

Leonid Aptekar



This is me, private of the 291st regiment of the 170th infantry division, 48th army. I wanted to send this photograph to my family, but I did not know their whereabouts and had this photograph with me throughout the war. This photo was taken in Rechitsa town Gomel region (Belarus) in November 1943.

I finished the 8th form of my Jewish school in 1940. In summer 1940 all guys of 1923-1925 years of birth were gathered in a Ukrainian school. I was to be recruited to the army 2 years from then. This

was the so-called 'labor mobilization'. We walked to Donetsk region. When we reached Stalino [620 km from Kiev], we were assigned to different sites: some went to mines and the others were sent to work at plants or in kolkhozes. I was sent to work in the Stalino kolkhoz. I worked there for about a year. When I heard that Germany attacked the USSR on 22 June 1941 without an announcement of the war, my first thought was about my mother and grandmother. I did not know what was to happen to them. I still believed that the war would be instantaneous and victorious for us. When Germans advanced as far as Donetsk region, we were told to move out of Stalino. I took a train to the Caucasus. We reached the Caspian Sea and from there we took a boat across the sea. I arrived at a settlement in Andijon region in Uzbekistan over 6000 km from home. I was short and did not look my age of 16. I was sent to a local boarding school. Later I was sent to a vocational school in Tashkent. I was assigned to a construction group. In the morning we had classes and in the afternoon we went to work at the construction site. The students were involved in the construction of an aircraft plant. I worked as a bricklayer. In autumn 1941 I finished my vocational school and got an assignment to work at the construction of a metallurgical plant in Zlatoust town Chelyabinsk region. I was a foreman at the construction site. I worked at the construction till December 1942. From there I was recruited to the army. I was sent to a sniper school. We lived in barracks and were trained in accurate shooting. We also studied military disciplines.

I studied 10 months. In November 1943 we were given military uniforms, warm underwear and winter jackets. We lined up and marched to the railway station to the music. We boarded a train. I was to go to Rechytza [250 km from Kiev] town Gomel region in Belarus where the 48th army headquarters were located. I was assigned to the 291st regiment, 170th infantry division, Army 48, as a private. I was sent to the front line without delay. There were minor battles occurring, the so-called combat survey. Our regiment was in defense. No snipers were needed and I became a machine gunner. In 1944 an overall offensive in Belarus began. Our 170th division went first. We beat the Germans as efficiently as they beat our troops at the beginning of the war. There were marshes on our right and left and this was advantageous for us. The Air Forces also supported us. I marched as far as Warsaw with my division. I had joined Komsomol before my first battle.

During this offensive I was wounded in my leg. I was taken to the army hospital and when I recovered, I was assigned to a reserve regiment where I was promoted to the rank of sergeant. We also took part in combat actions. I managed to return to my regiment afterward. I was wounded again near Warsaw on 15 February 1945. This was severe injury and I was taken to a rear hospital in Orekhovo-Zuyevo near Moscow by the sanitary train. When I was released I was assigned to the 91st infantry division belonging to the 39th army. We were urgently relocated to Königsberg. There were severe battles in this area. The Königsberg fortress was bombed day and night, Soviet, English and American Air Forces. Our division took part in these battles.