

# Vladimir Tseitlin

*Vladimir Tseitlin and his wife Larissa Goncharova live in a two-room apartment of a 9-storied building constructed in the 1970s in the south-eastern part of Moscow. The apartment looks tidy and cozy. Judging by the whereabouts I can say that the hosts have different interests. On the one hand there is a vast and diversified Vladimir's library and on the other hand there are a lot of embroidered doilies and cushions, flower vases belonging to his wife. Vladimir is a tall, stout and tacit man. He is modest and coy. He does not consider his life to be somewhat extraordinary, besides sometimes his memory fails him, especially when it goes about his relatives. He did not agree to be interviewed at once. However, he is hospitable, amicable and when our talk was winding up, his story was not as arid and simple as it was at the very beginning.*



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## **My family background**

My paternal grandfather Zalman Tseitlin and grandmother Sara-Kreina Tseitlin lived in an ancient Russian city Smolensk [370 km to the west from Moscow]. Grandfather was from the Jewish town Mstsislaw [Mogilev oblast, Belarus, 274 km from Minsk]. He was born in 1861. Mstsislaw is on the border of Belarus and Russia, not far from Smolensk. I do not know where grandmother Sara-Kreina was born. I think she is from Smolensk. Unfortunately, I do not know her maiden name.

Grandfather moved to Smolensk, when he was a grown-up. I still keep certificate of master of bakery belonging to my grandfather. In accordance with that certificate Mstsislaw dweller Zalman Faibishev Tseitlin was given rights and royalties of a guild master as per order of the Emperor. Grandfather was permitted to live in Smolensk not within the Jewish Pale of Settlement [1](#). Grandmother was a housewife and raised children.

I heard a family legend on the origin of the last name Tseitlin. When the empress Catherine II [Catherine the Great][2](#) was touring Russia, she came to the village of Smolensk province. A beautiful buxom Jewish girl brought bread and salt to the empress. The empress told her: "What a beauty! What's your name?". The girl replied that her name was Tseit. The empress said: "Well, I wish you as the say in Russian proverb 'be healthy as a cow and fecund as a sow'". The girl was

some sort of relative of my grandfather. Then she gave birth to 24 sons. All of them carried name Tseitlin. But it was just a family legend. I do not know whether it is true. Grandfather had relatives in England, America and other countries. Unfortunately I do not know anything about them.

In 1890 my grandparents got married. Grandfather and his young wife left for England to seek fortune. They had lived in Manchester, England 4 years. Their first child, my father was born in Manchester in 1892. In accordance with the English law, the baby born in England acquires the citizenship of this country. So my father became British citizen. He was called English name Ellis.

In England grandfather was not a baker. He worked at the steam engine manufacturing plant as a mechanic. He liked the job very much as it gave him the opportunity to use his potential, but the climate was not OK with him. His health was poorer. The doctor said that he had some sort of lung disease and he was recommended to return to his motherland. Grandparents and their little son came back to Smolensk.

Grandfather bought a house in Smolensk and regained work. Grandparents had three more sons in Smolensk: Haim born in 1897, Aron, born in 1899 and the youngest Samuel in 1901. Children were raised as Jews. They went to cheder. They knew Ivrit and prayers. Jewish traditions were observed at home. Sabbath and Jewish holidays were marked at home. The family belonged to middle class. Grandfather wanted all children to get education, but he did not manage. In 1909 grandfather was stricken with pneumonia and died. He was buried on the Jewish cemetery in Smolensk. There were hard times. Grandmother received some assistance from the Jewish community for the orphaned children. Of course it was rather skimpy as compared with the earnings of the grandfather. She could not even dream of higher education for her children. It was even harder with the outbreak of the WW1. Grandmother Sara-Kreinadied in Smolensk in 1919 and was buried in Smolensk Jewish cemetery next to grandfather.

When grandfather was alive my father managed to finish realschule [3](#) in Smolensk. He worked in the local bank after finishing school. When WW1 was over, father was drafted in the army. He was not drafted in specific troops. He was assigned an officer as he was educated. Father was a gun-soldier in the lines. He was wounded in the front and was sent to hospital in Smolensk. It was a hospital for the wounded Jews and all medical workers were Jews. My mother Mariana Havkina worked in that hospital as a nurse. My parents were young. They fell in love with each other and got married shortly after they had met, while father was still being treated in the hospital. They had a traditional Jewish wedding in accordance with the rites.

None of father's brothers, but Haim got special education. He finished financial school and then had worked as a financier all his life. Haim was drafted in the tsarist army at the very end of the WW1, but he was not in action since the war was over. Haim was the head of the regional finance department of Russian NKVD [4](#) from the pre-war period till the outbreak of the WW2 [Great Patriotic War][5](#). He worked in Smolensk for a long time and then he was transferred to Crimea. He had worked in Vologda [Russia, 400 km to the North-East from Moscow]. When the war was over Haim retired and settled in Moscow. He was married. He had two children - son Jacob and daughter Sarah. Both of them were born in 1920s. During the war Jacob was drafted in the army. He died in the first year of the war. Sara lived in Moscow. She died in 1975, 4 years after their father who died in 1971.

Father's second brother Aron was at the lead of the Smolensk Department Osoaviakhim. [Editorial's note: The society of assistance in defense and aviation and chemical construction, it was a mass volunteer organization of USSR citizens, existing from 1927 till 1948. The aim was to assist the army in military training of the civilians and nurturing patriotic spirit in them.] Aron had 2 daughters - Larissa and Zinaida. Both of them are alive and live in Moscow. We call each other sometime. When WW2 was unleashed, Aron went to the front and died in 1941.

The youngest brother Samuel was in the support staff of different departments by the ministry of the USSR. Both daughters Kreina, Lidia are younger than me. They live in Moscow. We do not get in touch that often. Samuel died in 1975 in Moscow.

My mother's family lived in the Jewish town Gusino in the vicinity Smolensk. Maternal grandfather's name was Yuda Havkin. I do not remember grandmother's name. Both of them were from Gusino. The family was well-heeled. Grandfather had a mill, the only one in the location and it was rather income-bearing. My father recollected that during Civil War [6](#), when everybody was starving, grandfather came to Smolensk from Gusino and brought them couple sacks of flour. Grandmother was a housewife and that was traditional. There were 4 children in the family: three elder sons, unfortunately I do not remember their names and my mother born in 1897. Mother was always called Russian name [common name] [7](#) Mariana. The family was religious. All mother's siblings went to cheder. Mother did not go to cheder, but she got Jewish education at home. Mother's brothers had lived in their native town all their life. They rarely came over. One my cousin Zyama Havkin came to Moscow to study in 1927. He graduated from aviation school, then Moscow aviation institute. Upon graduation Zyama got a mandatory job assignment to Moscow aviation plant to work as an engine expert. Grandparents died in Gusino in the 1930s. During WW2 one of mother's brothers was a partisan in Smolensk oblast and perished in the guerilla squad. Other brother died shortly after war. The third one lived in Gusino and died in the 1970s. All of them were married and had children, but Zyama is the only one whom I remember. Mother got some elementary medical education. It must have been courses for the nurses. Mother was a housewife after getting married.

Having discharged from the hospital, father entered the party of Bolsheviks [8](#) being captivated with the communist ideas. He was overwhelmed in the revolutionary work. After the Revolution of 1917 [9](#) father was appointed the deputy head of Smolensk municipal militia. During the Civil War he was appointed the commissar [political officer] [10](#) of the anti-gang squad, to be more exact the struggle against Makhno [11](#) gang. Father liked to go back to that time. He went to have talks with Makhno in his residence Guyai-Pole [about 800 km to the south from Moscow]. The talks were held regarding Makhno joining the Red Army, but they did not come to an agreement. In 1934 when father worked in France he met Makhno, who immigrated to France, at the Russian Embassy. I lived in France with my father and remember that episode. Makhno asked for a permit to come back to Russia under condition of security guarantee. He must have not been guaranteed security as he stayed in France. Father took part in the Civil War until 1920. Then father was demobilized from the army and was involved in financial and economic work. He was an educated person. There were few people like that back at that time. Parents moved to Moscow before I was born. Father was given an apartment in a large (for those times) 7-storied house in the center of Moscow at Nikitinskiy boulevard. It was a separate 2-room apartment, which was rare for that period of time as overwhelming majority of USSR population lived in poky communal apartments [12](#).

Our family was friendly and bonded. Mother was very kind and hospitable. Our house was full of guests: mother's pals and friends, relatives, who lived in Moscow. Brothers often came from Smolensk. Father had many friends. Father read a lot and was an erudite. He had rich library. He also nurtured in me love to books. Parents were pious, but they observed Jewish rites and marked Jewish holidays paying a tribute to the traditions. Jewish holidays were occasion to get together and have fun. We loved Pesach most of all. There was always matzah for that holiday. Mother cooked traditional Paschal dishes. I enjoyed gefilte fish the most. On Pesach parents' Jewish friends and our relatives came over. Parents went to the synagogue on holidays. On the anniversary of the death of our relatives father read Kaddish. Parents did not raise me in religious traditions. It was the time of anti-religion propaganda[Struggle against religion] [13](#). I think parents did not want me to be any different from my coevals for me not conceal anything and not to prevaricate. I think their religiousness was coming from the recollections of childhood, parents and grandparents - it was a tenuous thread, connecting them with the Jewry. My mother's family was more religious than father's. Though, it is hard for me to judge as I was a child at that time. Other than that they were common Soviet people. We marked such Soviet holidays as: 7th of November - when the Soviet regime came to power [October Revolution Day] [14](#), 1st of May - international labor day. The whole family went to demonstrations. In the evening our friends and father's colleagues and Civil War comrades came to see us. Father was a convinced communist and strongly believed in the party. Though, when the repressions commenced in 1937 [GreatTerror] [15](#) father questioned the correctness of the policy of the party. I remember my parents were speaking in sotto when certain subjects were broached and I could comprehend separate words. Father did not believe that some people he personally knew, were guilty.

Father was a in a high position at work and family was rather well-off. The fact that we had a separate 2-room apartment in the center of Moscow testified to our wellbeing. Parents did not have dacha [summer house]. On vacation they went to the spas in Kislovodsk, Pyatigorsk [about 1300 km to the south from Moscow]. There was a dreadful starvation in Ukraine in the period of 1920-1930 [Famine in Ukraine][16](#). There was hunger in Moscow but it was not as bad as there. It was the time when the food cards were introduced [Card system][17](#). Father had special cards for the responsible workers. There was a special store, where food was given by special cards and parents went there to get food. By the way, the variety was much better there than in any other stores. There was also a special polyclinic, hair-dressers and grocery store. Our living was pretty good.

## Growing up

I was born in Moscow in 1923. I was called Vladimir after Lenin [18](#). My name was popular with many people. I was an only child in the family. Mother was the one who brought me up as she was a housewife. She was also responsible for the work about the house. I did not have a nanny nor I went to the kindergarten.

In 1930 father was sent to France to work. Mother and I went with him. We had lived in France for 2 years. The embassy rented a house for all employees of the embassy and the chamber of commerce. It was easier for children to catch foreign languages. In 3 months I went shopping with my mom and was interpreting for her. There was no Russian school at the embassy and I went to an ordinary French school. I was good at studies. I remember the French school I went to. The educational system in France was different from the Soviet one. The youngest class was the 14th and the graduation one was the 1st. It happened so that I got ill and meanwhile my Soviet

friends with whom I studied together were transferred to another class. I came in the classroom and they were not there. I started crying and the teacher asked what the matter was with me. I explained her the reason. She took the book for the 1st grade, opened the last page and told me to read it out loud. I read it unflinching. Then she gave me two tasks to solve and I did it very quickly. She took my hand and brought me to the 13th grade and told the teacher to enroll me in her class.

We had lived in France for 2 years and in 1934 father was transferred to England. My father was appointed deputy USSR ambassador, Andrey Mayskiy was the USSR ambassador. Father was friends with him. There was a Soviet school for children of the embassy employees. All subjects were taught in Russian, and English was taught as a foreign language. Each week we had a meeting with some famous person. Mayskiy often came for a meeting in school. He told us interesting stories. He was Lenin's friend. When Lenin lived in England, he stayed with Mayskiy in one apartment. Lenin enjoyed playing chess. Mayskiy said when he won chess game, Lenin bore grudge when he lost. Ambassador Mayskiy did a lot for the children of the embassy employees. In summer we went to the pioneer camp to the sea-side.

With the outbreak of the repressions in USSR, employees of the embassies and trade representative offices were recalled. Upon arrival they were immediately arrested and after a short trial sent to Gulag [19](#) or shot. Mayskiy was called in Moscow for several times. He must have imagined what was going on there and refused to come referring to all kinds of reasons – either his wife or he was sick. Of course, the authorities in the USSR understood that he did not want to come back. Shortly before the war, in 1940 Mayskiy was appointed deputy minister of the foreign affairs. There was no way he could avoid coming back, even for a short period before the arrest. But still, he found pretexts to stay in England. During the entire period of the war he ensured supplies of the arms and provision from England. He was responsible for the monetary assistance. But bloodthirsty and vindictive Stalin reminded Mayskiy of his defiance. In 1949 Mayskiy was arrested and sent to Gulag. He was lucky to survive. Shortly after Stalin's death in 1953 he was released. Mayskiy never regained diplomatic work again. He was involved in scientific work and historic research. He became academician pretty soon. Later on he wrote in his recollections that almost all employees of Soviet organizations in London were arrested and exterminated.

Father was lucky to stay alive. Like others he was recalled from England. Father was likely to understand that he might be arrested upon his arrival in USSR. At that time some employees of Soviet representative offices and organizations refused going back and asked for political asylum from the government of the country, they were working and stayed there. But my parents were not thinking that way and wanted to come back to the USSR. In 1937 when repressions were in the full swing, we lived in the USSR. Father was predestined like many other people, who came back from the overseas. Father was saved accidentally. During the Civil War father was a commissar of the squad and the commander was his friend, who consequently became the general of NKVD. The list of those who were to be arrested and shot in the first place, was brought to that general. Looking through the list the general saw my father's name and crossed it out. Of course, he was taking a risk, but things turned out to be OK. Father only was reprimanded and that was it. Father's brother Haim who worked as the head of financial department NKVD told me that story. By chance he found out about the imminent danger for my father. Upon our return from England father was assigned the head of industry funding department at the ministry of finance. Father had to resign

after being reprimanded by the party. He worked in different inconsiderable companies. Father was inlawed after Stalin's death. He was not willing to be a dignitary any more and decided to resign.

When we came back to Moscow I went to secondary school № 110 [20](#). It was the school where children of leading party activists and famous military commanders studied. History teacher Novikov was the director of the school. He was awarded with two Lenin Orders [21](#) for his pedagogical work. Director selected excellent teachers. Bad students were transferred to other schools. All school-leavers entered Moscow University [Lomonosov Moscow State University] [22](#) without any entrance exams. There was a strong ideological work at school. We were imbued with Soviet propaganda. I was a good student. Mathematics was my favorite subject. I became a pioneer [All-Union pioneer organization] [23](#) in that school.

When I was in the 9th grade, some militaries came over to our school to encourage boys to transfer to artillery specialized school, which was the first of the kind in Moscow. In 1937 professional military schools were founded in Moscow. First there were 5 of them, then more were opened up. The best students were selected there - those who had straight excellent marks or 2-3 good marks and the rest excellent marks. Parents did not object to my studies at artillery school. In 1940 I was transferred there. We were taught major subjects in accordance with the syllabus as well as military artillery subjects. There were best teachers as well. I was fond of mathematics and other sciences. I became a Komsomol [24](#) member in that school. I did not take an interest in social work. We were clad in military uniform, but we were not confined to the barracks. We lived at home and went to school. Though, in summer time the entire school went to military camps.

There was no premonition that the war was coming. Then there were rumors that Germans were positioning their troops on our border, there was a special announcement on the radio refuting those rumors. They said that Germans were just having a rest after war in Poland and there was no dislocation of troops. In spite of that father kept on saying firmly that the war would be unleashed soon. When non-aggression Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [25](#) was signed, father and all his friends and pals castigated actions taken by the government as they thought that Hitler would violate the agreement and attack us. The person who captured half of the Europe could not be trusted .

I found out about the outbreak of the war from Molotov's [26](#) speech on the radio. I transferred to the 10th grade of the specialized school and was on vacation. That morning father's brother Haim was in our house. Haim's son Jacob was in the army at that time. Jacob was a student, but in 1940 there was an order regarding drafting the students in the army. Jacob served in artillery troops. I remember how uncle Haim turned pallid. He knew what the war was like from the experience of WW1. Besides he worked in NKVD and was informed of many things. Haim understood that the war would not be as fast and victorious as it was pictured in propaganda.

### **During the war**

School started on the 1st of September as usual. The director of school told us to align and said that we had to study well as now was the time when literate officers were in great demand in our country. The 10th grade students were agog to go in the lines, but we were told to finish school first then he would have our chance to be in the action. Moscow was bombed. Special fighting battalion was established [fighting battalion] [27](#). We were on duty on the roofs of the houses during the attacks of German artillery, quenching fire bombs. Then the students of our school were taken out of town to fortifications, where we were supposed to dig moats. We went there early in the morning

and late at night we came back.

On the 15th of October 1941 some reconnaissance battalion broke through the defense of Moscow. German soldiers headed to Moscow along Minsk highway. There was 1st of Moscow military artillery school. The cadets were woken up at night by the alarm and called for battle. They exterminated that battalion. The rumors were spread. The commandment was reported on the situation and all of them fled taking the money and cars. Then they were shot for that. The main communication in Moscow, the subway, was closed down. There were hardly any transportation in Moscow. The metro was closed down because the general headquarters was being evacuated. At the beginning of the war general headquarters were in the heart of the city, in the deepest metro station - Kirovskaya. Thus, the metro was closed down. There was the announcement that people could get products for 3 months by food cards. All rushed to the stores. Directors of stores also fled. People started plundering the stores. Gangsters rushed in the city. German planes released the leaflets: "Kill communists and Yids! Things will get better with our arrival". Moscow was panic stricken. There were the premises of the state organization in front of our house. The archives were burnt making clouds of dust. The workers got together at the plants. They were given 3-month wages and told to walk to Gorkiy. They said that the plant would be exploded. Our neighbor worked at the largest automobile plant named after Stalin, which was called Likhachev plant [28](#). When the workers were announced that the plant would be exploded they decided that they would not let it. They were on duty a round-o'clock and protected the plant. They were on pins and needles waiting for the Germans to come.

There were rumors that the senior students our school would be sent to the lines. I was awaiting that. Then the commander of the school brought us together and said that Stalin told to prepare professional soldiers for a multiyear war. We should not go in the lines being half-educated, but study well. In the evening all out of 5 Moscow artillery schools got on the train and left for Siberia. Schools were distributed in different cities. Our specialized school came to Kemerovo [about 3000 km to the east from Moscow]. We were on the road for several days. It was warm in the car. There were meal stations on our way. We went there to have warm food. Parents stayed in Moscow for the entire period of war. Father worked at the weaving mill as an economist. The factory was not evacuated, so father stayed in Moscow as well.

Vocational school and children's' theatre were also evacuated from Kemerovo from Leningrad. We kept in touch with them. They gave free performances. We settled in the hostel of some college and had classes there as well. Apart from studies we also were involved in coal mining works. Almost all men were in the front, but the country needed the coal. In spring 1942 we finished school and took the oath. Now we were true militaries.

100 people out of the 5 evacuated graduation classes of artillery schools were united in one battery and sent to Tomsk artillery school. Our battery was not reformed because we had a good level of knowledge - above the average. Military school did not give us much apart from the soldier's staff- bed regime and marching. School gave us all necessary knowledge. The school was large. Upon graduation the attendees were conferred the rank of a junior lieutenant and excellent students were conferred the rank of a lieutenant. In other schools only 1-2 people out of 100 got the rank of a lieutenant, but in our school all graduates got this rank. When we were graduating Stalingrad Battle [29](#) was about to finish. Germans were besieged by Stalingrad.

All of us newly-fledged lieutenants were sent to the front. We were dispersed in different cities. I was assigned to the town out of Moscow, Kolomna, to the reforming regiment. The reforming lasted for 2 weeks. I hardly had any spare time, but I managed to drop by my parents. Parents were starving. There was a provision crisis in Moscow. We were fed pretty well. There was a special ration for the cadets and I gave it to my parents.

From the very beginning there were a lot of casualties in the lines. In 1942 the last reserve was drafted, people born in 1892, i.e. those who turned 50. They were not drafted before. Youth from Middle Asia were also drafted: Uzbeks, Tajiks. They were not drafted in the tsarist nor in the Red Army. There were people who fought in WW1 among the draftees of 1892. They knew how to handle the rifles. It was hard with the people from Middle Asia. It was required that well-prepared people were in the artillery and I taught Tajiks and Uzbeks every day. I told them what howitzer and cannon were, how to load the shells and other things. It was a hard task as many of them did not understand Russian.

I was the senior officer of the battery. Our regiment was called SCR - supreme commandment reserve. The regiment was armed with 122-mm howitzer. It was heavy artillery. In 2 weeks our squad was sent to the north-western front. We appeared in the region Staraya Russa, in the vicinity of Demyansk [about 500 km to the north-west from Moscow]. In Demyansk our troops besieged Germans but did not manage to do away with them as Germans broke through the siege. Our task was to exterminate German groups. I happened in the period of January-February 1943. We had fought in that area by spring and forced the river Glavat and took a defense position.

War is a daily hard labor. The artillery did not attack, but it did not mean that we were safe. We were frequently bombed by aviation and fired by the artillery of the adversary. German reconnaissance planes must have noticed our firing points. There were times when our positions were fired by the entire division over open sights. Of course, during the firing we hid in the shelter, but there were wounded. When we were taking positions, our life was getting calmer and more gradual. We lived in the dug-outs or in the huts. If the land was dry, we made the dug-outs. If it was not possible, we made log huts. Then logs were laid with stones for them not to be hit with fragments and shallow shells. Sometimes we settled in the houses of the local citizens, sometimes we had to live in the trenches. There were all kinds of things.

We were well fed in the front. We did not starve. There were times when the army was moving forward and the suppliers did not catch up with the army, so nutrition was worse. Sometimes we were given 100 grams of vodka before the fight. Vodka was given by number of soldiers. Every day there was a report about the number of the aligned soldiers. Food and vodka were given in accordance with that list. Soviet holidays were marked in the lines: 1st of May, 7th of November. When we were on the defense positions, we had a tastier dinner and got more drinks.

Our battery consisted of about 100 people and 4 howitzers. The howitzer squad consisted of 8 soldiers and one commander. Battery commander was on the observation point and we fired from the closed firing positions as per his order. The observation point was prepared beforehand. The trench was dug, stereotelescope communication lines were installed. When the target was noticed the data was provided to make artillery calculations. As a senior officer I took the orders of the battery commander and gave instructions on the spot regarding aiming at the target and the timing of the firing. The fire position with cannons and howitzers was 2-3 km away from the leading



edge, behind the shelter. Our howitzers were transported by American haulers stood-backers, delivered from the USA in accordance with lend-lease [Editor's note: lend-lease is the system of transfer (loan or lease) of weaponry, ammunition, strategic raw materials, provision etc.; supplies in terms of lend-lease were made by the USA to the ally-countries on anti-Hitler coalition in the period of the WW2. The law on lend-lease was adopted by the USA Congress in 1941]. We received stood-backers during the forming and howitzers were supplied from the plants. Howitzer was a good weapon, produced at our plant. The production of this weapon was launched in 1938. It is not obsolete even now in terms of operational parameters. It is a very powerful weapon being able to shoot at the distance of 12 km. After the war the howitzers were purchased from us in the entire world. They still use them somewhere in Africa, because they are so good. Army ammunition warehouses were 50-100 km away from the front. Ammunition was transported to the warehouses by railroad transport and suppliers delivered it to the regiment. When we were in defense position, remaining at one and the same place, ammunition was supplied on time. When we were attacking and moving quickly to the West of Ukraine, there was no timely supply. At times we ran out of shells.

We were awaiting attack from Germans in the vicinity of Kursk [Kursk battle] [30](#) [about 500 km to the south from Moscow] and were getting the staff renewed because the army had a lot of casualties after the Stalingrad Battle and each front got the order to send a certain number of battle-seasoned gunners in the vicinity of Kursk. I and other gunners were dispatched to Kursk from the northern front. We came to the headquarters in Kursk. All of us were distributed to different armies, wherefrom we were sent to divisions. I came to #41 artillery regiment of rifle division. Kursk battle was over, when I was catching up with the regiment. Germans were vastly retreating and our troops were to persecute them until reaching Dnepr. When I joined them, bridgeheads had been captured. I was on the major bridgehead to the north from Kiev: it was the attack point. In October 1943 there were fierce battles. We started artillery preparation. Kiev was attacked on the 3rd of November 1943 and on the 6th of November it was captured. It took us hard to take Kiev. Germans were counterattacking trying to undermine our assault. There were a lot of casualties, but nonetheless we captured Kiev on the 6th of November. Our division was conferred the title Kievskaya. I did not enter the city, we went past it on the North. At that time I did not know anything about the mass fusillade of Jews in Babi Yar [31](#).

Then Zhytomir [about 650 km to the south-west from Moscow] was liberated. But Germans were counterattacking and captured Zhytomir once again. They tried to push us in Dnepr. Our division was besieged. It was fearsome. I was afraid not to be held in captivity. I did not know how our soldiers captured by Germans were treated in our country, but I knew for sure that Germans exterminated Jews. We broke through the siege, resisted German's attack and started assaulting. We liberated Zhytomir, right-bank Ukraine and moved forward. I had stayed in that regiment by the end of war. I was promoted in rank - now I was senior lieutenant. I joined the party during the war. It was mandatory for the officers, besides the procedure of entering the party was simplified.

During the war we did not have to liberate concentration camps and we did not come across any of them on our way. I found out from press about atrocities of Germans towards Jews. Those things were not often covered in papers, many details remained unrevealed. They treated me pretty good in the army. There was no anti-Semitism. The issue with nationality was not brought up in the front. Armenians, Georgians, Uzbeks etc. were fighting together. Only in years after the war we found out

that there were orders to confer Jews as less awards as possible, not to promote them in rank or confer high ranks.

Like in the peaceful times we were under the 'omniscience eye' of NKVD. Its subdivisions SMERSH [32](#) were founded. There was no less than one NKVD representative in each regiment. Usually there were more than one. Those 'warriors' had to divulge the spies and diversionists. They did not take part in the battles. They worked with military personnel, picked the stooges who reported on anti-soviet dispositions and talks. They were not respected in the army. Besides, penalty battalions were also under NKVD command. Such battalions consisted of volunteers out of criminals and militaries condemned with the martial court for different misdemeanors. Officers were reduced in ranks and sent to the penalty battalions and soldiers and sergeants were sent to the penalty squads. The soldiers of the penalty battalions fought to death or until they were wounded in the battle. After being discharged from the hospital they were sent to ordinary military units. It was called 'to wash off the guilt with blood'. I had to come across with those battalions. There were times when penalty squad was taking position on the left flank. Penalty squads were also sent for pre-battle reconnaissance. It meant that they were supposed to depict the attack under insufficient support from artillery in order to determine what kind of German forces were focused on that site. Of course, most of the penalty squad soldiers died. Upon their death, their families were reported that they were exonerated 'guilt was redeemed by blood'. Fortunately, none from our regiment was in the penalty squad. Closer to the end of war, two officers, senior lieutenants, who were previously in penalty squad, came to our regiment. They were wounded, therefore restored in rank and sent to us. They were good fighters and our soldiers treated them with respect. One of the officers said that their penalty battalion consisted of 4000 people. They were ordered to break through the river Danube in Budapest. After they succeeded in their task, only 200 survived out of 4000. They were rehabilitated and restored in rights.

Shelter squads were also under NKVD. Those troops were established by NKVD. They consisted of armed NKVD employees, who were to follow military subdivision. They were supposed to make sure that no deserting would happen and not to let anybody in the rear. They had power to kill the running soldier on spot. Deserters were caught. Sometimes they had to go through martial court. At times they were shot depending on the circumstances. Such shelter squads were made of loyal communists and Komsomol members. They acted very ruthlessly, even too ruthlessly.

There was an amusing story with me when we were in Ukraine. A journalist from the army paper came over to us. He had been asking me many things and then a short article was released in paper. The article was written about me, how I shattered the caterpillars and wedged the turret of the tank with one shell. The tank stopped and ceased fire, allowing our infantry to attack. Of course, it was preposterous as the person did not even think that caterpillar was on the bottom of the tank and the turret was on the top. Of course, it was a laughing stock. I was asked how I could adroitly do those things with one shell. Then I met the journalist and asked him how he could have written such tosh about me. I remembered his reply till the rest of my days. He told me "it was of no importance - the task was to write what should have been, not what had actually happened". I often recalled his words when I was reading our papers...

There were other funny stories. We fought on the territory of the Western Ukraine for the city of Ivano-Frankivsk [about 1500 km to the south-west from Moscow]. The city was defended by Hungarians. The war was winding and Hungarians were aware of it. So, they tried to be on our side

and not to resist. That is why Germans sent their squads trying to stop our attack. Germans sent the tanks against us and we were running out of shells. Only three shells left and those were smoke shells. Smoke screen was not a toxic smoke, but a stinky one. We had no choice but to shoot with them. There were clouds of smoke and when the smoke was dispersed we saw Germans getting out of tanks and stampeding. They must have thought that they were burning and left the tanks. Our infantry rushed to the tanks to get the trophies.

There was also an interesting case at the forced crossing of Dnepr during attacking the town of Stanislav, Khersonsk oblast [about 1200 km to the south-west Moscow]. When our infantry was crossing Dnepr, German bombers were strenuously bombing the crossing. Our troops were plainly visible and we did not have aircraft guns to bring down German planes. Then the division commander suggested that I should make a fraudulent maneuver. We had shells with remote control explosives in our ammunition sets. These were the shells which could be exploded in any trajectory point of their flight. They were meant for the troops. The shell exploded at the distance of 10m before the trenches, where the infantry was hiding so that the fragments of the shells hit the infantry. So we had to calculate at what distance the shell was to explode at the right time. We made one trial shot. Zenith blasts were usually bright and light, but this one turned out to be a dark cloud. After making trial shots I adjusted the data and we made couple of shots on the planes, but they were a little bit more advance, above the infantry. The shell flew off and exploded in the adjusted point. We would not be able to bring down a plane with such a shell, but we just scared off the Germans. They thought that there was no zenith artillery at the crossing and then all of a sudden there were such powerful blasts among the planes. German bombers turned back and flew away.

In 1944, when we were in Subcarpathia [33](#), I felt Jewish solidarity and assistance for the first time. I decided to take a picture with other officers and send the photo to my parents. We went to the photo saloon, but its host, an elderly Jew, said that he would not be able to take our pictures as he ran out of photo materials, We were about to leave and then the host asked whether I was a Jew. I did not look like a true Jew, so I was surprised by the question. I said that I was a Jew. Then he said that he would take only my picture by using his reserve and would not spend precious materials on the others. I was really taken aback, there were no things like that in USSR. It was the first time I thought that Jews must have survived because they had been supporting each other in the course of many generations.

Our division took part in liberating Budapest. The attack commenced on the 5th of December 1944 in the area to the north-east from Budapest and the city itself was captured on the 5th of February 1945. There were long battles. We encircled the city and positioned on two banks of Danube. We succeeded in the first stage of our attack: we broke through German positions and moved forward. The infantry was ahead, followed by artillery. The commandment was reported on the breakthrough. Tank army also joined us to support the breakthrough. I was on the outskirts of a hamlet in the observation point and saw our tanks moving in two rows along the highway. The hamlet was practically taken, only couple German tanks hid away there. Those tanks opened fire on our column of tanks. Some of our tanks were punctured and started burning. They could not support infantry. I understood that the next stage would be firing at the hamlet from long-range artillery weapons. It was not known whether Germans would suffer from that, but we definitely would suffer. I sent a soldier for him to reach our buttoned up tanks and making a use of the radio

connection I reported that the hamlet was practically taken by us. I also added that there was commandment of the rifle regiment and asked our gun soldiers not to fire at us. It was hard for the soldier to cross the territory under fire, but he managed to do that and sent the message like I asked. We remained alive the troops made a precipitant advance and approached Budapest. There was enough distance to fire at the city. Though we lacked the shells, there was enough for us to make 4 salvoes at the outskirts of Budapest. When the capital was captured, Hungarians finally joined our troops and subordinated to the general commandment. I remembered another case. During our stay in Hungary local people, Hungarians, came over to me asking to protect them from Romanians, who were killing and raping. I had to send my soldiers to protect the civilians.

By the end of the war, when the troops of the western front were on the territory of Germany, we were allowed to send the parcels home weighting up to 8 kg. We corresponded with the inmates of the orphanage. We decided to send children the parcel with the toys. We gathered a lot of nice and expensive toys, but it turned out that the weight was not 8, but 12 kg. I addressed to the political department asking for a permit to send the parcel of 12 kg. I described the content and the destination of the parcel and obtained a permit. We sent the toys to the orphanage and soon we received the answer. Children were very delightful and thanked us for the parcel.

When we crossed Carpathian ridge, battles commenced in Eastern Slovakia and in the cities Mukachevo, Uzhgorod. Slovakian tongue was approximated to Russian and we were able to understand each other very well. The population of that territory cordially welcomed us because Eastern Slovakia had been under yoke of the fascist Hungary since 1938. People were rejoicing in liberation.

There were fierce battles in Slovakia. Once German gunners hid behind the powerful walls of the gas plant on the outskirt of a village without letting our infantry keep their heads up because of the incessant artillery fire. 76-mm cannons could not pierce brick walls of their shelter. The division commander called me and told to shoot from howitzer over open sights. One howitzer was set over the open sights and after short trial shots all German gunners were exterminated by 3 shells. Being a gunner I can boast in our material part as well as in training of our soldiers, which was better than German's. That is why artillery was called 'the god of war'. It played the most important role both in defense from the German tanks and during assault, clearing the way for the infantry.

I was heavily wounded in the thorax with the fragment of blasted shell during the liberation of Bratislava. All my foot bones were crushed. I was in the hospital. I underwent operation and then I changed couple of hospitals. I met the victory day in the hospital.

I got awards for the battles - 10 orders and medals. The most important are Great Patriotic War Order of the 1stclass [34](#), Red Star Order [35](#), Medal for Military Merits [36](#) and others. In the post-war period I also received jubilee medals on the occasion of different memorable dates of victory and Soviet army.

## **After the war**

When the war was over I went to my squad from the hospital. We happened to be in Hungary. In early 1946 we were transferred to the Northern Caucasus, to the town of Georgiyevsk, Stavropol oblast [1400 km to the south-east from Moscow]. I got married during my service in the Northern

Caucasus. At that time many of my fellows, young lieutenants, married off. My wife Larissa Goncharova, was born in the Northern Caucasus in the town of Georgiyevsk in 1925. Larissa is Russian. Her father is Alexander Goncharov and her mother is Rozalia Goncharova. Larissa was the only child in the family. When we met, she studied at medical school. She quitted studies after getting married. In 1947 our son Sergey was born. The second son Igor was born in 1954, when I served in Siberia. Larissa followed me no matter where we went, sharing adversities and inconveniences of the professional officer. Of course, her life was not easy. She had 2 children. I was constantly busy with studies and work and could not help her with anything. My wife was strong enough to stand fast without involving me in everyday problems.

I had not seen my parents during the entire period of war. We did not have any leaves. My parents were in Moscow. When I was in the Caucasus I was lucky with a vacation. My father, having resigned from the leading position, worked as an economist at the banner factory. Shoulder boards with golden embroidery were also manufactured at the factory, where my father was working. Our commandment was eager to get those shoulder boards as soon as possible. Having found where my father worked, they sent me on vacation under condition that I would be back with the new shoulder boards for them. I came to my parents with my young wife Larissa. It was happiness without alloy. My parents were pleased to meet Larissa and they even did not care that she was not a Jew. They treated her like their own daughter and Larissa also loved them very much.

When I was in the Northern Caucasus, I decided to obtain higher education. The most logic for me was to enter artillery academy. There were 2 strong academies in Moscow: Aviation Academy and Artillery Academy. Both of them gave an excellent education. Subjects were taught by the teacher from Moscow State University. Mathematics, theory of mechanics were taught at the highest level. I entered the institution from the 2nd attempt. During the 1st time I failed because my preparation was not as good. The second time I passed all entrance exams with straight excellent marks and was admitted to the academy. It was the year of 1948 - the last year when Jews were admitted there. The next year none of the Jews was admitted. There were a lot of Jews in my course. There were 8 out of the 28 people, viz. 30% out of students. During my studies at the academy our family lived with my parents, in their apartment.

Baiting of Jews commenced in 1948 with the outbreak of the miserable cosmopolitans processes [Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [37](#). It was not a pre-war repressions period, when Stalin exterminated his adversaries without taking into account nationality. Since 1948 and up to Stalin's death in March 1953 these were Jews who were hunted, and it was in the open. Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was exterminated [38](#). Some of its members were shot and some of them sent to Gulag. Solomon Mikhoels [39](#), the chairman of the committee and a wonderful actor of the Jewish theatre was assassinated. It was an imitated car accident, but everybody knew that it was a murder. My mother and her friends went to the synagogue at Malaya Bronnaya. There was a commemorating prayer - Kaddish - over Mikhoels. It was the time when father was expelled from the party without any reasons. We understood that it was just the beginning and he was imminent with more dangerous things. In 1950, upon graduation of the 3rd course, I and some more of the Jews were expelled from the academy in spite of the fact that all of us had straight excellent marks, and sent to the remote military commands. I was sent to a small squadron in Siberia. I was the commander of the squadron in the corps regiment.

In years, I was shown my personal record from the academy. The curator of our course wrote that I was a good student, but politically inauspicious as my father was English subject. That was it. Can you imagine anything like that. They found out that father was born in England! I was expelled because of political motifs, not because of my performance. They could not openly say that I was expelled in accordance with item 5 [40](#). Though, I cannot say that my academy peers maltreated me. On the contrary, both peers and teaches had a good attitude towards me. I understood that my nationality would be stumbling stone in my further life. I even felt inferior at work. After Stalin's death I wrote a letter in the rehabilitation committee [Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union][41](#). I was called in Moscow and told that my father was totally exonerated and restored in rights with membership in the party since 1916. I informed the head of the academy of that and I was called to the academy to finish my studies.

Upon graduation there was a mandatory job assignment [42](#). Nationality was also considered and Jews were not assigned to good position. They wanted me to teach at high artillery school, but I was sent to scientific and research training area. Though, I do not regret that I happened to be there as the work was very challenging for me. I defended a thesis there [Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees] [43](#) and became a doctor of the technical science, acquired the status of the senior scientific employee - equal to the assistant professor in the educational institutions. I was a lieutenant colonel and later I became a colonel. We tested new arms on the training area. It was produced at Moscow military plants. Nudelman, a Jew, twice the Hero of the Soviet Union [44](#), a famous weapon designer, the head of design bureau of precision industry, came to test weapons. We met him. I was on frequent business trips in Moscow and took an active part in their elaborations. Nudelman suggested that I should be demobilized from the army and join his team in the design bureau. It was hard for me to get demobilized, as the general, commander of the training area, was against it. The medical board recognized me unfit for the military service in the civil times due to the consequences of my battle injuries. Thus, I had the grounds to get demobilized. In the period of 1972-1990 I had worked in the design bureau of precision industry being involved in elaboration of new weaponry. We had an excellent team. There was an intelligentsia. There were 90% of Jews. It was a strategic military enterprise. Even in the full swing of anti-Semitism Nudelman was entitled to offer job to anybody he wished no matter what nationality they were. He picked gifted designers, Jews, who were fired from other organizations. There was such an excellent team, that Nudelman's design bureau provided several samples of the arms annually, meanwhile it took 5 years to elaborate one pattern at other enterprises. Nudelman said when he turned 85 he was suggested that he should be conferred the title the Hero of the Soviet Union once again. Everybody agreed to it, he became twice hero of the Soviet Union .

When I was sent for a mandatory job assignment to training area, our family was given an apartment in the military community. When I was an academy student, we lived with my parents but I did not have the residence permit [45](#) in their apartment. In 1950 mother died from a heart stroke. Father remained by himself. I was expelled and sent to Siberia. I could not save parents' apartment. Father died shortly after mother. In 1954 he passed away from extensive myocardial infarction and the apartment was transferred to the state property as now nobody had residence permit for it. Parents were buried in Novodevichie cemetery in Moscow. It was a common city cemetery. [Editor's note: In USSR city cemeteries were territorially divided into sectors. Usually all city cemeteries have common land plots, plots for burial of children, sectors for burial of the titled militaries, Jewish sector, land plots of the political leaders etc. People were usually buried in

accordance with the will of the relatives of the deceased or the testament.]

When I worked for Nudelman's bureau the issue with apartment came up. Since I was born in Moscow and drafted in the army from Moscow I was supposed to get the apartment in Moscow in accordance with the law. In 1973 I got a 2-room apartment in a new house built in the south-western part of Moscow. At that time it was a newly built and now it is a lived-in district. My wife and I are currently living in that apartment.

It was mostly my wife who was raising children. I did not have that much spare time, but I tried to spend it with my wife and children. Even in summer my family often went on vacation without me. We marked birthdays of all family members at home. We also celebrated New Year's Day and Soviet holidays - 1st of May, 7th of November, Soviet Army day [46](#), Victory day [47](#).

Both sons were good students - prudent and kind. When sons' passports were processed they were to choose their nationality [Editorial's note: In the USSR the ethnic identity was indicated in citizens' passports. The situation in the Soviet Union was such that Jews had problems with entering higher educational institutions, finding jobs, traveling to foreign countries, etc.]. My wife and I suggested that the nationality of our children in passports should be Russian. They carry my name, but their nationality was Russian. As a matter of fact I do not identify myself a true Jew either. I do not know the language, nor Jewish traditions. My parents were the ones who kept the traditions, and it was stopped after their passed away.

Elder son Sergey finished school in 1965. These were hard years, when anti-Semitism was evolved at the state level. I understood it would be difficult for my son to enter the institute in Moscow with his Jewish name Tseitlin, even though it was written 'Russian' in his passport. The son left for Nizhniy Novgorod [about 400 km to the east from Moscow], successfully passed entrance exams and was admitted to the Novgorod Polytechnic Institute, Instrument Making Department. When Sergey was a student, we helped him out with money. Larissa took frequent trips to him. Sergey got married before graduation. His wife is a Russian girl Svetlana, born in Nizhniy Novgorod. Upon graduation both of them got a mandatory job assignment to Nizhniy Novgorod and settled down there. Sergey works at the military plant as an engineer - instrument-maker. He has a daughter Elena. We get along with my son's family. Sometimes we visit them. Every year they come over to us, when they are on vacation.

Younger son lives in Moscow. Upon graduation he finished medical school, served in the army. He also finished the course of masseurs. Igor worked as a sports masseur in hockey and basketball teams of the supreme league. Igor is married. His wife is also Russian, born in Moscow. They have 2 children: son Vladimir, named after me and daughter Alisa.

I retired in 1990, when my sons were independent. Then my wife and I decided to catch up with the missed opportunities during the period of my hard work. We started spending a lot of time together, going on vacations. We usually went to the leg treatment spas as my battle injury was constantly speaking for itself. In 1985 my wife and I went on voyage tour round the world.

When in 1948 the state of Israel was founded, I took it with great joy. It was good that Jews now had their own state and rampart. I approved of the mass immigration to Israel started in the 1970s. I could not leave as I worked for the military industry and my job was classified as sensitive, so I was entitled to leave abroad earlier than in 10 years after having retired. I could not even think of

it. When my friends or relatives were leaving, I thought they did the right thing. Of course, it was hard for the elderly people as the mode of life is going to be different and nobody would be able to accept it easily. As for the youth - they had a perspective, they did not have before. Usually children were the first who left, and their parents followed them. I found it good. I have never been to Israel, though I was invited and was willing to go. First, I could not go because the term of secrecy was not over, then because of my health. I can hardly walk, besides my physical condition is not as good . I am old... and nothing doing about it.

I thought it was great when the general secretary of the central committee of the Communist Party Mikhail Gorbachev [48](#) started perestroika [49](#) in USSR. I was aware that we were lacking behind in all respects. No matter what we did, we could not revive and catch up with the developed countries. The gap was only getting bigger, including the gap in the national politics. Yes, the very outset was wonderful. But the outcome of perestroika did not seem as good as it was pictured at the very beginning. Nevertheless, I think our country became better as compared to the past. The country became open, covering honest information. There is no censorship. Now we have the opportunity to visit our relatives abroad, correspond with them, invite them to come over without fearing of being repressed by KGB [50](#). State anti-Semitism is in the wane, though it is still felt in everyday life, nationality is of no impediment to enter higher education institutions or in promotion. A gifted person can find his way. Party does not play a critical role in our lives. Though we have a strong stratification in terms of income and it is sad.

I do not approve of breakup of the Soviet Union [1991]. I think it was caused by a mere conjuncture. Somebody wanted to wield the scepter and take Gorbachev's seat. Now I sympathize with Gorbachev. They are still scolding him, but in the course of history all would come in its place. There is nothing he should be nagged at! He was the one, who initiated the fight with the party regime, which planned our lives for us. Only courageous person could start things like that. Gorbachev also takes credit for the acquired liberties - having the right to speak one's mind.

Of course, I identify myself as Jew, but I do not know Jewish traditions. During Soviet regime I was constantly reminded of being a Jew. If there had been a true international politics during the Soviet regime, the way it was written in the constitution, none of the Jews would have felt himself humiliated and inferior. People of all nationalities would have been equal having a chance to realize their potential. I do not feel humiliated for being a Jew nee, just the other way around I am proud of being a part of such an ancient and talented nation.

Now I am taking an active part in Jewish life in Russia. I am deputy chairman of Moscow Council of Jewish War Veterans [51](#). In the post-war period there were rumors that Jews were not in the lines, just holing up in the rear. I think Stalin did a lot for such rumors to emerge. Ilya Erenburg [52](#) wrote in his recollections: "In summer I was asked to write an addressing speech to the American Jews about atrocities of Hitler and on necessity to do away with the Third Reich". One of the aides of the commander of the Soviet army chief political department A. S. Scherbakov said that there was no use in writing about the feats of Jews-soldiers of the Red Army. By the end of the war the surnames of Jews, being distinguished in battles, would be crossed out from the papers. After the war that tittle-tattle about the Jews, who 'fought in Tashkent' [Editor's note: Tashkent is a town in Middle Asia; it was the town where many people evacuated during the Great patriotic War, including many Jewish families. Many people had an idea that all Jewish population was in evacuation rather than at the front and anti-Semites spoke about it in mocking tones] grew stronger. Even now there are



people who believe that. Council of Jewish War Veterans was founded in order to exterminate those rumors. I am involved in the work of the council after having retired. We are in the middle of writing a book where all Jews, who fought in WW2, are enumerated as well as those who are reported missing. The book is called 'Commemoration Book of the Jews, Killed in Action against Nazi. 1941-1946'. I think it is the duty of those who survived to commemorate those who perished. The idea to publish such a book belongs to our chairman, the Hero of the Soviet Union Marianovskiy. The 8th volume has been released, the 9th one is about to be released and we hope that the 10th one will be published. Marianovskiy is our main 'bread-winner', who is going from one Jewish tycoon to another begging for money. There are a lot of donations for this commemoration book. People are willing to contribute. The book is circulated throughout the world. We are thanked by people who did not know anything about the death of their fathers, children, relatives. They find names in the book, commemorating their kin. They do not have a grave to attend and to bow, but at least there is a trace left - the names of those people are in our commemoration book. This is a commemoration book of the whole Jewish peoples. I think that it is a necessary and a great action.

We do not welcome nationalistic ideas in our Council. We rather support the internationalism spirit. Even though it is a Jewish council, nobody forces its members to follow Jewish traditions. We are not a religious organization. Only those go to the synagogue, who are willing and nobody pushes them. We keep friends with other communities, i. e. Ukrainian and Georgian. They invite us for their events and we invite them for ours. Of course, we keep in touch with other Jewish organizations - religious and social.

## **Glossary:**

### **1 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

### **2 Catherine the Great (1729-1796)**

Empress of Russia. She rose to the throne after the murder of her husband Peter III and reigned for 34 year. Catherine read widely, especially Voltaire and Montesquieu, and informed herself of Russian conditions. She started to formulate a new enlightened code of law. Catherine reorganized (1775) the provincial administration to increase the central government's control over rural areas. This reform established a system of provinces, subdivided into districts, that endured until 1917. In 1785, Catherine issued a charter that made the gentry of each district and province a legal body with the right to petition the throne, freed nobles from taxation and state service and made their status hereditary, and gave them absolute control over their lands and peasants. Catherine

increased Russian control over the Baltic provinces and Ukraine. She secured the largest portion in successive partitions of Poland among Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

### **3 Realschule**

Secondary school for boys. Students studied mathematics, physics, natural history, foreign languages and drawing. After finishing this school they could enter higher industrial and agricultural educational institutions.

### **4 NKVD**

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

### **5 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.

### **6 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.

### **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 Bolsheviks**

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16 April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

## **9 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.

## **10 Political officer**

These "commissars," as they were first called, exercised specific official and unofficial control functions over their military command counterparts. The political officers also served to further Party interests with the masses of drafted soldiery of the USSR by indoctrination in Marxist-Leninism. The 'zampolit', or political officers, appeared at the regimental level in the army, as well as in the navy and air force, and at higher and lower levels, they had similar duties and functions. The chast(regiment) of the Soviet Army numbered 2000-3000 personnel, and was the lowest level of military command that doctrinally combined all arms (infantry, armor, artillery, and supporting services) and was capable of independent military missions. The regiment was commanded by a colonel, or lieutenant colonel, with a lieutenant or major as his zampolit, officially titled "deputy commander for political affairs."

## **11 Makhno, Nestor (1888-1934)**

Ukrainian anarchist and leader of an insurrectionist army of peasants which fought Ukrainian nationalists, the Whites, and the Bolsheviks during the Civil War. His troops, which numbered 500 to 35 thousand members, marched under the slogans of 'state without power' and 'free soviets'. The Red Army put an end to the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine in 1919 and Makhno emigrated in 1921.

## **12 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.

## **13 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.

## **14 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.

## **15 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.

## **16 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.

## **17 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.

### **18 Lenin (1870-1924)**

Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

### **19 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.

### **20 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.

### **21 Order of Lenin**

Established in 1930, the Order of Lenin is the highest Soviet award. It was awarded for outstanding services in the revolutionary movement, labor activity, defense of the Homeland, and strengthening peace between peoples. It has been awarded over 400,000 times.

### **22 Lomonosov Moscow State University**

Founded in 1755, the university was for a long time the only learning institution in Russia open to general public. In the Soviet time, it was the biggest and perhaps the most prestigious university in the country. At present there are over 40,000 undergraduates and 7,000 graduate students at MSU.

### **23 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.

### **24 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.

### **25 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.

### **26 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.

### **27 Fighting battalion**

People's volunteer corps during World War II; its soldiers patrolled towns, dug trenches and kept an eye on buildings during night bombing raids. Students often volunteered for these fighting battalions.

### **28 Likhachev plant**

The oldest and the biggest Russian vehicle manufacturing enterprise founded on 2nd August 1916, best known for its 'Zil' brand. The 'Zil' trucks were widely used in the Soviet Union and Soviet occupied countries after the 1970s as well as in the Soviet Army. The enterprise also manufactures limousine vehicles buses and refrigerators. It has over 20000 employees and manufactures 209-210,000 vehicles per year. It has produced 8 million trucks, 39,000 buses and 11,500 cars in total.

### **29 Stalingrad Battle**

17th July 1942 – 2nd February 1943. The South-Western and Don Fronts stopped the advance of German armies in the vicinity of Stalingrad. On 19th and 20th November 1942 the Soviet troops undertook an offensive and encircled 22 German divisions (330,000 people) and eliminated them. On 31st January 1943 the remains of the 6th German army headed by General Field Marshal Paulus surrendered (91,000 people). The victory in the Stalingrad battle was of huge political, strategic and international significance.

### **30 Kursk battle**

The greatest tank battle in the history of World War II, which began on 5th July 1943 and ended eight days later. The biggest tank fight, involving almost 1,200 tanks and mobile cannon units on both sides, took place in Prokhorovka on 12th July and ended with the defeat of the German tank unit.

### **31 Babi Yar**

Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

### **32 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.

### **33 Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpatie)**

Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1919. It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population. In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the region, was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944. In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The region became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the region became an administrative region under the name of Transcarpathia.

### **34 Order of the Great Patriotic War**

1stClass: 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. 2ndClass: 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.

### **35 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.

### **36 Medal for Military Merits**

awarded after 17thOctober 1938 to soldiers of the Soviet army, navy and frontier guard for their 'bravery in battles with the enemies of the Soviet Union' and 'defense of the immunity of the state borders' and 'struggle with diversionists, spies and other enemies of the people'.

### **37 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'.



### **38 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.

### **39 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)**

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

### **40 Item 5**

This was the nationality factor, which was included on all job application forms, Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

### **41 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

### **42 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.

### **43 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 (doktarontura). 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.

#### **44 Hero of the Soviet Union**

Honorary title established on 16th April 1934 with the Gold Star medal instituted on 1st August 1939, by Decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Awarded to both military and civilian personnel for personal or collective deeds of heroism rendered to the USSR or socialist society.

#### **45 Residence permit**

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

#### **46 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'.

#### **47 Victory Day in Russia (9thMay)**

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.

#### **48 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.

#### **49 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.

#### **50 KGB**

The KGB or Committee for State Security was the main Soviet external security and intelligence agency, as well as the main secret police agency from 1954 to 1991.

#### **51 Moscow Council of the Jewish War Veterans**

It was founded in 1988 by the Moscow municipal Jewish community. The main purpose of the organization is mutual assistance as well as unification of front-line Jews, collection and publishing of recollections about the war, and arranging meetings with the public and youth.

#### **52 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.