

Zalman Kaplanas



This is my army picture. Here you can see me, junior lieutenant Zalman Kaplanas. The picture was taken in Vilnius in 1945.

In 1943 I was sent to the second squad of the Lithuanian division #16, which was getting ready to be sent to the front lines. Again I was given a uniform. The training lasted for two weeks. After that the mandate board considered my case and it was decided that I should go to Podol infantry military school. I graduated from the school in the rank of a junior lieutenant. I was sent to Yartsevo, Smolensk oblast, where the Lithuanian rifle division #50 was being reformed. I was platoon commander for 24 hours. The next day I was called by the regiment commander

Churbaneyev and was assigned commander of squad. I was in that position for about a week. Then I was assigned the personal aide of the headquarters commander. I worked for a couple of weeks and then I was supposed to go through the investigation of the board consisting of general and colonels. They wanted to check me. I was asked many questions. In the end they were satisfied with my answers.

The same evening my school comrade, a Lithuanian guy named Markovich, brought me a letter from Jurbarkas. His relatives wrote me a detailed letter, saying how my relatives perished. On 3rd July 1941 my brother Mendel was shot in the Jurbarkas cemetery together with 350 young Jewish people. Father was shot with the group of Jews in August. He had to dig a grave for himself. My dear mother, whom I loved best of all, was sent to Kaunas ghetto, where she died on 28th September 1941 during a big action. I was grieving. I was in a terrible mood. One thing to deem your loved ones to have perished and quite another thing is to know about that for sure. I was alone in the whole world.

In the morning I was called to the headquarters and told about my assignment to the post of the aide of the headquarters regiment commander. I lost control, burst into tears and said that I didn't want to work or to live. The regiment commander reprimanded me brusquely and told me to leave. I went outside, sat on the steps and started crying. I felt that somebody was giving me a hug. It was the regiment commander. He sat next to me and started comforting me. He told me that in Ukraine his wife and children had been murdered by the Lithuanian Polizei. He said that we should survive no matter what, for our foes not to gloat over our death. He said that I was capable and would cope with work. He said he would be helping me. So, I became the personal aide of the regiment commander.