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## **Women's work in the construction of the “Eastern Ring” road, built on the eve of the Second World War**

The article considers the social status and daily life of women who worked in the field of road construction in the Semipalatinsk and East Kazakhstan regions on the eve of the Second World War. In the difficult international situation of that period, Semipalatinsk and East Kazakhstan regions were considered important strategic objects in the economic life of the country. The significance of the Eastern Ring Road, called the construction of the century in the field of road construction and the connection of settlements with each other, was directly related to the rapid development of the economy of the region, which consists of two regions. Women also worked on this construction, which was of great importance. The author concludes that the work of women builders was high, judging by the research conducted on the basis of archival data, rare funds, consisting of press materials and published publications of a later time. The research work also noted the fact that the women's community, despite the difficulties caused by daily painstaking work, was not broken psychologically and morally, showed determination and endurance.

*Key words:* Second World War, Semipalatinsk region, East Kazakhstan region, women, construction, road, economy, “Eastern Ring”.

### *Introduction*

In the last decades of the 20th century, changes of a global nature are taking place in the Kazakh society. Such as the definition of the role of women in society in the history of mankind and the perception of women as individuals.

In general, the problem of women in general science is considered a complex topic. This is due to the fact that their age characteristics, relations between women and society, legal and equality issues and other complex studies require accuracy. Therefore, it is important to consider this issue from a socio-political point of view and express one's own opinion.

On the eve of World War II, the situation in the world, including in the Soviet environment, led to a radical change in the role of women in society. Established habits, everyday life and even the way of thinking have changed. It can be said that the psychological and moral determination and resilience of women were directly related to these changes.

It is known that the hardships caused by the World War, which had a great impact on the socio-economic, socio-political and cultural life of the country, were also a great test for the women of the East Kazakhstan region, which is located in the far rear. The women of the region, like all Kazakhstani women, were able to withstand the trials of wartime, worked tirelessly in agriculture and industry, in transport and in other areas.

More than 150 industrial facilities were built on the territory of the East Kazakhstan region, including the giant Leninogorsk, Sokolninsk lead, Irtys copper smelting plants, Zyryansk enrichment mines, 12 large ore plants with rare metal and gold mining enterprises [1; 203]. But basically they were engaged in the processing of non-ferrous metals mined in ore form. Cleaned and processed products from non-ferrous metals were sent as raw materials to large industrial facilities in the center. Industrialization, carried out on orders from above, was mainly aimed at developing raw materials and sending them to Russia. The reconstruction of all industrial facilities in the eastern region of the republic, the rapid fulfillment of orders in a military regime, the delivery of finished raw materials to the center subordinated the people to the interests of the front.

The complex structures of strategic importance in providing Kazakhstan with raw ores during the period of industrialization are the Eastern Ring, which, together with the Turksib railway, connects the

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territories of the Semipalatinsk and East Kazakhstan regions with the Altai Mountains, the water ports of Turksib and Irtysh, was built in 72 days in the spring of 1940 and has a length of 802 kilometers. The work of women who worked on the construction of the road should be singled out. During this period, the work of women in road construction, which is valuable information for modern researchers, was comprehensively covered in the press of both regions, including on the pages of the newspapers “Ekpindi Altai”[2], “Priirtyshskaya Pravda”[3].

On the eve of the war and during the war, Kazakhstan was considered the main strategic object for the extraction of raw materials and their transportation to Russia [4; 271]. However, the imperfection of roads, the logistics and transport system, and the problem of delivery to railway stations were the only obstacle to the favorable operation of the regional economy [5; 7].

#### *Research methods and materials*

The article deals with the ordinary life and activities of women in everyday life on the eve of the Second World War. When writing the article, various empirical research methods were used: comparison, description; methods of theoretical knowledge; general logical methods and methods of analysis, synthesis and systematic research; methods of historical objectivity were used.

The empirical research method is described by collecting data on the article. That is, in the process of working with a collection of archival documents, 641 funds, 3, 4 and 7 data blocks of the 1st inventory were examined and analyzed. The electronic resources of the state archive of the East Kazakhstan region, the electronic resources of the Zhyrnyansk regional department of the archive are considered. Descriptive methods were used in writing a concise and precise content of the research topic.

If we analyze the article as a whole, then from the point of view of the logical method, the characteristics of that historical period will be described by analyzing the life of the women who worked in the mentioned construction, the appearance of the work. The object of research is the historical aspects of the complexity of women's everyday life.

With the help of a historically reliable method, a number of researchers have received general consideration. For example, the works of G. Nurbekova [6], Z. Saktaganova [7], V. Murmantseva [8], G. Byrbaeva [9], V.N. Shepel [10]. These studies, as versatile aspects of everyday life, belong to a group of works on the general image of a woman in wartime, her life and activities in society.

The sources are the materials of the archive “Center for Documentation of Contemporary History”, the protocols of the Presidium of the regional trade union artels of the Soviet era, the administrative documents of economic institutions, rare funds, consisting of print materials and later data from the periodical press, including daily messages, propaganda information written by the builder about methods of collecting and systematizing women's memories, local history museum data. Among them are the works of local researchers and literary works.

#### *Discussion and results*

It is important to determine the causes of difficulties with unresolved issues in the field of industry, transport and road construction, which determine the economic situation of the East Kazakhstan region on the eve of the war. The absence of a highway regulating inter-district communication affected the intensive development of the economy of the eastern region of the republic. Assessing the true situation in that period, we notice that there were difficulties in the relationship of people with each other.

Such social problems not only hindered the work of the inhabitants of the region, but were also characterized by their inability to achieve an adequate standard of living. In summer, agricultural products of national production were transported along the Irtysh River on steamboats and barges, and in winter on sledges and cars over frozen ice [11; 40-41]. There was also a high risk of landslides blocking roads in mountainous areas. Residents walked hundreds of kilometers to reach the regional centers. It is difficult to imagine the working conditions of women working in such conditions. In 1940, engineer D. Karagadov wrote in the “Priirtyshskaya Pravda” newspaper that there was an urgent need for fast road transport and that the inhabitants of the region needed a road just as they needed water for the cotton fields of the Ferghana Valley. He also emphasized that the initiatives of the collective farmers of the fraternal republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are a vivid example of how any task can be implemented in a short time [12; 7]. This shows the difficulty of transporting the necessary goods due to the lack of modern special roads in Kazakhstan at that time and during the war years. In any case, there were public construction projects that solved a number of tasks of the Eastern Ring, such as the Big Fergana and Ural-Koshim canals.

Before road construction Zyryansk defense-zinc concentrates were transported by aircraft to Ridder, and the fuel needed by the Samara Machine and Tractor Station was transported by oxen over 350 kilometers. And the grain from Feklistovka, which is 40 kilometers from Uskemen, was taken on bullock carts or sledges to the port of Gusinoye, which is 150 kilometers in the opposite direction. Then this grain was delivered to Ust-Kamenogorsk on barges along the Irtysh.

Not without reason in the history of the "Eastern Ring" is called "The construction of enthusiastic people". Pavel Shestakov, a member of brigade No. 6, who led two hundred people, said in his memoirs that great importance was attached to the construction of the road: "The participation of the secretary of the regional executive committee Baryshev and the editor of the regional newspaper, Sapunov, at the construction site shows how important the construction of the road was. At the same time, employees of all structures of the regional government took part in the road construction work, they worked with shovels and scrap metal in their hands..." he notes. At the same time, he says that the road builder S. Metyaev could not cope with the hard work in the first days. This type of work is very complex, characterized by a complete lack of mechanization, only manual labor. It is written that only one horse-drawn cart belonged to the entire area, and the main tools of production were hand stretchers, shovels, hoes, and scraps of iron.

However, it is surprising that people were optimistic and went to work with great enthusiasm. The secretary of the collective farm party committee, S. Kalinin, also writes in his memoirs that the worker Tokabaev carried gravel on two oxen, and ten days later he was elected by the workers at a gathering as a foreman. He also writes that Tokabaev at that time was a 15-year-old boy, and 60 men and 12 women worked in the brigade [13; 4].

In general, there is little information about women who worked on the road construction of the Eastern Ring. Work was carried out with archival data, rare funds, consisting of press materials. In those years, daily news articles by party correspondents on the pages of the press daily informed people about what was happening on the Eastern Ring highway. The newspaper "Altaiskye Bolsheveki" (Altai Bolsheviks) writes that 24,000 collective farmers, including at their own expense, completed the construction of the road in 72 days, which usually takes 11 years and hundreds of millions of rubles [14; 78]. This large-scale work, carried out by the folk construction method, is one of the most unique structures in the practice of road construction. The best, qualified engineering and technical workers from all regions of Kazakhstan were appointed to help the road builders. Shovels produced in Nizhny Tagil and Krasnoyarsk in the Sverdlovsk region, hoes from the Zhambyl region, axes and heavy hammers produced in the Almaty region were supplied to the construction sites of collective farmers [15].

In the late 1930s, there were no highways in the region, even one kilometer long. Of course, the construction of the highway was provided for in the draft local budget in the early 1930s, but its special estimate was drawn up only in the 1940s, and this became possible thanks to the implementation of the Eastern Ring project. However, according to the third five-year plan for the development of the national economy, adopted at the XVIII Congress of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks held in 1939, it became known that funds for this construction were not allocated from the center. It only planned the reconstruction of 210 km of paved roads [16].

On February 23, 1940, a resolution was adopted by the Council of People's Commissars of Kazakhstan and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Kazakhstan "On the construction of the gravel road of the Eastern Ring by folk construction methods" [17; 4]. 80 collective farms, 8 district centers, 28 machine and tractor stations, including several local industries, enterprises of heavy and non-ferrous metallurgy of the union level, located in two regions of the region, suffered from the lack of a special road for the transport of raw materials. Getting to the nearest railway station Zhangiztobe from Ust-Kamenogorsk was a big problem within the region. Therefore, only water transport was used in summer, which was dangerous for human life.

On January 29, 1940, at a meeting of the agricultural artel "Red Partizan" of the Kirov district of the East Kazakhstan region, 231 members of the brigade were present, the question was raised that all farmers, engineers and workers of the East Kazakhstan and Semipalatinsk regions support the call for the construction of Uskemen-Buktyrma, Malo-Krasnoyarka, Samar-Kokpek, Georgievka.

The appeal says that in the eastern part of Kazakhstan, the districts of the East Kazakhstan region, bordering on it, a large area is occupied by the Semipalatinsk region. It says that the Markakol district of the East Kazakhstan region is located 570 kilometers from the regional center — the city of Uskemen, and 450 kilometers from the Zaisan district. At this distance is the Zhangiztobe railway station. Katon-Karagai is located 500 km from Ust-Kamenogorsk and Abyraly district, 450 km from the regional center Semey. It is

shown that only 12.5 thousand km of roads in two regions and only 2 % of them are covered with stone [18; 10]. The appeal was very important, because it clearly indicated all the needs. This was the start of a massive undertaking.

Construction was planned to be carried out in two stages. At the first stage, it is planned to build a section Ust-Kamenogorsk — Samar — Kokpek — Georgievka with a length of 444 kilometers. And secondly, the Kokpekti-Zaisan section with a length of 362 kilometers was to be built. The route “Eastern Ring” was divided into corresponding sections according to the number of districts of the region. East Kazakhstan region — 16 construction sites, Semipalatinsk region — 10 sites, that is, a total of 26 construction sites. On May 20, 1940, by order of the command staff, the 24,000-strong collective farm workers of the two districts began construction work along the entire route. At both stages of construction, women, Stakhanovites and collective farmers showed activity and distinguished themselves by the fact that from morning to midnight they performed their tasks perfectly.

The activity of cooperative artels was high in road construction. Among the archival documents published on April 2, 1940, in the materials of the decision of the Presidium of the Semipalatinsk Regional Trade Union, Protocol No. 16 on the organization of maintenance by artels named after “Novyi Byt”, “Rekord”, “Krasnyi Kustar”, Krupskaya collectively of the highway “Eastern Ring” with a length of 136 km. The construction of the road from the Georgivsky district to the village of Kamenka is entrusted with the preparation of artel workers, transport, necessary equipment and food [19; 138]. At the same time, we make sure that the best Stakhanovite artel women, who have shown themselves well in production and social work in the artel, are involved in daily agricultural work at the beginning of construction [20; 139]. It was planned to fully provide the sent stakhanovkas with temporary housing, folding tents, and if this is not possible, build yurts. It is written that on April 10 this year, the artels “Krasnyi Kozhevnik” were ordered to sew 4,000 gloves and 500 vests to builders in one day [21; 141]. From these archival documents, we see that the mentioned artels were specially preparing for the construction of the Georgovka-Kamenka road.

During construction, the problem of building roads in mountainous areas became more complicated. Because carrying the necessary explosives, finding empty places in the mountains and setting the explosives was a dangerous job. However, despite such difficulties, the women who worked in the team of explosives at the Zyryansk mine not only undertook dangerous work, but also selflessly distinguished themselves in its performance. One of these girls, Austra Birze, a two-piece bomber from Leningrad, performed daily tasks by 400-450 percent [22; 16].

The local writer Aitmukhambet Kasymuly in his book “Altaidan ushkan akiyk” (Eagle flying from Altai) writes about Austra Breeze that a Latvian girl with blond hair and in a red dress immediately catches the eye, she is a courageous and special girl. In her work, she was able to use the method of blasting from five to six places during blasting in rocky passes [23; 13]. The foremen and men at the beginning of construction were surprised at the courage of the fragile girl and showed special respect for her.

In general, workers strictly observe safety regulations. This is evidenced by the documents of the regional state archive On the correspondence of Leningrad with various organizations [24].

By the decree of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh SSR dated March 21, 1937, the Zyryansky district was classified as a workers' settlement. During this period, the demographic indicator increased due to the development of the Zyryansk Mining and Processing Plant. For the Zyryansk region, one of the labor-intensive sections of the 10-kilometer road in the Savirsyn Gorge has been approved. In a short time, more than 100,000 cubic meters of rock had to be excavated and several bridges had to be built. From the first days of construction, the workers participated in socialist competition and overfulfilled the daily volume of production by 150-200 %, then by 300-400 %. On July 16, 1940, the builders announced to the Motherland: 300 kilometers of dirt roads of the Eastern Ring, 190 bridges, 97 filters were built in the East Kazakhstan region. Upon completion of construction, 999,815 cubic meters of earthworks were completed, including 324,825 cubic meters of stone, 420,000 cubic meters of wood, 254,990 cubic meters of gravel. Thus, the first stage of the road was implemented in two regions in the east of Kazakhstan. Passing through Gorny Altai, it connected two railways and five districts near the Irtysh [25]. According to the first minutes of the decision of the Presidium, labor productivity was carried out in this way.

A lot of organizational and propaganda work on this construction was carried out by employees of the Zyryansky District Party Committee, field editors of the newspaper “Vostochny Krug”, an agitation brigade group with the participation of Komsomol women, headed by an ordinary teacher from Zyryan, Tamarora Vasilievna Korosteleva. Agitation was a very responsible job. In the State Archives on July 19, 1983, Tamara Korosteleva's household memoirs were published in the article “The Eastern Ring — the Heroic

Route" on the pages of the newspaper "Zarya Vostoka" No. 86. Reading the article, one can be convinced that we are talking about a complex and large-scale construction in the region [26].

The visiting editorial board, headed by the local correspondent Golobokov, is working on the construction of roads of national importance. Evdokia Ushakova, a journalist who worked as a special proofreader, is a typist, and Anastasia Shabunyaeva is a publisher. In this daily newspaper, the builders planned the progress of the road construction and worked with a specific task from the first days. Therefore, it is reported that due to active agitation at the beginning of the war, women overfulfill the task in terms of the daily norm [27].

During construction, it was normal for women to exceed the daily allowance. Irina Cherepanova, Kozhebaeva Nurzhamal, who managed to easily dig up 18.8 cubic meters of earth, stood out among the people and became an example in the implementation of this norm. I increase competition in the labor market and labor productivity by 200 % per day. It can be seen that the work of women in this construction was blessed and united.

A lot of work to eliminate illiteracy among builders was done by women teachers, such as Gulshira Shegirova from the Kyzyl Talap collective farm in the Tarbagatai district, Nadezhda Kupina from Kirov. Thanks to their tireless work, they received the badge "Honored Road Worker" [28]. Also, Komsomol members of Aksuat village, collective farms Tebisky, Karatal, Diyasheva and Isaeva performed double work in their shifts and received well-deserved awards. A series of several articles published in the May 29 issue of the "Priirtyshskaya Pravda" newspaper focuses on the work of women who worked on the construction of this "eastern ring". As an example, we can see that a group of women from Belagash, in particular women like Volkova and Shablitskaya, did their job 200 percent [25].

During these periods, poems by P. Kuznetsov, essays by D. Snegin [29] and G. Mustafin about women builders were published in regional and central newspapers. G. Mustafin wrote about the citizens of the collective farm "Stalin" of the Buktyrminsky district, and in his essay "Shygys Shenberi" (Eastern Circle) [30] he quoted about the "Marusa's Stone" with the words "an eternal legend in my memory". Pavel Shestakov from Leningrad writes in his archival manuscript "Put' zhizny" (The Way of Life) about the difficulties of construction, about how many women and girls worked in road construction and endured all the hardships.

It is known that in the 1940s, on the eve of World War II, the image of a woman was a hot topic in the work of M. Auezov. Mukhtar Auezov, based on a trip to the East Kazakhstan region in the summer of 1940, published a documentary story about women builders on the pages of republican and regional newspapers and included it in his collection of works. In the 8th volume of selected twenty-volume books by M. Auezov [31] East Kazakhstan region. The courage and endurance of the women of the Semey region are vividly depicted in the work "Onyn aty ekinshi" ("Shygys zholy") (Her name is second (Eastern Road)). Excerpts from this work were first published in 1940 in the newspaper "Ekpindi" [32] on June 6 on 14 pages. Later, in the June 19 and August 18 issues of "Socialist Kazakhstan", the full version was published under the title Maidan. Quoted in brackets (excerpt from a long essay written about the "Eastern Road"). Later, on August 29, 1940, several more chapters of the newspaper "Leninshil Zhas" were published, in which "Altyn zhuzikti kyzdar" (Girls with Golden Rings) was quoted (an excerpt from the story "Eastern Road").

In addition to artel workers, narrow specialists such as shoemakers, tailors, hairdressers, and photographers worked on complex road structures. Detailed information is given in the plan of protocol No. 16 of the Presidium of the Semipalatinsk regional trade union, which was sent to the workers of the road construction of the "Eastern Ring". For example, 6 artels are loaded according to plan. 2050 people worked in 3 sections of Georgovka, Georgovka-Nikolaevka, Nikolaevka-Daubay, which were assigned to the artel "Novyi Byt" in the village of Georgovka, Zharma region. 4100 pairs of shoes were made for them. There were 27 shoemakers, 30 tailors, 20 hairdressers and 20 photographers. Thus, the number of special economic specialists amounted to 97 people. This is information received from only one artel [33; 143]. If we compare the number of specialists and people assigned to complex road construction, it is quite possible that the construction of the road will be completed in 2 months.

At the beginning of construction, there were shops and kitchen services, many women worked there, one cook and three assistants were assigned to one brigade. Chefs such as Taisiya Andreevna Kruglikova and Vassa Zvereva provided breakfast, lunch and dinner for all the builders. From these data sources, we see that women were involved in kitchen work both in the morning and at night [34; 13].

According to the plan, cult detachments came and organized concert evenings in order to provide cultural services and agitation to the builders. By decision of the district executive committee, the choir of

the pioneers of the Kirov School came to the construction site and presented their art, leaving the builders in high spirits.

Among the documents on the construction of the “Eastern Ring” road in the East Kazakhstan Regional State Archive, one can see a list of Stakhanovka women and their rewards for work. One of these documents is a list of women builders, entered in the Book of Honor. The documents show how well women, united by one political ideology, were able to combine work and unity. Thanks to such collective work, the work of Eastern women was recognized, and the Semey and East Kazakhstan regions were provided with normal transport links with the regional districts.

During the war years, the level of maintenance of transport and the transport system reached a high level, thanks to the contribution of the combined labor of the people and the labor of women. Despite the lack of equipment and building materials during construction, people worked tirelessly to the end. Ignoring various diseases, they steadily followed the ideology of the main goal of serving the Union and serving the people. Women such as Galina Mezenina, Maria Kungurtseva, Evdokia Polulina, Tatyana Akentieva, Evdokia Borzenkova spent days without rest and sleep, despite the bad weather, in excess of the daily norm. At that time, some girls were already over sixteen years old, they had to grow up early and feel pre-war hardships. At that moment, the 17-year-old girl Evdokia Polunina said in an interview with the Rudny Altai newspaper that she worked without a break from early morning until midnight. We are well aware that the everyday life experiences that Polunina experienced have become a tradition and reality in the lives of many girls of that period.

### Conclusion

In the international context, Semipalatinsk and East Kazakhstan regions are considered important strategic objects in the economic life of the country, so the construction of roads has become a necessity. Undoubtedly, the work of women who worked on the construction of the Eastern Ring highway, which was called the construction of the century in the field of improvement and connection of settlements with each other, deserves great respect. At that time, social realities demanded the resumption of women's work, the mastery of a new profession. During the construction, women were able to solve the shortage of specialists voluntarily and persistently carried out the task, despite any difficulties. The construction of the Eastern Ring road, which is of great importance for the rapid development of the region's economy, was greatly influenced by the work of the women's community. In addition, the trials and tribulations of the construction work brought about a number of changes in the lives and careers of women. The careful work and skill of women at large construction sites prompted the Soviet authorities to reconsider their social and industrial position.

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### Екінші дүниежүзілік соғыс қарсаңында салынған «Шығыс шеңбері» жол құрылысындағы әйелдер еңбегі

Мақалада Екінші Дүниежүзілік соғыс қарсаңында Семей және Шығыс Қазақстан облыстарында жол салу саласында еңбек еткен әйелдердің қоғамдағы орны мен өмірі және күнделікті тұрмысы қарастырылған. Семей және Шығыс Қазақстан облыстары сол кезеңдегі күрделі халықаралық жағдайларда елдің экономикалық өміріндегі маңызды стратегиялық объектілер болып саналды. Жол салу және елдімекендерді бір-бірімен байланыстырып, абаттандыру саласында ғасыр құрылысы атанған «Шығыс шеңбері» тас жолының маңыздылығы екі облыстан тұратын аймақ экономикасының қарқынды дамуымен тікелей байланысты болды. Аса үлкен маңыз берілген осы құрылыста әйелдер де еңбек етті. Мұрағат деректерімен, сирек кездесетін қорлармен, баспа материалдарымен және кейінгі уақытта жарияланған мақалалар негізінде жүргізілген зерттеулерге сүйене отырып, авторлар сол кездегі әйел құрылысшылардың еңбегі орасан зор деген қорытынды жасайды. Сондай-ақ, зерттеу жұмысында әйелдер қауымының күнделікті ауыр еңбек туғызатын қиыншылықтарға қарамай, психологиялық-моральдық тұрғыда сынбай, қайсарлық пен төзімділік танытқаны атап өтілген.

*Кілт сөздер:* Екінші Дүниежүзілік соғыс, Семей облысы, Шығыс Қазақстан облысы, әйелдер, құрылыс, жол, экономика, «Шығыс шеңбері».

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## Женский труд в дорожном строительстве «Восточного кольца», построенного накануне Второй мировой войны

В статье рассмотрены повседневная жизнь, быт и положение женщин в обществе, трудившихся в сфере дорожного строительства в Семипалатинской и Восточно-Казахстанской областях накануне Второй мировой войны. Семипалатинская и Восточно-Казахстанская области считались важными стратегическими объектами в экономической жизни страны в сложных международных условиях того периода. Важность трассы «Восточного кольца», которая стала вековым строительством в сфере дорожного строительства и благоустройства населенных пунктов, была напрямую связана с бурным развитием экономики региона, состоящей из двух областей. На этом строительстве, которому придавалось большое значение, трудились и женщины. На основании исследований, проведенных в ходе работы с архивными данными, редкими фондами, печатными материалами, и на основе статей, опубликованных в более поздние времена, авторы сделали вывод, что труд женщин-строителей в ту пору был колоссальным. В статье также отмечено, что женщины проявили самоотверженность и выносливость, несмотря на трудности, создаваемые ежедневным тяжким трудом, не подвергаясь психологическим и моральным испытаниям.

*Ключевые слова:* Вторая мировая война, Семипалатинская область, Восточно-Казахстанская область, женщины, строительство, дорога, экономика, «Восточное кольцо».

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