

Arkadiy Redko



This is a photo of me, taken in Berlin on Victory Day, 9th May 1945. Our regiment photographers took such photos and each soldier wanted to have one to send it to his dear ones. This photo was mailed to my parents in Kiev. They proudly showed it to their friends and acquaintances. I went to the army in June 1942. All new recruits were sent to reserve Regiment 61 near Chkalov where we were trained in hand-to-hand fighting, shooting, the basics of military training. From there we went to the front in early 1943. The first stage of the war in 1941-42, when our troops were retreating and suffering great losses, was over. Those were the hardest years of the war. In early 1943 there was a turning point in the war. Our armies were attacking on all fronts. I was sent to regiment 125 of the rifling unit of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. My first battles were for the liberation of Donetsk region, the town of Konstantinovka. Our troops were advancing promptly. Our artillery regiment started artillery preparations and then infantry went into action. When we incurred big losses, we were sent to the rear for remanning for few days or months when we could lead a normal life where there was no war. Then we returned to the same front or a different one at times. So I started my front experience in the 3rd Ukrainian Front and ended in the 1st Belarussian Front under the command of Marshal Zhukov. In 1944 we relocated to the Manevichi station in Western Ukraine and we liberated other towns and villages there. This was when I received my first combat award: a medal 'For Valor'. Military units were continuously relocating. I was very fortunate: I was not wounded once during the period I was at the front line. Once I was shell-shocked and my commandment wanted to send me to hospital, but I refused fearing to be in hospital, when the war was over. I always thought the end of the war was close. We were advancing fast. In late 1944 we came to Poland. The attack on Berlin began in April 1945. Those were horrific battles. Our attack lasted few days and we incurred great losses. However, this was all we could do - and we won. This was the last big battle. I was near Berlin, when the war came to an end. On the early morning of 9th May we heard on the radio about the victory. This was such holiday! There was a festive meeting in the regiment. Everyone, even strangers, kissed each other, talked about the end of the war and the life at the front. We went to Berlin, and I and my fellow comrades signed on the wall of the Reichstag. Our peaceful life began.