

Yoyl Vaksman



This is my father Yoyl Vaksman. He had this picture taken at the end of June 1940 in Kishinev, the day he swapped watches with a Soviet soldier.

My father was born in Kishinev in 1906. After he finished cheder he was a cobbler's apprentice, and then he became a cobbler himself. By the time of drafting into the Romanian Army he became a cobbler of the fifth grade and this was written in his military pass. I don't know who nurtured Communist ideas in my father, and when, but he always used to sympathize with the Communist Party, though he himself was not a member. He also used to call upon the Soviet mode of life, taking part in the strikes, and Romanian authorities were after him. He was frequently arrested for dissemination of Communist literature. He was put in jail, beaten up, but always released. Once the craftsmen, who were on a strike, were taken away and punished by having freezing water poured all over them in the cold. After that Father got ill rather often.

On June 28th 1940 the Soviet Army entered Bessarabia and the Soviet regime was established. My father was rejoicing. He put on a dressy suit and went out to the central street, where Soviet tanks were placed, with the soldiers communicating with people. He came back very happy, showing Mother a simple huge Soviet watch that he swapped with a Soviet soldier for an expensive Swiss watch given to him by Grandfather Khuna. When Mother dared to tell Father that the swap wasn't fair and equal, he said that the most important thing was that the watch was Soviet. Then he went to the photo shop straight away to have a picture taken with his new watch.

Hardly had three days passed, everything vanished from the stores: caviar, tasty fish, smoked meat, cheese. Even bread became rare. Then repressions started. Many of those, who were connected with Zionist movements, as well as the remaining rich and well-off people were arrested and exiled. We were lucky to be beyond that. The Soviet authorities took no interest in us. My

father was disillusioned. The Soviet regime didn't meet his expectations. He even said in despair that they were not so-called brothers, but cousins.