

Isaac Rotman Among His Brother-Soldiers



This photograph was taken in 1942 in one of the villages near the front line. It was taken by one of my brother-soldiers.

When the war burst out, I worked in a small town near the Latvian border. After the attack of fascists people pushed the panic button there, and everyone who was able to, ran away. I had not many things with me, but on my way I lost most of them, including my degree work (almost finished). Approximately 2 weeks later I reached Kalinin and immediately went to the military registration and enlistment office. Taking into account my education, they directed me to serve in a signal battalion. So I went through the war as a signalman. I occupied some sort of exclusive position, because I was an educated person and they had nobody to replace me. When the battalion commander shouted at me using offensive words, I answered him the same way. In my battalion I was much elder than almost all others. By the beginning of the war I was already 30, and my commander was only 22.

At first I worked in a special car for radio intercept. Later I became a field signalman. A field signalman is a person who crawls, runs, walks - in a word, moves along a battlefield with a telephone tube and telephone wire in hands. At present when I watch films about war and see field signalmen, I am really puzzled how I managed to survive. Probably I live so long because I had survived in such a terrible war. It is interesting for me to live and I will never get tired of life. I saw burnt villages, sites of fire, people died on the gibbet. Despite of all horrors of the war, that time was not only awful, but also very fine. I knew for sure what I was fighting for, and people I met there were for the most part good and noble. I was never wounded, only once during severe bombardment I was slightly shell-shocked. The war was finished for me in Germany not far from Berlin on May 9. After the victory day our battalion was moved to Hungary. There we served together with Soviet, i.e. occupational armies.

As times goes by, it becomes harder and harder for me to recollect war time. I'm afraid that my heart will break if I recall its details.

And my Mum and sisters were evacuated right at the beginning of the war, therefore I managed to reestablish connections with them only at the end of the war.

During the war my elder brother was in Leningrad and nearly died from dystrophy. My other brother pressed for his evacuation and saved his life.

My younger brother also was in the army, but we knew nothing about each other.

During the war my elder sister died in evacuation in Omsk region. She was ill with tuberculosis and did not survive severities of the wartime. She was buried there.

I came back home in December 1945. They made us get off rather far from the city center, so I had to walk about 3 hours to reach my house. When I saw the first houses of the city, I embraced them and kissed. The city was very dark, there were many ruins, and great tragedy was in the air. I went to my sister: I knew that Mum should be there. Our meeting was very joyful. When I returned to our apartment after the war, I found it absolutely empty, only my old bicycle was hanging on the nail. For some reason marauders were not able to take it down. Not all our belongings fell a prey to marauders: my brother sold many things or exchanged them for bread. That day I saw nobody of our neighbors.