

Evadiy Rubalskiy In Uniform, 1943



This is me, Evadiy Rubalskiy, communication operator. This photo was taken in 1943 near Saratov. On 13th November 1939 I was recruited to the army and sent to study in Kalinin, Donetsk region [about 500 km from Kiev], in reserve artillery regiment 19. In April 1940 our division moved to the border with Estonia near Pskov where we had advanced training. We were told that despite a peaceful agreement between the USSR and Estonia was breaching it. One day at dawn we crossed the border to Estonia [Occupation of the Baltic Republics]. We were marching across historically Estonian lands, but there were no conflicts with the locals. We stayed there 2 months before we moved to Western Belarus. Since I was a construction man, I was ordered to the construction of the Grodno fortifications. [near the present Poland - Belarus border, 370 km from Kiev]. At night of 20 - 21 June 1941 the situation around us raised much concern. At night on 22 June few additional guards, including me, were appointed. My duty was off at 2 o'clock in the morning and having transferred the post to another guard I went to bed. At 4 o'clock in the morning we were awoken by powerful artillery bombardment. Shells were flying into the rear over our heads. We were close to the near-border stripe line: one and a half hours later German units broke through the border guard covering forces and came close to where we were. We were armed with rifles and didn't have bullet stocks. We could not retreat running back: there was mass barrage of fire. I didn't even notice that I was wounded in my arm at once. Germans were moving fast and we had to move on to Orsha. Finally I got some medical care in a hospital in Dubrovka village near Orsha. When I was released from hospital a month later, I was allowed one-month leave and was told to go home. From there I was sent to 722 rifle regiment of 205 rifle division. Germans were approaching Kiev and our division was fighting on the avenue of approach to Kiev. I was appointed a communications operator in a company. On 7 August 1941 our division and landing troops passed to the offensive and recaptured Zhulyany, a suburb of Kiev [today it's a district in Kiev], the Zhulyany airport. This

was our first success since we had only retreated before. We held out till 18 September, when we were ordered to retreat. [Kiev was occupied 19 September 1941.] Our division was the last one to take leave covering the retreat of other units. We had few wagons and trucks. Severely wounded patients rode on them and those who had slight wounds had to walk. I was slightly wounded in my neck. On our way we beat down German covering forces. Our crossing a swamp was extremely hard. Any of my fellow comrades perished in bogs. There was roar of battles around us. There were no more divisions or regiments and we gathered into units. We covered about 500 km in the rear of the enemy. This was just a beginning. There were many battles ahead of us. After crossing the front line a bigger part of our group, including me, was sent to reserve regiment 21 in Zolochiv, Kharkov region. About a month later we were sent to the 1st Guard rifle division. When we arrived to the point of destination the 1st Guard rifle division left the area to the Kaluga rifle division. I was assigned to the 323rd rifle regiment. I was given a communications squad into my command. We were to ensure communications in the 76-mm regiment batteries. On the severe winter of 1941-42 we had hard battles in Kursk and Kharkov regions. Our rifle division had battles for 2.5 months without intervals. Our soldiers and officers fought to the end and went into attacks. The division was successful, but there were significant casualties. By summer 1942 the casualties in our division constituted 60% for privates and over 70% for officers. We fought in the south of Stalingrad, in Krasnoarmeysk, Volgograd region. Division 244 finished its combat actions in Stalingrad on 20 September 1942. Of over 4 thousand people at the beginning of combat operations it had 288 people left at the end, including maintenance and logistics people. The division came to the eastern bank of the Volga to re-staff. Field engineers prepared rafts for the crossing. Fascists were trying to break through to the crossing area. The bank was in ruins after bombardments. There were broken railroad carriages all around. When I was getting on a raft, I was wounded in my legs and my right shoulder by a grenade. There was no medical aid available. We crossed the Volga and from there I was taken to the medical unit of the 13th Guard division where I got the first medical aid. From there I was taken to the hospital in Leninskiy settlement. This hospital was deployed in some wooden barracks and medical tents near the station buildings. This location was not a good idea for a hospital: railroad stations were priority targets for the German Air Forces. German planes bombed the hospital and there were new casualties. I was taken to the hospital in Engels town near Saratov. I took a passenger train to Saratov. The railroad station units sent me to hospital #3631 in the school building near the 'Combine' plant. I had to walk to the hospital from the railway station suffering from terrible pain in my wounded legs. I was kept in this hospital till 31 October 1942. When I was released, I was assigned to the battalion for recovering military in Saratov. From there I went to a military camp in 40 km from Saratov where marching companies were formed to be sent to the front. I was assigned to Guard artillery battalion 122 of the 51st Guard rifle division. After the Stalingrad battle our division relocated to the vicinity of Yelets town in early March 1943.