

Yakov Voloshyn



This is me during my mandatory service in the Soviet army; I am wearing the military uniform of a private. I sent this photo to my parents. It is signed on the back with the words: 'To my dear parents from their son, Red army private. Fervent hallo from the Far East! Kisses, Yasha. 20.03.38'. I finished school at the age of 16 in 1931. My teacher of drawing gave me a letter of

recommendation to enter an art educational institution. There was none in Uman. In Kiev there was an art vocational school. My parents decided to move to Kiev. My father received a room in a communal apartment on Kuznechnaya Street, present-day Gorky Street, in the very center of Kiev. I was admitted to the school in 1932. We were very hard up. My father earned little and my mother didn't work. We decided that I had to study and go to work. My uncle, Israil Menachimovich, worked in the commercial department of a newspaper in Kiev. He helped me to become an apprentice in the illustration department of the popular daily newspaper 'Proletarskaya Pravda' [Workers' Truth], present-day 'Kievskaya Pravda' [Kiev's Truth]. My tutors were Kazimir Reshko, a photographer, and Kazimir Swidzevski, an artist, who signed his drawings with the pseudonym 'Ognit'. Ognit taught me to retouch photographs. This kind of work was done manually at the time. It took a lot of effort to improve photographs or correct deficiencies for newspaper photographs. I was an industrious apprentice and a short time later I became one of the five best retouching experts in Kiev. I studied in the art school simultaneously and finished it in 1934. I continued working in the editorial office. I was recruited in November 1937. On my last day in the editorial office my colleagues gave me a cigarette case. There was an engraving: 'To the alumnus of the collective of Proletarskaya Pravda newspaper, Yakov Voloshyn recruited to the glorious Red army from the local committee of the editorial office. 30.11.37, Kiev'. I was sent to the Far East, 7,500 kilometers from home. The term of mandatory service was two years. I became a private in a chemical company. It was to perform chemical decontamination of the area in case of chemical offensive. I received my uniform. Since I was good at drawing my military service was not bothersome for me. There were classrooms for political classes in every unit. Our commissar was very happy that I could draw posters and slogans for these classrooms. In 1938 there was an armed conflict with the Japanese in the vicinity of Hasan Lake. I took part in combat actions. Combat actions lasted for eight days, I think. I worked with the newspaper until the end of my service. After I demobilized I decided to stay there longer. My parents wrote to me that life was difficult and in the Far East salaries were higher than in central parts off the USSR. I decided to stay in the editorial office under a contract. Besides Na Zashitu Rodiny newspaper I worked for two civilian newspapers and sent my parents money to support them.