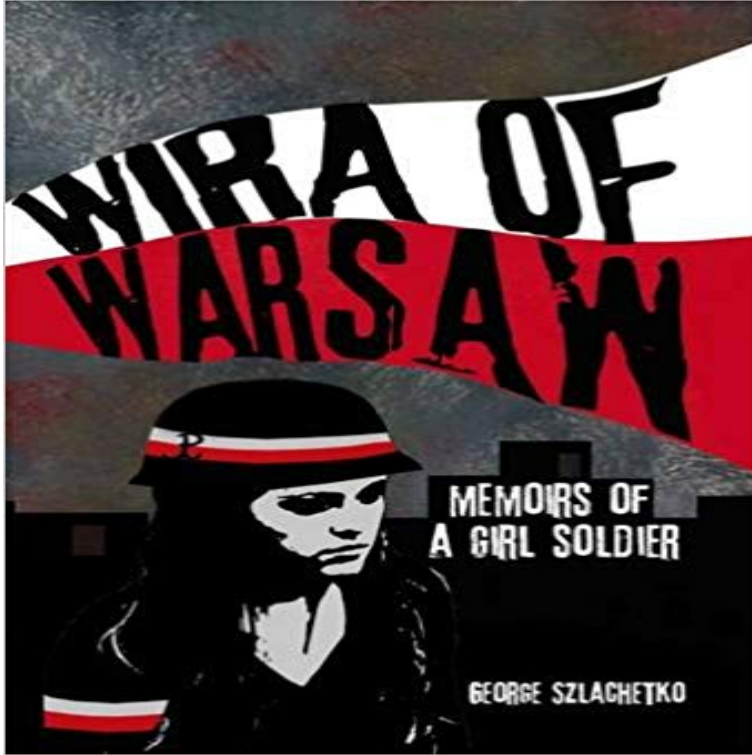


Wira of Warsaw: Memoirs of a Girl Soldier



This is the true-life story of a Polish girl soldier who fought for her country and lost her homeland; told through numerous vivid personal experiences. Aged 14 Wira became a freedom fighter and later played her part in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Liberated from a POW camp she began a new life in exile as a political refugee in England. - Danuta's story begins with her childhood years in German-occupied Warsaw. She was ten in 1939 when her family home in central Warsaw was destroyed. Her mother turned to smuggling to feed the family as they struggled to survive. The Germans closed down Danuta's school in an effort to destroy Poland's identity. Aged 14 she watched smoke rising from the burning Jewish Ghetto. The terror continued as Poles were rounded-up for forced labour. Flickering candles covered the streets where public executions had taken place. Warsaw's spirit was almost broken, but Danuta refused to be a victim and dreamed of fighting back. The opportunity arrived when she was recruited into the Grey Ranks, part of Poland's underground resistance army, within an all-female unit. She assumed the pseudonym Wira (pronounced Vera) and began her assigned sabotage activities, duties which had to be kept secret even from her own family. - One year later the Warsaw Uprising erupted and the city became an inferno. Abandoned by the outside world, the Polish Home Army resisted the brutal German onslaught for 63 days. Wira, then aged 15, played her part in the field Post Office, in the underground cellars filled with terrified civilians, and on the front line. Wira's survival was remarkable, but at what cost? - Wira became a POW in Germany joining over 1,700 Polish female soldiers of the Uprising at Stalag VI-C, Oberlangen. Following their emotional liberation, Wira met a Polish officer serving with the 2nd Polish Corps within the British 8th Army.

Faced with a hostile, Soviet-backed communist government in Poland, they took the difficult decision to remain in political exile in Britain. - The early years in a foreign land were difficult and the Poles formed close communities, gradually finding a place for themselves. Wira could never forget the past. In post-war years, Wira revisited her homeland and continued to work for her country's freedom. - In later years Wira was reunited with co-conspirators from the resistance. Finally, after 50 years of oppression, Poland became free again, the Warsaw Uprising was commemorated and Wira was honoured by her country. Now aged 86 she reflects on her life, still resolute that the Warsaw Uprising was inevitable. - About the Author: George Szlachetko is Wira's son. He was born in Ealing, West London where he still lives with his family. Having received a Bachelor of Commerce degree from the University of Birmingham, he pursued a career in finance. Over the course of three years George interviewed his mother, who also lives in Ealing, about her extraordinary life. He conducted additional research, visited archives and made a number of trips to Poland to illuminate the background to her life story.

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