

## Boris Pukshansky



This photograph was taken in Leningrad in 1950. At that time I was a college student. I used to wear only one war decoration: Order of the Great Patriotic War (1st Class). Now I'd like to tell you about the way I got it.

At the end of 1944 we moved to Latvia, and then to Lithuania. Therefrom we were suddenly moved to East Prussia. On January 17, 1945 we took Tilsit in stride. The city was empty; we met nobody in the streets: all citizens were evacuated far inland. The further approach to Königsberg was very hard, but nevertheless on April 9, 1945 the city was taken. Königsberg was in siege for some time, inhabitants starved, and we spoke among ourselves that it was our small revenge for Leningrad. But when our armies entered the city, we felt sorry for local residents and fed them up from our field kitchens.

In the beginning of May 1945 they put us into a lorry and brought toward Danzig. Near Putzig there was a small peninsula, which was connected with a very interesting military operation. That peninsula was 50 kilometers long and from 3 to 15 kilometers wide. German armies stood up for it. Field marshal Zaukel was in command. Our task was to persuade them to render themselves prisoners of war. On May 7 we met German delegation, headed by colonel Mangold. From our side the corps commander, the commander of reconnaissance unit (a colonel), and I participated in negotiations. I was their interpreter, but my military experience was also of great importance. First of all we wanted to know the number of German soldiers on the peninsula. To tell the truth, having heard the answer I did not believe my ears and asked again. Then I asked German representative to write it down. The number was enormous: 140,000. We immediately informed Rokossovskiy. He

encharged us with the task to continue negotiations. We came to agreement about the following: the Soviet army accepted their capitulation and the next day we would meet general Zaukel at his bunker and discuss the terms of surrender.

In the morning of May 8 we arrived to his bunker. We had to discuss technical problems of capitulation: you see, to take so great number of people prisoners was not so easy. Their weapon had to be left on the island, and we had to receive the map with instruction how to find it. Soldiers of our regiment met Germans on the isthmus and sorted them for sending to prisoner-of-war camps. It took Germans several days to leave the island. Soviet command guaranteed all prisoners life. By the way, head of SMERSH told our chief investigator that he was in charge of Zaukel. On the island there were 12 generals, all of them were allowed to take their belonging with them. They did it, though earlier they had asseverated to be interested only in saving their soldiers' lives. We escorted all those generals to Shtezin. Field marshal Zaukel repeated all the time: 'Give information in your newspapers that I am alive. My wife in Switzerland worries about me.' You see, we were not touched by feelings of his wife. For that operation I was awarded Order of the Great Patriotic War (1st Class). It was presented to me on May 16. In total during the war I was awarded 6 orders and more than 20 medals.