

Evgeniy Kotin



This is a picture of me as a cadet of the 1st Leningrad Red Banner Infantry School Named after Kirov. To the left is the medal 'For Bravery', to the right are the medals 'For Liberation of Latvia' and 'For Victory over Germany'. The photograph was made in Leningrad in 1945.

On the 10th of March 1943 I got the draft notification from the military enlistment office. Those who finished at least 9 grades were sent to Novgorod-Volyn military infantry school, evacuated in Yaroslavl. I became the cadet of the school. I went to the field squadron. We were taught to handle all kinds of weapons when the divisions when would be able to take command after graduation. On the 25th of April of 1943 we took the oath - the commander of the school got an order to send all cadets of school to the front-lines as privates. We got to the station Loknya, not far from Old Russa and came to the forest. We were assigned in the gun squad and were given personal weapon. At New Year's Eve, on the 1st of January of 1944 we heard the alarm and were told to get up, we were sent to the front lines. In the morning we were sent to participate in the battle at the station Nasva. It was my first true battle. Frankly speaking I was scared. I wanted to cower, to become small and inconspicuous.

The attacks were periodic. We attacked squeezing Germans out and then they push us to the initial positions. I went reconnoitering 2-3 times. Since I had finished 9 grades and was well up in the maps I was sent to the squad of surveyors while our reconnaissance squad was at ease. It is conducted on the forward edge. I was given the so-called 'blind' maps. At night when German artillery was firing at our positions, we were to determine where the shooting was coming from, the caliber and the type of the cannons and the distance to the German positions. I was focused on work and there was no place for any other emotions.

In July 1944 there was an attack. Our regiment re-dislocated to Latvia. I was sent to the reconnaissance squad. Shortly after that when a new commander came, I became his deputy. Our task was to push the German troops from Latvia. The battles were fierce. Though, both we and Germans understood that the war was winding up. Germans still were resisting. I was involved in reconnaissance as well as in the infantry battles. On the morning, on the 14th of April 1945 I was sent in reconnaissance to find the access roads to the hill, we were supposed to fight for. There were hardly any people left- 15 men and 3 elderly nurses. They did not want to fight as it would be silly to be killed at the very end of war. I was the first in the group. We did not know that a German sniper was up a tree, and the bullet hit me. I was lucky to stay alive and get just a dipnoous wound of the forearm. I was bandaged hastily and sent to the medical battalion after the battle. Soon the deputy political officer of the regiment came over and said that for that battle I would be awarded with the medal "For Bravery". They also sent a letter to mother saying that her son was awarded with the medal "For Bravery" as well as the words of gratitude for upbringing of the worthy defender of the Motherland. My wound was cleansed and in a week I was sent to the reserve regiment, mortar battalion. I had stayed there for a week. Suddenly at night of 8/9th of May we were woken up by shooting. We were scared that the Germans came over and all of us would be shot. We got out and saw that everybody on the meadow shooting in the air. People were shooting from guns, flare pistols, gats whatever people had. Somebody who was shooting noticed out frightened faces and cried out 'the war is over'. At noon, on the 9th of May our commander congratulated us on victory and gave us vodka to drink at lunch.