

# Arkadiy Redko

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Kiev

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

Date of interview: October 2003

*Arkadiy Redko is a short bald-headed man. Although he is severely ill, he is still quite vivid. In 1993 Arkadiy became assistant chairman of the Association of Jewish War Veterans in Kiev. He collects memoirs of the veterans. The organization resolves everyday life issues, assists veterans with medications and food products and takes care of lonely and ill people. Arkadiy has little free time. We met in the building of the Kiev Association of Jewish War Veterans, when he managed to get an interval. Arkadiy appreciated the idea of preserving the story of his family. He lives with his wife now.*

My parents' families lived in the village of Ilintsy, Vinnitsa region [285 km from Kiev]. I didn't know any of my grandmothers and grandfathers. They died long before I was born. I don't know where they were born, and never heard anything from my relatives in this regard. My paternal grandfather's name was Volko Redko. It's a Ukrainian name, but my grandfather was a Jew through and through. I don't know the origin of this name. My grandfather was born in the 1850s. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living. I don't know my grandmother's name. All I can say is that my older sisters, Mariam and Esther, were named after our grandmothers. All I know about my mother's father is that his first name was Avrum.

There were four children in my father's family: three sons and a daughter. Avrum, the oldest of the children, was born in 1880. The next was my father, Leib, born in 1885. My father's sister, whose name I don't remember, was born in 1886. My father's younger brother, whose name I don't remember either, was born in 1887.

My father never told me about his childhood and youth. I don't know anything about his life in his parents' home. His mother tongue was Yiddish. My father must have got some religious education. I don't know whether his brothers or sister went to school. When my father was old enough, he was sent to become an apprentice to a tinsmith. Later my father began to work as a tinsmith.

My mother, Pesia Redko, was born in Ilintsy in 1886. I don't know how many brothers and sisters she had. I only remember her two older brothers. One of them, whose name I don't remember, lived in Ilintsy. He was much older than my mother. He was a tall, stately man with a big black beard. My mother's brother was the chief rabbi of the synagogue in Ilintsy. Judging from my mother and her brother, my mother's family was very religious. My mother's second brother emigrated to the USA in the early 20th century. I don't remember his name. I only saw him once in July 1932, when he came on a visit. I was a child, and can hardly remember this meeting. My mother's family spoke Yiddish.

Ilintsy was a district town in the district of the same name. Before the Russian Revolution of 1917 [1](#) this was one of many Jewish towns in Vinnitsa region. Its population was about 10,000 people, of

which about 5,000 were Jews, so about 50 percent of the total population. Ilinty was located on the bank of the Bug River. There was a market in the main square and a church nearby. There was a synagogue not far from the main street. I don't remember whether there was a shochet in Ilinty, but I guess there must have been one, considering that there was a synagogue. In 1934 during the period of the Soviet authorities' struggle against religion [2](#), this synagogue was closed, and the building housed a machine and tractor yard. There was a club in Ilinty where they showed movies and conducted meetings. There was also a cinema where we, boys, used to go, when we managed to save a few kopeck.

There was a cheder in Ilinty before 1917, but after the Revolution it was closed. There was a seven-year Jewish school. There were no religious subjects taught after the Revolution, but teaching was in the Yiddish language. The school was near the church and the market. There was a football ground near the school. There was a big sugar factory in Ilinty where many townspeople had seasonal jobs. Jews in Ilinty were craftsmen and tradesmen, shoemakers, tailors and store owners. Perhaps, Jews also owned bigger stores before the Revolution, but they were dispossessed after the Revolution of 1917. There was also a very good assistant doctor in Ilinty, a Jewish man. There was no Jewish neighborhood in Ilinty; the majority of Jews lived in the center of town. Farmers lived on the outskirts keeping livestock and working their fields. There were district fairs in Ilinty. There were no Jewish pogroms in Ilinty [3](#), which otherwise happened frequently during the Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War [4](#). Jews got along well with their neighbors. People respected each other's religion and traditions.

My parents got married in the early 1900s. They had a traditional Jewish wedding. It could have been no different at that time. After the wedding the newly-weds settled down in the small wooden house on the bank of the Bug River, about 20 meters from the bank on Zemskaya Street, where our family lived till 1932. Our family occupied one half of the house, and the other half belonged to my mother's older brother Avrum, his wife and two children. There were two rooms and a kitchen in each half of the house. There was a small yard and a shed in the yard. There was a well, from where the families fetched water. For washing they heated it on the Russian stove [5](#).

My oldest sister was born in 1914. Her Russian name was Klara [see common name] [6](#), and her Jewish one Mariam after one of our grandmothers. My second-oldest sister, Esther, was born in 1916. She was named after the other grandmother. In 1918 my brother, Volko, named after my father's father, was born. I was born in 1924. My Russian name is Arkadiy, and I was given the Jewish name of Avrum after my mother's father. My youngest sister, Asia, was born in 1926.

My mother was a housewife after she got married. My father had to support the family. He traveled to neighboring villages looking for work. He mainly fixed buckets and wash tubs. He didn't earn much and we were poor. We lived from hand-to-mouth. We only had meat on holidays and our everyday food was bread and potatoes. The younger children wore the older children's clothes and shoes. However, we didn't care that much about it since the majority of the population of Ilinty lived that way: Jews and non-Jews. Despite our poverty, my father insisted that all children had education.

We spoke Yiddish at home. We also knew Russian and Ukrainian, but our mother only spoke Yiddish. She just knew a few Russian words. My mother wore a kerchief. My father didn't wear a hat. He didn't have a beard or payes.

My mother was more religious than my father. On Friday evening the family got together for dinner. My mother started preparations for Sabbath in the morning. She made gefilte fish and potatoes and put a pot with cholent into the oven for the next day. Even when my father was away from home for a few days, he always came back before Sabbath. My mother lit candles and recited a prayer and then we sat down to dinner. The next day my mother went to the synagogue. Sometimes she took me and my younger sister with her. My father didn't work on Saturday. My older sisters and brother didn't go to the synagogue. They studied at school where religion was not appreciated. The school children weren't only raised atheists, but they were also taught to 'enlighten' their retrograde religious parents, telling them there was no God. However, my sisters and brother joined the family for celebrations on Sabbath and other Jewish holidays.

Before Pesach my mother baked matzah in the Russian stove. We, children, enjoyed preparations for holidays. We hardly ever had enough food on weekdays, but my mother tried to make as much food as possible for holidays. She saved money to have chicken, gefilte fish, and make strudels from matzah with jam, raisins and nuts for holidays. There was a general clean up of the house before Pesach. Bread crumbs were removed and fancy crockery was brought down from the attic. I don't remember any details about the celebration of Pesach in our home, or whether my father conducted the seder: it was so many years ago... I remember that we also celebrated other Jewish holidays: Chanukkah, Sukkoth, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but no details. I was seven to eight years old then, and now I am 80.

In 1931 my father was arrested by the NKVD [7](#). He was kept in a cell for a month while they kept demanding silver and gold from him. My father was brutally beat, as they demanded: 'Tell us where the money is'. We didn't have any money or gold, and only when they had made sure that this was true they let my father go. I didn't recognize my father when he came home. He was 46 years old, but he looked like an old man. He was thin, couldn't walk and stayed in bed for a long time. My father didn't tell us anything, but that he was beaten terribly. My mother hardly managed to bring him to recovery. However, we didn't blame anybody thinking that it had just been a mistake. We thought that since the Soviet power had many enemies, the NKVD often had to resort to strong measures.

I went to the 1st grade of the Jewish school in 1931. My older sisters and brother also went to this school. I had all excellent marks at school and I enjoyed going to school. I had many friends. I knew many of my classmates before school. We used to swim in the river and play together.

A famine plagued Ukraine in 1932 [8](#). It was easier to survive in towns, but in villages people died in thousands. It was a tragedy for our family. We were starving. We didn't have our own vegetable garden and had to buy all food products. My father hardly ever managed to get work. My older sisters moved to Kiev. My brother went to study in a rabfak [9](#) in Kharkov [430 km from Kiev]. Only Asia and I stayed with our parents. Our situation was very hard. My sisters sent us a message saying that it was possible to find a job in Kiev and thus my parents decided to move to Kiev. We left Ilinty in December 1932. I studied in the 3rd grade at the time.

We settled down in the damp basement of a house on Artyoma Street in the city center. My parents fixed it as much as they could to bring it to a condition we could live in. I went to the 3rd grade of the Jewish school near our house. My sister Asia went to the same school a year later.

My father continued to work as a tinsmith in Kiev. He left home early in the morning to work in the streets fixing casseroles and wash tubs that housewives brought him. He earned very little, but at least we could survive.

My oldest sister, Klara, went to study in the Kiev College of Food Industry. At first she studied in the preparatory department called rabfak; then she became a student at the college. She was accommodated in the dormitory. In 1937, my sister Esther married Yuzia Orlovski, a Jewish man from Ilinty, whom we knew well. He finished a military school and became a professional military. They didn't have a Jewish wedding, considering the political and economic hardships of the time. They registered their marriage in a registry office, and in the evening there was a wedding dinner with the family in our damp basement on Artyoma Street.

I liked studying at school. I became a pioneer and then joined the Komsomol [10](#). We were raised patriots of the USSR and had unconditional faith in Stalin and the Communist Party. We learned patriotic poems and sang Soviet songs in Yiddish and Russian. They were popular Soviet songs by Soviet composers, such as the 'March of the Pioneers': 'Dark blue nights will burst in fires, We are pioneers - the children of workers, A fair era will come soon The pioneer motto is 'always be ready', or: 'My homeland is vast There are many fields and rivers in it, I don't know another country Where an individual can breathe so freely'

We sang songs about friendship and the Komsomol; I don't remember their titles. There was a melodious song in Yiddish about the happy life of various nations in the Soviet Union building a happy life for future generations.

The arrests that started in 1936 and lasted till the beginning of World War II [during the so-called Great Terror] [11](#) didn't have any impact on our family. They mainly arrested high officials, party activists and the military that were declared 'enemies of the people' [12](#). Almost every day there were announcements about new arrests in the newspapers and on the radio. We believed that there were true reasons behind it. Stalin was our idol.

My mother couldn't correspond with her brother in the USA. Soviet authorities cut off any contacts with foreigners. [It was forbidden to keep in touch with relatives abroad.] [13](#) People were arrested and sent to the Gulag [14](#) for having relatives abroad, or could be executed on charges of espionage.

After World War II, when I visited Ilinty, I was told that the director of the Jewish school in Ilinty had been arrested in 1936. He was captured when he was getting off a bus. They said he was an enemy of the people. I knew this man well and understood that he was innocent. But at that time, before the war, I had no doubts that he was guilty; I was just a boy then. However, at that time the majority of adults believed everything the newspapers wrote.

My older brother, Volko, moved to Moscow after finishing Industrial School in Kharkov. He had been reading a lot since his childhood and started to write poems in Yiddish at the age of 16. He was going to enter the Jewish department of Moscow Pedagogical College. He traveled by train, where his documents were stolen. Upon his arrival in Moscow my brother arranged a meeting with Kalinin [15](#). Kalinin had duplicates of all documents issued, and my brother managed to enter college. He lived in the dormitory where he met many activists of the Jewish culture. He shared his room with Aron Vergelis who was chief editor of 'Sovyetische Gaymland', 'Soviet Motherland', the only

magazine in the USSR published in Yiddish.

My father fell severely ill in 1939. There was something wrong with his legs: he couldn't walk and became an invalid. He couldn't work any longer. His doctor, a surgeon, told him there was no cure. My younger sister and I studied at school. My mother didn't work. My brother switched to the extramural department in his college and moved to Kiev. He went to work in the editor's office of 'Der Shtern', 'The Star' newspaper, published in Yiddish. There was a big team of Jewish writers and journalists. My brother's poems and articles were published in 'Der Shtern', and the Kiev newspapers 'Komunist' [Communist] and 'Pravda Ukrainy' [The Truth of Ukraine], published in Russian and Ukrainian. Volko also wrote reviews on Jewish literature. Sometimes he took me with him to meetings of Jewish poets. Volko believed that whatever I was going to do in life, I had to know the Jewish literature. Volko finished college in 1940 and received a diploma with honors. My brother was the pride of our family and my idol.

In 1939 the government issued an order to close Jewish schools in the USSR. I had finished eight grades before then and continued my studies in a Russian school. There was no anti-Semitism in this new school. I also had all excellent marks there.

My older sister, Klara, finished college in 1939 and received a [mandatory] job assignment [16](#): she was sent to the town of Stanislav, present-day Ivano-Frankovsk [490 km from Kiev]. She rented a room from a local Polish family. They treated her like one of their own.

On 20th June 1941 I finished the 9th grade. There was another year left at school, but I was already thinking of where to continue my studies. On the morning of 22nd June we got to know that German planes bombed Kiev and that the Great Patriotic War [17](#) had begun. At noon Molotov [18](#) spoke on the radio announcing that Hitler had breached the Non-Aggression Pact [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact] [19](#), attacking the USSR without announcing war. Then Stalin spoke: he said we would win.

The following day my brother Volko, my brother-in-law, Yuzia Orlovski, and I went to the district registry office to volunteer for the front. We were sure that the war was to be over soon and rushed to take part in it. The military commander told me I was too young to go to the front and that they would call for me, if necessary. Since my brother-in-law was a professional military, he was recruited to go to the front. My brother and other recruits took a course of training in the military registry office before they went to the front. My sister went to see Volko. She came one hour before he was to depart for the front. Volko gave her a notebook with his poems, 67 of his poems which he had written from 1937 to 1941 and which had never been published. My brother went to the front, joining Regiment 148 of the Kiev Proletariat division defending Kiev.

Evacuation began in Kiev. Everyone believed our troops would stop the Germans before they could invade Kiev, but my parents decided to leave anyway. We left Kiev on 7th July. There were my parents, Asia and I, my older sister, Esther, and her twins: her daughter Sophia and her son Herman, born in 1939. Herman was called Izia in the family. We headed for Chkalov, present-day Orenburg, in Russia. It took us almost eight days to get to the town of Sol-Ilets in Chkalov region. We found shelter with an old couple. Their sons were at the front and they treated us like their own.

My older sister, Klara, was in Stanislav when the war began. Her landlords were nice people and meant well for Klara. They told her to stay with them and that Germans were civilized and cultured people and weren't going to do any harm. My sister agreed to stay. On 28th June a lieutenant whom she knew came to tell her that the last train was leaving and if she didn't take it, she would be killed by the Germans. My sister decided to come to us in Kiev. On the way the train was bombed and only moved very slowly. The trip lasted twelve days. There was a long stop in Poltava. My sister took her luggage to her acquaintance and left it with her. She was so sure that the war was to be over in no time that she only took her documents with her. Klara arrived in Kiev on 11th July and began to look for us. Fortunately, there was an evacuation information agency in Buguruslan that helped her to find us. She joined us in Sol-Ilets'k four months later, in October 1941. The Germans exterminated all the Jews of Stanislav on the first days of the occupation.

The locals and the administration of Sol-Ilets'k were kind and sympathetic. They understood how hard it was for the people who had left their homes. This was a small town and the people living there were poor. They never reproached us with coming to their town. We heard the words: 'Why did you come here, did anybody call for you?' when we returned to Kiev from the evacuation. There was no anti-Semitism in Sol-Ilets'k. The locals didn't even know who Jews were.

I had to go to work to support the family. My father could barely walk, but he still tried to go out to find some work. It took a long time before he finally got a job as water carrier in the school of assistant doctors. It was too hard for him to work alone there and I helped him. My father didn't get money for this work, but received food cards [see card system] [20](#). I went to work at the Ministry of Defense storage facility. I was the only young employee there - the rest were 20-30 years older than me. We worked three shifts. I came home and went straight to sleep.

My sister Esther went to work at the railway station. When her husband, who was at the front, found her, she began to receive certificates for money allowances. My mother stayed at home and looked after Esther's twins. There was a ration of 400 grams per person. My younger sister, Asia, had to stand in line the whole day to receive bread for the family. In Sol-Ilets'k Asia went to work at the school of assistant doctors.

We never missed the news from the front. There was a map of the USSR where employees marked the positions of the Soviet troops in every organization. Each town or village left to the enemy was pain for us, but we believed in what Stalin said: that we would win. We were full of patriotism and hatred for the enemy. Boys were impatient about going to the front and I was no exception. There was less than a year for me to wait till I would go to the front.

We didn't have many clothes with us. When the manager of the storage facility saw what I wore to work, he gave me a pair of trousers. I wore them twice and then gave them to my father - his clothes were even more miserable than mine. Our landlords helped us a lot, giving us their sons' clothes. We kept in touch with those people after the war and corresponded with them till 1967, when the old couple died. No one of the family was left: both their sons had perished at the front.

In September 1941 we received a notification saying that my brother Volko was missing in action. We wrote to the military units and registry offices searching for him. His comrades, writers and journalists, also tried to help us, but in vain. We didn't have any information till 1976. In my despair I wrote to the 'Pravda Ukrainy' newspaper, which published my article, 'Looking for my brother' in 1975. My brother's former fellow comrade called me. This was Yakov Ziskind, a Jewish man. He met

with me and told me about my brother.

Volko perished on 7th August 1941 in the battle near the village of Stepantsy, Kanev district, Cherkasy region [100 km from Kiev]. During a counterattack he threw himself with a bunch of grenades under a German tank. Yakov Ziskind took my brother's passport and diploma to give them to us after the war, but on the next day there was an air raid and Yakov lost his leg. He was evacuated to a rear hospital at Zolotonosha station [140 km from Kiev]. The following day this station was captured by the fascists. All warriors of regiment 148 defending the station perished. Yakov was in hospital for a long time. Later he tried to find us, but failed. The newspaper article helped him to find me.

I went to Stepantsy where I met with the former director of the local school, Ivan Skoropud. He promised me to try to find my brother's grave. In 1980 the district newspaper 'Dneprovskaya Zvesda' [The Dnieper Star] published an article about Volko, entitled 'On a field near Stepantsy'. All school children were looking for Volko's grave, and, finally, they found it. His comrades had buried him in the field... I visited my brother's grave near Stepantsy.

I joined the army in June 1942. All new recruits were sent to the Reserve Regiment 61 near Chkalov where we were trained in hand-to-hand combat, shooting, the basics of military training. From there we went to the front in early 1943. The first stage of the war in 1941-42, when our troops were retreating and suffering great losses, was over. Those were the hardest years of the war. In early 1943 there was a turning point in the war. Our armies were attacking on all fronts. We sensed that we were on the way to victory. We became stronger. There were better provisions to the army and we also began to receive assistance from the US: vehicles for the front and food products. However, the Americans didn't open the second front before June 1944, when the US saw that our armies were on the threshold to Germany and knew that we might manage without their help.

I was sent to regiment 125 of the rifle unit of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. My first battles were for the liberation of Donetsk region, the town of Konstantinovka [610 km from Kiev]. Our troops were advancing promptly. Our artillery regiment started artillery preparations and then the infantry went into action. When we incurred big losses, we were sent to the rear for several days or months. At that time we could lead a normal life where there was no war. Then we returned to the same front or a different one at times.

So I started my front experience in the 3rd Ukrainian Front and ended in the 1st Belarussian Front under the command of Marshal Zhukov [Editor's note: Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov was born in 1896 in Kaluga province, Russia, and died in Moscow, in 1974. He was a marshal of the Soviet Union, and the most important Soviet military commander during World War II.]. After Konstantinovka we liberated Artyomovsk [610 km from Kiev] and on 17th October 1943 we came to Zaporozhiye [400 km from Kiev]. Then, in 1944, we relocated to Manevichi station [400 km from Kiev] in Western Ukraine and liberated other towns and villages there. This was when I received my first combat award: the medal 'For Valor'. Military units were continuously relocating. At times we moved to new locations by train and when there weren't enough vehicles we walked. The Americans supplied their first vehicles in 1944, but we still had to cover vast distances on foot.

There were three Jews in our company and two in the platoon. Vinnitskiy from Leningrad had a squad under his command. He was a good man. We didn't pay attention to each other's nationality. We were about the same age and were raised patriots. We cherished human values. It was

important at the front line what kind of a person was beside you. At times your life depended on your comrades. There was no anti-Semitism at the front. There was a common enemy, and a common goal: victory.

We usually pitched tents and sometimes stayed in local houses, when there was a village nearby. We had food supplies every day and the people in the field kitchen cooked for us. We also received mail from our families, and newspapers. There were central, front line and division newspapers. I liked to read articles by Erenburg [21](#) published in 'Krasnaya Zvezda' and 'Pravda'. These newspapers were read aloud and then we shared them with one another. I corresponded with my family.

We were young and during intervals tried to forget about the war. We had musical instruments in our military unit and arranged concerts, singing and dancing along to the music. When we stopped in a village, we went for walks and to dances.

In 1943 I submitted my application to the Party. The procedure was no different from the one in peaceful times. I needed two recommendations. I had a recommendation from the Komsomol and two recommendations from party members. The only difference was that if someone submitted an application before a combat action you added the following words: 'If I perish, please consider me a communist'. The candidateship lasted a year. I joined the Party on 9th May 1945, on the day, when the complete and final capitulation of fascist Germany was announced [see Victory Day] [22](#).

I was very fortunate: I wasn't wounded once the whole time I was at the front line. Once I was shell-shocked and my commandment wanted to send me to hospital, but I refused because I didn't want to be in hospital when the war was over. I always thought the end of the war was near.

There were also penal battalions at the front. I only heard about them. They consisted of former prisoners. I guess, they were sent to the front from 1942 to 1944. There were many military who failed to follow their commanders' orders, and even if it was impossible to follow them, they were sent to the tribunal anyway. They were sent to the most dangerous locations. They completed their task. They had to serve there till they 'tasted blood'. If they got wounded, they were sent to hospital and once recovered, they joined ordinary military troops.

We began to meet partisans in 1944 and talked to them. In 1944, during the liberation campaign in Lutsk region, we struggled with partisans for some time. One of them told the story of how they had shot one of the partisans, a Jew. He stood sentinel over other partisans, when he fell asleep. The partisan military tribunal sentenced him to death. I asked the partisan how it happened that he had fallen asleep. Could he not just have been exhausted? And this partisan just replied that if there had been an attack and the guard had been asleep they would have been eliminated. That's how it was: the laws of the wartime were not to be discussed. In Volyn region the commanding officer of my company met his friend, a partisan. They were in encirclement in 1941. Kovtun fought his way into a military unit, and his friend stayed in the woods. Kovtun gave him his horse. In late 1944, when the war was coming to an end, the partisan units were disbanded, and the partisans were assigned to military units.

There were representatives of SMERSH [special secret military unit for the elimination of spies; lit. translation 'death to spies'] in each squad in the army. SMERSH actually belonged to the NKVD and was responsible for fighting spies, but of course, there were many more SMERSH representatives



than spies. Those people were to identify people who expressed their concerns about so many unjustified losses or their discontent with the commandment, etc. They had their informers, whom they called 'volunteer assistants'. After the war SMERSH operated in our regiment in Germany.

We were advancing fast. In late 1944 we came to Poland. Some Polish people were glad the Soviet army was there, others hated us. Before attacking Warsaw we stayed in a village. This was in January 1945. I made friends with a Polish man; he was a nice person. I knew Russian and Ukrainian and thus had no problem understanding Polish. He told me about his life and country, and sang Polish songs. He told me that there were people who hated communist ideas and didn't like us to be there. I was 19 years old and this seemed weird to me; I didn't understand.

I remember the following episode from our attack on Warsaw: One soldier discovered a group of Germans in a forest. One of them left the group running from one tree to the next and looking back. I followed him. He saw that I was coming closer and threw a grenade. I threw myself to the ground before the grenade exploded. Then I rose to my feet and shot at him using my machine gun. He fell. When I came closer, he was still alive. He was holding a grenade. He probably wanted to blast himself and me, but it was too late. He turned out to be a corporal, who had been awarded three crosses. He was a sniper and had killed many soldiers during the war. We got to know this after we studied his documents. Our front newspaper wrote about it and published my photograph. I was awarded the 'Order of the Great Patriotic War, 2nd class'.

I faced fascists for the second time in April 1945, when the column of vehicles of our regiment moving in the direction of Berlin, was fired at in the woods. A shell hit a vehicle of our squad and many perished. When this kind of attack had happened at the beginning of the war, we tried to pass the dangerous location as soon as possible. At the end of the war, however, we didn't just flee. A group of soldiers of our regiment including me ran in the direction from where we heard the shooting. I ran to the nearest blindage. There were seven Germans, one of them an officer. They were caught unawares. I yelled, 'Haende hoch!' and they raised their hands obediently. I took the captives to our commanding officer and went back to my unit. Our army newspaper also wrote about this incident.

In April 1945 the central newspaper published an article by Alexandrov, chief of the department of propaganda and agitation of the Central Committee, in which he criticized Erenburg for his appeal to exterminate all Germans. Alexandrov wrote that we, Soviet soldiers, had to clearly understand the difference between fascists and peaceful people and be loyal to peaceful Germans. I felt the same way. Germans were different, just like all other people. Some Germans hated Hitler, but there were too few of them to raise arms against him. I hated fascists, but when they surrendered, I could shoot at them, or even hit them. When we arrived in Germany, the local population fled, thinking that we were going to kill them, but we didn't. However many towns, villages and plants they had destroyed, however many Jews and people of other nations they had killed, I was loyal to them: I respected kind people and treated German fascists like defeated enemies. We were also raised in the spirit of respect of German workers and German communists. We were sure that the Germans would kill all Soviet people forcibly taken to Germany, but we met girls and women working for German families and we were happy to see them and so were they.

The attack on Berlin began in April 1945. Those were horrific battles. The commander of the 1st Belarussian Front, Marshal Georgiy Zhukov, came there to take command in person. Our troops

were in the hollow, and the Germans had more beneficial positions than us. We couldn't see the German tanks - they were camouflaged. Our attack lasted several days and we incurred great losses. However, this was all we could do - and we won. This was the last big battle. I was near Berlin, when the war came to an end. On the early morning of 9th May we heard about the victory on the radio. This was such a holiday! There was a festive meeting in the regiment. Everyone, even strangers, kissed each other, talked about the end of the war and the life at the front. We went to Berlin, and I and my fellow comrades signed the wall of the Reichstag. Our peaceful life began.

Of course, the joy of the victory was saddened by the memory of those who had perished in this war: our fellow comrades, families and peaceful people. The Germans came to Ilinty three weeks after the war had begun. Many Jews failed or didn't want to evacuate. My father's brother Avrum and his family perished during a mass shooting of Jews in Ilinty. My mother's older brother, the rabbi of the synagogue in Ilinty, and his family were shot. We don't know the exact date, but this was one of the first mass shootings. On 17th January 1943 the family of my brother-in-law, Yuzia Orlovski, was killed during a mass shooting of Jews in Ilinty; there were seven of them: his father, mother, two brothers and a sister and her two children. They were buried in a common grave. Yuzia survived at the front. He was severely wounded during the defense of Leningrad [see Blockade of Leningrad] [23](#) and became a war invalid. When he heard about his family, he went to their grave, and there witnesses told him how it had happened. This was a tragedy. Yuzia lived his short life after the war in poverty and hardships. He died in 1963. He was buried in the Jewish section of the cemetery in Berkovets, Kiev. My father's younger brother died in evacuation in Tashkent [Uzbekistan] in 1942. His older son perished at the front in 1941. The younger son survived, finished a medical college after the war and became a doctor. I didn't have contact with him. He died in 1996. My father's sister stayed to live in Tashkent where she had been in evacuation. She died shortly after the war.

In 1945 I got a leave and went to Kiev to visit my family. They were in the same basement apartment where we had lived before the war. My older sister, Klara, and my parents returned to Kiev. My father was very ill and could hardly walk. My sister worked and helped my mother to take care of the father. My sister Esther, her husband and children also lived in Kiev, but not with my parents. My younger sister, Asia, finished the school of assistant doctors in evacuation and worked as an assistant doctor in a polyclinic. She fell ill with tuberculosis in evacuation. There was no medication and life was full of hardships and her disease progressed. My parents couldn't work and didn't receive any pension. Fortunately, Volko's friends did what they could to help my parents to get a pension of 200 rubles for their lost son, my brother.

Unfortunately, I only visited Ilinty twice after the war. Once I went there after demobilization in 1950 and the second time with my wife in 1973. She wanted to visit my homeland. Hardly anyone of all the Jewish families living there before the war survived. They were hoping for a miracle, but it didn't happen. My friends who stayed in Ilinty also perished.

Of course, many nations and many countries suffered in this war, but I think that the heaviest hardships fell on our people. Would any other country have endured this? Not one army or state. I think any other country would have had to surrender, sign an agreement and stop its existence at this. Germans were merciless to many peoples and particularly so to Jewish people. Only the Soviet people serried by the party and Stalin could win after suffering such great losses. According to the most recent data we lost 24 million people to the war. Who made a decisive contribution to the

victory? The Soviet Union and the Soviet army, of course. And those Jews who were at the front and perished fighting for the Motherland, did not give their lives for nothing. I can say the same about my brother, who perished young, having seen or done nothing in his life. We, the living, must feel this. That's all.

After the war I served in Germany for five years. My year of recruitment to the army, 1942, meant that I was subject to demobilization in 1950. Berlin was divided into four zones. Our regiment was to prepare territories for the arrival of English, French and American troops. Besides, in 1946, we were involved in preparing German specialists for their departure to the USSR. The government didn't want them to work for the occupational armies. They weren't forcibly taken to camps, they volunteered to go to the USSR. They were selected by representatives from the USSR - directors and human resource managers of big plants that were in need of qualified personnel since most of our specialists had perished at the front. There were announcements on the radio for qualified personnel willing to work in Soviet plants to make their appearance at certain locations. Those people had contracts and willingly went to work at enterprises.

The population of Germany suffered from hunger in the postwar years. And those, who went to the USSR, were provided with food and clothes and had normal living conditions. The majority of them worked at plants in various towns of the USSR, helping to restore the industries and install new production lines. They weren't involved in the military production, of course. I remember us sending a train with Germans to Kuibyshev, where they were accommodated in dormitories with everything necessary for a living. They could take their belongings with them and were allowed to correspond with their families. They wished to go to the USSR and were glad to have this opportunity. I don't know exactly what happened to these people then since I never met any of them, but I believe they returned home. I know for sure that they weren't forced to stay.

In the Soviet sector we helped the local population. I served in Kustrinchen on the border of Poland and Germany, and, later, in Frankfurt an der Oder. In 1945-46 we often went to the camp for prisoners-of-war, German officers. They talked to us and answered our questions. When the subdivision of the town into sectors was over, so was the arrangement of the Soviet sector. I was sent to serve in Berlin. I spent the last two years of my service in Dresden. Half of the town was in ruins from bombings. We stayed in the barracks of the former military academy in Dresden. We communicated with Germans. There were very good people among them. We did our ordinary military service and had trainings. There were SMERSH representatives in our regiment, but we didn't know their mission. We were far from them. The SMERSH representatives sometimes arrested the military. Once in 1947 our soldier guarding a German prisoner began to help him: he went to addresses that this German told him to deliver messages to. This German was arrested for his ties with intelligence and the soldier was arrested for assisting him. I don't know what happened to him.

During my service in Germany I was aware of the events in the USSR from magazines, newspapers and the radio. In 1948 the campaign against 'cosmopolitans' [24](#) began in the USSR. I knew about this from newspapers. Almost every issue of the newspaper published an article about Jewish scientists, artists, writers or poets accused of incredible things, even of their efforts to destroy the USSR. I couldn't believe those people were against the Soviet power and Stalin. Sometimes I bumped into names I knew, like Lev Kvitko [25](#), a Jewish writer, and others. I was sure they were innocent and couldn't understand why they were referred to as cosmopolitans. It wasn't just me, a

24-year old guy, but also older people who had no doubts about the truthfulness of what the papers published. I had an ambiguous attitude to this: I could not believe that the people whom I had known and respected were guilty and I couldn't distrust Stalin. Jews were blamed for everything; it was like there was an entire Jewish conspiracy. I didn't experience any change in attitude towards me in my regiment, but I sensed that the attitude towards Jews on the whole had changed.

When I read in newspapers about the establishment of Israel in 1948 [see Balfour Declaration] [26](#), I was happy. Finally the wanderings and persecution of the Jewish people were over and we had our own state.

In 1950 I demobilized and returned to my family in Kiev. I had to work and study. I had finished nine grades before the war. I went to work as a receptionist at the mixed fodder factory. In 1952 I went to the 10th grade of an evening school. I attended school after work, came home very late and still had to do my homework. It was very hard, but I was eager to get education. My family supported me as best they could.

I met my future wife, Tamara Shkuro, in the evening school. She and I shared a desk. I liked this sweet humble girl. We became friends first and then began to see each other. Tamara is Ukrainian. She was born in Poltava [315 km from Kiev] in 1922. Her mother, Tatiana Shkuro, was a housewife, and her father, Timofey Shkuro, was a cashier at the railroad. Tamara's younger sister, Yevgenia, was born in 1924. During the Great Patriotic War the family was in evacuation. After the war they moved to Kiev. Tamara's father was an invalid; he was bedridden for ten years. My wife's mother died in 1959, her father in 1963. Yevgenia got married. Her family name was Gorova. She was a cashier. Yevgenia had two sons. We were always close with her. Yevgenia died in February 2004.

In January 1953 the 'Doctors' Plot' [27](#) started. A group of Jewish doctors was accused of trying to poison Stalin. I simply couldn't believe it. I thought that Doctor Timoschuk, who disclosed them, was fulfilling someone's order. Somebody wanted to instigate anti-Semitism and they didn't disdain to use any means. This was a horrific time. I didn't believe what the newspapers published. I couldn't believe that there were Jewish people speaking against Stalin. Stalin was an idol in my family. Only my mother was against Stalin. Of course, this caused arguments. We argued with Mama and she kept saying, 'You will know who Stalin is, time will show'. I guess, she thought that Stalin was a tyrant and to blame for anti-Semitism and the arrests of innocent people, including my father's arrest and the resulting impact on his health condition. She never believed this could have been happening without Stalin's knowledge while my father and I thought this happened because of local officials, and Stalin had no hand in it.

On 5th March 1953 Stalin died. It was a grief to me like to the majority of the Soviet people. I was crying like people cry after their close ones. We were thinking what was going to happen to us and to our country. I still think that if it hadn't been for Stalin, we wouldn't have won the war. He solidified the people and taught us courage acting as an example himself. When fascist troops were close to Moscow, Stalin didn't evacuate, but continued to rule the country from Moscow. Yes, Stalin was a rough man, but he was as rough with his family as with his comrades. During the war we all knew the story of his son from the first marriage, Yakov Dzhugashvili [Stalin's family name was Dzhugashvili; Stalin was his revolutionary pseudonym.], whom Germans captured at the front. They offered Stalin to exchange his son for the German Field Marshal Paulus who was in Soviet captivity,

but Stalin refused saying that they wouldn't exchange a private for a Field Marshal. This was the kind of man he was.

I didn't quite believe what Nikita Khrushchev [28](#) said about Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress [29](#). I think, Khrushchev was wrong with regard to the evaluation of Stalin's personality and deeds. There are many books now representing Stalin as a bloodthirsty monster. Well, they can say what they want, but one needs to know the history. Everybody must know what Stalin accomplished. He was so far-seeing that back in 1939 he expanded the Soviet borders shifting them to the west. Who, if not Stalin, won the war? Who stopped the advance of the Germans? Of course, Stalin had his shortcomings. He exterminated the members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee [30](#), and he was killing Jews and other nations, but we need to pay tributes to him: Stalin rescued the Soviet Union and the whole civilized world from the fascist threat. This is my personal point of view and I shall not give it up. Time will show who is right.

In 1954 I finished school with a gold medal. I had all excellent marks in my certificate. That same year I entered the Sanitary Technical Faculty of Kiev Engineering Construction College. I didn't have to take any entrance exams having finished school with a gold medal. I had to pass an entrance interview [31](#). I never faced any anti-Semitic attitudes. Perhaps, the fact that I had been at the front, played a role. I studied well. I was one of the few communists in the course. I was appointed senior man of the group. My co-students and lecturers respected me. I had many Jewish and non-Jewish friends in college, and we still keep in touch. In all the years of my studies I only had three 'good' marks, the rest were 'excellent'.

My wife, Tamara, entered the Geodesic Faculty of the Land Reclamation College. We got married after finishing the second year in college, in 1955. My mother had died in 1954. We buried her in the Jewish cemetery in Kiev according to the Jewish ritual. Later this cemetery was closed since there were no more places for burials. My father didn't worry about my marrying a non-Jewish woman. What mattered to him was that we loved each other. He helped us with preparations to the wedding. We registered our marriage in the registry office, and in the evening we had a wedding dinner with our closest friends. We stayed to live with my father.

In 1956 a tragedy struck our family: my younger sister Asia died from tuberculosis. She was only 30 years old. We buried Asia in the Jewish section of the Berkovets town cemetery in Kiev.

I finished college in 1959 and got a job assignment to work at a construction and assembly agency. I worked as a foreman, an expert in sanitary engineering, on construction sites in Kiev. I was involved in the construction of all the major facilities in Kiev: hotels, colleges, the buildings of the Verkhovna Rada [Ukrainian Parliament] and the Cabinet of Ministers. My management thought highly of me. I worked there 33 years and had nothing to complain about. I retired in 1992, but I keep in touch with my organization. Tamara didn't finish college - it happened so. She worked as a geodesist. My wife retired in 1990.

My wife and I didn't celebrate Jewish or Christian holidays. We always celebrated Soviet holidays: 1st May, 7th November [October Revolution Day] [32](#), Victory Day, Soviet Army Day [33](#), 8th March [International Women's Day], New Year's. We also celebrated birthdays. Our friends and relatives visited us. On Victory Day we went to the Grave of the Unknown Soldier. Veterans of the war got together there to share their memories. Children brought us flowers. On this day I always recall those who didn't live to see the victory, and of course, my brother Volko is the first whom I recall.

In 1960 we received our first apartment. It was a communal apartment [34](#) and we had several neighbors. In 1968 my wife and I received a separate apartment in Rusanovka, which was a new district in Kiev then. Now it is a well established district on the bank of the Dnieper. We have no children. My father lived with us. He died in 1973. He was buried in the Jewish section of the Berkovets cemetery in Kiev.

My niece Sophia, Esther's daughter, married Boris Lifshitz, a Jewish man. Her only daughter, Zhanna, was born in 1959. Sophia was a housewife. Her mother, my sister Esther, was severely ill and bedridden. Sophia tended to her. Her twin brother Herman worked at the tram factory after finishing school. He was married and had a daughter. Herman fell ill with anemia and died in 1986. His daughter finished the national Polytechnic University. She works as an engineer.

When Jews began to move to Israel in the 1970s, I didn't even consider departure. My wife is Russian, she wouldn't go and I couldn't leave her. But first of all, I was a patriot and I could have never left my motherland for good. I was confused about my friends and acquaintances who decided to leave their motherland. I couldn't understand how they brought themselves to leaving their country, though I understood that anti-Semitism was dispiriting and it was hard for people to endure it. I never faced anti-Semitism, but I knew it existed.

In 1979 Zhanna, Sophia's daughter and granddaughter of my sister Esther, left the country. Her parents stayed in Kiev. Sophia had to take care of Esther. We were against Zhanna's departure, but now I understand that she did the right thing. We correspond with her. Zhanna lives in New York. She is doing well. She is married and has two children: her daughter was born in 1992 and her son in 1997. My sister Esther died in 1990, Klara died in 1991. They were buried in the Jewish section of the Berkovets cemetery, near Esther's husband and my father's graves.

In 1976 I got an unexpected gift from life. Volko had left his scrapbook of poems with Esther before he went to the front. These poems were published in Yiddish in 1976; the book was entitled 'The Lyre'. Besides, this same year my brother's friend and co-student, Aron Vergelis, chief editor of the 'Sovyetishe Gaymland', published these poems in Yiddish in ten issues of the magazine. Vitaliy Zaslavskiy, a Ukrainian poet, translated almost all the poems by my brother into Russian. He published six volumes of Volko's poems in Russian. The most recent one, 'Premonition', was issued by the Kiev publishing house 'Rainbow' in 2001, shortly before Zaslavskiy's sudden death. Besides, Zaslavskiy sent Volko's poems to Israel. In 2003 Volko was awarded the Literature Award of Israel posthumously. They now prepare a volume of poems by my brother in Ivrit for publication.

When the general secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union], Mikhail Gorbachev [35](#), started perestroika [36](#), it first seemed a turn to a better life to me. We were interested, but he didn't give us anything real. I thought Gorbachev made too many mistakes. They became fatal and led to the breakup of the USSR [Yeltsin in 1991 signed a deal with Russia's neighbors that formalized the break up of the Soviet Union. The USSR was replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)]. They say Gorbachev gave us freedom. Yes, one can go out into the street and shout that the president is bad, but it will not change anything. Yelling, making noise and going to parades will not make anything happen. I think perestroika didn't give us anything, but took away our past, our life and, finally, the USSR. I believe, this was an American plot. Gorbachev followed directions; he didn't have his own opinion.

I've taken interest in the life in Israel since it was established. I've never been there. I've had many invitations, but I refused. I've only traveled to Leningrad, Moscow and the Crimea with my wife. I read about Israel though. The situation is very hard now. I think their Prime Minister, Sharon, conducts the right policy making no mistakes. There is no other way out. It's hard to fight with Arabs. They surrounded Israel on all sides. The Jewish nation struggles for survival. The nation has lived in this hostile environment for 2000 years. I believe Israel must win. And it will.

I retired in 1992, but I've still been working since. In 1993 I became deputy chairman of the organization of Kiev Jewish veterans of the war. I was elected secretary of the all-Ukrainian organization of veterans of the war in the Jewish Council of Ukraine. I am a member of the military commission in the Jewish Council of Ukraine. For eight years I've been a member of the council of the Kiev Jewish community, a representative of the Jewish Council of Ukraine in the Sohnut [37](#) and Joint [38](#), and a member of the Association of Jewish War Veterans in Kiev.

As for the Jewish life in Ukraine after the breakup of the USSR, I think there are more Jewish leaders in Kiev and Ukraine than there is a Jewish life. There are many Jewish centers: 10-15 make a Jewish center, but they don't want to unite for the sake of the common goal, but want to take command. Over ten Jewish newspapers are published in Kiev and more than 47 in Ukraine. And they compete with one another. I think there will never be a Jewish life in Ukraine because people live very different lives. Ukraine will never get out of this state: it's necessary to replace the political elite. The only Jewish organization really beneficial for the people is Hesed [39](#). Hesed helps old people by providing food and medications; they also celebrate birthdays in Hesed. It's very important for old people to know that they are remembered. There are often meetings with delegations. And of course, Kiev's Hesed supports Jewish organizations. We need to render justice to them - they accomplish a lot.

I am an atheist; the majority of Jews are atheists. I think that any religion is anti-scientific. An intelligent person who knows about history would never agree to believe all those fables about the existence of God. Every nation has a religion believing that it descends from God. But in reality, people do not believe in gods or idols, they believe in real life. Real life is what is important.

Glossary:

## **[1](#) 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.

## **[2](#) 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.

### **3 Pogroms in Ukraine**

In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

### **4 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

### **5 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.

### **6 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.

### **7 NKVD**

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

### **8 Famine in Ukraine**

In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the



rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

### **9 Rabfak (Rabochiy Fakultet - Workers' Faculty in Russian)**

Established by the Soviet power usually at colleges or universities, these were educational institutions for young people without secondary education. Many of them worked beside studying. Graduates of Rabfaks had an opportunity to enter university without exams.

### **10 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.

### **11 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.

### **12 Enemy of the people**

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

### **13 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

### **14 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.

### **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 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.

### **17 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.

### **18 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

### **19 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.

### **20 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.

## **21 Erenburg, Ilya Grigorievich (1891-1967)**

Famous Russian Jewish novelist, poet and journalist who spent his early years in France. His first important novel, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurento* (1922) is a satire on modern European civilization. His other novels include *The Thaw* (1955), a forthright piece about Stalin's régime which gave its name to the period of relaxation of censorship after Stalin's death.

## **22 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.

## **23 Blockade of Leningrad**

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

## **24 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'.

## **25 Kvitko, Lev (1890-1952)**

Jewish writer, arrested and shot dead together with several other Yiddish writers, rehabilitated posthumously.

## **26 Balfour Declaration**

British foreign minister Lord Balfour published a declaration in 1917, which in principle supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. At the beginning, the British supported the idea of a Jewish national home, but under the growing pressure from the Arab world, they started restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine. However, underground Jewish organizations provided support for the illegal immigration of Jews. In 1947 the United Nations voted to allow the establishment of a Jewish state and the State of Israel was proclaimed in May 1948.

### **27 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.

### **28 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.

### **29 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.

### **30 Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC)**

formed in Kuibyshev in April 1942, the organization was meant to serve the interests of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet military through media propaganda, as well as through personal contacts with Jews abroad, especially in Britain and the United States. The chairman of the JAC was Solomon Mikhoels, a famous actor and director of the Moscow Yiddish State Theater. A year after its establishment, the JAC was moved to Moscow and became one of the most important centers of Jewish culture and Yiddish literature until the German occupation. The JAC broadcast pro-Soviet propaganda to foreign audiences several times a week, telling them of the absence of anti-Semitism and of the great anti-Nazi efforts being made by the Soviet military. In 1948, Mikhoels was assassinated by Stalin's secret agents, and, as part of a newly-launched official anti-Semitic campaign, the JAC was disbanded in November and most of its members arrested.

### **31 Entrance interview**

graduates of secondary schools awarded silver or gold medals (cf: graduates with honors in the U.S.) were released from standard oral or written entrance exams to the university and could be admitted on the basis of a semi-formal interview with the admission committee. This system exists in state universities in Russia and most of the successor states up to this day.

### **32 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.

### **33 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'.

### **34 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.

### **35 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.

### **36 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.

### **37 Sochnut (Jewish Agency)**

International NGO founded in 1929 with the aim of assisting and encouraging Jews throughout the world with the development and settlement of Israel. It played the main role in the relations between Palestine, then under British Mandate, the world Jewry and the Mandatory and other powers. In May 1948 the Sochnut relinquished many of its functions to the newly established government of Israel, but continued to be responsible for immigration, settlement, youth work, and other activities financed by voluntary Jewish contributions from abroad. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the Sochnut has facilitated the aliyah and absorption in Israel for over one million new immigrants.

### **38 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.

### **39 Hesed**

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avcgar 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.