

# Ferdinand Chernovich

Ferdinand Chernovich

Moscow

Russia

Date of the interview: October 2004

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

*Ferdinand Chernovich is a short grey-haired man. He is very amiable and good-wishing.*

*Ferdinand is limping a little bit. One of his legs was amputated as a consequence of the front-line wound.*

*He lives in a two-room apartment in the house built in the late 1970s. He lives by himself after his wife died.*

*Ferdinand does most things about the house by himself.*

*Twice a week a social worker comes to clean the apartment. Books is the first thing you notice in his apartment.*

*There are a lot of books on engineering, both in Russian and foreign languages, dictionaries, fiction books, mostly world classics.*

*In spite for being elderly and handicapped Ferdinand works at home. He writes annotations to technical manuals.*

*He knows three foreign languages and works on the books written by foreign authors.*

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

- **My family background**

My father's family lived in an ancient Russian city Smolensk [300 km to the West from Moscow]. I know hardly anything about my father Lev Chernovich and his kin. My grandfather's name is Jacob Chernovich. I do not know grandmother's name. Grandparents were born in Smolensk.

Before revolution as of 1917 [1](#) the city was included in the Jewish Pale of Settlement [2](#), and Jews were permitted to live there. I do not know what my grandfather did for a living. All I know is that he was well-off. Grandmother was a housewife. There were five children in the family. I do not know anything about my father's elder brother, not even his name.



My father's second brother was called Isaac. My father was born in 1891. He was given a Russian name Lev<sup>3</sup> (Jewish name Leib). Two sisters –Iselda and Mariam, who was called Manya in the family, were born after my father.

I think my father and his siblings got Jewish education. My father never discussed it with me. It is just my assumption as it could not have been otherwise back in that time. Jews were very religious before revolution, especially those who lived in small towns and boroughs. Apostates underwent stigmatization, so nobody wanted to be a castaway. Yiddish was spoken in the family. Everybody spoke good Russian, including my father's grandparents.

Father went to land survey school. In 1912 he was engaged to my mother. They must have been acquainted by matchmakers, because mother's family lived very far from Smolensk. She lived in Lithuania. That year father was drafted for the compulsory military service in the Tsarist army. Soon World War I was unleashed. Father was not very lucky he was captured by the enemy and sent to the camp for the captives located not far Wroclaw, Lower Silesia. Father did not tell much about his captivity. I know that prisoners of war were starving. Father corresponded with mother during his captivity. Father was released from the camp in 1918. When the war was over, father came back to Smolensk.

My mother's family lived in a small town of Girtakol - in Lithuanian province. I tried to find that town on the map, but failed. During my trips to Lithuania nobody could tell me anything about that town. I think it was a Jewish town. It must have been exterminated during WW2. Anyway it currently does not exist. I have never seen my maternal grandparents. I only know about them from my mother's tales. Grandfather Moses Ledskiy was a teacher in the Jewish elementary school. Grandmother, whose name I do not know, was a housewife.

Both of my grandparents were born in Lithuania, probably in that town. There were five children in the family. My mother's two elder brother's immigrated to the USA in 1910. One of them died on his way. He was hit by a train. The second one Gersh Ledskiy managed to get to the USA. Family did not keep in touch with him. The only thing they heard from him was that he had managed to arrive in the USA .My mother Rozalia (Jewish name Reizl) was the third child in the family. She was born in 1895. The youngest child of the family, Ida, was born in 1900.

Grandfather was a mathematics teacher in the elementary Jewish school. He paid a lot of attention to the education of his children. Mother and her siblings went to lyceum. All of them finished a full course. When World War I began and Germans put foot at Lithuanian territory, mother and her younger sister Ida fled to Ukraine to Kherson suburbs [470 km to the South from Kiev], where her distant relatives lived. The town they lived in was called Oleshki, then it was renamed Tsyurupinsk. When father was released from camp, he came to Oleshki to see my mother. They left Oleshki and went to mother's parents in Lithuania. They got married there. I think they had a traditional Jewish wedding. Mother said that father was feeble and exhausted after captivity.

He was fed well in Lithuania. He was given a lot of milk to drink. They lived with mother's parents for a while and then father took mother to Smolensk. They lived in the house of father's parents. For some reason father's relatives did not like and did not accept my mother. Mother said that the only person who treated her well was father's elder brother Isaac. Others were constantly giving her the cold shoulder. Mother loved father very much and did her best for his relatives to get to like her. She did not want to be the bone of contention. Unfortunately, all her efforts to get along with

father's family were futile. Father went to work as a land surveyor. Mother was a housewife. She took hard continual disdain and humiliation towards her. Finally, parents decided to move to Moscow. In 1922 they left Smolensk.

Parents settled in the center of Moscow, in the house across the Central Recreation Park. Previously their house was a bathhouse. It was remodeled into apartment building. All apartments in that building were communal [4](#), the so-called corridor system: a long corridor where the doors of the apartments were opened on. There was no bathroom. We had to wash either in the kitchen, or take a tub in the room and wash there. 19 families lived in our apartment. Each family occupied one room. Apart from us there was another Jewish family.

The rest were common Russian families. There were constantly quarreling and swearing and binging. Jews always were caught in the middle even when they were not guilty. Food was cooked on kerosene stoves. There were 19 stoves, one for each family. The kitchen ceiling was black from kerosene smoke. When the women cleaned their rooms they used to clean only a small part of the corridor, just in front of their rooms, so that the corridor looked like a chess board- white and black squares.

Mother became a pharmacist apprentice. Then she became a pharmacist. I was born in 1923. I was named Ferdinand in honour of my relative. Father left us shortly before I was born. He had another family. That is why I know so little about my father's family. Mother did not like talking about father, and I did not ask much about him. I considered father to be a man who had broken my mother's life. It is an unpleasant recollection for me. My father was not interested in my life either. I treated him likewise. I practically did not know him. He worked as an economist for the construction ministry.

He had duly paid alimony to my mother until I turned 18. Father came to my mother once a month. He gave her money and left at once. He even did not talk to me. He said couple of words to my mother, and that was it. Then I found out, that father left his second family and got married for the third time. His third wife was much younger than he was. She left him shortly after they got married. Father died in 1964. His neighbors told me about it. I do not even know where my father is buried. Father lived in a communal apartment. His neighbors noticed that he had not left his room for couple of days. They called the police. When they unlocked the door, my father was found dead.

### • **Growing up**

When I was born, the year of 1923, there was a terrible unemployment. Mother lost her job and remained unemployed for three years. We lived on father's alimony and on monthly child support in the amount of 7 rubles. We were indigent.

Mother never got married again after she divorced father. She lived only for me. I was the essence of her life. Mother did her best to bring me up. She tried to teach me how to read and write in Yiddish. But I was not good at it. Either I was a poor student or my mother was a poor teacher. Mother did not tell me about Jewish history and religion. She did not observe Jewish traditions and did not mark holidays. Maybe it was caused by the struggle of the Soviet regime against religion [5](#). Mother understood that I would be raised an atheist at school and she did not want to make my life more difficult.

Mother made up her mind to get educated during the period of her unemployment. When I was two, she entered Moscow Pharmaceutical School. In a year she was able to get a job in the pharmacy and to transfer to the evening department. She worked and studied. In 1928 she got a diploma of a pharmacist. At the beginning of the 1930s she was employed at the pharmacy.

After revolution of 1917 Baltic countries, Lithuania one of them, where mother's relatives lived, were not merged in the USSR. That is why mother could not keep in touch with her family. Soviet regime did not welcome those people who had relatives abroad and strongly disapproved of corresponding with them [5](#). The only mother's relative I knew was her younger sister Ida. She did not come back to Lithuania after World War I and settled in Ukraine, in Melitopol [now Zaporizhzhya oblast, Ukraine]. She got married there. When I was six mother got severely ill. She was in the hospital. There was nobody who could look after me. Ida came and took me to Melitopol. I had stayed with my aunt for a year before my mother got better.

In the middle 1930s Ida and her husband moved to Kharkov [now Kharkiv, Ukraine] before annexation of Baltic countries to the USSR [7](#). Aunt Ida kept trying to get a permission from the Soviet authorities to go to Lithuania to attend the funeral of her parents. But all her efforts were futile. When the WW2 was unleashed [8](#), Ida was evacuated in Kazakhstan. When the war was over she tried to return to Kharkov, but her apartment was occupied by other people. She tried to find an apartment, but failed. She came to Moscow to live with us.

She did not manage to find a job in Moscow. She left Moscow for Lvov [now Lviv, Ukraine] and settled there. In 1954 she got married for the second time. Her husband was a very decent Jewish man, whose name I do not remember. I visited her a couple of times. In 1982 Ida died from cancer. Mother and she were the closest people for me.

In 1931 I went to the first grade of Russian secondary school. It was the school in the closest vicinity to our house. It took me 15 minutes to walk to school. I was the only Jew in my class, and of course I felt anti-Semitism in every day life. I was teased and hurt. When I managed to stand up for myself, teasing and hurting stopped. I could not feel anti-Semitism from teachers, moreover I felt their support and assistance. Our teachers were very good. Most of them came from intelligentsia. I liked learning at school. I was an excellent student since the 1st grade and I finished school with excellent marks in my certificate. I did not learn things by rote. I had a good memory and it was easy for me to learn things. Chemistry was my favourite subject in senior grades. I also studied chemistry in extra-curriculum classes. I was confident that I would continue my education in the chemistry department of Moscow University [9](#). It was a realizable dream: Anti-Semitism was felt on social level, but it was not displayed on the state level before war. Jews were accepted in institutions of higher education and employed without a problem.

I was a young Octobrist in the first grade [10](#). Then I became a Pioneer [11](#), joined Komsomol [12](#). I did not even admit a thought that it was possible not to join Komsomol. I joined Komsomol in 1939 at the age of 16. I was never interested in social life, and I kept away from all kinds of social events. I loved reading and playing football with the guys at the stadium.

During the weekend my mother and I used to ski during winter and in summer time we took long strolls and went to the forest to gather berries and mushrooms. At that time I did not understand what was going on in the country. Even older and more experienced people did not understand what was happening. When in the year of 1937 repressions and Great Terror started [13](#) I did not

doubt that those people were guilty. I could not get one thing -- how come there were so many peoples' enemies? I did not question anything else.

In 1934 two German Jews came in our class. When Hitler came to power in Germany, their families managed to flee to the USSR. Both of those boys finished ten classes in our school. Their fathers were arrested in 1937 on suspicion of espionage for Germany though they were common workers at the plant. When Yezhov was arrested [14](#) and Beriia came to power [15](#), the father of one of those boys was released from prison and came back home. The person was arrested on a false charge, and he was set free after they cleared things up. Those boys went to school and nobody persecuted them neither teachers nor students. Nobody reproached them for their fathers being peoples' enemies [16](#).

- **During the war**

With the outbreak of WW2 in 1939 people were perturbed. However, there were no assumptions that Germany might attack USSR as we were constantly convinced that our army was invincible and nobody would dare to attack us. Even if it happened, the war would not last long and our valorous army would fight the enemy on his territory. Of course, we believed in that. Besides, Polish territory was divided and its considerable part was annexed to the USSR [17](#) which was another proof of our power.

When Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact was signed [18](#) people calmed down as with this agreement friendship and mutual assistance between Germany and USSR would be established. In November 1939 Finnish campaign was commenced [19](#), and USSR gained the victory. Though, after war in Poland drafting age was reduced by one year. The drafting age was 19 and since 1939 it was changed to 18. Thus, lads after finishing 10-year school were not able to enter the institute without serving in the army.

When I was in the 10th grade I got a document from the military enlistment office stating that I would be drafted in the army in autumn 1941. I had to postpone entering the institute for two years. Even if I had entered the institute right after finishing school, I would have studied only for two months and drafted in the army anyway.

In spring 1941 I passed my final exams. I did not make any plans for summer. On Sunday, June 22, 1941 I was at home by myself. Mother went out somewhere. My neighbor knocked on the door. She told me to turn radio on. Molotov was finishing his speech [20](#) on outbreak of war. I was able to hear his last words: «Our cause is just. The enemy will be defeated. We will gain the victory».

The next day all senior students gathered at school to go to the military enlistment office without making any previous arrangements. They told us to leave and wait for the notification. Then we went to the military plant, located not far from our school. They did not accept us. They said that we had to be trained first and besides we would be drafted in the army later on. Some of my classmates entered military school, but I did not want to become a professional military. We initiated organizing volunteers' corps [21](#) by our house administration.

At nights we stayed on the roofs of the houses in turns, quenched fire bombs and took people to the air-raid shelters. Germans began bombing Moscow in July 1941. On the 10th of August I was supposed to come to the military enlistment office with my belongings and passport. Mother was

really worried. She already knew the results of war. The pharmacy she worked for was turned into military hospital for the wounded. Mother did not want to be evacuated. She had worked there for the entire period of war.

In October 1941 there was another air-raid on Moscow. Demolishing bomb hit the park located by our house, which was considerably fractured so that it was impossible to live in it. First mother spent night at work. Then father decided go in evacuation and suggested moving in his apartment, but mother refused and kept living in our dilapidated house. When our troops came to Moscow for reorganization in spring 1942, I went to Ispolkom [22](#) to get apartment for my mother. They gave promises me but did not do anything.

After Stalingrad battle [23](#) our regiment was in Moscow again and I went to Ispolkom to remind them of their promise. Finally mother was given a room of 7 square meters in the communal apartment in the basement where three more families lived. When mother said that she lived with her son, she was told without any embarrassment that her son was at war and could be killed. She remained living in that basement. I lived in that room after I was discharged from hospital. We had lived there until 1957. We were not put on housing record because the occupant space requirement was 2 sq.m. per person, i.e. according to the Soviet law 3.5 individuals could live in our apartment.

Other draftees and I were sent to the camps in Chelyabinsk [about 1500 km to the North-East from Moscow]. We were not given the uniform, we stayed in our civilian clothes. They wanted to allocate us in different military schools according to our education. I did not want to go to the military school as I was not willing to become a professional military. I was lucky. At the beginning of November we were brought to some school, but there probably was a excessive number of students as the commander asked if there was anybody among us who did not want to study. Some people stepped forward. I was one of them. We were sent to the training squadron of the reserve regiment. We had stayed there for a month. We were taught how to become radio operators.

There was malnutrition. We were constantly starving, thinking only of food. In December we were given uniforms and sent to Kazan suburbs in the Guards mortar division. I was a private, and had remained a private until the end of war. We left Kazan for Gorkiy [now Nizhniy Novgorod], where we got ammunition, mostly consisting of mechanized combat vehicles, rocket launchers called Katyushas [24](#). The latter appeared shortly before the war. There were no prototypes of this machine and for such a machine not to be taken by Germans, there was a tritolo box with Bickford fuse.

Commander of the weapon was given an order to explode the weapon before it could be taken by Germans. Of course with the explosion of that tritolo box the weapon would be torn in pieces. There were such cases during war. The first battery of Katyushas took part in the battles close to Orsha. Then it was besieged and the soldiers blew up the weapons and themselves. When I was in the lines, there were couple dozens of squadrons and regiments with Katyushas. First, Katyushas were mounted on the tanks, then on the trucks.

At the beginning of January 1942 our Guards mortar squadron was sent to Volkhovskiy front. At that time our counterattack in that direction was terminated and there were no severe battles. Radio stations were not used there and we were field telephone operators and laid cable in the

fields. We were on round-o'clock duty on the phone. We were supposed to stay by the phone for 24 hours. If cable was ruptured somewhere we were supposed to crawl to the place where it was ruptured and joint ruptured ends. Cable was precious to us, we always ran out from it. That is why when the squad moved to another place, we reeled on cable and took it with us. We had to do it rather often. Katyushas made one salvo and moved to another place not be noticed and demolished by Germans. Then they remained on their positions. The radio-operators were given a truck to take the equipment before we moved to another location.

Rockets for Katyushas were brought on a regular basis. There were no cases when we ran out of them and there was no replenishment. Though, trucks were not able to get closer to the emplacements and we had to carry the shells by ourselves. First, the shells were not big, weighing about 10 kg. Then more powerful and heavier shells appeared. From the very beginning Katyushas were very powerful weapons and Germans were deterred by them. Neutralizing area of the shell was huge. The place was in ashes. Though, there cases at war when our soldiers were impacted as well. Fortunately there were no likewise cases in our battery that Katyusha would hit our troops. There was an observation post ahead of us, from which fire was regulated.

We lived in dug-outs. There were severe frosts. The earth was frozen. It was impossible to dig. We had to use a crow bar. Of course, it took us a long time to make a dug out. It was the most vexing when we were through making dug-outs and getting settled, we had to move to another place in couple of days. So, we had to start all over again. First, our nutrition was not very good. There was not enough food and besides it was not replenished on a regular basis. Then it got better and nutritional standard was increased.

In April 1942 our separate Guards mortar squadron consisting of 200 people was sent to Moscow. Our commandment was entirely changed. It was found out that squadron commander and commander of the headquarters took food from the warehouse and went to women. They were taken from us and we did not know what happened to them. I think they were reduced to a lower rank and sent back to the lines. The reforming in Moscow lasted rather long -- 2 months. It was a happy time for me. I lived in military barracks, but I was able to see my mother almost every day.

In squadron we had march drills and political classes. Germans were squeezed out from Moscow and there were hardly any air-raids. Beside ours, there were two more squadrons in our regiment. One of them had a lot of casualties and the other one ran out of ammunition. Those battalions were also sent for reforming. Then we were merged with another regiment and sent to Stalingrad. By that time we began to besiege Germans on the suburbs of Stalingrad. Our regiment took part in demolishing German forces close to Stalingrad.

The city itself was practically devastated by the Germans. We were positioned in 13 kilometers from Stalingrad. We had stayed there for 7 months -- for the entire period of the Stalingrad campaign. Commanders developed operational plan and stealthily moved 10 armies there. We began our attack on November 19, 1942. There were a couple of mortar regiments like ours at the operational disposal of the army.

First we worked on dug-outs. Winter was coming and we had to get ready to it. The area in the vicinity of Stalingrad was a bare steppe. There was no place to hide. Army supplies of provision and ammunition were regular and timely. We had meals twice a day -- late at night and early in the morning. It was impossible to bring food in the daytime as Germans started fire. I was lucky

because I did not smoke, and I did not crave for cigarettes. I saw that for smokers absence of cigarettes was more dreadful than malnutrition. There were no sanitary conditions. We did not take bath for couple of months. All of us were lice-ridden.

Infantry was involved in Stalingrad battle but not as much as in other battles. Artillery played the major role in this battle. First there was an artillery preparation. Germans rushed out from dug-outs. White snow was turned into a black when Germans were running. Mortar squadrons and our Katyushas started fire. I did not consider Germans to be human-beings and I did not feel sorry for the killed German soldiers falling on the ground.

From newspapers I learned about German atrocities on the occupied territories. I saw burnt trees in the vicinity of Stalingrad and hanged peasants, whose cadavers were pecked by birds. I knew about the attitude of Germans towards Jews and how they ruthlessly murdered them. Germans did not only kill Jews. I could not comprehend how they could possibly do so much harm.

German forces in the vicinity of Stalingrad were defeated on February 2, 1943. 22 divisions consisting of 330 thousand people were besieged. I saw those captives, even tried to talk to them. I had an excellent mark in German at school and there I was able to apply my knowledge in practice. Captured Germans did not look like people: lice-ridden, emaciated and frozen... They looked miserable. They were dressed in some torn clothes. At the beginning of the blockage the food was supplied to the besieged German troops by planes. Then that corridor was demolished: tank division demolished the aerodrome and communication was terminated. Finally Germans were famished. One of the captured soldiers said that he was an Austrian. I asked him what was the attitude of common people to Hitler. He said people were not against Hitler, they were against war. In couple of months other participants of the Stalingrad battle, I among them, were awarded the medals «For Liberation of Stalingrad» [25](#).

After Stalingrad battle our regiment as a part of Guards mortar division was sent to Moscow for rearmament and replenishment. We had stayed in Moscow for two weeks. I was so filthy and lice-ridden that I did not apprise mother of my arrival in Moscow before I had taken bath for couple of times. I could not let her see me in such a state. Though I was looking forward to seeing my mother and a short delay seemed unbearable to me. I wanted to see my mother as soon as possible and give her a hug.

Finally, I was able to see my mother. She still stayed at work overnight. I learnt sad news from her. She was told by the neighbors of our relatives that her sister Sarah and three of her children, who lived in Lithuania, had been shot by Germans. It was the time of a mass fusillade of the Jews. When Germans came in Smolensk, my father's siblings and their families were murdered in gas chamber.

Our regiment was replenished and well-armed. We were sent to Kursk. It was withdrawn from division and went to battles as a separate regiment. Our army was getting ready for Kursk operation [26](#). We arrived there at the end of March, 1943. Mass battles were commenced on July 5, 1943. Probably we knew that a fierce battle was ahead of us. During political classes we were told about coming operation, its tasks. We were apprised of the situation on other front-lines.

As usual, we began making dug-outs. We were thoroughly getting prepared. Intelligence was to do their work before attacking. It was necessary to capture Germans. They had to be cross-examined in order to find out about the plans of German commandment, the armament, number of soldiers



and reserve troops to be involved in the battles. Our reconnoiters found out that Germans were planning to attack on the 5th of July. We were ready. In the morning on July, 5 dozens of German planes were seen in the air.

Our regiment was in Orlovsko-Kursk direction, there was also Belgorod-Kursk direction. It was even a more fierce than Stalingrad battle, but it did not last long. Germans were bombing hard. There were less casualties in our regiment as compared to the infantry.

Tank and infantry division had the most casualties. Artillery was in the second echelon and had less casualties accordingly. We had been retreating for about a week and came to the border with Ukraine. Then the initiative was taken by our troops and we started attacking. By that time there were many trucks in the army, including American stood backers and land rovers. They speeded up moving of our squadron and made it easier.

Americans helped us with provision. They sent us canned meat, chocolate, egg powder, but they were not in a hurry to open the promised second front. We were swiftly moving forward. Our regiment took Novgorod-Severskiy and moved towards the central Ukraine. Artillery played the major role in Kursk battle. Our artillery was excellent, maybe even better than the German one. Germans did not have such weapons as our Katyushas and they did not manage to design anything of the kind.

They had six-barreled mortar guns. But they were nothing to compare with our Katyushas. I was awarded with the medal for Military Merits [27](#) after Kursk battle. I got it in autumn, 1943. It was written in my order citation that I demonstrated discipline and valor. Then I was told that there was a decree by the minister of defense not to give high class military awards to the representatives of certain nationalities such as Jews, Chechens, Tartars. I do not know whether that information was true. It was mostly likely that people were included in the list to be awarded with the Red Banner Order [28](#), but in fact they were given the award of a lower class.

After Kursk I was not a telephone operator, but a radio operator. Communication with commandment was established. Battery commander had communication with division commander, division commander had communication with the regiment commander and so on and so forth. I serviced artillery instrumental reconnaissance, which was observing the adversary and regulating fire. All that data was transferred in cipher via radio operators. We did not know the cipher.

We moved to the west -- to Byelorussia. We liberated the town of Novozybkov in Bryansk district and stopped by Gomel. We fought for positioning. There were no battles. Only in June, 1944 we liberated entire Byelorussia. We left western Byelorussia for Poland.

I did not feel Anti-Semitism from my commandment. Commanders were just to me. Privates might make a mistake. There were cases when I was reprimanded, but anti-Semitism was not implied. Most of the soldiers around me were sure that most Jews were not in the lines, they were just sitting in the rear. It was a mere assumption in post-war period. People often said that Jews were fighting in Tashkent rather than in the lines [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].

I did not come across penal battalions, but I heard about their existence. Two people from our regiment were sent to the penal squadron. One of them, a young lad, was driver's assistant. During washing he caused malfunction in the car because of being inexperienced. Another man was a driver. We were attacking, and his car got broken. He was told to stay by the car and wait for us. He did not have food with him. He had been waiting for couple of days and then some regiment walked past him. They found out that he was a driver and had a car.

The driver left with that regiment. Then our deputy regiment commander found the driver and ordered him to come back. He refused to do so and told that our squad had left him, and that regiment helped him out and took in their squad. He was forced to come back in our squadron and then he was allocated to the penal battalion. I did not know what happened to him later on. The soldiers in penal battalions were supposed to fight till death or until the first wound. It was called «washing away one's guilt with blood». The wounded were sent to the hospital, and then back to the lines, but not in a penal battalion.

There was at least one SMERSH representative in each regiment [29](#). Their official task was to capture the spies. But usually they spied on our soldiers ensuring that there was no «moral degradation», panic or discontent with the actions of the commandment or representatives of the Soviet authorities. I think there were making stooges from soldiers and officers. They took part in the battles rather rarely, but were awarded on a regular basis. I was lucky to be a private and not get in touch with them.

My front-line experience ended in Polish town Belostok. My colleagues, radio-operators and I were on our way to the observation post and I stepped on the mine. I was the only one who suffered from a pin-point blast. My comrades picked me up. Somebody had the car brought and I was taken to the medical battalion. I was on the operation table in 40 minutes. My leg was amputated. Heel bone and calf were crushed, so my leg could not be saved. My leg was amputated about to a knee length- 28 cm lower from the knee.

I spent couple of days in medical battalion and I was transferred to the army hospital in Tbilisi, Georgia. It took 13 days to get to Tbilisi from Belostok. I had stayed in the hospital for 6 months. I was given a temporary artificial limb and was taught how to walk with an artificial limb.

During my stay in the hospital I corresponded with mother and my front-line comrades. I was informed by them that I was included in the list of awardees for Great Patriotic War Order [30](#). I asked to send my award to Tbilisi military enlistment office. Soon, I was conferred with a Red Star Order in the hospital [31](#), which was of a lower class than the Order of Great Patriotic War, it meant that the class of my award was reduced. In Moscow in May 1945 I was given the medal «For Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45» along with others who participated in the war [32](#). Later on I was given the medals to commemorate jubilee dates of WWII and Soviet army. I have 15 awards, but only three of them are war decorations.

At the end of February 1945 I was discharged from hospital and on March 1, 1945 I came back to Moscow. In the hospital I was given the status of disabled having the right to work. Pensions for disabled or retired were miserable at that time and it was next to impossible to make a living on them. That is why people worked until they physically could not die by hunger. In Moscow I settled in mother's poky apartment in the basement and began looking for a job. Disabled people had the pension in the amount of 45 rubles per month.

It was possible to get by for 3 days on that amount of money. It was impossible to survive without work and I could not be a burden to my mother not only in the household, but also financially. There were not very many men, most of them were in the lines. Soon I managed to find a job as an accountant in small company. My salary was skimpy, but the work was not tiresome, besides I had time to get ready for the entrance exams in the institute.

I did not join party in the lines. At work I was offered and recommended to join the party on a number of occasions. I objected to it. In the hospital I heard the talks of the wounded officers, the way they cursed Jews. All of them were ordinary members of the party. I understood that I should not become the member of the party, besides I was not willing to do that because I was never interested in political issues.

- **After the war**

I had straight excellent marks in my secondary education certificate, and I did not have to take entrance exams, just to go through the interview [33](#). It was as easy as pie, and in September, 1945 I became a student of Moscow Institute of High Chemical Technologies named after Lomonosov, the faculty of chemical engineers. Mother insisted on full-time attendance in spite of the fact that my salary made most of our budget. During my studies I received pension for disabled soldiers, which was a little bit increased by that time and a stipend.

I was an excellent student during entire period of my studies and I received increased stipend, but it was not much money either. Many students had odd jobs at night unloading cars at freight depots, but I was not capacitated to do that. I was not involved neither in Komsomol nor in social work in the institute. I was deeply immersed in studies.

In May 1948 the state of Israel was founded and recognized by other countries. It meant a lot to me. Jews had been roaming all over the world for centuries without having their own land. Now they had their own land, and their own state. It was my state as well. I admired prime-minister Golda Meir [34](#). I consider myself to be a Jew and I was never ashamed to be a Jew in spite of not knowing Jewish language, Jewish traditions, being raised atheist and brought up in Russian culture.

Anti-Semitism appeared right after the war. It started on social level. At that time I heard that Jews were not in the lines, trying to save their lives in evacuation. Anti-Semitism on state level came to place in 1948 when Campaign against 'cosmopolitans' began [35](#). Jews involved in science and culture were persecuted. Many actors and writers had alias names, and when there was an article in the paper about some of them, it was always emphasized that he or she was a cosmopolitan Jew concealing himself by a «euphonic» surname, and his true name sounded typically Jewish.

Jews were exiled in GULAG [36](#), they were not employed. They were not only exterminated morally, but physically as well. The members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested and murdered [37](#). The above-mentioned committee was founded during war times and assisted our army very much. A wonderful actor Solomon Mikhoels was the chairman of the committee. [38](#). He was overridden by a truck in Minsk. His death was considered to be an accident, but I along with many people understood that it was not unlikely to be accident. Mikhoels was my mother's favourite actor.

My mother and I attended the performances of the Jewish theatre for couple of times where Mikhoels took part. I was rapt by Mikhoels's actor's talent in both performances I saw, no matter that they were in Yiddish and I did not know that language. Soon after his death the theatre was closed down.

In 1950 I graduated from the institute. Scientific research and post-graduate studies was my dream, but it was unrealizable for me. Jews were not admitted to post-graduate studies. In accordance with the Soviet law the board had no right to give me a Mandatory job assignment [39](#) in another city or another republic because I was an excellent student and disabled. At that time there was a tacit instruction not to hire Jews. I was given a mandatory job assignment to the closed plat of ministry of defense, located in the outskirts of the city.

When I asked to find me a closer working place, I was told to take my mandatory job assignment or look for a job on my own. I understood that I would not be able to find a job by myself and I had to agree. The plant was 60 km away from Moscow and I had to take a commuter train to get to the plant. I could not go back and forth every day and I was given a room in the hostel by the plant. I had worked for three years at that plant. My job was very interesting. Besides, I got the opportunity to acquire quite a good qualification.

The working conditions were hard for me, because it was difficult for me to walk at that time as I was trying to get used to the artificial leg. The territory of the plant was huge. There was no transport, and the village, where I lived was far from the plant. At that time Saturday was a working day. But we did not work full time, so I managed to visit mother on Sunday. According to my mandatory job assignment I was supposed to work for three years, after that I had the right to quit my job.

Of course, I felt Anti-Semitism. I was not promoted, on the contrary I was constantly nagged. I had to prove that I was right. My nationality was the only reason for that. They had no right to fire me during the term of mandatory job assignment, and when the term was over they began putting pressure on me. Fortunately, new director came to the plant, who stood up for front-line soldiers. He ordered to leave me in peace.

In January 1953 doctors' plot commenced [40](#). I was lucky not to be at the plant at that time. I was sent to attend courses in Moscow. If I was at the plant at that time, I would be in trouble for sure. Anti-Semitism was very severe at that time. I would have been difficult to visit mother on the weekend -- I could have been thrown from the train. I heard there were cases like that. Of course, I did not believe that doctors were guilty in poisoning Stalin. Most people believed that thinking that Jews were able to do anything.

Stalin's death in March 1953 became a nation-wide sorrow. People were mourning as if their closest person died. People were crying in the streets, without hiding tears. I did not mourn over Stalin's' death. At that time I understood that he was not as good as he was deemed to be. I had fear though. Beriya came to power after Stalin's death. I was confident that Jews would be even more fiercely persecuted and there would be dreadful times. But I was pleasantly disillusioned. Beriya gave an order to release arrested doctors-poisoners. Beriya was not at power for a long time. He was arrested as a state criminal and sentenced to capital punishment.

When Nikita Khrushchev [41](#) took the floor on the Twentieth Party Congress [42](#) divulging crimes committed by Stalin, I believed him. Khrushchev's speech confirmed my own views and observations. Stalin conducted terrible politics. By dreadful repressions he decapitated the army before the war. Maybe if he had not exterminated the best military leaders, Hitler would not have decided to attack us. Things would have been different. At least there would be less bloodshed for sure.

National politics conducted by Stalin was also ruthless. What was the need to exile [Forced deportation to Siberia] [43](#) such peoples as Chechens, Crimean Tartars and Kalmyks [44](#). I saw the representatives of many nationalities in the lines. They did not fight worse than any others. Even in the post-war period, especially in frontier troops there was an order not to send on duty two people of non-Russian nationality simultaneously. People felt that they were not trusted and I doubt whether they would feel love for the USSR. When I was employed at the plant, construction works were being held on the territory of the plant carried out by the prisoners.

These were the people who were captured by Germans during war times due to the stupidity of our commandment. When they were released from captivity they were sentenced to ten years just because they did not die and let themselves being captured. Such prisoners were convoyed by security guards of Uzbeks and Azerbaijani, because a Russian security guard, especially if he was in the lines, could sympathize with the prisoners and make an indulgence, while people of other nationalities made no indulgence and opened fire during any insubordinate conduct.

Our commandment was really untalented. Germans did not have so many casualties as we had. Stalin devastated agriculture starting from the years of collectivization [45](#), when skilled and hardworking peasants were exterminated and exiled like kulaks [46](#). Though, even now there are people who say that Stalin exiled people for a reason. Probably nobody would be able to change their view ... I do not make an idol out of Khrushchev, he made a lot of mistakes during his reign, but I think that he can be forgiven just because of Twentieth Party Congress coming Rehabilitation [47](#) of the innocent convicts. In spite of the hopes and expectations during his reign, Anti-Semitism was not in the wane.

I longed for coming back in Moscow. In 1956 I left the plant and came home. It was hard to get a job. I had been to over 40 places before I found a job as an engineer at a design institute. My salary was much lower, but I was in Moscow, at least I had home and in the evenings a loving person was waiting for me, cooking dinner and doing laundry for me. In 1957 the ministry of health care gave my mother a room in the communal apartment. We moved there.

My aunt Ida, mother's younger sister was really worried because I was single. She lived in Lvov, but she had a lot of acquaintances in Moscow. Aunt came to Moscow and started passionately looking for a bride for me. She had couple of girls in view, and one of them became my wife. Mariam was born in Moscow in 1923. Her father Ilia Berman worked for the ministry of iron and steel industry and her mother was a housewife. Mariam had a younger brother Alexander born in 1927. Mariam graduated from chemistry department of Moscow State University. She was not admitted in the post-graduate department, but her mandatory job assignment was in Moscow. She was employed at the chemistry laboratory. It was the time of campaign against cosmopolitans. They started firing Jews. Luckily the head of laboratory was a decent and brave man and did not allow firing any Jew from his laboratory.

We got married in 1958. We had an ordinary wedding. We got registered in the state marriage registration office, and in the evening we had a modest wedding party in Mariam parents' house. We invited only the closest people. Mariam and I lived with her parents. Her younger brother Alexander was a test instrument engineer. He was married and lived with his wife in the apartment of her parents. Our family life was very happy. The only thing that made us sad was not having children.

At home we marked birthdays of our family members and such soviet holidays as May 1, November 7 [48](#), Soviet Army Day [49](#), Victory Day [50](#), New Years Day. New Year's day and Victory Day were our favourite holidays. On the 9th of May my wife and I went to the tomb of Unknown Soldier, to the monument of eternal flame. We brought flowers to the tomb, met front-line soldiers.

In the evenings we went to see some of my front-line friends or invited them to our house. We had drinks to commemorate those who perished, sang war songs. There are very few front-line soldiers Moscovites left. One of two of them is bedridden, another one cannot talk as a result of apoplectic stroke. I do not know anything about front-line soldiers from other cities.

The rest of the holidays were taken by us an extra day off. We had the opportunity to invite friends and have fun. Mariam's parents were atheists like my mother. They did not mark Jewish holidays at home. My wife and I often went to the cinema, and to the theater. We liked to go to the seaside on vacation. I was often given vouchers to the sea resorts for being disabled.

I had worked for 10 years in design institute. I was very slowly promoted in position because of my nationality. At the end of the 1960s I began to work for the design bureau by the ministry of chemical industry. They treated me very well and I got a promotion. Shortly before retirement I was the chief project engineer. I had worked there until retirement. I retired in 1983.

In 1968 my mother died. I wanted her to be buried on Jewish Vostryakovskiy cemetery, but I did not manage to make arrangements. At that time residents of certain district were supposed to have their relatives buried in certain cemeteries. The residents of our district were buried on Karpyakovskiy cemetery. For my mother to be buried in Vostryakovskiy cemetery I was supposed to get the certificate at work signed by director, the chairman of the mestcom [51](#) and party organization stating that I was religious. I could not do that. If I had done it, I should have forgotten about further promotion. My mother was buried in Karpyakovskiy cemetery. It was a secular funeral.

In the 1970s mass immigration to Israel started. I sympathized with those who were leaving. I was trying to assist them in anything I could. Many friends of mine left for Israel at that time. I wanted to immigrate as well, but I understood that it was not possible for me. Israeli climate was contraindicative for my wife. She would have died there. People left for a better living. There was no sense in leaving to die. Besides, I understood that an elderly incapacitated person would not be able to find a job. It was hard for me to picture that I would not be working and be a burden.

In 1982 my wife got severely ill. She had chronic intestinal inflammation of mucus membrane. It must have been connected with her job. She was dealing with different chemical materials, and some of them were hazardous. Nobody could tell for sure what caused her disease. She was getting worse and worse. She was losing weight dramatically. Mariam was on the brink of death from cachexia. I left my job. I was convinced to stay, but I had no choice -- I was to look after my

wife.

I managed to find a good hospital for her, and the doctors repaired her health. She was in the hospital for eight times. Friends helped me to get the medicine, which were in deficit at that time. In 1999 Mariam had nonreversible intestinal atrophy and at the beginning of 2001 she passed away. Her younger brother Alexander died earlier, in 1992. My wife was buried in Novodevichie cemetery next to her parents and brother. I reserved the lot for myself there as well. The funeral was secular.

At the end of the 1980s the General Secretary of the Central committee of the Communist Party Mikhail Gorbachev [52](#) declared a new political course, perestroika [53](#). First I was delighted by that. There were certain articles in the constitution on liberties of word, publishing, religion, travel, but those promised liberties were not executed in actuality. Then perestroika appeared to be in decline. Gorbachev has always been the slave of Communist Party and could not do anything to harm it. Dull politics of our semi-literate leaders brought to willingness of the USSR republics to gain independence. By the way, in accordance with the constitution they were entitled to do that. If certain ideas came in the head, there was not stopping them.

After Lenin's death [54](#) there were no educated people at power. Finally perestroika caused breakup of the USSR [1991]. I took it as a catastrophe. A huge and powerful country collapsed, and «independent» states were being founded, without being able to defend themselves. There was one good thing done by the first president of Russian Boris Eltsin – he did away with Communist party. But he was not able to push the matter through. Communist party should have been treated the same way as Nazi party was treated at Nuremberg process so that it would not exist.

Before revolution there were such people in the party who were ready to go to the penal colony for mere ideas. They were struggling for communistic ideas without sparing their lives. There were honest people in the lines as well, who were ready to rush at tanks with a bunch of grenades. After Stalin's death a lot of go-getters and stooges were streaming in the party. There was no communist party any more. Communist Party of Russia appeared in Russia and it was real fascist party. Though, it is not the only party, which governs the country. But who knows what is ahead of us ...

I live by myself after my wife's death. From financial standpoint I live better than any Russian pensioners. I have pension in the amount of 6000 rubles the equivalent of 200 USD. It is enough to get by and for medicine. I have a good command of three foreign languages- German, English and French. I am able to work at home. I am given work by the institute of scientific and technical information. I am handed materials in German, English and French and I am supposed to make a short annotation in Russian within certain time frame. So, I am not poor. Social worker from the municipal organization, which supports veterans of war, helps me about the house. Twice a week a lady from the social service comes to cook and clean the house.

After breakup of the USSR there appeared a lot of Jewish societies in Russia. Jewish life revived. I cannot say that I am taking an active part in the Jewish life. I am not interested in religion. I must have taken way too strong «inoculations» of atheism when I was a child. I am a member of Moscow Council of the Jewish War Veterans [55](#), headed by the Hero of the Soviet Union [56](#) Moses Maryanovskiy. We get together and meet interesting people, attend lectures, watch movies. I have new friends and they help me to get over my loneliness.

- **Glossary:**

### **1 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

### **2 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.

### **3 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.

### **4 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.

### **5 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.

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

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

## **7 Occupation of the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)**

Although the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact regarded only Latvia and Estonia as parts of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, according to a supplementary protocol (signed in 28th September 1939) most of Lithuania was also transferred under the Soviets. The three states were forced to sign the 'Pact of Defense and Mutual Assistance' with the USSR allowing it to station troops in their territories. In June 1940 Moscow issued an ultimatum demanding the change of governments and the occupation of the Baltic Republics. The three states were incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics.

## **8 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.

## **9 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.

## **10 Young Octobrist**

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

## **11 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.

## **12 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.

## **13 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.

## **14 Yezhov, Nikolai Ivanovich (1895-1939)**

Political activist, State Security General Commissar (1937), Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR from 1936-38. Arrested and shot in 1939. One of the leaders of mass arrests during Stalin's Great Purge between 1936-1939.

## **15 Beriia, L**

P. (1899-1953): Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

## **16 Enemy of the people**

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

## **17 Annexation of Eastern Poland**

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

Belarusian Soviet Republics.

### **18 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.

### **19 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)**

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannengeim line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

### **20 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.

### **21 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.

### **22 Ispolkom**

After the tsar's abdication (March, 1917), power passed to a Provisional Government appointed by a temporary committee of the Duma, which proposed to share power to some extent with councils of workers and soldiers known as 'soviets'. Following a brief and chaotic period of fairly democratic procedures, a mixed body of socialist intellectuals known as the Ispolkom secured the right to 'represent' the soviets. The democratic credentials of the soviets were highly imperfect to begin with: peasants - the overwhelming majority of the Russian population - had virtually no say, and soldiers were grossly over-represented. The Ispolkom's assumption of power turned this highly imperfect democracy into an intellectuals' oligarchy.

### **23 Stalingrad Battle (17 July 1942- 2 February 1943) The Stalingrad, South-Western and Donskoy Fronts stopped the advance of German armies in the vicinity of Stalingrad**

On 19-20 November 1942 the soviet troops undertook an offensive and encircled 22 German divisions (330 thousand people) in the vicinity of Stalingrad. The Soviet troops eliminated this

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

## **24 Katyusha**

The 82mm BM-8 and 132mm BM-13 **Katyusha** [rocket launchers](#) were built and fielded by the [Soviet Union](#) in [World War II](#). The launcher got this unofficial, but immediately recognized in the [Red Army](#), name from the title of a Russian wartime song, [Katyusha](#)

## **25 Medal "For Defense of Stalingrad" was established by decree of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR on December 22, 1942**

750 thousand people are awarded this medal.

## **26 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.

## **27 Medal for Military Merits**

awarded after 17th October 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'.

## **28 Order of the Combat Red Banner**

Established in 1924, it was awarded for bravery and courage in the defense of the Homeland.

**29 SMERSH: special secret military unit for elimination of spies 'Death to spies' by SMERSH, a phrase meaning "Death to Spies!" (Smert Shpionam.) This slogan is said to have been coined by [Joseph Stalin](#) and certainly reflected his own murderous character. SMERSH is actually the Ninth Division of the [KGB](#), which is dedicated to Terror and Diversion, led and staffed by the most fanatical [Communist](#) killers. SMERSH was originally created into five separate sections. The first section works inside the [Red Army](#), ferreting out dissident soldiers, former prisoners-of-war, or those who had been in encirclements, and summarily executing them**

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

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

### **31 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.

### **32 Medal 'For Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45', Established by Decree of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR to commemorate the glorious victory, 15 million awards**

### **33 Entrance interview**

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

### **34 Golda Meir (1898-1978)**

Born in Russia, she moved to Palestine and became a well-known and respected politician who fought for the rights of the Israeli people. In 1948, Meir was appointed Israel's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. From 1969 to 1974 she was Prime Minister of Israel. Despite the Labor Party's victory at the elections in 1974, she resigned in favor of Yitzhak Rabin. She was buried on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in 1978.

### **35 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'.

### **36 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.

### **37 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.

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

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

### **39 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.

### **40 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

### **41 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

#### **42 Twentieth Party Congress**

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

#### **43 Forced deportation to Siberia**

Stalin introduced the deportation of Middle Asian people, like the Crimean Tatars and the Chechens, to Siberia. Without warning, people were thrown out of their houses and into vehicles at night. The majority of them died on the way of starvation, cold and illnesses.

#### **44 Kalmyk**

A nationality living on the Lower Volga in Russia. During World War military formations set up by Kalmyk prisoners of war fought on the side of the Germans.

#### **45 Collectivization in the USSR**

In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

#### **46 Kulaks**

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

#### **47 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.

#### **48 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.

#### **49 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'.

#### **50 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)**

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

#### **51 Mestkom**

Local trade-union committee.

#### **52 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.

#### **53 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.

#### **54 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.



### **55 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.

### **56 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.