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A Russian-Ukrainian Joint Battle for Sevastopol

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This movie about the Nazi invasion of Crimea and the battle for the main port city was a joint Russian-Ukrainian film that was released in two languages.

LOS ANGELES — Banking on favorable word of mouth, the producers of the film "Battle for Sevastopol" are hoping for a break-out international hit.

Mila Rozanova, a Russian film producer who is the worldwide representative for "Battle for Sevastopol," told The Moscow Times that distribution deals are being negotiated even as the war epic gets more exposure in countries around the world.

The biopic chronicles the story of a young Soviet woman, Lyudmila Pavlichenko, who joins the Red Army in 1941 to fight the Nazi invasion of the U.S.S.R. She becomes one of the deadliest snipers in World War II, with 309 kills to her name.

Seeing the threat, the German High Command orders the young woman eliminated at any cost. Meanwhile, the deadly sniper has fallen in love with a soldier who perishes in the devastating fighting. Wounded physically and emotionally, she is pulled out of combat.

As a member of the Soviet delegation visiting the United States to lobby for American support, the legendary Soviet woman sniper meets First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (played by Joan Blackham) and the two develop an unlikely friendship.

"The film is based on true events and shows real war heroes," the film's director Sergei Mokritsky explained.

"After studying the archives and consulting with historians who told us in detail about the life of Lyudmila and that historical period in Odessa and Sevastopol, we realized that we didn't need to invent much of the script. Life itself has written a fascinating script for us," Mokritsky said.

"Visually the film is divided into three parts. The dirty war, which looks almost black and white; the very chaotic and colorful image of prewar scenes; and then the glossy image of the peaceful United States," the Muscovite director explained.

Surprisingly, when war is once again raging in Ukraine, this time between Russians and Ukrainians, the film was a Russian-Ukrainian co-production, filmed on location in the Crimean cities of Sevastopol and Balaklava, Kiev, Odessa and Kamenets-Podolsky. The idea of the biopic was originally conceived by the Cinema Committee of Ukraine in 2012. Later it became a joint venture with Russia's New People studio and filming started in 2013. The film was made in two languages, Russian and Ukrainian, and both versions were released on the same day.

The filmmakers are skeptical about any future ventures between the two countries.

"I don't know if there will be another co-production cooperation," said Rozanova. Given the current political climate, "it's complicated but might be possible," Rozanova added. However, what makes that unlikely is the fact that production subsidies are provided by state organizations. For example, "Battle for Sevastopol" needed $5 million before the cameras started rolling.

Rozanova said that the film is a rarity in another sense; its captivating story line makes it appealing to international moviegoers. The picture has already been sold in Japan, South Korea, France and Germany.

Film.ua

Famed sniper Lyudmila Pavlichenko is played to acclaim by Yulia Peresild.

"China was a big play for us," Rozanova said, adding that the picture's premiere at South Korea's Busan film festival competition paved the way for the Chinese distribution deal. The film's star, Yulia Peresild — a virtual unknown when cast — was awarded best actress at the Beijing International Film Festival.

Natalya Mokritskaya, the head of New People and the director's wife, has been instrumental in bringing the story of this female war hero to the screen in partnership with Ukraine's Kinorob company.

"This is not just a film about war. Our director Mokritsky's main goal was to make a film about a very strong human being. And about love," explained Rozanova.

"Despite the complicated period in the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, we simply excluded politics from our work," the director was said. "For me this film is part of our joint history," he added.

The film has been submitted to compete in the upcoming Toronto International Film Festival in September. This Canadian festival now ranks as the world's top marketplace for foreign and independent motion picture sales.

"We are also considering entering it in the Hollywood Foreign Press Association's Golden Globes race," Rozanova told The Moscow Times, adding that "most likely it will be a VOD/DVD release in the United States as well."

In CIS territories "Battle for Sevastopol," which was released by Hollywood's 20th Century Fox Film Corp., grossed in excess of $9 million, placing it in first place at local box office charts the week of its release. Foreign figures have not been released yet.

On the international festival circuit, "Battle for Sevastopol" will follow last year's

controversial "Leviathan," which won the best foreign language Golden Globe and was one of the five Oscar nominees in the same category.

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