

Yakiv Chudnovskyy

Russian Vets

Duration 28:54

- 00 00 My name is Yakov Aronovich Chudnovskyy. I was born on June 15, 1926 in Pavlovsky Posad near Moscow, Gorky highway, 90 km away from Moscow. On June 22... we had a radio, it looked like a plate...00 31
- 00 31 I heard... it wasn't 6 am yet...I heard a rustling sound; and then Levitan's voice...announcing... I don't want to talk about it... everyone knows... "Attention! Attention!" That was how the war broke out. 00 51
- 00 51 I really couldn't believe... I thought "what? Germany?" Well, I had been following the events closely...The Soviet Union was always described as...It was ridiculous...more so that the peace pact with Germany had been concluded! 01 13
- 01 13 The war broke out. Literally a couple of days later... there was a factory not far from where we lived... you may have heard...*Electrostal* factory. It was a major plant. Kramatorsk Metall...rather... Machine Building Plant... they were trying to strike it from the first days. 01 37
- 01 37 We saw all those flashes...we saw planes flying in Gorky's direction. We saw it all during the nights. Exactly a month later, on July 22... we lived near a railway station...01 59
- 01 59 I loved going to a pastry shop there. I used to be there as soon as it was open. I loved fresh buns they had there. They smelled deliciously. I loved it! I was the pet of the family. 02 11
- 02 11 I loved buying them. The shop wasn't open, they were unloading a truck and there was a waiting line there. I saw several planes in the sky flying west of Moscow. 02 34
- 02 34 OK, let them fly. There were 5 or 6 echelons standing there. All of a sudden they started throwing down bombs, direct hit. They were flying low throwing down bombs. There were wounded there. 02 51
- 02 51 There were horses there too. You can't imagine what was going on there. I still can't get it out of my mind. The field was strewn with fragments of human and horses' bodies. 03 03
- 03 03 Everything was scattered around. Horrible! My parents and sisters got scared on hearing that I was so close by. The planes flew on in the direction of a viaduct. They wanted to destroy it. 03 24
- 03 24 They wanted to block the railroad traffic. They didn't manage to hit the viaduct. I found myself lying on the ground. I don't know how I ended up lying there, whether it was by instinct or otherwise. 03 43
- 03 43 Many people fell on me. I got out and ran home. While I was on my way home there was another air strike on the other side. It was horrible, right? 03 54

Yakiv Chudnovskyy

Russian Vets

- 03 54 Literally immediately... for many years after... the railway station clock stopped exactly at that moment. For dozens of years afterwards...it remained stopped...nobody ever rewound it. 04 11
- 04 11 A water tower cracked because of the shock wave. The war scars were there until I left for Canada. It all was there. I'll never forget it. I looked at those war scars every time I was passing by. 04 29
- 04 29 Except for the clock which was replaced later. That was the first air strike I witnessed. By the time the war began I had just graduated from 7-grade school. I enrolled at a vocational school. 04 44
- 04 44 I finished the vocational school. There was a (inaudible) factory close to where we lived. I got a metal worker's job there. I worked there... I was eager to enlist in the army before being drafted but I was denied. 05 03
- 05 03 In '44 I enlisted in the military after passing the medical commission's examination. On March 18, '44 I was mobilized. They sent us from Pavlovsky Possad to Moscow's Chernyshevsky Barracks, you might have heard of. 05 30
- 05 30 We arrived at the gathering station. A day or two later I was sent... via Gorky railway... to Vladimir Region, that's where Moscow Region ends...a village where 129th reserve anti-aircraft regiment was stationed. 06 05
- 06 05 We were trained as loaders and gun layers, etc. at the anti-aircraft and artillery squad. The training lasted from March 18 to May 1. On May 1st we were sent to the front. 06 37
- 06 37 We were on board a passenger train. At 4 am I was passing by my home town and my own house. I saw... I was warned: "If you... by any means..." We were on board a passenger train..."If you, by any means, get off the train you will be tried accordingly by a military tribunal". 07 05
- 07 05 I wrote a letter and put it into a triangular envelope. I said "My dear, don't worry. I am on my way to the front. I'm passing by our house". I saw a women walking by. I threw to her the letter her with my address on the envelope. 07 17
- 07 17 And obviously my parents did receive it. The thing was: I had a cousin by the name of Sioma. He lived in Zhitomir. He graduated from high school with honours. 07 34
- 07 34 He enrolled at Novogireevo Military Aviation College. Once the war broke out all of the graduates enlisted into the military. He was in fighter aviation. He went on a number of missions. 07 56
- 07 56 He sent his last letter from Gomel. After that he went missing in action. A week later Gomel was invaded. I was sent to town Mozer, Gomel Region. I thought I was facing the same fate as my cousin. 08 20

Yakiv Chudnovskyy

Russian Vets

- 08 20 As soon as... on May 2nd, we joined our military unit... we got off the train and right into action. At first we carried projectiles, we did this and that. There was a river-crossing on the river Mozer with a ferry boat and pontoon bridges. 08 56
- 08 56 A regular transportation flow ensured weapons supplies and evacuation of the wounded. We arrived there on May 1st and stayed for about 5 months. There were special check points there. We would cross the river Mozer. 09 34
- 09 34 There were saboteurs there. We watched for them sitting in camouflaged trenches. Occasionally we managed to catch deserters or collaborators. We brought them to our unit. 09 58
- 09 58 After that our unit was involved... before Minsk and in Minsk...our artillery was involved... After that we were delayed. Our unit received new American equipment. Before that we had 37 mm guns. What we received were 45 mm ones. 10 29
- 10 29 The guns were high quality automated ones. The shells were packed as if they were candy packs. Everything was very high quality. We ate American canned stewed meat. 10 52
- 10 52 And we were involved... Oh and we took our position on the left bank of the river Praga, Warsaw. Afterwards we were involved in liberation of Warsaw. As Anatoly put it, Warsaw lied in ruins. 11 18
- 11 18 There were land mines all over the place. It was a horrible site. Often... I spoke Yiddish a little...I was sent on reconnaissance missions or to deliver mail to the HQs in the night time. 11 36
- 11 36 While on my way I heard the sounds of shooting in the distance. Pieces of walls were torn off by the wind. I had to beat against the wind. I heard the sound of shooting in the distance... I was on my way hearing and seeing all that. 11 54
- 11 54 Our unit was stationed in Warsaw. Afterwards we were sent... we reached the river Oder. We were sent from Oder back to Warsaw. At that time the old government in exile in London... they had an intention to stage a kind of a coup. 12 19
- 12 19 What they did? There were cemeteries with vaults there. They were fundamentally build and beautiful. It was a place where they used to bring small arms and ammunition. It was obvious they were preparing for something. 12 39
- 12 39 We were assigned to guard it there. We used camouflage. There was an incident. They just brought coffins full of weapons. They were unloading it. We realized... we were given instructions "No shooting!" 13 04
- 13 04 I was armed with a submachine gun. I rushed out shouting "Hände hoch!" I aimed my gun at them. They all scattered! (Chuckling). After that it was clear... measures were taken... they were kept down. 13 23

Yakiv Chudnovskyy

Russian Vets

- 13 23 And when... oh and the Victory Day. On the Victory Day I was in Warsaw. On the 9th of May... there was a kind of a Kremlin in the downtown Warsaw...It was a mint house where the money were printed, the zloty. 13 47
- 13 47 We used the paper to write our letters home! Some of us grabbed the money thinking it was a real currency or something; naturally it wasn't. There... the Victory Day...the Germans or the Poles... there was a warehouse...14 06
- 14 06 One of our comrades ran into a barrel. By the smell of it he realized it was alcohol. It was on the 9th of May. He shot his submachine gun at the barrel. He perforated it. He started telling everyone...literally...14 29
- 14 29 ... the entire battalion... took pans or buckets full of alcohol, shouting "The Victory Day!!" Everyone got drunk. Our commander got scared "What's wrong with you?!" There must be discipline during the war!14 48
- 14 48 Afterwards it became clear... oh and the sergeant...he had a battle experience...He goes "Don't you drink it! I'm going to be the first to taste a sample!" (Chuckling) 15 00
- 15 00 He drank a sample and said "Oh, it's good. Go on, drink it!" That was an incident... literally all of us were disciplined. "Where's the barrel? Who did it?" But no one told who it was. 15 18
- 15 18 "Who was it?" "Everyone drank, end of story!" That was an anecdote or an incident! After that, the war being over, literally in July our unit was to be disbanded. I was sent to a military radio communication unit in Vilnius. 15 49
- 15 49 It didn't take me long to learn the *dot-and-dash*. I mastered it, I had known it before, I had done it back home. I had... there were German cities...we sent information from the Western Front to Moscow. 16 14
- 16 14 It didn't last longer than 2 months. Vilnius was a wonderful city. I remember a good synagogue there. There were lots of Jews there too. I remember speaking Yiddish to them. There was a prison on the opposite side of the street. Political prisoners were serving time in that prison. 16 42
- 16 42 We were disbanded again. We had a choice. I wanted to be a tank man. I was sent to a Tank College in Verkhniy Ufalei, Chelyabinsk Region. I completed the program as a driver. As Anatoly put it, those tanks were IS-2 model. 17 16
- 17 16 My tank was IS-3, a more up-to-date model. He told a story about fuelling the tanks using buckets. Our tanks were more up-to-date. It worked the right manner using a fuel tank. The tank was characterized by an exceptionally high cross-county ability. 17 42
- 17 42 It had spring suspensions. The crew didn't have to apply much force to open and close the manholes. The undercarriage was very good. I spend 6 months training to be a driver. Those were all possible kinds of manoeuvres: overcoming obstacles, etc. 18 07

Yakiv Chudnovskyy

Russian Vets

- 18 07 The tanks weren't equipped for firing out of hand, only during short-time stops, right? I acquired a specialized training as a mechanic/driver. After that I was sent to Port Arthur. 18 25
- 18 25 We received tanks in Chelyabinsk, a new IS-3 model. They were tested on a tank training area. My number was 517, I still remember it. The tank was like my own. 18 48
- 18 48 Where there was an alarm or we formed a line... it had its own feature. During testing...it had a sharp angle at the front. When tested...by a mechanic or anyone...he probably applied breaks... and made a dent. 19 16
- 19 16 When we were on a mission, sometimes at night, I used to touch it: Oh, that's my baby! It had a small dent at the front. I was with this tank in Port Arthur. 19 33
- 19 33 The location was called Dafanshen. That was where the Japanese army had attacked the Russian Army in 1905. We were stationed in Kwantung barracks. Those Japanese! What barracks they built, what washrooms, what clothing they had!19 52
- 19 52 They had pure-wool winter underwear and socks. The facility was first class! We admired everything while stationed there. So that was Port Arthur. When we were off service we used to go sightseeing to Port Arthur. 20 23
- 20 23 The Japanese erected a special memorial there in honour of Russian soldiers. We even met some of the surviving veterans. Some had married Chinese women. Oh how they cried, how they wanted to be back home, to send regards to the families! 20 54
- 20 54 ... in Ryazan or Moscow...(inaudible) it's better not to get caught there, you wouldn't be treated nice... They were missing so much! That's where I served till October, '50. 21 15
- 21 15 There were no new army drafts at that time. It could be explained by the fact that men power was needed to raise the agricultural sector. Comrades came to us; all of them were married with children. 21 30
- 21 30 They were kind of...physically... not so fit...We treated them like our own family. We shared... we had enough food. We shared our experience for them to master the skills as soon as possible... as the mechanics, shooters... etc. 22 03
- 22 03 We lived like a family. I still have some pictures. In '50, at the end of the year I demobilized. I returned home to Pavlovsky Posad. There was something that surprised me. 22 20
- 22 20 I had finished a 8-grade school and worked as a metal worker. I was eager to get any job. They tell me "OK". I come back 2 days later: "We don't have any openings any more". 22 39

Yakiv Chudnovskyy

Russian Vets

- 22 39 I searched for a job for 6 months or so – without success. Afterwards I met a friend, a very good friend, we had common interest in geography. We knew the names of all world’s waterfalls, capitals, rivers, etc. We were good friends. 23 06
- 23 06 I met him. I said “I can’t get a job”. His father was a Civil War invalid. He had worked in human resources departments. He was retired at the time. He figured out right away what the problem was. 23 24
- 23 24 My friend says “Come to HR tomorrow”. I didn’t know what to think. When I came to HR they hired me right away. What was the problem? You remember the year 1948? 23 41
- 23 41 That was when the State of Israel for founded. Anti-Semitic campaign raged in the country. When I used to come to an HR... I went there wearing my uniform...“OK, you’re hired. Leave your papers. Come back in 2 days”. “There are no openings any more”. 23 57
- 23 57 That’s what was happening anywhere I tried to apply for a job. I even went to “Elektrostal” Plant, trying to find a job there. They denied me any job I applied for. 24 08
- 24 08 And so my friend told about me to his father and I was hired. I got a simple job. Afterwards I finished an evening secondary school. I made up my mind to apply for a college. 24 29
- 24 29 My mother was an invalid. They paid scholarships in colleges. And so I enrolled at a college. My knowledge was just basic. However I hoped I would pass all the exams. 24 45
- 24 45 Of course I... (can I go on?) There was a law: war veterans were admitted non-competitively...non-competitively. And so I passed all the exams. As far as I remember I got one “4” mark and two “3” marks at the exams. 25 08
- 25 08 When my co-workers asked me how I did at the exams I said “I’m admitted”. My friends and my co-workers congratulated me. All of a sudden, a week later... right before September 1st...what was the year? ‘54...25 32
- 25 32 ...I received a letter: “You are not admitted as you failed your competitive examination. You may withdraw your application and go to any college where numbers of candidates are low”25 45
- 25 45 I was disappointed. I wasn’t able to figure out what had happened. I took an unpaid leave. I didn’t say anything to anyone at work. I went there. I wanted to see the Director. His name was Komarov. 26 02
- 26 02 His secretary looked like a real anti-Semite. He entered the office. I wanted to follow him. She said “He’s busy”. She knew what was going on. I didn’t listen to her and entered his office. 26 19

Yakiv Chudnovskyy

Russian Vets

- 26 19 "Hello". "Hello". I go "I don't understand what the reason might be: I passed all the exams but was told that I failed". He goes "What? You are not admitted as you failed the competitive examination". 26 33
- 26 33 I go "Where are you? The whole Soviet Union knows while you, in the downtown Moscow...you don't know anything? There's a law that all war vets who pass admittance exams..." 26 44
- 26 44 He goes "What do you want?" I go "I want to study". He goes "Go to another college". I banged my fist on his desk. I go "I don't know! I'm going to be a student here whether or nor you are a director". I slammed the door and left. 27 04
- 27 04 I was at a loss then. I wrote a letter to Moscow's Komsomol Committee. 3 days later I received a letter from them. I remember the name of the person who signed it. His name was Pustovoitov. 27 23
- 27 23 I got a pass and went upstairs. I saw my director approaching me. I turned away from him. The elevator must have been out of order. He too was climbing the stairs. 27 39
- 27 39 He was climbing down while I was climbing up. I entered the office. I saw my letter in Pustovoitov's hands. I saw that something was written in a bold red writing. 27 49
- 27 49 He goes... his first question was "Do you want to study or do you just want to be a writer?" It was mid September already. I go "Sure I'd like to study. But I don't know... if the director... he can always fail me whenever he wants...It's hard to study if I don't get a scholarship". 28 21
- 28 21 He goes "He just left my office. He's not going to wrong you. You can go. It's settled." I go "I need a place in a students' hostel". He goes "Tell him you need a place in a hostel" 28 39
- 28 29 It was too far for me and too time consuming to commute to the college from Pavlovsky Posad every day. There was a college's hostel right in Pushkino, on the river Klyazma, right? 28 54
- 28 54
End of file
- Yakiv Chudnovskyy 2
Duration 4:38
- 00 00 I came to see him. Now he was so nice to me. He goes "Here's a letter from some guys "This is the beginning of the academic year; dear so and so; I am being delayed in the Army. I'd like to continue my studies". You should have spoken with me like that!" 00 19
- 00 19 I said nothing...nothing. I said "I'd like a place in a hostel" He goes "No problem". And his secretary told me "You've got a place in the students' hostel. 00 31

Yakiv Chudnovskyy

Russian Vets

- 00 31 I went to the college. On one occasion he came to our physics class as a replacement teacher. I thought "He's going to bother me now". While I was a student there, he was afraid of me and I was afraid of him. 00 48
- 00 48 I didn't tell about that to anybody. And so I graduated from the college. Afterwards, the secretary wanted to assign me to a position in the Far East. I said "I've been there. Let youngsters go there". 01 04
- 01 04 Where would I go? I looked at a map. Instead of Moscow region I picked Makeevka, Donbass. It was close to Donetsk, the place could be reached by train or air. 01 18
- 01 18 I went there by myself. While there I got myself a degree in Metallurgical Engineering. I worked as shift engineer and branch manager for inert gas production unit; I worked as a process engineer and assembly engineer. 01 36
- 01 36 I continued to work there even as a pensioner. This badge (shows)... I never wore it. In '89 I was awarded this badge as a socialist competition winner. It wasn't just for nothing. 02 07
- 02 07 Every year on the Metallurgist Day, the Ministry of Ferrous Metallurgy nominated candidates for winner of socialist competition. The commission was very thorough. 02 20
- 02 20 They took into account all the factors. We were working in energy production branch. They took into account such factors as prime cost, oxygen quality, number of workplace accidents, aesthetics, etc. We ended up all-Russia's winners! 02 42
- 02 42 Today's the first time I wear this badge. (Were you, as a Jew, mistreated by officers during the war?) Never! Never! I had Jewish commanders. We communicated as equals. 03 10
- 03 10 No, not at all during the war. At work I didn't have any conflict situations with my workers; while I did have conflicts with my supervisors. (During the 50's, the Doctors' case)... right (the anti-Nazi committee, Mikhoels, etc.)... right, right...03 37
- 03 37 (That's where you faced it) Right! I did. I think it was a command from above. I worked for a very decent man, a war vet. He said "You can come to me any time and everything will be OK". 03 57
- 03 57 While in Canada... our son...immigrated in '96, right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He was a gold-medal school graduate. He got a degree with high distinction. 04 19
- 04 19 He was looking for a job. Some one left. He got a job as a programmer. In 2000 my wife and I immigrated to Canada. (Thank you very much). You're welcome. 04 38
- End of file End of interview