

Iosif Zalevski With His Partisan Friends



These are Belgian partisans photographed after Belgium was liberated. The man with the armband on the right is my second husband, Iosif Zalevski. The photo was taken in Belgium in 1944. After finishing a higher secondary school Iosif worked as a mechanic in the port. He was recruited to the army in 1939. When the war began he was on service in marine troops in the Crimea. Germans sent their landing troops at the very beginning of the war and Iosif was captured. Iosif pretended he was Ukrainian. He kept it a secret that he was Jewish by applying much soap foam in the shower and sleeping under a blanket at night. During a check-up in a concentration camp Iosif ran out into the snow naked to avoid the check-up because he was circumcised. I don't know in which camps Iosif was. All I know is that they were in Poland. He escaped three times and was captured twice. They beat him and put him back into the camp. In early 1944 Iosif and his friend Alexandr made a

hole into the floor of the railcar during transportation and escaped. People around told them they were in France. Iosif found partisans that helped them to get to Belgium. In Belgium Iosif got accommodation with a family of farmers that was aware that their tenant was a partisan. Iosif and his friend worked at the farm helping their landlords. They got a message about when they were needed at the partisan group. When Iosif and his friend returned to the farm they knew that if there was underwear drying on the line that meant Germans were in the village. This served as a warning. Iosif and his friend did mining and blasting work. He didn't tell me any details of his participation in the partisan movement. I believe he was a good performer since he got a wonderful letter of evaluation of his performance after Belgium was liberated in December 1944. Iosif liked his landlords very much. He said they treated him like a son. When Belgium was liberated Iosif got an invitation to go to USA, but he turned it down. He was dreaming about returning home, but his motherland was not as welcoming as he had expected. All those that returned from concentration camps or occupied territories were subject to the so-called filtration. Fortunately, Iosif had a certificate that he was a blaster otherwise he wouldn't have escaped Stalin's camps. During the war Iosif was severely wounded and shell-shocked. He had splinters in his head and for a year and half after the war he spent most of the time in hospitals.