

Leonid Rozenfeld



This is a picture of me when on service in the Soviet army in 1943. The photo was taken somewhere in Russia. After two-month training in a military unit in Frunze, where I was in evacuation during the war, I was sent to the military infantry school. I studied very well and was promoted to first sergeant. We were supposed to study six months, but a month before graduation we were demobilized to the army. We were sent to the vicinity of Bryansk near Sukhinichi [Russia], 1,500 kilometers from Frunze. I remember our train stopped in a field. We got off the train and marched to our military unit. We were distributed to various units. I was sent to rifle regiment 407 of the Central Front [it was later renamed Bryanski and then 1st Belarusian Front]. I became first

sergeant in a rifle company. We were ambushed in our first battle. Our unit moved to the area where no German troops were left when all of a sudden we got under fire of German troopers hiding in the woods. My comrade cadet Sasha Andronnikov was wounded in his throat. He shouted something and died in my arms. Many of our military men were wounded or killed. We began to fire back and the fascists retreated. This first battle is still vivid in my memory. There were many more that were also terrible, but this one was the most horrific. I wasn't a coward and was always among the first attackers. We drank one hundred milliliters of vodka before action on a battlefield and called it a 'frontline shot'. It inspired a feeling of courage. I must say here that bullets or bombs hit those that gave in to their fear. Sometime I was appointed commanding officer of a machine gun platoon and then I received the rank of junior lieutenant. In late June 1943 we were moved to the vicinity of Orel [Russia] where our units were in defense in-depth near Kursk. Our commandment knew that the fascists were preparing for a massive attack and gathered the best units in this area. There were four defense lines. Our unit was in the second defense line. On 5th July operation 'Citadel' began. It is known as the Kursk battle. I participated in this battle. Fascists bombed our positions for several days. It was a non-stop bombing. They broke through our first defense line, but then our second line rose. My rifle unit was there, too. The Germans had their tanks moving ahead of the infantry, but we cut them off with aimed fire. We had lots of casualties, but we went into attack. This battle was a turning point in the Great Patriotic War. After this battle our army went into attack along the whole front line.