

Lev As A Soldier



I, Lev Yagupolskiy, in the army.

We, students, all wanted to go to the front. There were seven of us, guys, we were young and stupid. But we were patriots. And we wrote a letter addressing it to Stalin. We wrote to him that they were not taking us to the army. Of course, that letter never reached Stalin, but in a week's time we were summoned to the military recruitment office and they sent us to the Military Academy in Moscow. On 16 November all military academies were moved to Middle Asia from

Moscow in one night. We studied in Samarkand until 1942.

When at the front I found out that intelligence officers had found some shells with chemical substances near Smolensk. The commandment and soldiers didn't take seriously the dangers of chemical hazards. Soldiers had enough difficulties besides carrying extra weight gas masks, they thought. In my regiment everybody had gas masks, it was a strict requirement. We arranged smoke screens against tanks, we had to complete very serious tasks. I was in a rifle regiment on the very front line.

Once my knowledge of German almost killed me. On 25 December 1942 there was shooting - they were shooting, we were shooting. Then all of a sudden it became very quiet. Our commissar called me, gave me a megaphone and told me to go to the 1st trench (in about 100 meters from Germans) and say whatever occurred to me. He said the Germans were preparing a break through somewhere and the only way to identify the location was to force them start shooting. I started talking against Hitler - no response. Then I said that they came to our land and they would be defeated like they were near Stalingrad. There was no reaction from them to whatever I was saying. I thought I was going to fail to complete the order.

But then I recalled that our newspapers wrote about a train of French and Italians arriving in Germany. And I said "You are sitting here in the country that is not yours, and your wives are at home with the French and Italians, great masters of love making..." And they started shooting on one end, and then on another end. Our side responded. There was so much shooting that I was under a layer of soil. Later they pulled me out of there. It turned out it was their Catholic Christmas and they wasn't preparing any action against us, they were just drinking their schnapps. This happened at the Kalinin front. They say, Jewish people did not fight.

I remember Bogomolnii, a battalion commander, a Jew. His soldiers carried him out of the battlefield with the wound in the stomach. We were friends with him. There was no anti-Semitism on the front. My orderly was Onischenko, a Ukrainian. He was a senior sergeant. We got along very well. We were one big family. It couldn't have been otherwise. We only distinguished between a good man and a bad man. I was 19 years old, and many soldiers were older than me. War was a little bit like a game for me.

Different things happened at the war. In 1942 Stalin issued an order "Not one single step backwards!" and anybody suspected of being a coward was to be shot with no delay). One man there stretched his hand and the German bullet targeted it, and he was shot as a suspect for trying to find an easier way to leave the front. I learned important lessons in the army. There was much concern at the Kalinin front with regards to a chemical attack. A general arrived to check the readiness of military units to a chemical attack. In the morning the Germans began shooting with smoke shells producing crimson smoke screen moving in our direction. The general gave a command "Gases!" Everybody put on their masks in my regiment. The general finished his inspection and left. In 3 days time there was an order issued at the Kalinin front to promote the Head of Chemical Department Yagupolskiy to the rank of senior lieutenant and position of Chief of Chemical Department of the Division.

Very soon I was sent to Moscow - mine was a very high position. I arrived in Moscow but my division had already left for the front. I kept submitting my requests to be sent to the front but I was refused. I was sent to Novosibirsk and then to Omsk to lecture at the Officers' College. I served

in the army until 1945