

Mikhail Katsenelson



This photograph was taken in 1940 in Zhitomir region of Ukraine.

Here I'll tell you how I got there. I have no photographs where I am younger, therefore I'll also tell you some words about my school years.

When I was a pupil of the 9th form (it was in 1936), my father was sent to Bronnitsy near Moscow. There he worked as a drugstore manager (as usual). We lived there (as well as in Millerovo) at a service apartment.

Mum kept the house alone: we had no assistants. We had not many books: possibly due to our frequent moves from one place to another. I liked to read, but had not enough time for it, because in addition to school studies I was engaged in music: I learned to play violin. I did it with pleasure, and gave it up with pleasure, too. But my delicate ear for music turned to be very useful to me in the army.

You know, the war was a great tragedy for all people, it was an arduous trial, and people seemed to think about nothing except the war. But it lasted 4 long years, and for the most part its participants were young people.

Therefore it was desirable to while sorrow sometimes: they arranged contests of amateur art activities. [Amateur art activities included dancing, singing, etc. in collectives or individually] I participated in one of such contests. Together with other participants we were brought to Moscow by planes. I was the leading singer. We sang the popular song Ty Odessit, Mishka! (You Are From

Odessa, Mike!).

There in Bronnitsy I finished my school.

In 1938 I entered the Moscow Power Economy College named after Molotov. By the way, Polina Zhemchuzhina, his wife was the director of the College. I left the parents' house because it was too far to go to Moscow for everyday studies.

So I settled in a hostel. [Hostel is a specially constructed apartment house for residing of students, workers or other citizens during their work or study.] When a first year student, I got seriously ill with chronic malaria. Therefore I had to repeat my first year course.

In 1939 I started my studies again as a first-year student, when a sudden government decree ordered to take all first-year students away in the army. People were told that students were taken for a year term. All of us moved to Ukraine by freight cars.

We came to Zhitomir and started studying military science. I got to the school for gunners and radio operators. They taught us how to handle a machine gun and a radio set. In spite of the fact that radio studies were much more difficult, it was rather easy for me.

You see, people with tuneful ear were able to learn Morse code easily, and I was one of them. I studied very well; therefore I finished the School before the appointed time. Together with several soldiers we were sent to a military unit.

There I was given the rank of first sergeant and started my service at the aircraft garrison near Zhitomir. Taking into account my successful studies at School, they appointed me the lead aircraft radio operator. But suddenly a great trouble came upon me: I suffered from air sickness!

So I was sent to health examination. There I was examined thoroughly and the results were not encouraging: I was certified as unfit for flights. I became a radio operator at the airdrome.

As our military unit was in the process of regimentation, we lacked airplanes and specialists. Therefore sometimes it was necessary to replace my comrades. Sometimes I served as a rigger.

During that period of time I took advantage of the situation and made my first parachute jump. It happened to be not very successful, and received a scolding.