

Yakov Gauzner With His Colleagues



This is my father Yakov Gauzner (second from right sitting) with a group of colleagues who received the state award for the successful accomplishment of the task set by the State Committee of Defense. The photo was taken in Sverdlovsk in 1944. In 1944 we moved to Sverdlovsk [2,300 km from Odessa], where my father was appointed chief engineer at one of the hugest optical-mechanical device plants within the People's Commissariat of Armament. The plant manufactured aerial cameras, devices to obtain intelligence data from air as well as objective data on the bombarding and attacking results. It's difficult for me to judge what and how much my father did, but there's this one episode I can tell you about. General Headquarters issued an order: for a specified number of enemy planes brought down, and tanks bombed, a pilot received the title of 'Hero of the Soviet Union', for such and such a number - 'Order of Lenin', for such and such a number - Order of the Red Banner of Battle, and so forth. It was stipulated that the results of bombing could solely be proven by the aerial photographs. The cameras were obsolete, so the pilots had to go further down to get sharp photos. The plane losses immediately increased. The marshal of aviation, Vershinin, the head of the Air Force, issued an order by which he absolutely prohibited to go down under a specified level. Once photos were brought to him, which clearly depicted the result of the bombing. Instead of awarding the pilot, he ordered to reduce him to the ranks. He assumed that it was due to the fact that the pilot was flying too low, that the photos were so accurate. However, he was told that the pilot had not violated his order and that those photos were shot with cameras from the prototype batch of the Sverdlovsk plant, at the height designated by the rules. The marshal requested the inference of the Air Force Research and Development Institute. They confirmed. After that Vershinin ordered to recommend the plant workers for governmental awards. My father received the 'First Degree Order of the Great Patriotic War'. This award was only assigned to fighting officers partaking in battles.