sounds kinda like my name.

“Lyudmila, Lyudmila. Join us! You can get a Major status and... chocolate!” Says the man on top of the now still tank.

Chocolate? That’s new.

I run near the edge on the right, still concealing myself. It’s about 12 meter drop into the vast, barren wilderness. I put another round in and fire at the open target.

*Miss.*

*Pull back.*

*Fire.*

*Miss.*

*Pull back.*

*Fire.*

*Hit.*

*Scream.*

*Run.*

*Blood.*

*Red.*

*Down.*

*Down.*

*Down.*

It’s better if you don’t see their face. I shuffle up from the spot where I lay. Leonid shuffles up to like a puppy following his owner. He stares up at the sky with much curiosity.

Nightfall. Best time for shooting. Best time to be shot.

“Are we going to camp?”

“Yeah. Seems like the right choice,”

We walk down a old road that I have walked on hundreds of times.

*Clunk.*

I look down on the ground to see bullets scattered and footprints in the thin layer of snow coating the road. I put my hand ahead of Leonid's body to stop him.

"Wha..." He tries to say before I shush him. He quickly looks down at his nearly perfectly shined shoes to see the golden death darts.

The wind pushes against me as I sprint over to a covered area. All of a sudden, my legs are pulled out from under me and air seemed to disappear out of my chest. I land on the cool, rocky earth under me.

"The greatest sniper of all time, stumbled over a bunch of rocks." Leonid mumble as he sprints over to where I stumbled.

As I rise up from my fallen position, I see a fleck of red dotting the snow. I stare at the area where I fell.

A wire.

"Do you think it's communication wires?" Leonid says as he walks down the path of the wire.

"I think so..."

Silence falls as I steadily follow Leonid down the long road. My feet began to ache and I am about to reach to tell him just to turn around when I see a faint glow coming from the fields on the side of the road. Five men hunch over a box in the middle of the field.

I lay down in a prone position with Leonid besides me. We both swing our guns from our necks and put another round in the rifles.

*Aim.*

*Pull back.*

*Fire.*

*Hit.*

*Scream.*

*Pull back.*

*Fire.*

*Hit.*

*Scream.*

*Aim.*

*Pull back.*

*Fire.*

*Hit.*

*Scream.*

*Run.*

*Blood.*

*Red.*

*Down.*

*Down.*

*Down.*

Leonid gets the other two.

“Should we find out what they were looking at?” I ask Leonid.

“It was a communication device. I could tell. Also the four men, other than the communication device handler, were officers. So good job.” He replies.

“Camp, moy malen’kiy soldat?”

“Camp.”

We walk back the long path to where we came from by taking a fork in the road that is only visible if you are looking for it.

I start to romanize Leonid calling me his little soldier and it makes my heart skip a beat. He causes the long journey back to feel like only a few minutes.

The camp is a old barn with a tent on the outside. On the inside, the barn was filled with makeshift beds and laughing folk. In the outer tent held a temporary infirmary, mess hall and a place for officer meetings.

“I am going to talk to the officers, could you bring my stuff to my bed?” Leonid told me.

“Sure, as long as you get me a plate of the delicious food,” I said sarcastically.

As I walk over to the barn door, I hold my breath before embracing the storm.

You can see one side of the room is covered with men doing everything from sleeping, smoking, flirting, and bragging about their days. The other side is filled with the same, except more chatting over their guns than anything else.

I hear an echo of whispers dancing the hall as I walk in.

“Hey, Gorgeous.”

“Smile.”

“Don’t be rude, sunshine.”

I walk over to the makeshift bed Leonid is sleeping in and then head back out to eat dinner with him.

After a while of chatting, we go off and separate off to our beds.

I go down the whole barn to the end where my bed is. To the left and the right are mumbling sleepers and an occasional PTSD scream.

As I settle in my hay covered broken table, I think of what tomorrow will bring. Then, I am dragged into the cold, deep and empty black nothingness of sleep.

I jump up to the sound of a officer running through the barn shouting my name. I hear an occasional groan that they quickly silenced by their own good of mind.

“Private Mikhailov,” he says, “you have a duel with the best Fascist sniper today.”

He hands me a piece of paper with the area as Leo runs up.

“She will go alone,” Mikhailov adds.

Slinging my rifle over my shoulder and I grab some ammo. I then go to the outer tent and eat a quick breakfast of bread. I grab some rations for the next couple of days, including some chocolate, biscuits and butter which I get for being a non-smoking women.

I walk through fields till the sun trickles through the trees.

I’m here.

I sit in the grass behind a batch of boulders and wait. I assume he is doing the same.

All movements are subtle. I don’t know where he is and he doesn’t know where I am.

Any move can mean of my life.

So I wait.

And wait.

Seconds fade to minutes. Minutes fade to hours. Hours fade into days.

*It’s been three days. Maybe he is not even here.* Thoughts echo my brain.

Suddenly, a movement. One to many. I strike.

*Aim.*

*Pull back.*

*Fire.*

*Hit.*

*Scream.*

*Red.*

*Down.*

*Down.*

*Down.*

I walk over back to camp with his papers and collapse in my bed.

I slept like a baby till shouts filled the barn.

*An attack.*

I leave the barn in a rush just like I did yesterday. We walk down the road till it winds down the canyon till we are halfway towards the town. There we find another camp under attack.

I sit behind rocks just high enough so I can peak over with my rifle. Leonid settles next to me, when we hear a call say, “Lyudmila Pavlichenko, you will not escape us. When we catch you, we will tear you into 309 pieces.”

“Aw! They know your number,” Leonid says.

I hear the first bullets shot. I search for my next target.

*Aim.*

*Pull back.*

*Scream.*

*Red.*

I look back to see Leonid clenching his shoulder with shock spread on his face.

*Hit.*

Leo has been hit. Shot! I throw down my rifle. I scan the field until I remember the camp. An infirmary has to be there as well. I start to drag him across the snowy ground.

“Moy malen’kiy lev! Moi saldkiy! Dorogaya!” I shout as I am 100 yards away.

*My little lion! My sweetness! Dear!* He is going and the snow is turning red.

*75 meters.*

*50 meters.*

*25 meters.*

*15 meters.*

*10 meters.*

*5 meters.*

*1 meter.*

I drag him into the camp and hand him over to a nurse. I sit in a bed beside him and the world seems to slow and no words seem to come from Leonid.

Two days pass, when he finally speaks up, “I love you and if I don’t make it know that I will look after you from the heavens.”

“You can make it, Leo!” I say with tears streaming down my cheeks.

Each hour seems to tick slower and slower, till the world seemed to stop spinning and my tears seemed to freeze in the cool air. Every time I hear a harsh breath, I jump from my bed to see what is wrong.

He dies eight hours later.

My mind goes through all the ways I could have saved him, but this was the unavoidable. Fate has chosen his destiny.

I seem to drift out of this world and into one of my own. All of my senses seemed to dull. Everything felt there, but it also felt like I was watching my own body from the stars.

We go other places to fight. Silence has taken over me, but my attacks get harsher. I attack at the leg, so they call out to their friends. Only for them to be my next victims. Their screams are the only noise that ring my ears.

Every stare and every word coming out of my comrade's mouths are meticulously crafted, or they would be the next victims.

Soon, we go into the town to fight.

I go on a rooftop to attack with what is left of our division.

*Aim.*

*Pull back.*

*Bang.*

*Scream.*

*Blood.*

*Hit.*

I was shot.

My head spins and I can feel the blood rushing down my shoulder. My vision starts to blur and blacken till nothing is left. Now, at least I will join my love, Leonid Kitsenko, in death.

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Lyudmila Pavlichenko lived though. She lived through all the pain because she kept fighting through all her pain. She was evacuated by submarine along with the rest of her division because of her status. Sevastopol later fell into the hands of the Nazis days later. Lyudmila had a total of 309 kills, including 39 Nazi snipers. They used her later as propaganda to help to the war effort. She visited the U.S. and became the first person from the Soviet Union to stay in the White House. She became close friends with Eleanor Roosevelt. She speaks out often about



the American media and their views. She states her famous quote, "Men, don't you think you have been hiding behind my back for too long?" Lyudmila remarried and had a child. Her first son, Rostislav, who tried to erase himself from her mother's fame. She died by a stroke in 1974.

A song titled Miss Palvickenko was written about her by Woody Guthrie in 1945 and a Russian-Ukrainian joint movie was in 2015.