

Isaac Rozenfain With A Bunch Of Bulgarian Girls



This is me with a bunch of Bulgarian girls. This photo was taken in Lom in 1944. I served in the 84th separate tank regiment for the last two years of the war. I joined it in late 1943, when the Transcaucasian front was disbanded and we were assigned to the 4th Ukrainian front. We had T-34 tanks that excelled German tanks by their features. I was an experienced tank man. We were very proud of being tank men. Air Force and tanks made up the elite of the army. Tank men usually stayed in the near front areas and were accommodated in the nearby settlements. During offensives we moved to the initial positions from where we went into attacks. Sometimes tanks went into attacks with infantry, but we didn't know those infantry men. My tank was hit several times, but fortunately there was no fire. Perhaps, I'm wrong here and other tank men would disagree, but I think if there was an experienced commander of the tank, the tank had a chance to avoid being set on fire. The thing is: if a tank is set on fire, what's most important is to get out of the tank. The manhole was supposed to be closed and the latch was to be locked and this latch might get stuck. We closed the manhole, but never locked it. On the one hand it was dangerous, but on the other, it made it easier to get out of the tank, if necessary. The tank might turn into a coffin if the latch got stuck. Germans shot bullets at us and we believed that if we heard a bullet flying by, the next one was to hit our tank. Then we evacuated from the tank and crawled aside before the tank became a convenient target or hid behind the tank, if there was no time left to crawl to a hiding. In 1944, when our regiment was fighting within the 4th Ukrainian Front, the Soviet army entered Moldova. I had very special feelings about my homeland. I knew Romanian and when we were in the woods the others sent me to nearby villages to exchange gas oil for wine. Gas oil was our tank fuel. The villagers were happy to have it for their kerosene lamps. And we were twice as happy since Moldova was known for making good wine. Our regiment was involved in the Iasi/Kishinev operation. All types of forces were involved in this operation. Our tank regiment passed Kishinev in its suburbs and we could see how ruined the town was. After the Iasi/Kishinev operation we entered Bulgaria via Romania. People welcomed us as liberators. On 24th September 1944 we arrived in the town of Lom. It was hot and I jumped out of the tank without my shirt on. A bunch of Bulgarian girls surrounded me. One of them gave me a bunch of field flowers. Then the

bravest of them, Katia, asked me to get photographed with them. Her boyfriend took a photo of us. I gave Katia the address of my parents at their evacuation spot and she sent them the photo.