

Larisa Shyhman With Her Friends



I, Larisa Trachtenberg (at the bottom from the left) with my friends from a radio operator school am in this photograph. This photo was made in Aktyubinsk (Uzbekistan) on 17 January 1945.

There were no discussions about the war in our houses and we only heard on the radio that a war began. At first there were talks that it wasn't going to last long and there was nothing to be worried about, but in August, when it became clear that German troops were advancing, my father decided to send my mother, my sister Maya and me to uncle Isaac in Konstantinovka Donetsk region. We didn't stay long in Konstantinovka. There were air raids, it was horrific... Later we went Astrakhan on a barge. It was cold, but we didn't have any winter clothes. We left Kiev when it was summer. We were told that holding Germans back was a matter of one or two months... We almost starved to death on the road: there was nothing to eat. Only once in a while we could get some boiled cereal... In Astrakhan we were accommodated in a school building.

Later we were taken to a German settlement, in the Volga region. We lived in Kharkovka villsg. I went to deliver water to fields. I had a strange horse looking like a camel. I also made haystacks and worked on a combine unit. All kinds of work I did.

In 1942 my aunt Yelizaveta found us there. Uncle Zakhar was mobilized and sent to Cheliabinsk and my aunt was with her Aviation College in Aktyubinsk, Kazakhstan, 2500 km from Kiev. She finally found us and we moved to where she was. I became an apprentice at a power plant to obtain my card. What I did there? I cleaned it and came home all dirty with fuel oil, with only my teeth white... Looking terrible, dirty... Then my aunt employed me as a courier. Winters are

severely cold in Aktyubinsk and I had my feet frostbitten the moment I started work. I only had rubber galoshes to wear. There was a school of radio operators opened in Aktyubinsk. I finished it and went to work as a radio operator in 1942. The Morse code and so on. I worked with planes, sending them to Tashkent (today Uzbekistan) where they had crews formed and then they returned, landed where we were and we sent them to the front. This was how I worked.

I also went to dance in a dance group in 1942-43. There was an aviation school teaching pilots. They were going directly to the front. There was an amateur performers' club. I danced well. We gave concerts in hospitals. I looked like a girl, but I was a teenage girl and felt like seeing boys. All my friends had boyfriends and only I was alone. Later I had my admirers as well. I was merry and always smiled... a coquette...

In 1944, when Kiev was liberated. They didn't let me go since I was subject to the draft already. I had this status ever since and even had a uniform and three insignias when I was in Kiev. So, I didn't have permission to go. I worked. I saw so many horrible things... I still remember planes crashing into the mountains in the fog, but they didn't cancel flight: it was a war. My aunt wrote me: 'Request transfer to Kiev'. It wasn't easy to obtain permission to come to Kiev. One day in 1945 chief of the republic's department arrived and I described this situation to him and he said: 'You know, I cannot send you to Kiev, but I can arrange for you to go a bearing location school in Baku', - location operators land planes, special training. So I agreed and went to Baku in Azerbaijan, 3500 km from Kiev where I finished this school. I was there on Victory Day on 9 May 1945. Everybody was so happy... Meanwhile my aunt addressed deputy chief of the department in Ukraine. He wrote a letter requesting my transfer to Kiev upon finishing school in Baku. I arrived in 1945 and went to work as a radio operator in Zhuliany. I worked there until retirement.