

Iosif Gotlib With His Chief And Chief Of The Training



This is me, Iosif Gotlib (first from right), after I successfully passed my exams for the license of locomotive assistant operator. From the left is Shluze, chief of the training department of Sambor locomotive depot, in the center is chief of depot, who was a member of the examination commission. This photo was taken in Sambor in 1940.

In 1937 my brother Moishe became an apprentice in a railcar depot and I became an apprentice of a joiner. I studied 2 years and in 1939 I was to take my specialty exam and obtain a certificate of qualification, but this didn't happen after the fascist Germany attacked Poland. In August 1939 German troops came to Poland and the Great Patriotic War began. We didn't see Germans in Sambor. We read in newspapers and heard on the radio about intervention of Soviet troops. We didn't know anything about the Soviet Union before. When Soviet troops liberated Poland from fascists Sambor and Lvov districts were annexed to the USSR. They became a part of the Ukrainian SSR. We were very happy about it. I became convinced atheists and my mother and father were distressed by it. They kept observing Jewish traditions and we were telling them that they were holding to vestige of the past.

During the Soviet regime private shops became the property of the state. The owner of the joiner shop where I was an apprentice was also taken away from my master. I failed to obtain my certificate of qualification. However, the railroad depot of Sambor employed me as a joiner. In the first months of my employment I joined Komsomol. There was a Jewish chief of the training department of the depot. His surname was Shluze. He suggested that I attended training classes for locomotive operators after work in the evening. I studied there 6 months and I was a successful trainee. I had a medical examination and there were no restrictions. I passed all exams and obtained a certificate of qualification to work as assistant locomotive operator of freight and passenger trains. I took my first trip in June 1940. Since then I worked as assistant locomotive operator and I earned well.

I could play few musical instruments: piano, accordion, saxophone. I took part in an amateur club of the Sambor depot. There was a brass orchestra that often performed at concerts. I was a saxophone player, a dancer, master of ceremonies and a soloist singer. So I went on trips according to the schedule to be able to attend rehearsals.

On the 22nd of June 1941 at 6 o'clock in the morning I was to take a trip to Germany as an assistant locomotive operator. I came to the depot at 5 o'clock in the morning to obtain documents and do the final inspection of the locomotive before departure. I was surprised that there were no lights in the depot and there were many people in military uniforms on the platform. The depot radio announced that all depot employees had to stay in the depot and if they left it they would be executed. I didn't understand what happened. At about 10 o'clock one of militaries announced that Germany attacked the Soviet Union without an announcement and that we were at war.