

Saul Askenazi On The Reichstag Footsteps



This photograph was taken in May 1945 in Berlin:

not more than a week after the unconditional surrender of Germany.

At present there not many people who can show you this sort of photo from their private archive.

So many times I addressed the local military registration and enlistment office. I wanted to go to the front! I had a score to settle with Germans: all my relatives, whom I loved, were lost (I was sure in it by that time) because of Fascism, because of Nazism.

I wanted to fight. And again I was scrapped as a foreigner. 2 years more I spent in Central Asia. And at last they agreed to send me to the army.

I got to the 1st Belarus front, to the division no.69. Marshal Zhukov was the commander of the front.

I started in Poland. We were brought there via Urals.

We won back Warsaw and Berlin. I participated in the meeting with Americans on Elba. [The Meeting of the Red Army and American armies in Torgau took place on Elba in April, 1945. As a result of that meeting, Germany was split into two parts.]

I served in infantry as a submachine gunner. I was afraid of nothing: I can't say that I ignored myself, but I thought 'It's better for me to perish, than to somebody else, because nobody will cry for me.' In this connection I recollect the following tragical story.

Being at the recruiting center, I saw a guy there. A very young woman (his sister or a wife) saw him off. She cried so bitterly! My heart was breaking!

And later, already in Poland I suddenly saw that guy in our entrenchment (nearby and opposite to us Germans were sitting in the similar entrenchment).

Before I had time to say I was glad for him (that he was alive and fine), he got up to his full height and shouted with all his lung power:

'Hey you, Germans (round oath), I am not afraid of you!' and fell dead at that very second. Till now I cannot forget that crying little girl at the recruiting center, even more than him. At the front it happened sometimes that people went out of their mind.

I went through the war unhurt, though that war was terrible! Imagine, from 180 soldiers of my company only 8 survived, including me.

You know, I forgot some details, but the meeting on Elba impressed me greatly (and not only me). Certainly, everyone understands that that meeting resulted in something good (German army was divided into parts, and the war ended faster).

But it was not that result that stuck to my memory. All the war time they spoke that all our allies did not hurry up to open the 2nd front, etc. You know: the Soviet propagation.

And there we saw those allies first-hand. We embraced, shook hands, and exchanged souvenirs. Stars from our field caps were a great success among Americans. All of them knew one word in Russian - 'a comrade'. And we drank there a lot: vodka, whisky - it didn't matter!

Before the meeting political departments and SMERSH recommended us to follow special instruction and carry out 'friendly meetings in the spirit of revolutionary vigilance.'

[Political departments were special bodies created by the Central Committee of the Communist party in the Soviet Army and Navy fleet for strengthening of political work, and mainly for realization of total shadowing.]

And one more trifling thing stuck to my mind: boots of American soldiers were polished!