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The Moscow Times Remembers: Anna Fyodorovna Andreyeva

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Anna Fyodorovna Andreyeva

In the run-up to Victory Day on May 9, when Russia commemorates 70 years since the Allied victory over Nazi Germany, staff members at The Moscow Times describe the wartime experiences of their own families.

Today, intern Lena Garrett tells the story of her grandmother Anna Fyodorovna Andreyeva

My grandmother, Anna Fyodorovna Andreyeva, was born in 1929 in the Vitebsk region of Belarus. She spent all of the Great Patriotic War under German occupation. After the war she lived and studied in Leningrad, and then moved with her family to Uzbekistan where she worked as a teacher. She wrote her recollections of the wartime period in 2011.

The first Germans to arrive were the pilots. They occupied the ten best houses in the village, the ones in the center, furthest away from the forest. They took up one room in our house. The other room was where we lived. There were five of them in our house. Whenever they went out, leaving only their commanding officer in the house, he would put the door on the

latch. Sometimes he would invite us in to tune into Moscow on the radio. He understood everything; he was an educated man; played the violin; was always polite; would always greet us and smile. He would show us photographs of his two daughters and of his wife. Our young Masha was three at the time, the same age as his youngest daughter. He used to carry Masha about in his arms, kiss her, bring her rice porridge from the kitchens and give her sugar and sweets — treats that we had never encountered before the war. One day mother grew very sick, and he took her to see the German doctor who gave her some medicine, and she got better. So, there were good people among the Germans.

But there were other Germans too — SS officers who burnt villages, herded people into barns, doused them in petrol and set them on fire. They treated Jews exceptionally cruelly and inhumanely. Before the war there were 400 Jews in Tolochin, where they worked in shops, pharmacies, hospitals, and other establishments. The first thing the SS officers did was to chase them onto a road which they sealed off with barbed wire, and on which they stationed watchtowers. The road was guarded predominantly by Polizeis, people from the western parts of Ukraine and Belarus. They started off by handing out yellow stars with the label "Yid" to the Jews, which they were obliged to sew onto their clothes themselves. They were forced to do certain work; to sweep the streets, clear the snow, until one day — it was freezing that day — when they were ordered to gather their belongings and leave their homes.

They did exactly that. They were chased up to the forest where there was an anti-tank ditch. The ditch was dug before the war in order to prevent German tanks from advancing. They were chased right up to the edge of the ditch — among them many women, children and elderly people — and the Polizeis, the main perpetrators, began to shoot. Some fell into the ditch wounded, still alive. One little boy managed to break away from the crowd. He ran up to a German and started asking not to be killed. The German suffered a heart attack and was carried away.

The Polizeis continued to shoot innocent people. We heard about this from our uncle Arkhip who was already an old man at the time. He and some other old men were rounded up and ordered on pain of death to throw earth over the bodies. People — the dead and the living — were buried beneath the soil. A while after it happened the boys from our village would run over there to have a look — children aren't afraid of anything — and they would tell us how the snow that had fallen there was the color of blood.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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