

Frumkin Veniamin Lvovich

Russian Vets

Interview date Aug 30/2012

File 975_5161
Duration 22:47

- 00 00 (background conversation) (Introduce yourself) My name is Frumkin, Veniamin Lvovich. I was born in 1922, in Smolensk. (Your parents) My father was a forester, he passed away when I was only 3 years old. 0056
- 00 56 My mother, she had a difficult life, she had 4 children: 3 daughters and I, the baby of the family. She was illiterate. She was from Poland, she had difficulty speaking Russian. 01 14
- 01 14 My memories of her are so warm. (How did you survive?) You know, I didn't feel any particular... what do you mean "survive", you mean my childhood? (Yes. Did you mother work?). No, she didn't. My father managed to set up a small store for her. 01 45
- 01 45 And it helped her to make ends meet. She was trading, making mere kopeks. I didn't feel any particular poverty. My mother always gave me something to eat. She gave me money to buy a bun or an ice cream cone. I remember eating strawberries with sour cream and sugar which I liked very much. 02 15
- 02 16 So with all the apparent poverty I used to regale myself. (Did you study or work?) Yes, I finished 10 grades, rather 9 grades. A cousin of mine advised me, as my mother couldn't afford to put me through a University, she advised me to enrol in a college. 02 53
- 02 53 And so I did. I was admitted to the college, Moscow College of military engineering. Before that I applied to another military school which was Navy department of 1st Medical Institute, Leningrad. However, my chest was too small, they told me they couldn't admit me to the Navy department. 03 24
- 03 24 And then the war began. I was involved in the war as a military college student. As a military college student I was in the Moscow defence zone. Afterwards we were transferred to Tartar republic to finish the college program. After graduation we were given the rank of lieutenants. 03 56
- 03 56 We were sent to the front right away. I was at the front. I had a big position: I was regiment's engineer, just think of it: I was just a 20 or 19 year old kid. I was regiment's engineer at the very front line. 04 20
- 04 20 I was in 1160 Rifle regiment, 352 Rifle division. The very front line was a trench. Well I wasn't exactly in a trench. I was in an arrears dugout with two trenches in front of me: the German and the Soviet ones. 04 42
- 04 42 It was an active defence on our part. Our goal was to capture a "Yazyk", a German prisoner who would talk. We spotted a German machine gunner and brought down fire on both sides making sure he couldn't escape. 05 09
- 05 09 My sappers made a passage over a mine land surrounded by barbwire. I remember it all. I remember taking out the prisoner. It wasn't an easy job to take a prisoner from the front line. 05 30

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- 05 30 I stayed at the front line for quite a while – over a year. Afterwards I was at the war but not at the front line any more, not a regiment’s engineer in a trench. I had a different position. 05 47
- 05 47 But all the same I was in action. There were raids and shooting and wounded soldiers and dead bodies everywhere. It was scary. I remember the first time we went for a “Yazyk”. Our artillery was all over the place. 06 08
- 06 08 We fired at a German trench which was 200 or 300 m away from us. The artillery made quite a noise. I remember sitting in a trench with my white camouflage cloak on, as it was in the winter. 06 26
- 06 26 I was so scared that at some point I started running back from the trench. Afterwards I adapted to the combat environment. I can be proud of myself: our chief of staff wrote in a commendation that I was courageous in combat. It was equal to being awarded a medal. 06 48
- 06 48 As for medals, I do have some. I have 3 medals. I didn’t receive one medal by accident. I can tell you why. We accompanied a tank brigade, I was in command of the accompanying company, the platoon commanders were in front. I was with our chief of staff in the tank. 07 12
- 07 12 The platoon commanders received their medals. Our chief of staff asked me why I wasn’t given a medal. I told him that I loved the commendation I was previously given. I thought I would keep it if I survived. 07 32
- 07 32 But they gave it to me just as a recognition of my courage by my own unit. But never mind, I was happy as it was. After the war I was a military academy student.... First I was a military advisor for Korean People’s Democratic Republic. 07 51
- 07 51 I mean for North Korea. After that I enrolled in Military Engineering Academy. I studied at Military Engineering Academy for 5 years and 8 months. I finished the complete course. I started my studies there as a captain and on graduation I was promoted to a lieutenant colonel. 08 17
- 08 17 At the period of time... it was in ‘53... the time period wasn’t quite favourable for my nationality. I wasn’t given a position higher than my rank. There was an order at the time, saying that those who had the rank of a major were to fill a position of a lieutenant colonel. 08 48
- 08 48 However, being a major I was sent to fill a position of a major. But never mind. What really mattered was that I survived. I was wounded: a shrapnel hit me in my neck just 1 cm short of the carotid artery. 09 05
- 09 05 Should the carotid artery have been hit, I wouldn’t be here with you today or speaking to that matter. After graduation from the academy I served and I worked. I was sent to Minsk to serve as a military representative at a military plant. 09 24

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09 24	There, in Minsk I met my future wife, who is sitting next to me now. I am happy with my choice: she is both pretty and my soul mate. But I wasn't let to serve all the time. A time came for me to leave the army. 09 48	
09 48	I was over 50 years old. And I stayed at the plant to continue my work as a civilian. I was a senior inspector in charge of hoisting cranes. I worked there until the decision was made for me to leave... (Can I go on speaking?) 10 17	
10 17	...for Israel. We were given an opportunity to leave. For me to leave... I was nervous thinking I wouldn't be let go to Israel, taking into account my work at a secret production plant. 10 33	
10 33	I worked as 1 st Department Manager, which was a secret department at a military production. I tried to get rid of a number of top secret documents. They were "top secret" as opposed to "top important" which I didn't have. 10 54	
10 54	I destroyed the top documents following the official procedure for destroying documents of such level of secrecy. The rest of the remaining secret documents didn't make me nervous at all. 11 03	
11 03	I wasn't kept from leaving. I was let go to Israel with my family. (the fronts you were in after the battle of Moscow) 3 rd Belarusian Front, I'm not sure about the other fronts, I know about the armies: the 31 st army, 3 rd Shock Army. As for the fronts – that was the 3 rd Belarusian front, I know that for sure. 11 41	
11 41	I have a medal here (shows) for Liberation of Czechoslovakia, this one is for graduation from the Academy. (Where were you when the war ended?) When the war ended... well I remember how it was: we were shooting in the air. 12 05	
12 05	Where was I? Weird...the 3 rd Belarusian Front... let me see... Prussia...We started from Moscow advancing to Vitebsk, Grodno, Poland, Suvalki, Prussia, and storming Konigsberg... I was sent from Konigsberg to the Far East, to fight against Japan. 12 46	
12 46	I was awarded Medal for fighting against Japan in the Far East. For me 2 wars were over: with Germany in Prussia and with Japan in the Khalkhyn Gol area. That was the war against Japan. 13 09	
13 09	(Your medals) I have 16 medals, and I haven't received some of them yet. Some of them are anniversary commemorative medals. I have 3 Orders: the Order of Red Star which I received in Poland, the Order of the Patriotic War, 1 st class and the Order of Patriotic War 2 nd class which was given to those who had been previously awarded with the same Order 1 class and proceeded to the end of the war. 13 43	
13 43	Those are my Orders. As for the medals: Defence of Moscow, Storm of Konigsberg...(The highlights from the 2 wars) I remember the highlights...there were interesting episodes during the war with Germany. 14 12	

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- 14 12 You mean in combat? (Yes). I have already told you about capturing a "Yazyk". Once, on a New Year eve, I asked Akhmedianov, my sergeant major, to set a sleigh and to go further away from the front line. 14 49
- 14 49 I was so tired of the constant shooting. I needed some quiet time at the rear. I fell asleep and he brought me to the rear while I was asleep. That was one interesting episode. 15 01
- 15 01 There was another episode. There was a division's engineer and my commander who treated me well, and I remember his name. I was tired of being in a rifle regiment... I wasn't supposed to be tired of being at my post...15 25
- 15 25 He understood my feelings well: all the time seeing mine fields, wounds, etc. etc. He gave me an assignment to go to the rear of the front. I went there, but a day later I was ordered to go back to the front line. 15 39
- 15 39 Why? My replacement was killed by a sniper just 1 day after his coming to occupy my position. I had to return to my regiment to fill that position. (sighs) (As a Jew were you mistreated?) 16 10
- 16 10 No doubt. No doubt! I wasn't promoted higher than the rank of a major for 14 years! And I was an Academy graduate! I knew it because I was supposed to be promoted after 5 years of being in the rank of a major. I was kept from promotion.
- 16 30 Well, ok, I had a good job. But I knew it. Besides, if you want to know what my feelings were, I can tell you how it was after I graduated from the Academy... 16 46
- 16 46 ...Even before the graduation from the Academy, there was a command tactics department student by the name of Pfeifer. He was an "A" student, etc. While I was an average student, he was an outstanding one. 16 58
- 16 58 He wasn't allowed to continue working on the diploma project. He was a lieutenant colonel already. He was removed from the diploma project and demoted in rank. You see they found a wrong book in his stuff! 17 13
- 17 13 I was spared because there was information on my dossier that my father was a factory worker. At that time the original milieu was important: they checked if your parents were factory workers or office workers. 17 25
- 17 25 And you know what happened? I know what I am talking about. His name was Pfeifer. I was sent to fill the position according to my rank instead of a higher position as I have already told you before. 17 52
- 17 52 The Academy Commander, Colonel General Kotlyar, Hero of the Soviet Union, and a well known military commander, was replaced with Colonel General Galitsky. 18 17

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- 18 17 He died at the age of 53 and I think that he died following the shock he had gone through. He was humiliated. At first he worked as a Department Head for Engineering troops tactics. 18 30
- 18 30 But you cannot compare the Department of Engineering troops tactics with the post of the Head of Kuybyshev Military Engineering Academy. (Was it this way at the front?) No, it wasn't. I didn't sense anything. Not a single time. Not at the front. 18 51
- 18 51 We used to be equal. We were facing death. And we were in a harm's way. There was no difference between Tartars and ...At some point I was in a Tartar division. 19 04
- 19 04 I was sent to the Tartar division. Hamisianov was a Tartar man. He was killed... rather he wasn't. Ivanov was killed. (sighs). Well, answering your question, I wasn't subjected to any mistreatment when I was at the war. 19 29
- 19 29 Nothing was based on my nationality then, nothing at all. (Do you consider yourself a hero?) You mean a hero? No I don't. But I was in combat. I was on a number of dangerous missions. I was at the very front line for 1.5 years. I was sent on a lot of missions, we caught many "Yazyks". 20 02
- 20 02 Personally I didn't shoot sitting in trenches, although I had chances to spot and shoot someone. So in this respect I'm clean in God's eyes. Just joking. One of my comrades who was sent there before me was killed by a sniper. I had to go back. It means I was smarter than he; I didn't stick my head out. Or he was too tall, I don't know. 20 31
- 20 31 (As a military advisor what did you do in Korea?) As an advisor I was involved in training and instructing them. They had an army, with platoons and companies. They had a personnel arrangement similar to what we had. 20 54
- 20 54 Besides, they had similar ranks and insignia. We trained them how to fight. We had interpreters. It was weird that an interpreter was promoted to lieutenant colonel. He married a Korean woman there. 21 18
- 21 18 He was an ethnic Korean too; we had Koreans in the army. (Should the young generations know about Jewish heroes – WWII veterans?) Young people must know about heroism of people who lived before them. 21 50
- 21 50 They must know about their gallantry fighting the enemy of the human race. We were the defenders of the civilization. What were the god damned Nazis? They thought they were the superior nation while the rest of the humankind were their slaves they could torture and murder. 22 25
- 22 25 Just think what they did to the Jews! This is something we should never forget. (Thank you) 22 47

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Duration 1:03

00 00

My mother and my sister were evacuated to Kuybyshev region. It's interesting how I was a student of Kuybyshev Academy and they were evacuated to Kuybyshev region. They lived there. And strange as it was our correspondence was never interrupted.00 26

00 26

At that time there were no stamps. We used to fold our letters as triangles. I used to send them money all through the war. Well, not exactly cash, but they received my allowance for me. I was in touch with my mother and sister all the time. (Do you have any war photos?)00 58

00 58

Ask Maya. (Background conversations) 01 03

End of file

End of interview