

Alexander Grin



This is me, Guards sergeant of the 11th Guards Night Bombers Regiment, in our unit. I sent this photo to my parents from the front and they kept it with care.

This photo was taken by a military correspondent at the front near Kiev in 1944.

In May 1942, when I was 17 and a half years old [the recruitment age was 18], the military registry office summoned me. They said, 'Sit down and write a volunteer application to the army'.

Who would dare to refuse those orders at that time! They sentenced people for desertion and then nobody would ever find justice.

I was recruited to the 17th squadron of the Civil Aviation near the railway station in Frunze where they trained navigators/radio operators on aircraft.

We lived in a barrack. There was poor food: sprat soup and boiled cereals. Those who came from Frunze rarely got leave to go home. We were given uniforms: boots, trousers and overcoats. There were two groups of 25 cadets each at school.

There was military order. Our commander was first sergeant of the training unit and had been at war. For some reason he became furious with us and made our life as hard as we could imagine.

He was to train us in drilling. We had wonderful teachers in other military disciplines who were navigators and radio operators of the Civil Aviation.

We finished our training in May 1943 and went to the headquarters in Moscow by train. We were accommodated in a military unit, the 1st air transportation division of the Civil military aviation, near Vnukovo airport.

I was responsible for communications and navigation during flights. I was a navigator/radio operator of the plane. At times the Germans knocked down our planes. It's aviation, and many things happened.

In fall we were sent to a bombers' unit, i.e., to the army. I was sent to the 11th Guards Night Bomber Regiment to the west of Stalingrad at Morozovskaya station.

Our regiment was also involved in the liberation of Stalingrad. We bombed German positions and ramparts. We flew to bomb Donetsk basin in Ukraine, 600 km west of Stalingrad where the front line was.

In winter 1943 we relocated to Ukraine, to Gorlovka in the vicinity of Donetsk liberated from fascists. We flew to drop bombs across Ukraine and Poland. As a rule, we flew every night. At least, we were to be ready to make flights every night whether or not we received a task that night.

In summer 1944 we were in the vicinity of Kiev. Kiev was liberated in early November and the front line was actually near our border. We were dropping bombs on Romania. Our major task was to deprive Germans of Romania gasoline.

In 1945 we bombed Berlin.

I was awarded an order of the Great Patriotic War and a medal 'For courage'. We got awards for successful flights.

I joined the Party at the front. I started my service in the rank of sergeant and when the war was over I was Guards first sergeant.