

Yevsey Abramovich Kotkov



This is a picture of me, Yevsey Abramovich Kotkov, taken in Kiev in 1920. After the Tsar was forced to abdicate in March 1917, residence permits were cancelled, and we returned to live in Basseinaya street in the center of Kiev. We were all for the revolution and freedom. Then we heard about Lenin and Trotsky. Everybody around was talking about the 'power of workers and peasants.' They were forming into the workers' units. They were called 'Workers' Guards' at the beginning. The authorities in power changed rapidly. They changed 11 times -- the town was occupied by different units. I remember that the Denikin Army (led by General Denikin ? Commander of the

White Guard Army) occupied Kiev; then it was the Petlura army, then the Germans with guns and cannons and then Poles. This was in 1920. At that time, I was 16 years old and wanted to join the Red Army, so I went to their recruitment office. They asked me how old I was and who my parents were. I told them that my father was a craftsman. They also asked whether I knew Kiev well. They told me to go the railroad freight yard where I would see a train marked with red crosses. I found that yard, and the train. A woman in a leather jacket came out to meet me. She was the Commissar of the train. She had a Mauser gun. She took me as a corpsman. In 1921, after the Peace Agreement with Poland, she told me that she was going to send me to study in Moscow. But I said I wanted to stay home. She gave me hug. I remember many Jewish people came to Kiev then. They were all shouting 'Freedom! Freedom!' Many of them had to buy, sell and barter to survive. There was a high rate of unemployment in Kiev. The employment office sent me to a private tinsmith shop. I worked as tinsmith my whole life.