

Adolf Landsman



This is me as a lieutenant of the 8th rifle division of the separate 108 tank regiment. I sent this picture to my parents in Moscow. There are military awards on my tunic: an Order of the Great Patriotic War of the first class, the Guards insignia is to the left of the order. It is written overleaf: 'As a keepsake for my dear parents to commemorate the Great Patriotic War. 1943.' The picture was taken near Kursk.

In May, 1943 I finished the artillery school and was sent to the front, to the 20th separate artillery squad of the Russian Supreme Command. I was appointed commander of the firing platoon. Two gun groups, six people each were under my command. There were two cannons in our ammunition as well.

On July 5, 1943 German attack at Kursk [battle] started. From the very outset of the attack Germans used a lot of tanks, including the tanks of the newest makes such as 'Tigers' and 'Panthers' and self-propelled weapons: 'Ferdinand'. On that day our squad went to the town of Maloarkhangelsk in a railway echelon. It was my baptism of fire. Over sixty years had passed but some episodes were engraved in my memory and I remember them as if it was yesterday. It was almost a momentary transition from the peaceful life to fierce war life. I got very scared as I was aware that I might be killed any minute.

I could escape death by hiding in the pit, but at the same time I understood the responsibility for being a commander. If I rushed to the pit my subordinates would follow my example. I deliberately banished that sense of fear from me. I understood that I ought to fulfill my duty.

It was arid and sultry on that day and there were swarms of dust due to multiple shell bursts, and the visibility depended on the direction of the wind, and whether it changed from better to worse and vice versa. Suddenly, I saw the group of our soldiers who were trying to take cover from the machine-gun firing. I gave an immediate order, 'Get the weapons ready', and in a couple of minutes all was set. I determined the distance to the machine gun and indicted the target to the pointer, determined the type of the shell, detonator and the range setting.

The first shot missed. I adjusted the range setting and commanded once again. The second shot was precise and the machine-gun ceased fire. Our weapon was noticed by a German from another machine gun and he, in his turn, started firing at our weapon. I and two more soldiers were wounded. I was wounded in the leg and fell down. The weapon commander put a tourniquet over the wound and when the battery commander found out that I had been wounded, he ordered me to crawl back to my initial position. The doctor told me that I had a penetrating wound of the shin, my bone was not touched and I would be back in the squad in a month. I was taken to the hospital in truck together with other wounded soldiers. My first battle was over.

I was discharged from hospital in a month and sent to the separate tank fighter division # 874 of the artillery regiment. I took part in the battles of the Dnepr and the liberation of the left-bank of Ukraine. In April 1944 I came to the 1st Ukrainian front and was allocated to the 2nd Guards airborne division.