

## Efim Finkel



It is me, Efim Finkel, private first-class, artillery regiment, 25 Chapaev division, after I was awarded an order of Combat Red Banner. Photo made for a frontline newspaper near Stalingrad in, 1943. I received a subpoena from the military registry office in June 1941. All draftees were sent to Bolgrad in 70 kms from Razdelnaya where military units for the front were formed. Before I joined the army I had only held a rifle a few times at military training classes in lower secondary school. We had high patriotic spirit. We were sure that the Soviet army was undefeatable and that the war would soon be over and we would win the victory. Stalin's spirit was with us as a leader and he would lead us to the victory. From Bolgrad we moved to the town of Renie near the Romanian border. We arrived there in the morning and at night we participated in combat action. I was in an artillery regiment. I was a loader and learned from others looking how they were doing it. At first I was assistant of loading soldier, but in 2 days I had to load cannons myself since my trainer was killed. Our artillery regiment was a part of 25 division. We moved from one front to another. Our artillery unit was the

first in attacks and infantry followed us. It may sound strange, but I didn't feel any fear during the combat action. It came after it was over when we remembered our comrades that were killed. We lived in ground houses that we made by ourselves. There was a field kitchen where meals were made. I was wounded in my arm for the first time near Odessa in 1942. Nurses couldn't evacuate me from the battlefield before it got dark. I lost a lot of blood. I was sent to a hospital in the rear. I had my forearm bone splintered with a bullet. The wound healed in a short time, but I had to stay in hospital until the bone grew together. I corresponded with my fellow comrades and returned to my military unit as soon as I was released from hospital. The injury not change my attitude, I wasn't more afraid in combats. I never wanted to join the Communist Party. At the front it was customary to write application to the party before a battle. I avoided it every time. Our political officer asked me why I didn't become member of the Party and I replied that it was a big honor, but that I didn't quite deserve to join the rows of communists. Later he kept asking me just as a formality and left without hearing the answer that he already knew. I never cared about politics and must have contracted my father's negative attitude to the Party. I never faced any anti-Semitism at the front and my combat awards are direct evidence of this statement of mine. People were valued for their human nature at the front and nobody cared about their nationality. Among my front friends there were people of different nationalities, including Jews. Certainly, to observe the Jewish traditions at the front was impossible, it even did not come to my mind. In 1943 I was awarded an Order of the Combat Red Banner for courage Stalingrad [present day Volgograd] battles, I was awarded several medals during the war. In 1944 there came a turning point in the war and it was clear that we were close to victory. In May 1944 I was wounded on my head. I had injury of my cranium and was taken to a hospital in Tashkent, Middle Asia, 2000 km to the southeast of Odessa. Hospitals for severely wounded patients were located in the rear for safety reasons. I stayed in hospital until January 1945. I was demobilized after such severe injury.