

Shur, Kalman Manushovich

Sergeant

Kalman Maushovich Shur was born in 1917 in the Lithuanian town of Antalyepte. His father, Moishe Leib, was a roofer. Young Kalman attended *cheder*, and at the age of 12 left Anta-lyepte to study in the yeshiva in Panevezhis (Ponevezh). Since it was so difficult for his father to support the family, at the age of 15 Kalman was forced to return home to work.

In 1939, he was called up by the Lithuanian Army and assigned to an infantry regiment; he was attached to a bicycle company. In 1940, with the annexation of Lithuania to the Soviet Union, Shur was assigned to an artillery regiment with the rank of Private 1st Class. At the beginning of 1941, he was demobilized and returned home.

In 1941 the Germans attacked the Soviet Union and started to advance toward the East. Kalman and his sister fled, but their father and sick mother, burdened by small children, were forced to remain.

Along the way the refugees were attacked by the Shaulists — Lithuanian Fascists — and his sister was killed.

After extensive wandering Kalman reached the Chuvash Autonomous Republic, where he started working on one of the kolkhozes. Winter arrived. Ragged, bereft of the most essential clothing, Shur left for the warmer Central Asian regions. In Bukhara he again found work on a kolkhoz.

At the beginning of 1942, he learned of the formation of a Lithuanian division in Gorki and requested that the Military Commissariat send him there.

His return to the north was not easy. He fell ill on the journey, was hospitalized, and only after he had recovered in the spring of 1942 did he reach HQ of the 16th Lithuanian Division. From here he was sent to an artillery battalion of the 249th Infantry Regiment. More than half of the battery, and of the entire division for that matter, were Jews.

In the fall of 1942, the 16th Division was transferred to Tula and in the last days of December was dispatched to the front. On February 24, 1943, the division first met with the Germans in battle in the town of Alekseyevka,

southwest of Orel. In the fighting near the village of Panskaya, Shur destroyed two enemy guns and put to flight a German company attacking the regiment's position.

In July-August, 1943, the Lithuanian Division fought on the Kursk salient and then turned northwest to Polotsk to take part in the efforts to liberate Byelorussia.

The 249th Infantry Regiment took up positions north of Polotsk near Nevel. On November 9, 1943, Kalman Shur put a German "Ferdinand" tank out of action with a direct hit and with accurate fire neutralized several enemy weapon emplacements. For his bold and skillful action in battle, he received the Order of the Red Banner.

In the summer of 1944 the Soviet Army unleashed its attack on Byelorussia. Troops of the 1st Baltic Front, to which the 16th Division was attached, were given the task of capturing Polotsk, thus opening the way to Lithuania and Latvia. On June 29, the division started its attack northeast of the town of Dretun.

The Germans fortified their position with anti-infantry and anti-tank barriers and with minefields.

The combat-tested troops of the 16th Lithuanian Division stubbornly overcame the resistance of the Germans and advanced rapidly. Then the enemy attacked at the right flank of the 4th Assault Army, to which the 16th Division was attached. The Third Battalion, 249th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Major Vulf Vilenski succeeded in crushing the enemy forces in bayonet combat, and thus the division continued its advance successfully.

Especially heavy fighting was encountered while crossing the Drissa River. Here the infantry units, supported by artillery and mortar fire, managed to overcome the obstacle of the river and forced the Germans, who had suffered heavy casualties, to make a hasty retreat.

On the way towards Lithuania the troops of the 16th Division displayed exceptional heroism. On July 4, 1944, Polotsk was taken. In the next two weeks troops of the Lithuanian Division, fighting without rest under very difficult conditions, stubbornly advanced, liberating Byelorussia and approaching their own Republic.

On July 27, 1944, troops of the 1st Baltic Front captured the city of Shaulyai. On August 2, the 16th Division was concentrated around this city under the command of the 2nd Guards Army.

The winds of war brought the daring artilleryman Kalman Shur to Lithuania. In his native Antalyepte he learned of the brutal acts committed by the German and Lithuanian Fascists in the first months of the war. They had shot his parents and small sisters and brothers, as well as his relatives and Jewish neighbors.

The remains of the battered German troops were pushed west of Shaulyai. They threw in reinforcements to recapture the city. The 16th Lithuanian Division was ordered to bolster up its defenses. Most of the forces were concentrated southwest of the city.

On August 17, 1944, the Germans brought in troops as well as "Tigers," "Ferdinands," and "Panthers" which were supported by air power in the attempt to advance on the city.

Soldiers of the Lithuanian Division were fully determined to stop the Germans. For three days the enemy attacks were repulsed and the Germans driven back. Finally admitting defeat, the German Command halted its attempts to advance at this section of the front.

The fight for Shaulyai was one of the brightest pages in the history of the Division. It was here that the crack SS "Greater Germany" was crushed.

When the division reached Lithuania the Republic was *Juden-rein*, i.e., cleared of Jews, as the result of the mass shooting of the remaining Jews by the German and Lithuanian Fascists; hence there were no Jews to call up to the army.

On October 5, 1944, the 16th Division crossed the Krozhente River and, advancing southwest, entered East Prussia. The German units of a tank division, the officers school of the 3rd Tank Army and infantry units engaged the Lithuanian Division. Fierce fighting ensued.

Sergeant Kalman Shur of the 249th Infantry Regiment barred the way to scores of enemy tanks near the village of Uzhleknyai in Shilute region on October 12, 1944, and repulsed numerous attacks. When most of the guns of his unit had been put out of commission, he and ammunition loader Ushpolis

continued to shoot at the German "Tigers" and the German soldiers behind them. One of the shells hit a "Tiger" and it burst into flames. He continued to fire at the advancing German infantry and killed more than 100 soldiers.

For two days Shur held off the Germans and maintained his position, although he was seriously wounded. Soviet soldiers came to his rescue and evacuated the wounded sergeant.

On March 24, 1945, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union to Kalman Maushovich Shur (Shuras).

After recovering from wounds received in battle, Sergeant Kalman Shur returned to his division to take part in battles for the liberation of Latvia. In one of them he was wounded again and hospitalized.

After recovering he was sent to the Kurland Peninsula. Assigned to another unit, he asked to return to the Lithuanian division. Two weeks before the war ended, his request was granted and he was transferred to the 16th Lithuanian Division.

Very shortly after, the enemy surrendered to the Kurland group and the war ended. Kalman Shur was demobilized and returned to Lithuania. His chest was covered with orders and medals, evidence of the battles he had fought and his personal courage. He settled in Vilnius, where he worked for 24 years in a leather-goods factory.

In 1975, on the 30th anniversary of the victory over Fascist Germany, a new military award appeared on the chest of Kalman Shur — the Order of the Red Star. Long after the war, "Red sleuths" i.e., history buffs of the 6th Vilnius Regional Construction Administration, discovered in the official files an honor citation about Senior Sergeant Kalman Shur, artilleryman of the 249th Infantry Regiment. The document read:

In the fighting on February 22, 1945, near Ezergal in the Latvian SSR, Sergeant Kalman Shuras, gun commander of the 249th Infantry Regiment, with skill and accuracy destroyed two German guns and their crews. Firing a 75mm gun, he partly destroyed almost an entire platoon of German machine gunners, thus paving the way for the advance of our infantry units. During the counterattack, which followed, fire from his 81 mm mortar stopped enemy

machine gunners, thus repulsing the counterattack. During the second counterattack, he again directed his aim accurately but was wounded by an enemy shell.

For his courage and bravery in the struggle with the German Fascists, Sergeant Kalmanas Maushovich Shuras of the 249th Infantry Regiment is deserving of the Order of the Red Star.

signed

Commander of the 249th Infantry Division,

Lieutenant Colonel — Volbekans

Commander of Artillery of the 16th Lithuanian

Infantry Division, Colonel P. Petronis

In this campaign Shur was wounded in the head. After recovery he did not return to his unit so that he did not receive the Order of the Red Star at that time. In fact it took 30 years for the Order to finally reach the hero. The person who then presented the award was Military Commissar of the Lithuanian Republic, Major General P. Petronis, former commander of artillery of the 16th Lithuanian Division, who had drawn up the honor citation.

In 1973 Shur's older daughter and her family went to Israel, as did his younger daughter in 1977. In 1979 Kalman Shur received notice that his own request to leave the USSR had finally been approved, and in April of that year he and his wife arrived in Israel.

Source: Shapiro, Gershon (Ed.), *Under Fire, the Stories of Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union*, Gershon Shapiro, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1988 pp. 491-496