

Yoyl Vaksman



This is my father Yoyl Vaksman. This picture was taken in 1942 in Ulyanovsk, where he worked in the labor army. He sent this picture to Kokand where we were evacuated.

My father was born in Kishinev in 1906. After he finished cheder he was a cobbler's apprentice, and then he became a cobbler himself. By the time of drafting into the Romanian Army he became a cobbler of the fifth grade and this was written in his military pass. I don't know who nurtured Communist ideas in my father, and when, but he always used to sympathize with the Communist Party, though he himself was not a member. He also used to call upon the Soviet mode of life, taking part in the strikes, and Romanian authorities were after him. He was frequently arrested for dissemination of Communist literature. He was put in jail, beaten up, but always released. Once the craftsmen, who were on a strike, were taken away and punished by having freezing water poured all over them in the cold. After that Father got ill rather often.

On 28th June 1940 the Soviet Army entered Bessarabia and the Soviet regime was established. My father was rejoicing. He put on a dressy suit and went out into the central street, where Soviet tanks were placed, with the soldiers communicating with people. Hardly had three days passed, everything vanished from the stores: caviar, tasty fish, smoked meat, cheese. Even bread became rare. Then repressions started. Many of those, who were connected with Zionist movements, as well as the remaining rich and well-off people were arrested and exiled. We were lucky to be beyond that. The Soviet authorities took no interest in us. My father was disillusioned. The Soviet regime didn't meet his expectations. He even said in despair that they were not so-called brothers, but cousins.

On 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War broke out. My father was demobilized in several days. I remember seeing him off. Father kissed me saying that the war wouldn't last long. The Red Army was very strong and would defeat the Fascists, so he would be back home in a couple of weeks. But he didn't go to the front, he was mobilized to do physical work for the army. He worked at the military plant in Ulyanovsk.