

Vera Sonina Among Students



This photograph was taken in Novosibirsk in 1944. It shows a rehearsal moment (we performed vaudeville by Sollogub Bewitched Omelette. We used to play it on tour round the Novosibirsk region, and spectators gave us food for it. Now I'll tell you how I found myself in Novosibirsk.

When the war burst out, I was in Kishinev. I immediately went to a military registration and enlistment office. [Military registration and enlistment offices in the USSR and in Russia implemented official call-up plans.] Right away I asked them to send me to the front line: I could not imagine another way to live during the war time.

They told me 'We are not able to waste our time talking to a woman. You should go to Leningrad, to the place of your registration.' One of my colleagues (a Moldavian) took me to the railway station. A lot of trains went through Kishinev; all of them were overcrowded - it was a real mess. As for me, I already did not care where to go, I only wanted to change. My friend seized me by the collar and pushed me into the moving train. I fell down on heads of other passengers, but nobody grumbled. The train arrived to Odessa. There I went to a local military registration and enlistment office again. They were glad to see me and said that as far as I was a graduate of the College of Physical Culture, they directed me to the military hospital #411. Injured people were already taken to that hospital. My position was called a nurse, but in fact I did a lot of different work, necessary for the hospital. I both cleaned wards and assisted during operations. I managed to apply knowledge received at my College. I knew both anatomy and traumatology; I was able to make complex bandaging. I mastered all medical procedures very quickly and easily learnt names of medical instruments. I was lucky to work together with a remarkable doctor and a noble person - professor Ghinkovskiy. During the first operation professor Ginkovskiy whispered to the second surgeon 'And does the newcomer know the instruments?' And he got the following answer 'Better than anyone!'

Soon Odessa suffered from bombardment. The hospital was evacuated. After a long way we found ourselves in Samarkand. I asked to send me to the front line. But director of our hospital put me to shame. He explained me that at bottom of fact hospital was a front line and that I had to stay

where I could make myself useful. So I became thoroughly engrossed in my work. I elaborated rehabilitation system for casualties. I ran my training sessions to music. They gave me a pianist, and she appeared to be my countrywoman. She was also born in Zaporozhye and evacuated to Samarkand. We made close friends. By the way, my method of rehabilitation awaked interest of doctors from the 1st Leningrad Medical College, which was evacuated to Samarkand, too. These doctors came to our hospital, and were present at my training sessions. Try to imagine, how proud I was! I worked 24 hours a day, almost without sleeping, and I never felt tired. All my feelings were replaced by feeling of great sympathy to those wounded men. Before their discharge wounded persons appeared before the special commission which decided what to do: send them to the front line or demobilize. I was a member of that commission. The truth is that twice I played a cunning trick. Two wounded persons had limited mobility of arms after deep wounds. By means of my method I was able to rehabilitate their arms. But one of them had 6 children and the other one - 5. They were not very young any more. I told the commission that those cases were long uncared-for and that those men would never be able to shoot. And I told the truth to those wounded persons. I said that the front line would not grow poor because of the loss of 2 soldiers, it would be better for them to bring up their children. I received letters from them (from their native villages) for a long time.

In the hospital they gave us not so much food, but it was of good quality, they gave us meat once a week. They paid us salary, to tell the truth, very small. Suddenly I received a letter from my sister Annette. She found me by a miracle. She had been evacuated to the Urals.

Later I received a letter from the Leningrad Theatrical College (from Tomsk, where the College had been evacuated). Serebryakov, director of the College wrote to our hospital that Sonina Vera Markovna, a teacher of physical culture must leave for Tomsk (to the College). I took that letter and went to the military registration and enlistment office again. I said 'Either you send me to the front line or I go to Tomsk.' - 'Front line is not interested in women', they answered. - 'Go to your College.' It happened in 1944. I reached Tomsk and began to study at the Theatrical College (they did not stop studies in evacuation). I entered the second course. Later together with my College we moved to Novosibirsk, and then (already almost at the end of war) returned to Leningrad. We celebrated Victory Day already in Leningrad.