

**Sheil Barkin**

**Russian Vets**

Duration 21:11

- 00 00 I was born in 1923. My name is Sheil Barkin. What else should I tell you? (Where were you born?) In town Daugavpils, Latvia...in Latvia. My father was a worker there. I finished grade 5 plus 2 graded of pre-school...pre-school. (I apologize, let me fix the mic. Background conversation. Let's start over)01 46
- 01 46 I was born in town Daugavpils, Latvian SSR in 1923. (What's your name?) My name is Sheil. My father's name was Abraham. My mother's name Mala... Malka. 02 06
- 02 06 I went to a Hebrew school. I finished grade 5 plus 2 grades of a pre-school. Afterwards I worked. I worked for the owner as an apprentice, I worked as a furrier. 02 31
- 02 31 Do you know what a furrier is? Afterwards the war broke out. I remember it was a Sunday. I was sitting in a park named (inaudible) with my friend. And all of a sudden the Germans came flying. 02 53
- 02 53 It was three days later, as far as I remember, or rather a day later, right on the first day. They came flying at noon. They started bombing. We heard it... we were just 16 year old boys. 03 11
- 03 11 That was the end of life. They bombarded day and night, the Germans were. We realized that everyone was leaving the town. And we left too: my father, my mother, myself, other kids. 03 34
- 03 34 I got lost... lost my parents while we were on our way out of town. They went along another road. As I found out later they went on to the train, they boarded the train. They were told the train was going to the Soviet Union. 03 54
- 03 54 Instead, the train went back to Latvia which was already occupied by the Germans. They ended up in a ghetto. They were executed... (Cell phone ringing)... my mother, my father, my sister and brother, sister's husband and her 10 months old baby. 04 13
- 04 13 They all were murdered. I was the only survivor. I walked and walked day and night. I crossed the Soviet border. I didn't find any train. There wasn't any train to be found. 04 36
- 04 36 I walked as far as Bologoye. There were crowds of people there, many of them lying on the floor, tired, sleeping, and waiting for the train. I met my friend there at the railroad station. I asked him if he was on his own. 04 56
- 04 56 He said he was. I said I was on my own too. "Let's go together". And so we got together. Later on an echelon arrived. It was an open echelon. And we jumped on the open echelon. 05 15

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- 05 15 We got on the open echelon. We didn't care where it was heading. It reached as far as Novosibirsk. In Novosibirsk farmers were already waiting for the train to arrive. 05 28
- 05 28 We went along with them. The farmers welcomed us. We joined a collective farm (Kolkhoz) where we stayed and worked for 2 or 3 months. Later... I didn't have any coat. I only had what I was wearing when I left my hometown in the warm time of the year. 05 41
- 05 41 I left my hometown on June 26. The war began on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. It began to grow cold. We were paid with bread. We sold the bread. We went to Novosibirsk to buy me a coat. 06 01
- 06 01 It was a military looking green coat. And so we got on a train and went on. We heard about a good sheep or cow breeding farm ahead of us. And so we got off the train there. 06 22
- 06 22 We were sent to a dairy farm. We got there on a cart... what were they called... bull-carts. It was very, very, very far. And suddenly we saw the farm down the road. 06 46
- 06 46 There were 200 cows there. We stayed there for a while and from there we set off to join the army. At that time I turned 18 as did my friend. We enlisted in the army the same day. We found out there was a Latvian division. 07 08
- 07 08 We joined the Latvian division which was very far away. The Latvian division was in Gorokhovetsky camps, a reserve regiment. They admitted us. There were many young men there. 07 27
- 07 27 Military specialists were there to recruit artillery men, mortar men, machine-gun men, etc. I didn't ask to be sent to any particular arm like others did. I didn't ask of anything. I was willing to join any unit. 07 45
- 07 45 I was admitted as a heavy machine gunner. I joined a company as a heavy machine gunner. We got our training there. On June 15 we left for the front. At first we went to a front line division. Ours was a front line division. 08 05
- 08 05 Unlike the reserve regiment, our division had been involved in the battle of Moscow. The first offensive had taken place near Moscow. I wasn't involved in it. Later on it went to Staraya Russa and on to the North-West Army Group. 08 25.
- 08 25 The division was sent to the front line again. I went through training. Our division was granted the Guards title and the Guards color. We were 43<sup>rd</sup> Latvian Guards...at first it was 201<sup>st</sup> Latvian division. 08 50
- 08 50 And so we went to the front and that was it. I remember the date: November 28<sup>th</sup>. We were ordered to go to the front to replace a Kazakh unit there. Those were the Kazakhs. 09 12

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- 09 12 They left after we arrived there. We took our stand there at night, in the winter. We took our places. The scouts set off on a reconnaissance mission to find out where the Germans were. 09 40
- 09 40 They returned from the mission all covered with blood. They brought back two dead bodies in a sleigh. The next day we had a skirmish. There was no attack on November 29. An attack was launched on November 30. 10 05
- 10 05 I liked it very much. Katyusha rocket launchers fired. Tanks moved on both flanks. Artillery, machine guns and mortars – all types of weaponry were involved. We started moving forward little by little. 10 25
- 10 25 Some of the soldiers occupied a few gun posts. They found some bread, wine, tea etc. As for us, we had to hold our posts, there was no way leaving our machine guns unattended. 10 41
- 10 41 We reached a village called Simonovo, as we were told. I didn't see it myself. It was night and day. Our commanders said it was Simonovo, near Simonovo. We reached the village. After that the Germans started firing back. 11 02
- 11 02 Mortars... oh! Mortars were firing fiercely...My commander... he was hit... a mine hit his head. And all the insides got out and onto my arm, my trench coat sleeve. I was mildly wounded... a perforating wound...11 30
- 11 30 Still I didn't leave the battle field. That was a mild wound. After a while my arm was hit, it was a severe wound. The bone, nerves and tendons were wounded through the trench coat, blouse, and jersey. 12 05
- 12 05 Blood was spurting from the wound like a fountain, that high. There was no one around to give me first aid. Everyone around was dead, the commanders, everyone was dead. 12 23
- 12 23 And then a soldier ran up to me, he asked me "Where is your first aid pack?" I said "I went into battle, I didn't keep it on my back, I kept it down here". He took off my cloths and dressed my wound. 12 45
- 12 45 And I started... little by little...crawling back on my stomach. There was no way I could stand up. I would have been shot dead right away. I started crawling back, little by little, moving my legs and arms. 13 08
- 13 08 I wanted to get to a medical unit. I didn't take off my helmet until I reached the medical unit. I reached the medical unit. My first words were "Do you have any food here?" 13 22
- 13 22 They said "Senior Lieutenant here is asking. Is there anything to eat?" He said "There are bread crusts with butter". I go "Give it to me". They gave it to me and I ate. 13 42
- 13 42 I was hungry as a dog! The next day I was transferred to a field hospital on a horse back and in a sleigh. They redressed my wound and showed me to my bed. Everything was so cosy, clean and warm. 14 02

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- 14 02 Life went on! I felt as if I was born again. And there many, many more field hospitals ahead of me – 5 or 6 of them until I reached the medical train, a mobile unit as it was called. I was sent to a Latvian hospital. 14 25
- 14 25 The Latvian hospital was in Yaroslavl. And so I was brought to the Latvian hospital. There were other wounded guys with me there. They were already expecting us. 14 38
- 14 38 We were admitted to the hospital. We were asked what our names were and other information. They put robes on us. They showed us to our wards: 4 men in a ward. It was so cosy and warm there. 14 54
- 14 54 There was enough food there. I slept day and night! (Chuckling) They started to treat me. I underwent a 3-hours long operation. My arm was hanging like this (shows). 15 11
- 15 11 I stayed at the hospital for 5.5 months. And then there was a commission, a military commission at the hospital. They decided I wasn't fit for military combatant services... 15 33
- 15 33 ...and that I wasn't fit for anything. There was also an expert evaluation at the hospital. I was given the status of WWII invalid, group 2. I was paid money for 3 months. 15 48
- 15 48 They asked me "Where do you want to go now?" They gave me a certificate stating I was entitled to moving to any place I wanted. I found my sister, she was in Kuybyshev area. 16 00
- 16 00 They lived in a remote village. I went there. I stayed there for a while. It was in the summer. Then the summer ended. My brother-in-law worked in 108... 108... navy construction site#108. 16 41
- 16 41 He took us there. They lived in a small room there. I got a job there. What could I do there? I got a security job there, at construction site #108. I had worked a year there before the war ended in '45. 17 10
- 17 10 We were sent back to Latvia right away. We came back there. I didn't go to my home town of Daugavpils. The town was in ruins. Instead I went to Riga. I started looking around in Riga. 17 33
- 17 33 I met a girl at the construction site. She also worked there. After a while e moved together. We had kids – the twins, boys, two boys, but they were premature. She worked some place, she lifted some heavy staff, but they looked undamaged. 18 02
- 18 02 I washed them under the tap. I washed them and gave them away to the cemetery. Later on we had more children. The life was difficult... kids, you know... our life wasn't all cake and ale. 18 18
- 18 18 I had a status of a war invalid until the end, until I moved over here. I had a group 3 invalid's status for life... for life. That's it. I haven't worked here. I don't have any English speaking skills. 18 34

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- 18 34 I wasn't very healthy. I have heart problems. I've had 2 heart surgeries, and a (inaudible) surgery. I haven't worked here. I've been a welfare recipient. Afterwards, 10 years later, I started getting my pension. 18 55
- 18 55 And right away I was given a BA. I was among the first of those who got a BA. I've been a BA for 27 years already. (As a Jew were you mistreated during the war?) What? (Repeats). Not very much. (Inaudible). I got along well with everyone. 19 26
- 19 26 (Have you met the youth here in Canada, have you shared your war stories?) Not much. They don't even believe that the Jews have lost so many of them – 6 millions. "It's a lie, they say, the Jews never fought in the war". 19 49
- 19 49 "Jews were not in the army, Jews were not anywhere near". (Were there such people?) Yes, there are such people. (Here?) Here, here, here. Here too. I can't, say, put on my jacket and come here. 20 13
- 20 13 Oh, there are Nazis from various armies. There were people from the German army in my building. I put on my jacket on the holiday and to the club and then I gave my jacket to my daughter, otherwise they would have torn off my medals. 20 36
- 20 36 (Where were you on the last day of the war?) The last day I was at my post. Yes, I remember. Such a big (Inaudible) in town Yeysk, Krasnodar Region. Construction #108. 21 03
- 21 03 (Thank you!) 21 11

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