

## Grigoriy Fihtman



This is me, Grigoriy Fihtman. This photo was taken in Orenburg in 1946.

In 1943 I was mobilized to the army. Young men went to the army at the age of 17 at this height of the war. This was 1943, when Ukraine was to be liberated and Byelorussia and there was a long road to go before the victory. During the war I served in the army for a year, four months and nineteen days. I remember this duration very well since presently the state counts every day of military service at wartime as three days paying pensions. At that time every day of the war

meant thousands of deceased. Every day! I served at the border with Afghanistan where we fought basmachi gangs. Those gangs consisted of former kulaks, as Stalin called them, from Central Asia republics who escaped to Afghanistan in the early 1930s during collectivization. They took advantage of the war situation and engaged us into combat action in the south. I became a sergeant there and had a squad under my command.

In 1944 I was sent to Orenburg infantry school. I was a cadet there for 14 months. I studied well and only had one problem. There was a mandatory item in the curriculum: 'Each officer must learn to swim'. I am afraid of water. My lieutenant said: 'there is a swimming pool. It's not deep. I will push you in the water and will move your hands and you will learn to swim'. I was trying hard, but I never learned to do it. In May 1945 we were finishing our school. I met victory there. I remember this day very well. We lined on the drill square and waited there for an hour. We didn't know anything and were trying to guess: what's happening? Chief of our school came to the square and explained: last night Germany signed its capitulation and the war was over. We began shouting 'Hurrah!' and officers who had guns fired out all their bullets saluting. We had tears of joy in our eyes - from then on there was to be no more killing. We understood that the war was going to last five-ten days more, and everybody knew what kind of work we would be given work. So we met Victory Day and from that day Victory Day has been the dearest holiday for me and also, for my family. In 1946 I demobilized from the army.