

Yuri Bogdanov

Yuri Bogdanov

Moscow

Russia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

Date of interview: October 2004

Yuri Bogdanov is a stubby man. In spite of his baldness he looks young for his age. Yuri is a professional soldier, having dedicated his entire life to the army service.

Only after being transferred to reserve he taught in the civilian institution. Yuri has been writing a lot since his retirement, mostly memoirs of his life and the generations of his family.

Some of his stories have been published. He is very sociable and communicable and a good story-teller. He has been living with his daughter since his wife passed away.

They live in a two-room apartment of a five-storied building of the 1960s.

His great-grandchildren are the most important thing for him, especially the eldest one, Kirill, whom he calls his best friend and interlocutor.

Now I'd like to fulfill Yuri's request by publishing his appeal at the beginning of this interview.

'I am kindly asking everybody: If this interview is read by some of the kin or people who know Cousin Malka (nee Bogdanova, born in the early 1940s, married in Vienna, Austria) as well as Malka's brother Grigoriy (who with his mother left for the USA or Argentina from the camp of displaced persons, located in Germany, and who changed their names), please respond to this letter. You can get in touch with me via Centropa. I am very grateful for any information about my family.'

- [My family background](#)
- [Growing up](#)
- [During the war](#)
- [Post-war](#)
- [Glossary](#)

- **My family background**

My father came from a Jewish peasant family. My grandfather Gershen Bogdanov and his family lived in the village of Parichi, near Babruysk [in that period in Russia, today in Belarus, about 40 km south of Minsk]. My grandparents were born in Parichi. Many generations were born in that village. Grandfather was a peasant. He rented land from a landlord and tilled it by himself.



He grew wheat, corn and potatoes. The money he got for the harvest was enough to get by till the next fall. Grandmother Nekhama was a housewife, which was customary for Jewish families. There were three children in the family: the first-born, Folia, then the middle one, Noson, and my father Jacob [Jewish name: Yankev].

My grandparents were religious. Father told me that Jewish traditions were kept at home. Grandfather went to the synagogue during Sabbath and on religious holidays; Grandmother only on holidays.

When the sons grew up and started cheder, Grandfather took them to the synagogue with him. Everybody marked Sabbath and religious holidays. The kashrut was observed. I never met my grandmother; she passed away in 1927. I knew my grandfather though. He always wore a hat. He had a long beard and plaits [payes].

My father and his brothers got religious education in cheder. They finished four grades of the Jewish elementary school. When the sons became adults, each of them took his own path. The eldest, Folia, left for Poland. He finished a lyceum there, then graduated from university in Warsaw. He lived in Grodno [since 1939 in Belarus, about 250 km west of Minsk]. I don't remember what Folia's profession was. He had three children - two sons, Grigoriy and Lev, and a daughter, Malka. In 1941 Folia was shot by the Germans in Grodno.

His wife was able to escape with their children. Lev and Grigoriy were drafted into the Soviet army [during the Great Patriotic War] [1](#), and Malka happened to be in Vienna, Austria, and got married there. I don't know how she ended up in Austria. I was in the army at that time [in the 1940s], and my parents didn't tell me anything about it.

Lev and Grigoriy wrote to my father when they were at the front and sent pictures. Grigoriy went through the entire war. He was a private in the infantry troops of the Soviet army and finished the war in Germany. He stayed in Germany after the war. He managed to come to the USSR and take his mother to Germany.

In 1947 they appeared in the camp for displaced persons under alias names and left either for America or Argentina. In winter 1947 Grigoriy left for Moscow to say good-bye to us without mentioning his further plans. I haven't heard anything about him since then. So, the last peg to hang on was gone 45 years ago. All my efforts in finding him were futile. I hope some of Malka's or Grigoriy's relatives or people who know them will read this story. I would be very thankful for any message about my family.

The second brother, Noson, had a prearranged marriage. He was married to a Jewish girl called Nehama, born in a village near Mogilev. He settled in his wife's house and acquired a husbandry, following Grandfather's example. They had two cows, one horse and a plot of land.

The Soviet regime wasn't after Noson after the [Russian] Revolution of 1917 [2](#) because he didn't hire people. Then collectivization in the USSR [3](#) and dispossession of kulaks [4](#) started, and in 1928 Uncle Noson and his wife were exiled to Siberia having been preliminary plundered. They didn't have children.

Noson and Nehama were imprisoned in the Gulag [5](#), and later they didn't want to come back home. They settled in Novosibirsk [about 3,000 km south-east of Moscow]. Noson was very friendly with

my father; he used to visit us.

In 1958 his wife Nehama passed away, and my lonely and sick uncle remained by himself. He died in 1970 from cardiomyopathy. It happened outside. He had been so alone that I had to go to Novosibirsk to bury him.

My uncle bequeathed all his property - his house and savings - to my father. But my father didn't get it because he had passed away by then, and his entire bequest was acquired by the state. All I was able to get from Noson's house were his Jewish books, prayer books, and the portrait, which hung on the wall. The portrait was made from inscriptions in Hebrew, I couldn't decipher. That is all left from him as a keepsake. Those recollections are still painful.

I know hardly anything about my father's prenuptial life. He didn't talk much about himself. I think my father was drafted into the tsarist army in 1905 and he served there as a private for three years. I don't know what my father was involved in after his return from the army.

My mother's family lived in a hamlet called Svisloch near Mogilev [about 180 km east of Minsk]. Grandfather's name was Volf Rosenblum. I don't know my grandmother's name. Before they moved to Svisloch, my grandparents lived in the village of Berezino, not far from Minsk, where their children were born. Mirra was the eldest daughter, born in 1869.

Then Moses was born in 1873. The third child was daughter Seine-Guta, born in 1875. My mother Feige-Leya was born in 1882. The youngest child, son Ele, was born in 1884.

My mother never told me why her parents decided to move to Svisloch from Berezino. Grandfather Volf had a joiner's shop, for the sake of which the whole family was maintained. Grandmother was a housewife. The family was considered intelligent for those times. Grandfather paid a lot of attention to education. All his children grew up well-mannered and educated. They were well-read and self-educated. I cannot say much about their entrepreneurial qualities, but I can definitely say that they were wonderful spouses and parents, considering family to be the most vital predestination.

I think my mother's parents were religious. It couldn't have been otherwise with the Jews living in hamlets and hick towns. Religion was the pivot of their lives. Nobody was brave enough to be considered an infidel by the neighbors and acquaintances. Besides, I can say so for sure by observing my mother's life, who remained religious in spite of ruthless atheistic propaganda of the Soviet regime [see struggle against religion] [6](#). She must have acquired her adherence to the Jewish traditions and religion from her parents.

Mother's eldest sister Mirra was married to a local Jew, Meisha Ugorskiy. They left for Moscow shortly after getting married. Mirra had three children. Mother's brother Moses was married and also had three children. He was drafted into the tsarist army during World War I, was captured and passed away in Berlin in 1915. Seine-Guta was married to a Mr. Rosenblum. I don't remember his first name.

They lived in Mourom [Vladimir oblast, about 250 km from Moscow]. They had two children. She died in Mourom in 1953. The youngest brother Ele was married to Etya. They didn't have children. They lived in Babruysk. Ele died in Babruysk in 1950. Mother's sisters and her brothers' wives were housewives. I don't know what my mother's brothers and brothers-in-law were involved in

professionally. No matter what they did, they worked hard to provide for their families.

My parents had a prearranged marriage. It was a common way to get married back in those times. I don't know the details of their arrangement, but my parents got married in 1912. They had a traditional Jewish marriage. My parents didn't tell me about their wedding. They kept their marriage certificate [ketubbah], issued by the public rabbi in Parichi. [Editor's note: there was a title of spiritual rabbi (kohein) and public rabbi.

The spiritual rabbi performed at the synagogue and the public one represented interests of Jews to the state authorities.] Unfortunately, it was lost during evacuation. Grandmother had passed away before my mother got married. I don't remember the year of her death. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Svisloch. I'm sure the funeral was in accordance with the Jewish rites as it couldn't have been otherwise back in that time.

My parents moved to Babruysk after getting married. It was a big city as compared to Parichi and Svisloch. [Babruysk was an important lumbering center with a very active Jewish community life. The total population numbered approximately 42,500 in 1914, 61 percent were Jews.] It was easier for my father to find a job there. Besides, my mother's younger brother Ele lived there with his family. My parents were friends with Ele and his wife Etya.

I remember Babruysk very well since childhood. Most houses were one- storied, but rather big and made of stone. There were large plots of land on the outskirts of the city, where the inhabitants grew vegetables, cereals, fruit and kept cattle and poultry. They fed town-dwellers. There was a big market in the downtown area, where they sold their products. There were some two-storied buildings in the city, and they seemed huge to me.

Our family lived in a one-storied stone building in the center of Babruysk, on 21 Leterta Street. I still remember this address though I haven't been to that place since the war. Now it is difficult to take such a long trip, but I don't give up, and still hope I will have a chance to come back to my native city. Of course, I wouldn't recognize it now.

Babruysk was practically entirely devastated during the war, and the buildings of my childhood were most unlikely to escape destruction. I don't know whether that house was owned or rented by my parents.

I remember the synagogue very well. My father used to go to a large and spacious two-storied synagogue. Men were on the first floor, women were on the second floor. It wasn't the only synagogue in Babruysk; I just don't remember any other. There were a lot of Jews in Babruysk, more than half of the population. The other half consisted of Poles, Belarusian and Russians.

• Growing up

My father finished only four classes at school, but he was a very intelligent and active person. He was good at everything he tried to do. He lived for his family, strove to maintain his wife and children, and managed it very well. He apparently did it better than me when I was an adult.

In 1914 my elder brother Solomon was born. In 1915 my mother's father, Volf Rosenblum, passed away and that is why my second brother, born in 1915, was named Volf. When my brother went to

school he was called by the Russian name Vladimir [common name] [7](#), consequently he kept that name.

I was born in 1921. I was given the Russian name Yuri; my Jewish name is Yudi. Only Yiddish was spoken at home. It's my mother tongue. I spoke Yiddish in my childhood and I remember this language very well now. Of course, we were fluent in Russian, but we didn't speak it at home.

Father worked hard and was entrepreneurial to earn money. During the NEP [8](#) my father came into money due to his entrepreneurial skills, hard labor, business acumen and intelligence. He had a shop for casting mill stones and grain milling, which were in high demand in the collective farms [9](#) and state-run collective enterprises [Sovkhoz] [10](#). Millstones were huge, with a diameter of about three meters. My father had his own stamp with his surname written on it. All millstones produced by my father were stamped with my father's stamp.

In 1928 my father was conferred with a golden medal at the agricultural exhibition, and he was very proud of it. I don't know what happened with that medal. We were rather well-off thanks to my father. We had enough money not only for a living, but we were able to save money as well.

My mother didn't work after she got married. She helped Father the way she could. She was also a homemaker, who nurtured the children and created a hearth. When I hear 'Jewish mother,' I associate it with my mother. She was a true Jewish mother, who lived for her children and kept them in her heart and soul.

Almost every summer my parents took us to father's brother Noson in the village of Daraganovo [today Belarus, app. 40 km from Babruysk]. We spent the whole summer there. These are very pleasant memories. I recall the taste of fresh milk given to us by Aunt Nehama. I remember a pine coppice not very far from the house, where we hung a hammock.

Uncle Noson and Aunt Nehama didn't have children, and gave all their love to their nephews. Daraganovo wasn't very far from Parichi. We always stopped by Grandfather Gershen's and enjoyed his hospitality. We loved Grandfather very much.

In 1926 my father decided to immigrate to the United States. At that time my cousin Solomon, the son of my mother's sister Mirra, was at the head of the American Jewish Joint [11](#) Distribution Committee in Minsk. The documents for the departure of our family had already been processed, but Mother said she didn't want to leave for a foreign country abandoning her kin, whom she would never have a chance to see again. I remember my parents talking many times in the evenings and my father convincing my mother to leave, but my mother would burst into tears. So, we stayed.

My parents were religious. We observed all Jewish traditions at home; though my parents used to wear secular clothes. I don't remember my father in a long black jacket or my mother in a long black dress. My father shaved, and had no beard. My father wanted to keep abreast with the time. He didn't want to look frumpish.

My mother covered her head with a kerchief when she went outside. She had beautiful thick long hair, and I didn't like the idea of concealing her gorgeous hair. Father had prayer books as well as tallit and tefillin. I still keep my father's tallit. Even during Soviet times when religion was almost outlawed and religious people were persecuted, my father still went to the synagogue on Sabbath and during Jewish holidays.

The Jews of Babruysk treated my father with respect, and considered him to be a decent religious man. We were rich and Father always gave money for charity, for the needs of the synagogue. He was not tight-fisted.

All of us observed Sabbath at home. My parents didn't work on that day. Mother tried to do all work about the house on Friday, and cooked food, that would be sufficient for two days. Bread wasn't baked at home. There were a lot of Jewish bakeries in Babruysk, where bread and Sabbath challah were on offer.

On Friday my mother cooked chicken broth with homemade noodles and gefilte fish. She cooked in a Russian stove [12](#), and put the pot with cholent in the oven for Saturday. The oven door wasn't opened until Saturday noon, and when my mother took the clay pot from the oven, it was still warm. Of course, we had to do certain things on Sabbath - switch on the light at night, stoke the oven to get warm, boil water for tea. We made arrangements with our neighbors, non-Jews, and some of them came to help [shabesgoy]. My father went to the synagogue Saturday morning, and then he read prayers and told me the stories from the Bible.

My elder brothers went to school at that time and they were inculcated that it was silly to believe in God, saying that it was obsolete. Probably my father didn't want my brothers to cheat, that's why he didn't make them take part in Sabbath classes.

I remember very well how we marked Pesach. Mother got ready for the holiday in advance. The house was always clean, but there was a major cleaning before Pesach, though I didn't understand the need for that. The rooms were emptied so that mother could whitewash walls, clean windows and wash floors.

On the eve of Pesach all bread was taken from the house, even little slices and crumbs were burnt. [The Passover cleaning, the mitzvah of biur chametz -- getting rid of chametz - and other traditions described below belong to the Pesach traditions according to halakhah.] It was the time when Pesach dishes were taken from the loft. They were kept there before the holiday. We ate only matzah for the entire Pesach period. There was no bread.

Mother always cooked a lot of tasty food, i.e. traditional Jewish dishes such as chicken broth, chicken stew [tsimes], gefilte fish, chicken neck stuffed with liver and fried flour, strudels with jam, nuts and raisins [fluden]. My parents and I went to the synagogue on the first Pesach day.

In the evening Pesach seder started. Father was at the head of the table, leaning on the pillows. There was the biggest goblet in the center of the table. It was meant for Elijah ha-nevi. My father stuck to the seder tradition. I, the youngest son, asked him the four traditional questions. I wasn't taught Yiddish; I just memorized those questions by heart.

Father divided the matzah into three parts, and hid the middle one between the pillows. Of course, I saw where he was putting the piece of matzah called afikoman, and I always found a way to steal it. Then father gave me redemption for the afikoman to be given back.

The entrance door was open for Elijah ha-nevi to come into the house, sip our wine and bless us. At times I thought that the goblet, meant for Elijah ha-nevi, was shaking and it was Elijah ha-nevi who had come and was sipping our wine. I understood that he wouldn't drink all the wine, as he was supposed to visit all Jewish houses, and not to hurt anybody's hospitality. Then we sang mirthful

Pesach songs. My father's shop was closed during the first and the last Pesach days. None of his workers went to work as all of them were Jews.

My father fasted for 24 hours during Yom Kippur, the way it should be done. Mother also fasted, but fed the children. She thought we were too small for fasting. [Editor's note: children under the age of nine don't fast, and then they start fasting little by little. Boys start to fast as long as adults do by the age of 13, girls from the age of 12.] My father went to the synagogue for the whole day during Yom Kippur and prayed there.

In the evening we had a feast. During Sukkot we used to put up a sukkah in the yard, and were having meals there during the holiday. My father prayed there. I also remember Chanukkah, because I was given money not only by my father, but also by all relatives and acquaintances who came to see us on that day. I cannot say that I needed that money; I just enjoyed buying some sweet things or a toy without asking my mother for money.

Our happy life was over in 1928, when the powers decided to do away with the NEP. They sequestrated my father's shop and he was made a deprivee. [Editor's note: People that had at least minor private property (owned small stores or shops) or small businesses were deprived of their property and were commonly called 'deprivees'.

From 1917 to the middle of the 1930s this part of the population was deprived of civil rights and their children were not allowed to study in higher educational institutions. Communists declared themselves to protect the interests of the oppressed working class and peasants and only representatives of these classes enjoyed all civil rights.] Father was also deprived of food cards [see card system] [13](#).

We turned into indigent from rich. My uncle Noson came to see us in 1928. We loved him very much, and each of his visits was a festive occasion for us. He always brought village products: eggs, cheese, butter and honey. Noson was very worried. I understood from his conversation with my father that he was afraid of exile and wanted to leave his savings to my father.

My uncle brought a little bag with silver coins. I also understood that my father also had savings. In the evening I saw my father make a small millstone from flint and from some other materials and stashed away his and Uncle's money. Then he locked the aperture and hid the stone in the shed under firewood.

In 1928 I entered the first grade of the Jewish seven-year compulsory school. It wasn't far from our home. I didn't have any problems with my studies.

After my father was bereft of his shop, he was involved in construction. The production of xylolite slabs was launched at that time, and father made xylolite floors in houses under construction. This job wasn't lucrative, but took a lot of effort and time. Father was aware that our prosperous life was over, and he even feared to be arrested. He knew he should save his children in the first place.

My elder brother Solomon, called Syoma by us, was very gifted. He had excellent marks at school and was able to finish a two-year curriculum within one year. In 1929 he finished the tenth grade of the Russian compulsory school at the age of 15. Father sent him to Moscow to Mother's sister Mirra. Syoma got ready for the entrance exams to Moscow State University [M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, the best University in the Soviet Union, also well-known abroad for its

high level of education and research]. He became a student of the physics and mathematics department at the age of 15.

Father rented a room from an elderly lady, who also agreed to cook for Syoma. Vladimir left for Moscow after Syoma. He entered a vocational school and studied to become a turner. He lived in a hostel. Father went there to see my brothers, brought them food and money. Having seen Moscow, my father understood that the whole family should move there. He was known by everybody in Babruysk, but it would be easy for him to hide in such a large city as Moscow, where people didn't know him. And that way he would be able to avoid arrest. In March 1930 my father went to Moscow to find a job and an apartment. He was so brisk that he was able to cope with many things.

My mother and I remained on our own. I felt myself an adult man being in the third grade, and responsible for my mother. At two o'clock that night somebody knocked on the door. We woke up, and Mother opened the door. Three men in leather jackets came in. They said they were from the GPU [14](#), and started searching the apartment. The whole house was topsy-turvy and all precious things - bonds, silver, money, jewelry etc. - were put on the table. Then they put all those things in a suitcase and left in the carriage with my mother. I was ordered to stay in.

At dawn the same carriage came to the house, and one of those three men took me with him and we went somewhere in the city. He asked me where my father and brothers were. He also asked where the gold and money was hidden. He fawned, then threatened, then promised a reward. I said that my father and brothers were in Moscow and that I didn't know anything about gold and money. I was scared.

I couldn't follow how long I was with that man, and when he brought me back home. I ran to my uncle Ele, who lived close to us. Aunt Etya soothed me and gave me something to eat. My aunt and uncle had a long discussion, and then it was decided to send a telegram to my father. On that day my uncle and I went to the GPU to bring food to my mother. They took the package, but they didn't allow us to see Mother.

Next day I went there by myself, and stood in a long queue to be able to ask to see my mother so I could give her warm things. I saw my mother behind the bars. She stretched out her hand and exclaimed, 'Yudle!' I will never forget her emaciated and thin face, her worried eyes, her backcombed hair and blood seeping from the wound on her head. I was so distressed that I would never forget that. I told her that we had sent a telegram to father. She shook her head disapprovingly.

I didn't go to school at that time. There were other things on my mind. I stayed with my uncle Ele. I spent the whole week in fearsome expectations. Finally, Father came back from Moscow. He went to the GPU straight from the railway station. He went to see investigator Golubovskiy, who was in charge of my mother's case. They said he kept all confiscated things for himself. They went to the shed. I was told not to enter.

Father must have given away all he had for mother to be saved at any cost. In the evening my father came back home with Mother. My parents were talking all night long. I was nine and I joined their conversation. Mother reproached Father for making us indigent, and Father reproached Mother for not having been willing to leave for the USA in 1926, and chucking away such an opportunity. Now there was no way to immigrate. Father explained his fear for mother's torturing,

beating and exile, the way it had happened to uncle Noson. That is why he gave away everything he had, even uncle Noson's savings.

That night Father made the decision to move to Moscow immediately. During his stay in Moscow he found out that there was an opportunity to get a job in the construction of the Losinoostrovskaya-Belkovo railroad. The construction center was located in the committee forestry between the stations of the Northern railroad Podlipki and Bolshevo [about 170 km west of Moscow]. There were barracks for workers between the stations Podlipki and Bolshevo. There were also barracks with separate rooms with one kitchen for two rooms.

Father left the next day to settle there. Father stayed in Mirra's apartment. I will always be grateful to her for her hospitality and help during the hard times for our family. Syoma rented a room somewhere in Moscow, and Vladimir lived in the hostel. Mother and I stayed in Babruysk for a while. In about a month we received a telegram from my father saying that we should leave.

Grandfather Gershen came from Parichi to help us pack our things. He was an elderly handsome man with a long white beard. He packed dishes. There were a lot of everyday and festive dishes. Grandfather wrapped each cup and plate in paper very carefully, so fragile things weren't broken during our trip.

My mother and I left for Moscow. My father, my brothers and Aunt Mirra met us at the railway station called Belarusskiy. Then we took a tram and got off at Yaroslavskiy station, and then went to Podlipki by electric train. [Editor's note: There are nine main railroad stations in Moscow. The stations are named after train routes: from Yaroslavskiy train station the trains leave in the direction of Yaroslavl, from Belarusskiy train station in the direction of Belarus, from Kiev train station -to Kiev etc.] Then we went through dense forest and reached the barrack settlement, where we were supposed to live.

The barracks were a little bit more than two meters high. They were made from double boards with sawdust between them for warming. There was no electricity. We had to carry water from the wells, located at a distance of 300 meters from the house. There was a beautiful pine forest with wonderful meadows and glades. Then our barrack was given a number: 202. Our mailing address was the following: 202 Committee Forest, station Podlipki. We lived in two adjacent rooms, 11 square meters each.

In Babruysk I was in the third grade of the Jewish school. The nearest school for four classes was in Bolshevo, about five kilometers away from us. It was a one-storied wooden building. There was a church close by. It must have been a church parochial school. I went to the Jewish school in Babruysk and didn't know Russian very well. I wasn't good at writing, so I was accepted in the second grade.

During the first winter the children of construction workers were brought to school in a carriage. The next year I went to school on foot. Then I found a way to go to Bolshevo station to catch a train to Podlipki station. It was the first time when I understood that it was bad to be a Jew. I was the only Jew in my class. I was mocked at for being a Jew in school and out of school. I had to go through teasing and taunting, even beating. I don't want to recall those times.

When I went home from school by electric train I quickly thought, that if I jumped off when it stops before a traffic light, before reaching the station, it would be much closer to our house. There were houses of railway workers not very far from the station. They lived in the same barracks as we did. Some guys saw me jumping off the train, and then they rushed from the bushes and attacked me, giving me a good spanking. I came back home in tears and with a bleeding nose. How could I defend myself? I complained of it to my brother Syoma.

He met me at the station once, and both of us made my 'enemies' flee. Later on, when I happened to be in one school with them, we made friends. I finished the third grade in Bolshevo and went to the fourth grade in Podlipki. The whole village of Podlipki consisted of the Kalinin [15](#) defense plant and the houses of its workers. There were no other enterprises, and that's why this village was called Kaliningrad. I went to school #1 [16](#) in Kaliningrad. Of course, there was also an air of anti-Semitism there, but I was older and was able to defend myself.

The years 1930 and 1931 were times of starvation. There was a strict food card system in the country. My mother was supposed to get daily bread. She had to exchange those cards for bread and feed four men. I was the one who brought the bread, and I ate the crust on my way home. Once a week my mother went to Moscow to get bread. We stopped by Aunt Mirras's house. We came back with loaded bags. Besides, we had to chop wood and bring water. Mother wasn't able to do all that by herself.

I was ten, but in spite of my age I was responsible for those chores. I had a good stamina since childhood knowing how to do chores. For my mother it was the hardest to do the laundry for such a big family. Self-service laundry in Kaliningrad was at the public bathhouse. Ladies laundered there in big tubs. My mother and I took linen to the laundry when I went to school. After school I went to the laundry with my mother and we took the clean wet linen back home. It was very heavy. I had a backpack for that purpose. In winter my mother and I transported the linen in a toboggan.

Father was 42, but full of pep in spite of his bygoness. He took pains to make a better living for us. He rooted out the trees around a house. Of course, Syoma and I helped him with that, though he was the strongest and did most of the job. He rooted out a plot of 500-600 square meters and planted potatoes. Father made a little orchard in front of the house.

In summer 1931 the organization that built the railroad was liquidated and the barracks were given to their inhabitants. We became the owners of two rooms in the barrack, but my father was jobless. He wasn't given a job at the defense plant in Kaliningrad. He found a job in Lyubertsy [along the Kazansk railroad] and was involved in the construction of xylolite slabs. He was familiar with that process as he had had that experience in Babruysk. I went to my father's construction site several times. When I saw my father working there were no doubts he had abundant energy.

The workshop was launched, but there was a fire, and the shop burnt down. We thought that father wouldn't escape prison, though he was innocent. Then they found the worker, who was the arsonist. Father was exonerated, but again he remained without a job. Then he worked as a foreman in the construction of the Academy of Science in Kaluga [about 250 km south of Moscow]. He was so efficient at that job that the management appreciated his work, and even promised to give him an apartment in Moscow as trips to Kaluga on the turnpike took four hours. My father was unlucky again.

Construction was temporarily out of funding. Father went to the wool institute to work as the head of the warehouse and worked there for a rather long time. And at the same time he had another job as a teller in some sort of construction company. There was Stalin's portrait above the wicket. Once the portrait fell down and the glass was broken. My father was fired the next day, though it wasn't his fault. Then the wool institute was either closed down or merged with another institution, and my father was left without a job.

My father lost jobs many times, but in spite of all he was the only bread- winner of the family, because my elder brothers didn't work at that time. My brisk and honest father was constantly being humiliated. Then, my father worked in the construction of a dwelling house. He was well-respected and in 1935 he was given a room in a communal apartment [17](#) of the house he had built. I was at the meeting where my father was given the keys to the apartment, as well as a bonus and a prize for his work. My father took pride in that. Mother didn't want to move into the communal apartment, though it was in the city and had all conveniences.

My brother Vladimir moved into that apartment. He came to us in Podlipki. Having finished school Vladimir went to work at the plant and studied at the machine building college in the evenings.

In spite of getting home late from work, my father still did things about the house. He made our apartment warm, built another room, a veranda and made another stove. We had an opportunity to lease a room, and that extra income was a big help. Mother always remembered her brilliant life in Babruysk from her standpoint and reproached father for giving away all his savings to the GPU. I am still prone to think that my father did the right thing; otherwise we would have ended up in the Gulag. I knew what it was.

In 1935 prisoners built a canal to the Moscow river. I was 14 and on my way to and from school I saw hundreds of poor, hungry and exhausted convicts who were working strenuously under control of well-fed and bold guards.

We took pride in my brother Solomon. In spite of poor material conditions and lodging he was an excellent student, and finished his studies brilliantly. It was the time when outstanding and world-renowned scientists taught at the physics and mathematics department. In 1935 my brother graduated from Moscow State University and obtained a mandatory job assignment [18](#) to the All-Union electronic technical institute. My brother never told us the details of his job, just mentioned that he had a very important assignment, connected with the elaboration of new kinds of armament.

Within five years he became a candidate of science and then he defended his doctorate dissertation [see Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees] [19](#). He was overwhelmed with work and his personal life was in the background. He was so thoughtful and tender towards mother and I ... Syoma got married unexpectedly in 1940, and at the beginning of 1941 his daughter Susanna was born.

Syoma was more than a brother to me: he was my teacher, my mentor and my spiritual guide. Often I came to him and he always found time to listen to me and help me tackle my problems. My other brother Vladimir was much more aloof from us. We saw him mostly when he brought linen to mother to wash.

In 1934 Grandfather Gershen passed away in Parichi. My parents went to his funeral. Grandfather was buried in accordance with the Jewish traditions in the Jewish cemetery in Parichi. Since then my father recited the Kaddish annually on the day of Grandfather's death.

My school life was rather standard: joining the Oktiabryata [Young Octobrist] [20](#), then the pioneers [see All-union pioneer organization] [21](#). I wasn't a brilliant student, but a rather good one. At any rate I wasn't in the lowest rank and the teachers were satisfied with me. My elder brother Solomon should be given credit for that. He did a lot for me to like exact sciences - mathematics and physics. I had a lot of pals at school, but there were only two bosom friends: a Jew, Grigoriy Robinson and a Caucasian, Yuri Makhmutbek. We lived close to each other and stayed friends.

• During the war

The times of the Great Terror [22](#) commenced. There were 'enemy of the people' [23](#) trials, which were astounding for us, schoolchildren. Our idols - great military leaders, party activists - were arrested, and then in the trial reports they were charged with preposterous things even in a child's view: espionage in several countries simultaneously etc. Portraits of most of those people were in our textbooks. Before that our class teachers used to tell us which names and which portraits should be crossed out or glued in books. I remember those terrible years from 1936 until the beginning of the Great Patriotic War.

The year 1937 was the year of general horror. My parents weren't party or governmental activists, and we had a skimpy living and there was no reason for fear. But those were the times of great tension and fear. We were scared to say an extra word, or some phrase that might later be misinterpreted. I submitted my application for Komsomol [24](#) membership that year. My brother plied me with love to books. Reading became my favorite leisure pursuit. I loved poetry.

At that time there was a lot of doggerel - just rhymed slogans and recitations of articles. I liked Pushkin [25](#), Lermontov [26](#), and Yesenin [27](#), a more modern one, the Soviet regime disapproved of. His verses were considered effete as he wrote about feelings, nature, relations between people in the epoch of global performance.

The government thought Yesenin's verses to be shallow. During the discussion of my entering the Komsomol at the class meeting, the girl I was in love with got up and said that I had recited Yesenin's verses to her and was unworthy to be a Komsomol member. I was accepted in the Komsomol only the next year.

In 1939 I finished the tenth grade of compulsory school at the age of 18. Many lads of my class of graduates entered military schools. A military career didn't seem attractive to me and I decided to have military service for a regular term and then enter the institute. I was allocated to Narofominsk [about 70 km south of Moscow], a town outside Moscow, to the communications squad of the infantry regiment of tank division #14. It was the time when the war in Poland was over and there was an annexation of Polish territory [see Annexation of Eastern Poland] [28](#).

Then the Finnish campaign commenced [see Soviet-Finnish War] [29](#), and my mother was really perturbed that I would be dispatched there. Our division didn't participate in the Finnish events. There was a radio platoon in our squad and being compared to the others I was rather educated - ten classes - so I was taught to work with radio matters. The army had some radio stations for

communication with the battalion. I was good at sending with a key, broadcasting six groups, which was rather proper for those times.

In May 1941 I became a sergeant and a radio operator. I remember my senior and junior commanders with respect, but I had most respect for Captain Sukhinin - the commander of the communications regiment.

The soldiers' mode of life was rigid. There wasn't enough room for the squad soldiers in the barracks. Three soldiers slept on double-decker bunks. Other than that it was the ordinary life of a soldier: military alarm, sports, duties, training and political classes. At times we were given permits to leave. Sometimes my mother and my beloved came to see me, either both of them or separately. We had certain expectations for the future without knowing that war would sever us.

All of us were patriots believing in the correctness of Stalin's actions. We were confident in the combat efficiency of our army and thought that nobody would endeavor to attack our country. We had been told since childhood that our army was the strongest, our tanks were the fastest and our cannons were the most powerful. Nobody believed that Germany would be belligerent towards us, we were even more positive after our victory in Poland and the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [30](#). Our political instructor convinced us that a non-aggression pact had been signed with the Germans, but England and France were our enemies.

The term for regular army service was two years, and in September 1941 I was supposed to be demobilized and come back home. You can only imagine how much I was looking forward to my return. But my plans were doomed. My coevals, lads born in the period of 1920-22, who were in the regular army service, had to take an assault of the fascist army in June-July 1941. According to statistics one or two out of a hundred of those lads survived. I was lucky to survive that's why it's my duty to talk about that time.

On Sunday morning, 22nd June 1941, at 4am, the Germans started an artillery attack of our borders. German fighter-planes and tanks moved to the East. We had a calm night in our camp tents. The wake up signal was supposed to be one hour later on Sunday. None of us knew that the war had been unleashed. Things were the way they had always been.

Only by 10am our worried commanders were called for a meeting. That was the time when we heard the word 'war.' Shortly after that we were sitting on our benches in the back of a truck of new khaki color. A white rhombus with the number '6' was drawn on the back header; it was the sign of our regiment. We sat shoulder to shoulder having backpacks with communicator device, gas masks on our side, and a holster with cartridges and a spatula. We had short rifle in the knee area. We were clad in guerrilla wear and a helmet, tilted over the eyes for it not to be carried away by the wind.

The highway Moscow-Minsk, familiar to us from training, was now our way to war. There were bright variegated flowers right behind the verge. Rye and flax ears could be seen in the field. I was deeply immersed in my thoughts. I was sure that the war would last no longer than two-three months, and most likely would be over by October. I pondered over my arrival home and entering the extramural department of the aviation institute and working as communicator in the navy or aviation. But I was still dubious. I wondered why the war with tiny Finland had lasted for four months. How would we be fighting the Germans, who had captured almost all of Europe? We learnt

good lessons from Finland and we wouldn't repeat the same mistakes, I thought.

On 21st June we drove in the daytime, and the next day we moved mostly in the evening and at night being aware of the bombing. I saw death for the first time. Our politics instructor was in the first truck standing on the footboard to have a better view of the road. He was hit by an oncoming car and died at once. We passed Vyazma, Smolensk, crossed the Dnepr and stopped north of Orsha [then Russia, today Belarus, about 500 km south of Moscow]. Here, in the forest, the first battalion and regiment headquarters were established. Other subdivisions were supposed to get there.

All of a sudden a black car approached us. A general clad in a black leather coat with general's stars in the buttonholes and two lieutenants got out of the car. Platoon commander Roslyakov reported to the general that the soldiers were marching. The general ordered the regiment commander to move to Borisov, settle by the crossing and wait for the orders. The general and lieutenants got in the car and left. Roslyakov rushed to the commander with the report. The authority of the general's uniform was unconditional for us; nobody could question any orders coming from him. For such a sergeant like me meeting a general was like seeing a god. That was the way we were raised.

At the same time we saw the same car passing by, escorted by a column of 10- 12 cars. Roslyakov appeared in a rush, he was ordered to find out the name of the general and his position. We followed the car column. There was a road junction after five or six kilometers. There was a traffic jam, the road was blocked by cars, weapons and carts. There was no way we could pass, and then the car with the general vanished into thin air. Then we heard the humming of German planes. The Germans started bombing. People rushed in all directions.

Everybody who was at war keeps in memory the first hour spent at war. It is the boundary separating him from the common world, changing his goals. All things which were vital before appeared to be shallow as compared to the craving for life and fear of death. Each of us had his own hour of death. It was a fascist bomb for my acquaintances living in Arbat. A shell hit the theater building making hundreds of families homeless.

For a front-line soldier it is the death of a comrade. For me it was the bombing east of Orsha. I recall this very hour, when I go back to the beginning of war. When the bombing was over, there were killed and wounded soldiers, tens of burning and upturned trucks, killed horses and upturned carts. We had seen nothing of the kind before. It happened within a couple of minutes.

I understood the role of the general, but I wasn't brave enough to say it out loud. The lieutenant must have thought the same. Nobody admonished us of possible diversions at war, fight in the defense, in the siege, captivity and concentration camps. We were taught only to assault and to win, but in reality it turned to be different. We weren't able to find the general and we returned to the regiment. We stayed for several days in the forest north of Orsha. It was calm there; we could only hear the distant sounds of passing cars.

A week passed and we still were scarcely informed about the war. The Germans had captured Minsk on 28th June and approached Borisov by that time. We didn't know and couldn't have congested that the Germans had taken Latvia and Lithuania, part of Estonia, Belarus and Ukraine, that 14 divisions of the western front had been exterminated by the enemy. At the same time there were a lot of heroic regiments, battalions, squads and platoons which were able to break through

the siege in battles. We thought that our regiment was such an unconquerable force that it was able to change the course of war.

We were sure that our commandment let the Germans inland on purpose for them to be exterminated by our regiment and division. In the evening of 29th July we were ordered to take a defense position south of the town of Borisov. A short June night went by very swiftly, and on 30th June we crossed the Berezina River. I will dwell upon the next six days. They were the most terrible days in my military life.

Later there were numerous battles full of horror but they can't be compared to the first war days of my baptism of fire at the age of 19. Each of those days is embossed on my memory stronger than any of the other battles that were to come. These were the days when I turned into a soldier, a warrior, a man, and wasn't a docile homesick boy any longer.

The headquarters of the regiment were south of the town, very close to Berezina. Finally we had something to do. The three of us - I, Sergeant Dadunashvili and Private Sedoleyev - were sent to the first battalion with a radio station to establish communication with the regiment. Sergeant Kozlov was at the lead. He was supposed to make sure that there was communication and to come back to the squad. Crossing the meadow we saw soldiers without weapons, insignia and sometimes without fore-and-aft caps. They went to the south either in groups or solely, looking back very often. We met commanders, too.

We didn't understand what kind of people they were, but we could feel that they were trying to escape a great peril. One soldier came to us in a tunic without buttonholes. He was very weary, pallid and asked for food. He told us not to go anywhere as German gun soldiers settled in the forest. We didn't have food with us; Sedoleyev gave him a rusk. The soldier hungrily ate it. We suggested that he should go with us, but he refused. He said he would try to cross the Dnepr as he thought there would be new squads.

At that time we didn't know that we would be in the same position. Hardly had we approached the forest as we heard artillery fire and bullets whistling above our heads. We got ready for shooting, but we couldn't see the Germans. Kozlov lead us round about the forest. He was a professional soldier, tacit and strong and I was sure that we would be safe with him.

We came to a meadow and heard the clatter of a string of bursts. Everybody got down, Kozlov remained standing. Then he made a couple of steps and fell down. I crept to him and saw that his eyes were open but didn't seem vital. Human life was taken so rapidly! We started to creep back to the meadow and hauled Kozlov's body with us. Only Kozlov knew the location of the 1st battalion, that's why we decided to return to our regiment. There was a single shot and Sedoleyev cried out. The bullet hit the battery supply that was sitting on his shoulder. He was wounded in the shoulder by the bullet.

We were approaching the road along the Berezina River, behind which the regiment headquarters were located, and saw German tanks accompanied by shell blasts. Where were we supposed to go? We hauled defunct Kozlov and wounded Sedoleyev. I was the only one with a senior rank; the other ones had the rank of privates. I had to make a decision.

We had to bury Kozlov first while we were still alive. Dadunashvili and I dug a hole and put Kozlov's body there, and covered his head with a handkerchief after having taken out the documents from his tunic. We made a mound, put a small log there and made an inscription with an indelible pencil: 'Kozlov Vladimir Sergeyevich, born in 1920, perished on 30th June 1941.' We were sure that we would come back here and make a worthy tomb for him.

Sedolev was getting worse and worse. Dadunashvili took care of his burden. The wound wasn't deep, but bleeding. We bandaged the wound, but the bleeding didn't stop. I had served in the army for two years with Sedolev. He was much older than we were. His wife and children were waiting for him at home. Sedolev was a Kazakh. He didn't speak very good Russian, but it didn't bother us. He was like a father for us. We loved him very much.

We tried to get a hold of the regiment by radio with voice messages and by sending a key. There was no response. We had to leave. Every moment was imminent with siege. We might have been in the siege already. We didn't hear any battle sounds only from the South so we moved there. We came onto a rural road in an hour. We saw marching soldiers, carriages, and sometimes we saw trucks. It wasn't so sultry, but we were emaciated. I was wondering where our regiment was and where we were to go.

I asked a soldier and found out that there was a battle by the Borisov crossing and our squads were crossing the Berezina River. We decided to go there as our regiment was most likely there. We saw a carriage with wounded soldiers passing by. We asked the nurse to take our Sedolev and said good-bye to our friend. There were two of us left. Dadunashvili had come to our squad in December 1940. He was from the Georgian town of Tbilisi. He finished the first term at university, the history department. His father was a doctor and his mother was a teacher. Dadunashvili was my age, but he was corpulent, and physical exercises were hard for him. We loved him for his kind and open heart.

We sat on the shoulder of the road. It was getting dark. We saw the soldiers passing by, one by one and in groups. They seemed to be at a loss. We were in the same boat. None of us knew where our regiment or squad was. They didn't want to be left with the Germans. There were some officers among them. They were supposed to stop passing soldiers and organize them by saying, 'Listen to my order!' and all of us would form a military subdivision, not a throng. But it didn't happen. I fell asleep sitting. It was foggy at dawn. The road was empty.

We tried to communicate with our regiment, and again we failed. It was calm. There was no shooting. We thought that the Germans had left and we moved back to the meadow and saw German motor sidecars there. Right after that a couple of German soldiers clad in uniforms and helmets came from the forest. Then there was a column of Germans moving on motorcycles towards the South. They were armed with machine guns. We understood that our troops weren't ahead of us, and there was no way we could take that route.

We were not only despondent, we were also starving. The last meal we had was the day before we had left the battalion. We didn't hear cannonade at the Borisov crossing. It seemed serene and quite. We turned the radio transmitter on receiving mode, but there was nothing on the air, if we shifted a little from our radio wave, we could hear German speech. We came to a glade. We could see the rut left by a truck, as the rut was very deep and filled with mud. We saw a pile of cans on the side of the road. It turned out to be condensed milk. The truck must have been overloaded, and

they threw those cans away. We hunkered for tasting that milk, and each of us took a big can. We were full, took some cans with us and left.

We had walked for several kilometers and reached a wide unpaved road. We saw women, children and elderly people walking by in torn clothes. I saw a petite tanned woman with two tiny children in her arms. Those infants, swaddled in blue blanket sheets were screaming desperately. I went to them and offered my help. The woman looked at me indifferently and said all I could do was to kill her children. She said she wasn't strong enough to carry them, and had no milk to suckle them. She could have carried one. Which of them was she supposed to abandon? In her opinion it was better for both of them to die. I asked them where they were from; she said she was from Minsk.

Her husband was in the army and her twins were born on 3rd June. Her house had been demolished by a shell. Her parents and younger brother lived in Parichi, but the Germans had already come there. They were Jews and the Germans most likely would have murdered them. That woman traveled in a truck with evacuated people, but on their way militaries took the truck and told them to go on foot to the train station. She was lacking behind, and said she couldn't walk any more.

We took the crying children and went to the shoulder of the road. I was about to open the can with the condensed milk to feed those children and Dadunashvili went to the forest. Soon he came back and said that gypsies were in the forests and there might be a chance that they would take the lady with the twins with them. We moved into the forest. The gypsy group was on the point of leaving, they were loading all their chattels in a cart.

An elderly gypsy moved towards us. He must have thought that we wanted to take his horse. He said he wouldn't give away his horse, as it was the only one he had. I told him that we wouldn't take the horse, if he took my sister's children in his nomad tent. The gypsy called the ladies, they discussed something in whisper and then he said he wouldn't forsake a lady with children. We gave him the cans with condensed milk, said good-bye to the lady and went back to the road. We understood that the gypsies wouldn't abandon them as Germans disliked gypsies as much as Jews. When the elderly gypsy found out that the lady was a Jew he out of solidarity gladly agreed to take her with them.

We were despondent not only about the position we turned out to be in, but also because of the unfulfilled assignment. We thought that our regiment must have had terrible losses because we failed to establish communication with the battalion. We had been trying to communicate with the battalion, but all our efforts were futile. There were still throngs of fugitives on the road. Sometimes trucks passed, but none of them stopped to pick up at least the weakest ones.

Suddenly we saw the truck with the sign of our regiment: the white rhombus with the number 6. Then the second one followed. We waved our hands, but nobody paid attention and the trucks passed by. They seemed to be escaping from somebody. Then the third truck with the familiar sign showed up. We ran after it. I was able to get a hold of the back header. I was about to get on the truck and somebody snapped at my fingers. I fell on the road. The truck was out of sight. Dadunashvili helped me to get up and said that it was the truck of the head of our financial department. I hurt my leg, and I had an ache in my fingers. But my soul hurt the most. I felt myself a tiny grain carried away by the gale. The second day of our wandering, and the tenth day at war, was over.

In the morning we woke up on the shoulder of the devastated road. There were no fugitives. Germans might have shown up, so we left for the forest closer to the crossing. We walked across the forest and happened to be on the tussocky peat bog. It was harder and harder to walk. Then we had to find a place so as not to get drowned. We jumped from one hassock to another. We couldn't turn back as it was as dangerous as moving forward, besides we hoped that there would be the end of the bog soon. But it seemed boundless. Were we to die in that mire? Finally I felt solid soil.

There was a field covered with weeds ahead of us, and we could notice a hamlet from afar. We went there. The dog started barking and an old woman came outside. I asked whether there were Germans there and she said that the Germans wouldn't be able to reach that place. The hostess told us where we were. As it turned out there was a path to the hamlet, and we walked across swampland.

The closest crossing was by the village of Chernyavka, 15 kilometers away if taking a path to the East, and we would have to walk for 25 kilometers through villages. The hostess didn't know who was at the crossing. She said that there wasn't war in their place; she could only hear cannonade sounds in the distance. The hostess cooked some food. Before sitting down at the table we were looking for a place to hide in case Germans came. The best place for us was the garret of the old shed and we took the transmitter there.

Our meal was interrupted by the barking of the dog. We climbed up to the garret; the hostess took away the ladder. We saw three German motorcycles approaching the hamlet. We had five cartridges among the two of us, given to us by a soldier we had met on the road. We decided to shoot as soon as the Germans appeared in the yard, we allocated targets. I had an unusual composure. It was most important for me not to miss. I didn't care if I survived.

The Germans stopped by the gate without stopping the engines. The hostess went towards them and they asked in broken Russian whether she had seen any Russian soldiers. The hostess shook her head. I was still aiming at my target just waiting for the Germans to enter the yard. Suddenly they turned around and left. We fell asleep at once being exhausted from strain. We were woken up by the hostess. She invited us for dinner. We weren't hungry. We started thinking over our further actions.

We could infer that battles weren't far from where we were, judging by the visit of the Germans. We decided to move to the crossing. Our radio station was useless as we ran out of battery supply. We decided to hide it in the garret without mentioning anything about it to the hosts. We thought that we would come back to the place soon. Then it suddenly dawned on me not to and I made up my mind not to leave it behind.

We moved on early in the morning. The hostess talked us into staying. She even suggested that we should stay with her sister for a week or two as she wasn't known by anybody and the only way to reach her was via the path. She thought that the war might be finished within a couple of weeks. But we wanted to reach our troops. We saw a hamlet after a couple of hours. When we approached it, we noticed a field kitchen and our soldiers between the houses. There were no doubts: the village was taken by our soldiers. I felt such rejoice! I asked one of the soldiers where the commander was and went to the hut, the soldier pointed at.

The major was sitting at the table. He was looking at the table map. We reported to him: 'Sergeant Bogdanov and Private Dadunashvili, trying to get to our troops.' We told him everything that had happened to us during those past days and showed him the map to the crossing drawn from the words of the hostess, and our Red army documents. The major asked if our radio station worked. We said that it was OK with the exception of battery supply. When we were talking the senior lieutenant came in with a report that there were Germans to the east and to the north of the hamlet. The only way to Berezina was through the Southern bog. The major told the lieutenant to take us to establish communication with the division.

On our way the lieutenant told us that their regiment had been able to break through a siege for a couple of times moving steadily towards the East. After night marching the regiment made a halt in that God-forsaken hamlet not far from Berezina. The only way to the crossing was via that hamlet and the German troops were trying to break through to the crossing in order not to let the retreating Red Army troops cross the river. The task of the regiment was to stop the fascists. The path surrounded by swamps and peat bogs was very important as there was no ford.

The villagers went to the forest to hide. The soldiers on the shoulder of the road dug trenches and got ready for defense. The lieutenant led us to the other end of the hamlet, showed us our neighbors to the left, our fortification place and the observation point. The only thing to the right was the road. That was our battle position: not to let fascists into the hamlet. We made one trench for both of us, but it turned out to be too deep, as the bottom was filled with water. We made a parapet with moss, settled the station and started waiting. The senior lieutenant put down our data, clarified the task once again and gave us ammunition for two: twelve cartridges, one bottle with combustion material and six rusks. It was the evening of the fourth day of wandering.

Germans approached the village at dawn and started fire. We could hear the din of tanks and deafening blasts coming from the right side of the forest. Short bursts of gun-machines were heard from the left. One by one the Germans were crossing the road in front of us. It was our sector. Dadunashvili shot one German on the road, the rest of them hid in the forest on the opposite side of the road. A tank was moving towards us. I took the bottle with combustion material. As soon as the tank was close to our trench I threw the bottle.

The tank kept on moving, and then it was on fire. I don't remember what happened then. The second tank moved in the village. I could hear the clatter of the gun-machines and blasts coming from the cannons. The battle was in the center of the village. Soon the entire village was on fire. We felt the glowing air. German infantry marched on the road. We ran out of cartridges and there was no use for us to stay in the trench. I looked at an adjacent trench. There was nobody there.

We moved to the forest and met our neighbors from the left trench. They had gone in the same direction. There was a senior lieutenant among us. There was a swamp right behind the village. Water slopped under our feet. Gradually we made it across the bog to the forest. Our fatigue outdid our will, sensibility and precaution. We reached the point when we weren't able to control our actions. Dadunashvili and I sat under a spruce, broke the last rust in two parts. My leg, which had been injured when I fell down from the car, was hurting really badly. German planes were humming above us, but it wasn't an obstacle for me to fall asleep.

I woke up at dawn. I saw a streak of water in front of me. It was the Berezina River. We went closer to the river. There were target indicators all over the place. We could hear bullets splashing on the

water. Shells were whistling and clattering. Corpses and carcasses were floating on the river. Water ripples were red with blood. There were 15 of us. We took two wounded from the swamp. Then each of us took a long pole. The senior lieutenant cried out the order: 'Ahead!', and we rushed into the water. In a couple of seconds we felt no bottom.

The current threw us to the raft with the wounded. We propped the raft with our poles. We were swimming and pushing the raft in front of us. We considered our purpose to push the raft rather than to swim to the bank across. Our efforts and goals were common: to rescue the wounded, and that willingness was stronger than fear and fatigue. Then I felt the bottom. Dadunashvili fell and I dragged him to the bank. We came to the bank, walked for a while and then stopped at the brink of dry pine woods with funnels and dug-outs full of blood-stained bandages.

The remainder regiment was in the pine forest. It is difficult to put my exaltation in wording. Finally we were home. Only seven men survived of our communication regiment. None of the commanders survived. Only Nazarov survived out of all radio operators. Something happened to him during those days. He used to be affable and smiley, but he met us in an aloof mood. As soon as Captain Sukhinin, the head of communication, found out about our arrival, he came to see us right away. Now he was supplying for the head of the headquarters and other commanders. He was very happy to see us, hugged and kissed us. I couldn't help bursting into tears.

We gave Sukhinin the documents of Senior Sergeant Kozlov, told him how he had perished and about the wounding of Sedoleyev. We were fed and we finally calmed down. There was a stop to our roving and constant fear to be captured by the Germans. We were told that the 1st battalion we were trying to reach, had been bombed, attacked by German tanks, and without being able to take defense positions thrown into the Berezina.

I was taking a nap, when I heard the loud order: 'Get up!' There was an unknown junior lieutenant in front of me clad in a new uniform. Dadunashvili was already standing, so I got up too. The lieutenant asked another question with the same intonation pitch: 'Were you captured by Germans? Which assignments did you get from them?' I couldn't comprehend what he was talking about.

Then he said he would shoot us at once if we kept silent. We told him about our hard misadventures, but he wasn't interested in that; he reiterated the same question: what was our assignment given by the Germans. We again started our story, and then he called two armed soldiers sitting close by and told them to take us to the special squad, the SMERSH [31](#).

Captain Sukhinin approached us. He was the one who understood what was going on and stood between us and the junior lieutenant. He said that he knew us as radio operators of the regiment and he would vouch for us. The junior lieutenant tried to object to Sukhinin by saying that he wasn't entitled to stand in his way and that he would report to the commander of the SMERSH making Sukhinin take us there by himself. Sukhinin said that being acting regiment commander he ordered the lieutenant to leave the regiment immediately. The junior lieutenant and his subordinates left. Only later on we got to know that Sukhinin rescued us from big trouble: we could have been shot as German spies.

In a day we left for the formation close to Smolensk. There radio operator Nazarov told us that he had to report to the junior lieutenant about our coming back from the siege. He had to fulfill the

order otherwise he would have been taken to the camp. These were such times.... SMERSH people didn't disturb us anymore and I thought there was an end to that. But I was mistaken. They never left their victims out of control.

In 1948 when I was in the military academy I was reminded of that case: I was called into a special department of the academy and told that they knew about my being in the siege and that it wasn't known what kind of assignment I was given by the Germans before coming back to the regiment. There were no consequences but I was reminded once again that the vigilant NKVD [32](#) still kept me under surveillance. That was a game of a full cat releasing a mouse from its claws and then catching it again ...

In September 1941 after the establishment of a new formation having battles for Yelnya [Russia] the remainder soldiers of our regiment joined the 1st infantry division. I still remained electronics operator. After battles for Sumy and Shtepovka on the south-western front we were suddenly transferred to the town of Narofominsk outside Moscow and took a defense position at the river Nara. I was doomed to have battles in the place where I used to serve in the army during peaceful times. The battles were severe. Germans rushed to Moscow.

The hardest battles were near Moscow in November 1941, where our troops were in the basement and Germans were on the top floors. This house is still preserved in Narofominsk. Now it is the Soviet Army house, at that time it was called Red Army house.

Captain Sukhinin remained regiment commander, but he always remembered us, 'old' electronics operators. The winter of that year was very snowy and frosty. It was especially cold at night. A few times ski battalions came to our battalion. These were mostly sportsmen: well-armed skiers from Sverdlovsk, Perm, Kuybishev. They were clad in white fur coats, hats and varenki [warm Russian felt boots]. We envied them being desperately cold in our thin military coats. As a rule they were sent across the Nara River with an assignment to capture the bridgehead at the opposite side of the river.

An electronics operator was sent with such a squad to establish communication with the regiment. Dadunashvili and I were sent with some of those battalions. It was night, 30 degrees below zero. Bright stars were twinkling on the dark blue velvet sky. We walked on the ice of the river Nara with a young lieutenant, the ski battalion commander. On the opposite bank there was a cowshed to the left and a red factory building to the right. We had to transmit messages: 'Uranus, I am Star. Can you hear me? Receiving' - 'Star, I am Uranus. I can hear you well.'

As soon as we came to the middle of the river the whole sky was radiant with flare lights and the Germans started gun and mortar fire. Ice broke with each shell blast. Water was seeping through the ice making our clothes wet and then icy. We had to lie down on ice. We had no other way to go. The battalion halted but the Germans didn't cease fire. In lying position we noticed that the gun-machine to the left was right in front of a cowshed, and the mortar was to the right. The lieutenant wasn't with us.

We decided to transmit that data to the regiment. 'I am Star, please call the Second' - 'the Second' meant the commander of the regiment headquarters, Captain Sukhinin. We told him about our observation and in a couple of minutes they started fire from the gun-machine and mortar-machine. The gun-machine made no sound. Only after adversary fire wasn't so intense any more,

the battalion was able to take the bridgehead on the opposite river bank. Unfortunately we weren't able to stay there long, and the next morning we had to go back with serious casualties.

Sukhinin called us and expressed his gratitude. He said that he would grant a governmental award to us. It was October 1941. At that time awards were very rare. We didn't keep that episode in our memory during day-to-day battle. We were so much surprised when on 6th November 1941 we were called to the headquarters of the division and given the medals 'For Valor' [33](#); at that time they were made of silver and had a red band on them. The embossed number on my medal was 30468, and Dadunashvili's was 30469. Certificates for the medals were signed by the chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets, Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin. There were a lot of awards afterwards. I have 27 orders and medals.

But the most precious and memorable was the Medal for Valor given to me in Narofominsk on 6th November 1941. In that period our division was conferred the title Guards division and I had the honor to be present in the conferment ceremony with some other representatives of our regiment. Captain Sukhinin was also present. In 1973 I went to school # 45 in Moscow, where the museum of our division was. There I saw the picture on the wall, taken when we were given the red Guards banner in 1941. Sukhinin and I are in that picture.

After the liberation of Narofominsk our regiment went farther to the west. In February 1942 the severest battles started in the village of Zakharkovo [about 100 km from Moscow]. We had to take a defense position there.

First of all I would like to say a few words about Captain Sukhinin. Probably everybody met such a person at war, whom he would remember all his life and joyfully talk about. Sukhinin is such a person for me. When I recall the war, I think of Sukhinin. He was a person with high morale, who became a second father to me.

In 1941 I was only 20, and I cannot say I considered myself a grown-up. Captain Sukhinin saved us from the camps and contumely, showed great kindness and benevolence toward us. Besides, he broke through the siege being at the lead of a couple of dozens of people, who were in the headquarters of the regiment by the Berezina River. Before the war he was commander of the 14th infantry regiment. He was a professional soldier, always neat and tidy. He had a shoulder belt with the crossing on the back.

Our relationship with Captain Sukhinin became warmer and warmer with more casualties in the 14th infantry regiment. We were like relatives. Once at night one of the senior commanders organized a bath in one of the huts. Having a bath at the front is like a feast and relaxation. I was happy to go to the bathhouse with Captain Sukhinin when he suggested so. We were given linen, soap, a bucket and a pot. Water was heated in one barrel outside, another barrel contained cold water. There were two wooden benches in the bathhouse, and it was warm. The light fixture was made from a cartridge. We took our military jackets off. I told Sukhinin that he could undress while I would go to fetch water. I took the bucket and the pot to get water. There were a lot of soldiers by the fire waiting for their turn to get in the bathhouse.

When I came back Captain Sukhinin had already taken his clothes off and was waiting for the water. Soon we ran out of water. I put my military jacket and boots on and rushed outside to get water. When I was scooping hot water, there was a blast nearby. I was thrown back. Then I ran to

the hut, where Captain Sukhinin was, and saw that there was no roof left. Captain Sukhinin was on the bench. I began to shake him and noticed that there was blood seeping from a couple of wounds on his chest. It was very light in the hut from combusted petrol, leaking from the upturned light fixture. The regiment doctor came at once, but it was impossible to rescue Sukhinin. We buried our dear man in the cemetery in the village of Zakharievo, close to Moscow, 18 kilometers from Narofominsk.

The next day we took the village of Zakharievo. We were walking across the village. It was snowing. I saw a German officer leaning against a wall. He was curled up lying still with his left hand stretched out, all covered in snow. I touched him with a gun to make sure that he was dead. He fired immediately from an automatic pistol. I was wounded in the head. The bullet came in over my upper lip and exited close to my left ear. Then I happened to be in the hospital in Orekhovo-Zuyevo.

The doctor said one or two millimeters off and I would have been dead. Fractionary cranium parts were coming out for many years. I still have a scar from that wound. I stayed in the hospital for a few months and then returned to our troops. Soon I was wounded for the second time. A mine fragment hit me on the side on my soldier's thong made out of thick leather, which saved me. Part of the thong pierced my abdomen, but softened the shock and stopped the fragment. The doctor removed that piece of thong and the shell fragment. I thought if God had spared me twice, the third bullet would be lethal for me.

After being discharged from the hospital, I was sent to the Stalingrad front of the south-western army. I never came back to my regiment. Before going back to the front I was given a one-week leave for full convalescence. I went to Moscow. None of my kin was in Moscow. I corresponded with my family and knew that all of them had been evacuated to Sverdlovsk [now Yekaterinburg, Sverdlovsk oblast, 1,400 km from Moscow]. My brothers were drafted into the army at the beginning of the war.

The elder, Solomon, was at the front for a couple of months, and then he was called back to Moscow, as he was involved in work which was of paramount importance for the military. When the Germans were approaching Moscow, my brother's institute was evacuated to Sverdlovsk and he kept on working there. Shortly before the war my dad was employed at the Kalinin plant at Podlipki station, and that plant was also evacuated to Sverdlovsk. Thus, my parents and Solomon happened to be in Sverdlovsk together.

Syoma's fate was very tragical in Sverdlovsk. The institute wasn't provided with the necessary experimental capability, and safety rules weren't observed. He had a lethal electric shock. In December 1942 my brother passed away. It is hard to imagine what my parents and all his acquaintances had to go through. He was buried in Sverdlovsk. I was haunted by the thought why there was nothing on his grave, except for a mound. At the end of the 1940s I was in Sverdlovsk for my academy practical training. I was able to find my brother's burial place and put a tombstone there.

I went to Moscow. It was the hardest time for me. The city was devastated; there were neither family nor friends. Finally I was able to find an acquaintance of mine. It was a girl from a senior grade of my school, one year older than me. Her name was Elvira Martirosova. I wouldn't say that I was in love with her during school-days. We hardly knew each other at that time.

Elvira was just the only acquaintance I met after being discharged from the hospital. I was convinced that I would die at war, and it was very important to see somebody I knew before going back to war. We spent the whole day together. We strolled along the city, had a talk, remembered our common acquaintances and our pre-war time. I had to leave in the morning. Elvira suggested staying in her house overnight. That night became our nuptial night.

In the morning I knelt to propose to her and besought her to get registered in the marriage registration office. Elvira said that I shouldn't make any commitment and hasty decision to get married. I talked her into going to the state marriage registration office. It turned out that we had to pay three rubles for getting registered. Neither I nor Elvira had the money. Then I remembered that I had the certificate for the Medal 'For Valor', and I was supposed to get a monthly payment of five rubles for that certificate.

I received the money in the savings bank and paid for the marriage certificate. My wife came to see me off at the train station, straight from the state marriage registration office. I went to the Stalingrad front. In the first place I would like to say that I went through the entire war after getting married. My combat life didn't become any better but I wasn't wounded ever again, moreover I didn't even get a scratch. I think it was for the sake of my wife. It looked like I had obtained a mascot.

Elvira was born in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku, in 1918. Her father, Konstantin Martirosov, was an Armenian, and her mother was a German from a family of German colonists [34](#). In 1921 Elvira's elder brother Aksen died during the Armenian and Turkish massacre. Her mother couldn't get over it and died in 1923.

Elvira remained with her father at the age of four. Konstantin did his best for a motherless child not to feel the loss of her mother so acutely. But at the beginning of the 1930s he was sent to the Gulag for a preposterous indictment, and he died there shortly after. They wanted to put her into an orphanage, but her relatives from Podlipki took her. They raised Elvira. After finishing school Elvira went to Moscow, and entered the Plekhanov state economy institute, the statistics department.

There have been so many tales of the Stalingrad battle [35](#) that my story wouldn't add anything new. These were the times of severe battles. All I had seen before Stalingrad was nothing to compare with that. The city was totally devastated; there wasn't a single building left. German artillery was constantly firing. The Volga bank was the mostly fired on, for our troops not to be able to cross the river. Dug funnels and trenches were all over the place. We walked on iron as the earth was covered with fragments of mines and shells.

There was a German concentration camp for our soldiers near Stalingrad. We went by it and saw dug-outs crammed with wounded soldiers frozen to death. Nobody changed bandages and the blood seeping from wounds was getting frozen. It was a horrible scene. Even battle-seasoned soldiers couldn't help bursting into tears. Frozen cadavers were lining the road. The Germans didn't manage to burn them. There were ravines filled with corpses in the city. In spite of severe frosts we choked because of the putrid smell. Then we got used to that and paid no attention to it later.

Battles were held for each house, for each inch of land. These were battles of life and death. We paid the highest price for the victory in the Stalingrad battle - too many casualties. In skirmishes I

established connections moving with my radio set from the regiment to the sites where communication was to be established. First there was artillery fire, and then snipers appeared. It was very dreadful, but fear came only later during respite. There was no fear in the battle, only thoughts of how to carry out the assignment. In January 1943 the fascist troops were forced to retreat from Stalingrad.

On 2nd February 1943 the meeting devoted to the liberation of Stalingrad was held.

The Stalingrad battle was crucial in the course of the war. It was often broadcast in the roundups that our troops were attacking. During the first two years of war there were mostly messages about the retreat of our troops from such and such city after severe battles. We were attacking on all fronts; it gave us hope. I had another reason to rejoice - my wife was pregnant.

Our daughter Tatiana was born in 1943. It is difficult to put my emotions in words. In spite of war, rivers of blood and devastation, a little human-being was born - my daughter! It is next to impossible to picture how hard it must have been for Elvira with an infant in a starving and cold Moscow. I think her deed was as great as the feats of soldiers at war.

We moved forward. After Stalingrad our division went for replenishment in Romania. I was a senior lieutenant at that time. I have dearest recollections of Romania. Cernavoda was the first city that was liberated by us in Romania right after crossing the USSR state border. All frontier towns were devastated, but that one seemed to be safe and sound as if there was no war there. I was going in a jeep along the city and there was a car column. Suddenly I noticed a group of people clad in black hats with payes.

They stood by the synagogue. I heard that the king of Romania, King Michael [36](#) agreed with Hitler not to touch Romanian Jews and Hitler had fulfilled that agreement. I stopped the car and greeted them in Yiddish. They thrust through to me with the exulting sound of 'Acheron, Acheron!', pulled me out of the car and brought me to the synagogue. The car was waiting for me, I had to be off, but they didn't let me go. Everybody wanted to thank me and give me a hug. I will remember the meeting with the Jews of Cernavoda for ever. After Romania, we liberated Bulgaria, then Hungary. I finished the war in the Austrian city of Baden near Vienna.

• **Post-war**

The population of those countries treated us differently. I think that their attitude wasn't determined by the mere fact that we belonged to the USSR, but by our attitude towards them. When we took Baden, I was a captain, the head of the communication squad. It was a big division, a few hundred people with many radio stations. We established communication for the entire army. Our squad settled in a mansion pertaining to some German commander. My personal aide reported to me that the basement of the mansion was taken by a family of seven people, who serviced that German commander.

Besides they had little dogs, either they bred them or kept them for the children to play with. I went to the basement to see those people. They were peaceful Austrian people. I understood that they were not my enemies. I didn't go to war to be belligerent with old people and children. Those people had done no harm to me. I ordered my cook to bring them our extra helpings. We had our own kitchen, and there was always food left. While we stayed there, the food was brought to them,

which was enough for the people and for the dogs.

Many militaries brought suitcases full of trophies back home. It was possible to take anything. I thought that it was dishonest and indecent. My wife would have never accepted plundered things. I considered the end of war and my survival to be trophies. I was 24 and my beloved wife and daughter were waiting for me at home. A watch was the only thing I brought back from the war.

When we were on the point of leaving the mansion an old lady, who lived in the basement, came up to me and gave me a wooden box. I opened it up and saw a golden lady's watch with a golden bracelet. The lady said in German that it was a present from them, their way to express gratitude for my cordial attitude towards her family. She told me she would be very happy if I took that watch for my wife. I understood how frank she was and I took the present as I didn't want to hurt her feelings. It wasn't a trophy but a present from the bottom of her heart.

I have never felt anti-Semitism. People treated me differently. But this attitude didn't depend on my nationality, but on my personal qualities. The standards of value were different at war.

I became a candidate of the Party at war, and joined the Party during my studies at the academy. At that time I believed in communist ideas as sincerely as I hate them now. I really went into battle crying out the name of Stalin. No matter what! I knew the way my family was treated, I was indignant about repressions of those, whose devotion to the Soviet life was doubtless, but still Stalin remained my idol.

I hated Germans, fascists - to be more exact. I didn't hate them for unleashing war; I hated them for their atrocity. What they did couldn't be comprehended by human beings. There is a measure to everything. Wolves are beast, which kill their prey to get food, and it is not considered to be bad. But: 'lupus non mordet lupum' ['A wolf shall never bite another wolf', Latin proverb]. A human being is not supposed to kill men. Fascists violated that rule; they had no human qualities they were supposed to have. Morale is a determining feature for me. What kind of morale are we talking about, if they exterminated millions of people for just being Jews and equally groundlessly murdered helpless civilian people.

Those people were not against them, they didn't fight fascism. All they were guilty of was being Jews, and it was enough for the fascists to kill. Stalin was able to create unquestionable love towards him and Hitler was able to ply Germans with hatred towards Jews. A man who believes his idol, can be inculcated with any idea, which will become the sense of his life. That was the way with Stalin in the USSR and the same was the case with Hitler in Germany. The most fearsome for me now is that a new idol might emerge and people would follow him blindly, succumb to him and believe in the correctness of his actions.

I will not mention all my awards. The first and the most precious for me was the medal 'For Valor.' Then I was conferred with two orders: an Order of the Red Star [37](#), and an Order of the Great Patriotic War [38](#), 1st and the 2nd class. Then followed: the Medal for the Liberation of Moscow [39](#), the Medal for the Liberation of Stalingrad [40](#), medals for the capture and liberation of different cities, and a Medal for Victory over Germany [41](#). In the post-war period I got jubilee medals on victory dates of the Soviet Army.

I don't think that the war was really won by us. We were predominant neither in armament nor in tactics and strategy - we fought with cannon fodder. I wouldn't be brave enough to call it a victory. It isn't known how many lives we gave for each German. They name the figure of eight to ten men, but who can tell for sure? Sixty years after the victory we hadn't buried all the perished. Many people are still reported missing. Can we consider it a victory if we see the way people, who were at war, live? They survived, but they struggle, having much worse of a living than the defeated enemy. I can name many facts, which speak for our Pyrrhic victory. That's why I don't like wearing my awards as I consider it amoral to those who didn't returned from the war.

In 1946 I came back home, but I couldn't envisage my living clearly. I decided to remain in the army. I joined the Moscow military command. Apart from my wife and daughter my parents were also waiting for me in Moscow. My brother Vladimir came back to Moscow. After the war he entered the evening department of the Moscow aviation institute. He worked as an engineer in a design bureau. My brother got married before the war.

His elder daughter Alla was born in 1938, and his younger one, Elena, was born in the post-war period, in 1947. Vladimir and I weren't as close as I was with Solomon and we saw each other very rarely. I can hardly say anything about him. He died in Moscow in 1985 and was buried in the city cemetery.

My parents got an apartment in Moscow after the war. Of course, what really helped was both of their sons having been at war. Both of my parents were retired at that time. In spite of the antagonistic attitude towards believers, my parents still stuck to Jewish traditions and remained religious. The only operating synagogue was located on Arkhipov Street, and my father had his seat there. When I came back to Moscow, my father was very proud when I went to the synagogue with him. We marked religious holidays with my parents at home.

Elvira, our daughter, and our son, born in 1947 and named Konstantin after Elvira's father, always came to see my parents. My parents were very happy to see us. I always spoke to my parents in Yiddish. Even now when I go to the cemetery, I speak Yiddish to them. In general I speak Russian. I don't have anybody to speak Yiddish with at home.

Mother died on 4th July 1954. She was buried in the Perlovsk Jewish cemetery in Moscow. The funeral was according to the Jewish tradition. Now as I am even older than my mother was when she died, I take many things differently. There is no way I could overvalue my mother being a mother, a wife and a grandmother. How hard her life was....

Our entire family was centered on her. I remember mother's wrinkly hands with nodulous knuckles. How could Mother manage to do the laundry, cooking and at the same time find a warm word of comfort for everybody? Even at war, when it was very fearsome and hard, I thought of my mother at moments that seemed to be the last and it was comforting. Father lived twelve years longer than Mother did. He died in 1966 and we buried him next to mother in accordance with the Jewish tradition.

In 1947 I was sent to Kharkov artillery radar academy. It was an encouragement. There was a really big competition, ten to twelve for one seat. There should have been preliminary exams in the military command before taking entrance exams at the academy. In 1947 a new faculty was opened - the radar faculty. 80 students were accepted, and 13 of them were Jews.

We were admitted by competition and they treated us friendly and unbiased. Anti-Semitism wasn't felt during my studies no matter that the times were hard. In 1948 cosmopolitan trials commenced [see Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [42](#). The students of the academy were untouched. Nobody changed the attitude towards us, but in general anti-Semitism was displayed in the USSR and remained unpunished.

The same year, 1948, the state of Israel was founded. It was a very joyful event for my parents and me. My father even wanted to immigrate to Israel at that time to take part in the building of the new state. Then he understood the uselessness of his goals as he was too old for that. But both my parents and I have always felt thrilled and keen on that state.

The 13 Jews from our course were very friendly. There is always a person in the family that can be called the conscience of the family. The whole family would listen to his or her opinion, and would be afraid to fall in his/her estimation. I think our group of 13 was the conscience of the entire course. People came to us to ask for advice and support. Eight men out of those 13 were excellent students, who obtained golden medals at school, gifted people.

The first graduation class of our faculty was in 1952. There were very few experts in radar and many students of our course were offered high positions: half of the people of the course were conferred the rank of a general. When the mandatory job assignment process was over, we, the 13 Jews, were not given a mandatory job assignment. Our wives came, we had the graduation parties, but we were not given mandatory job assignments.

The year of 1952 was hard and tough. We stayed jobless for a month. We had feasts, went for a picnic, to the theater, for a stroll. We lived in the hostel with our families.

In a month we were called to the Moscow human resources military department and everybody was given a job assignment according to his specialty. All of us became deputy commanders of radar regiments, located at all frontiers of the Soviet Union. I was assigned to Kyrgyzstan, to the town of Kokmak [about 4,500 km west of Moscow] bordering on China. Others were sent to the Far East, Turkmenistan, to the North... I understood if we weren't Jews, we would get mandatory assignments corresponding to our knowledge and merits.

At that time I understood that we lived in a terrible country. There was a sudden change in my conceptions. They say: 'Jews are all friendly, they stick together, always assisting each other.' I knew things about everybody. Each of them felt himself at home when they came to see me; I was treating them likewise. We were solidary, being one team. Why? Not because we were Jews. If now red-haired people were persecuted, they would also cluster together the way we did. I was treated very well at my workplace.

The Doctors' Plot [43](#) didn't reflect on me in any way. Of course, I didn't believe in charges against those people. One month of staying in Kharkov after the mandatory job assignment process created a serious crevice in my belief in the Party and in Stalin. I understood that all of that was slander, and I was surprised that many people believed in that obvious libel.

I changed 18 jobs during 38 years of working experience. Of course all my assignments were in remote regiments and in the severest conditions. My wife was always on my side. She is the one who should be given credit for all the good things happening in my life. Due to her painstaking

work, a barrack turned into a cozy house, I always wanted to come home to.

My children became good people because Elvira raised them to be, not by words but with her own example. She was the most decent and just person I've ever met. Elvira didn't have the opportunity to work like it happened with most wives of militaries, who led a nomad life with their husbands. Usually there were no jobs and not enough positions in the hick places we were stationed in, besides they didn't want to hire people who could leave at any time by getting an order. She has never reproached me for that. She was never irritated.

In March 1953 Stalin passed away. His death wasn't a tribulation for me or for other civilians and militaries. At that time I understood what the USSR and what kind of dreadful role was played by Stalin. That's why I wasn't confounded by the speech of Nikita Khrushchev [44](#) at the Twentieth Party Congress [45](#), where he denounced Stalin's cult of personality. Khrushchev confirmed and proved those things I started to understand myself. Now I'm also prone to think that there should be no cult of personality, not even in the family, not to mention the state.

I felt state anti-Semitism once again when I was involved in radar work, which was later worth Stalin's state prize. My family name sounded rather Russian, but my nationality didn't fit. Then my director suggested that I should change my nationality. He said he had already made arrangements for me to get a new passport with the name of Bogdanov, but with a different nationality: Russian instead of Jewish. Of course, I didn't agree to such a betrayal. And of course, I wasn't included in the list. I was really hurt, but being mean wasn't the price that I was ready to pay for success.

My nomad life was hard on my children. Every time we moved to a different place, my children had to change school, change their friends. Other than that they lived like ordinary Soviet children - became Oktiabryata, pioneers, Komsomol members. They went to school, took part in different festive occasions for children.

My wife and I marked Soviet holidays at home not because we considered them to be holidays, just because it was generally accepted. I remained a party member, so it was obligatory for me to mark Soviet holidays and to subscribe to the newspaper 'Izvestia' [one of the most popular communist papers in the USSR, published from 1917 to the 1980s, with the circulation exceeding eight million copies].

Certainly it was nice to get extra days off and on such Soviet holidays as 1st May, 7th November [October Revolution Day] [46](#) and Soviet Army Day [47](#) we got together with my friends in my house. Only the Victory Day [48](#) on 9th May was sacred to us. In the morning my family and I went to the Grave of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow and brought flowers there. In the evening the front-line soldiers got together to commemorate the past and to sing military songs.

My daughter had an ear for music. Though it was hard for her to take music classes due to our moving from one place to another, she managed to finish music school and then enter the music institute in Moscow. My daughter was a professional musician, she played in an orchestra. My son had a propensity to exact sciences, taking after his uncle Solomon, whom he had never met.

Konstantin graduated from the physics and mathematics department of the Moscow Physical and Technical Institute. Then he became a post-graduate student. Like my brother he became a

candidate of science rather rapidly, then he wrote his dissertation and became a professor.

Tatiana got married. I don't want to recall her husband. Her private life wasn't a happy one. Tatiana gave birth to a daughter in 1974. Her name is Olga; now she is married. Her family name is Etke now. She gave birth to two children, making me a great-grandfather.

Timur was born in 2000 and Ersu in 2003. My son has two children. The elder one, Ilia, born in 1972, graduated from university. He is married now. Ilia's son Kirill was born in 1999. My son's daughter Evgenia, born in 1980, is an engineer. She is single.

I didn't plan to leave when the mass immigration took place in the 1970s. I didn't judge people who were immigrating; I assisted them in anything I possibly could. I sympathized with them, rejoiced in their making a new life for themselves. But I didn't see such an opportunity for myself. I was born and raised here. I fought for this country.

My relatives are buried here. My children are here, too. I understood that my wife and I weren't young any more and it would be hard for us to get adjusted to a new mode of life. If our children wanted to leave, we would do that in a second for the sake of their future. But our children weren't enthusiastic about that idea, so we stayed. I don't regret this decision of mine. What is done cannot be undone.

In 1975 I retired from the army in the rank of a colonel, as I had reached retirement age, and settled in Moscow. I went to work in the civilian institution to teach radar ranging. I felt the consequences of my war wounds: I became a war invalid of the second class.

I became a pensioner in 1987 and have been a story-writer since then. These are mostly tales about war, some of them are memoirs. Some of those stories were published; other ones are waiting to be. I wanted to leave a true story about my life and the life of my family to my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

I understand that my children don't display a keen interest in that and neither do my grandchildren - they are trying to earn their daily bread. But things change in time, and they will happen to be interested in their lineage. I wanted to make that task easier, and then it turned out that my stories also appealed to other people.

At the end of the 1980s the general secretary of the central committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev [49](#) declared the start of the new KPSS policy - perestroika [50](#). Of course, Gorbachev's speech seemed to be very attractive, but at the very beginning I didn't respect him as a personality. In my opinion he was an ostentatious man, who didn't have a solid belief. I will not deny that something was done during the very outset, and quite a lot to begin with that we obtained real liberties - the liberty of word, meetings and demonstrations, religion.

Soviet people were allowed to go abroad without having to get permission from the state authorities and party organizations no matter whether the person was a party member or not. Then perestroika became crescent. Finally, after a few years we were able to see its results: the society was split into rich and poor, even indigent, the middle class practically vanished. Scientific work wasn't funded; education and culture remained on a poor level, being the determiners of the future of the country.

State anti-Semitism was also in the wane, though it remained on the common level. This is my personal opinion and I'm not waiting for any improvements in this matter. But no matter what, anti-Semitic contempt makes the Jewish community cluster together in solidarity, finding ways to remain safe and sound, otherwise after several generations they might become lazy, alcoholics without initiative and drug addicts.

My son wasn't able to do any scientific work during perestroika just because it wasn't funded. Konstantin was offered a job in the USA and has lived there for twelve years with his family. Then he came back. Now he lives in Moscow. I hope he will have the opportunity to live and work in his motherland.

When the Iron Curtain [50](#) fell, which separated the USSR from the rest of the world during the Soviet regime, my dream of visiting Israel became reality. Once, I was invited there by the Israeli Committee of Disabled War Veterans. The second time I was invited by my friends. I got acquainted with the chief police officer of Tel Aviv, who accompanied our group.

He was born in Kiev, but lived in Israel for many years. This was ten years ago. We traveled throughout the country. We saw historic places of Israel, kibbutzim, cities. I was delighted to meet people in that fragrant garden of the desert. Bad thing is that the population of Israel is decreasing. There are five million Israelis and Palestinians are teeming. I am scared to think what might happen. I was happy to see the Israeli army. I am really in raptures by it. There is such an amazing atmosphere in the army and it is supported by people so much that for the Israeli youth it is an honor to be drafted into the army. They believe in what they are doing. The army is a young generation. Maybe this little burgeon will make Israel rich and powerful.

Perestroika was followed by the breakup of the USSR [in 1991], which I regarded as a necessity and doubtless historic conformity. I consider it natural that new independent states were founded on the shambles of the former empire. It would have been better if it had happened earlier. It is also historically justified. The smaller the country is, the more efficient is its government and the better is the living. I blame the communists for having failed to recognize their own mistakes, crime. They lacked the sense of conscience and intelligence to apologize for all their wrong-doing within 70 years of reign. If they were to do that, our life might be different.

There were quite good things in the USSR, which might still be useful for us and we shouldn't have rejected them. Our communists turned out to be incorrigibly indecent and miserable people. But our government didn't finish the process and didn't condemn the communist party as a criminal organization the way it was done at the Nuremberg trial with the fascist party. We are still reaping the fruits of it.

In the 1990s the revival of Jewish life started in Russia. Though, it's a hard process. But there would be no revival without assistance provided by America and other countries. This process is more streamlined in Moscow than in other towns and cities. There are no hungry Jews now. Jewish charitable organizations have arranged hospices where any Jew can have kosher dinner. There is a wonderful community building [Hesed] [52](#) in Moscow. A person of any age can come there and spend his leisure time by studying Yiddish and Ivrit, Jewish traditions as well as learning foreign languages and computer. I go there very often and see the revival of the Jewish life in Moscow.

People are provided with food, medicine, consumer services, qualified medical treatment. They invite everybody and they are always willing to help. I enrolled in the circle on Jewish history studies. I was interested in that. There was good company there, too. Then I found out that each member of the class was paid 500 rubles per month just for attending classes. I felt humiliated and stopped attending classes. Now I am studying history at home via the Torah. I go to the community house for birthday parties of my friends. I don't mark religious holidays. I've always been an atheist and I don't want to prevaricate.

I lived with my wife Elvira for 58 years. We have two wonderful children. In 2001 Elvira passed away. She was buried in the city cemetery. Except for her name, her father's and brother's names are engraved on her tombstone too. When Elvira died, my daughter moved in with me. Now she is the home-maker.

I think I'm a happy man. I'm 83 and I'm still willing to be active. There are very few front-line soldiers of my age. When I am unwell, I keep telling myself: you are a happy man, you shouldn't forget about it. I'm trying not to make the life of relatives hard. I haven't succeeded in everything I wanted to, but still my wife and I were able to raise magnificent children.

My daughter and son are decent and honest people. Of course, everybody has his own view of moral. As for me I consider a man ethic when he has the gift from God to feel the pain of another person. I'm also happy for having an opportunity to raise my grandchildren and now my great-grandchildren. The youngest great-grandson is a year and a half, the oldest turned five, and I think him to be my friend and good company. Maybe this is the greatest happiness ever possible.

• Glossary:

1 Great Patriotic War: On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war.

By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

2 Russian Revolution of 1917: Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over.

The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

3 Collectivization in the USSR: In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern

Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

4 Kulaks: In the Soviet Union the majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

5 GULAG: The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps.

By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh.

After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

6 Struggle against religion: The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

7 Common name: Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

8 NEP: The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

9 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

10 Sovkhoz: state-run agricultural enterprise. The first sovkhoz yards were created in the USSR in 1918. According to the law the sovkhoz property was owned by the state, but it was assigned to the sovkhoz which handled it based on the right of business maintenance.

11 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee): The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities.

The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

12 Russian stove: Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

13 Card system: The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc.

The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

14 GPU: State Political Department, the state security agency of the USSR, that is, its punitive body.

15 Kalinin, Mikhail (1875-1946)

Soviet politician, one of the editors of the party newspaper Pravda, chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets of the RSFSR (1919-1922), chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (1922-1938), chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (1938-1946). He was one of Stalin's closest political allies.

16 Communal apartment: The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the

construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

17 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR: Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

18 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees: Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktorantura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

19 Young Octobrist

In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

20 All-Union pioneer organization

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

21 Great Terror (1934-1938)

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

22 Enemy of the people

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

23 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education.

The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

24 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837)

Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

25 Lermontov, Mikhail, (1814-1841)

Russian poet and novelist. His poetic reputation, second in Russia only to Pushkin's, rests upon the lyric and narrative works of his last five years. Lermontov, who had sought a position in fashionable society, became enormously critical of it. His novel, A Hero of Our Time (1840), is partly autobiographical. It consists of five tales about Pechorin, a disenchanted and bored nobleman. The novel is considered a classic of Russian psychological realism.

26 Yesenin, Sergei Aleksandrovich (1895-1925)

Russian poet, born and raised in a peasant family. In 1916 he published his first collection of verse, Radunitsa, which is distinguished by its imagery of peasant Russia, its religiosity, descriptions of nature, folkloric motifs and language. He believed that the Revolution of 1917 would provide for a peasant revival. However, his belief that events in post-revolutionary Russia were leading to the destruction of the country led him to drink and he committed suicide at the age of 30. Esenin remains one of the most popular Russian poets, celebrated for his descriptions of the Russian countryside and peasant life.

27 Annexation of Eastern Poland

According to a secret clause in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact defining Soviet and German territorial spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union occupied Eastern Poland in September 1939. In early November the newly annexed lands were divided up between the Ukrainian and the Belarusian Soviet Republics.

28 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red

Army was halted at the so-called Mannenheimer line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannenheimer line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

29 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

30 SMERSH

Russian abbreviation for 'Smert Shpionam' meaning Death to Spies. It was a counterintelligence department in the Soviet Union formed during World War II, to secure the rear of the active Red Army, on the front to arrest 'traitors, deserters, spies, and criminal elements'. The full name of the entity was USSR People's Commissariat of Defense Chief Counterintelligence Directorate 'SMERSH'. This name for the counterintelligence division of the Red Army was introduced on 19th April 1943, and worked as a separate entity until 1946. It was headed by Viktor Abakumov. At the same time a SMERSH directorate within the People's Commissariat of the Soviet Navy and a SMERSH department of the NKVD were created.

The main opponent of SMERSH in its counterintelligence activity was Abwehr, the German military foreign information and counterintelligence department. SMERSH activities also included 'filtering' the soldiers recovered from captivity and the population of the gained territories. It was also used to punish within the NKVD itself; allowed to investigate, arrest and torture, force to sign fake confessions, put on a show trial, and either send to the camps or shoot people. SMERSH would also often be sent out to find and kill defectors, double agents, etc.; also used to maintain military discipline in the Red Army by means of barrier forces, that were supposed to shoot down the Soviet troops in the cases of retreat. SMERSH was also used to hunt down 'enemies of the people' outside Soviet territory.

31 NKVD

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

32 Medal 'For Valor', Established October 17, 1938

The medal was awarded for personal courage and valor in the defense of the Homeland and the execution of military duty involving a risk to life. The award consists of a 38mm silver medal with the inscription "For Valor" in the center of the award and the letters "СССР" at the bottom of the award in red enamel. The inscription is separated by a Soviet battle tank. At the top of the award

are three Soviet fighter planes. The medal is suspended by a grey pentagonal ribbon with a 2mm blue strip on each edge. The medal has been awarded over 4,500,000 times.

33 School #

Schools had numbers and not names. It was part of the policy of the state. They were all state schools and were all supposed to be identical.

34 German colonists/colony: Ancestors of German peasants, who were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to settle in Russia.

35 Stalingrad Battle (17 July 1942- 2 February 1943) The Stalingrad, South- Western and Donskoy Fronts stopped the advance of German armies in the vicinity of Stalingrad. On 19-20 November 1942 the soviet troops undertook an offensive and encircled 22 German divisions (330 thousand people) in the vicinity of Stalingrad. The Soviet troops eliminated this German grouping.

On 31 January 1943 the remains of the 6th German army headed by General Field Marshal Paulus surrendered (91 thousand people). The victory in the Stalingrad battle was of huge political, strategic and international significance.

36 King Michael (b. 1921): Son of King Carol II, King of Romania from 1927-1930 under regency and from 1940-1947. When Carol II abdicated in 1940 Michael became king again but he only had a formal role in state affairs during Antonescu's dictatorial regime, which he overthrew in 1944.

Michael turned Romania against fascist Germany and concluded an armistice with the Allied Powers. King Michael opposed the "sovietization" of Romania after World War II. When a communist regime was established in Romania in 1947, he was overthrown and exiled, and he was stripped from his Romanian citizenship a year later. Since the collapse of the communist rule in Romania in 1989, he has visited the country several times and his citizenship was restored in 1997.

37 Order of the Red Star: Established in 1930, it was awarded for achievements in the defense of the motherland, the promotion of military science and the development of military equipments, and for courage in battle. The Order of the Red Star has been awarded over 4,000,000 times.

38 Order of the Great Patriotic War: 1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.

39 Medal "For Defense of Moscow " was established by the decree of the of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR as of May 1, 1944. More than a million of people were conferred with that medal .

40 Medal for the Defense of Stalingrad: established by the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as of 22nd December 1942. 750,000 people were conferred with that medal.

41 Medal for Victory over Germany: Established by Decree of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR to commemorate the glorious victory; 15 million awards.

40 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans': The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952.

The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

41 Doctors' Plot: The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt.

As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

42 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971): Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods.

He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

43 Twentieth Party Congress: At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

44 October Revolution Day: October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

45 Soviet Army Day: The Russian imperial army and navy disintegrated after the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, so the Council of the People's Commissars created the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on a voluntary basis. The first units distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23, 1918. This day became the 'Day of the Soviet Army' and is nowadays celebrated as 'Army Day'.

46 Victory Day in Russia (9th May): National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

47 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-): Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring).

The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

48 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring): Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

49 Iron Curtain: A term popularized by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech in 1946. He used it to designate the Soviet Union's consolidation of its grip over Eastern Europe. The phrase denoted the separation of East and West during the Cold War, which placed the totalitarian states of the Soviet bloc behind an 'Iron Curtain'.

The fall of the Iron Curtain corresponds to the period of perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the democratization of Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

50 Hesed: Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society.

The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs).

The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.