

**Grinberg, Shulim Sonovich**

**Russian Vets**

**Interview date Aug 29/2012**

975\_5141

Duration 37:22

- 00 00 (Background conversation) I have a good life here. I have son and daughter, grandchildren and great grandchildren. One of these days I am going to Toronto for Bar-Mitzvah. Thank God! 0032
- 00 32 (Introduce yourself) Grinberg Shulim Sonovich, I was born in Rybnitsa, Moldavian SSR, on the Soviet side, the former...that's where I was born. (When) I was born in '22. But there is one correction.01 04
- 01 04 The matter is that when I was young I was a healthy man, and it happened so that before enrolling in a military college, I was too young to be admitted. I changed my date of birth to February, '21. 01 23
- 01 23 Officially and according to the documents, my date of birth is February 21, '21. But in fact I was born on an Yom Kippur Day in '22. That's clean. But officially my year of birth is '21. And for the purpose of service and jobs, my year of birth was '21. I volunteered to enrol in a military college. In order to be admitted I "added 1.5 years" to my actual age. 02 00
- 02 00 (Why did you go to the college?) (Laughs) Well, you see, it's an enthusiasm: beautiful uniforms... a military aviation college... beautiful uniforms with various stripes, etc. 02 24
- 02 24 And so I enrolled in the college. At that time, in '39 when I enrolled, nobody cared about education 02 34
- 02 34 (just a second. Background conversation)02 59
- 02 59 In '39 I was a technical college student in Odessa. There was a Jewish machine-building college there. Not long before graduation I wanted to switch to aviation. I applied for admission into a military college. I applied at Voroshilov's military Commissariat in Odessa. 03 17
- 03 17 And so I was sent there, to Volsk Aviation/Technical College. The public mood of that time was defending our Motherland etc. And so it happened that I ended up being a military college student. 03 39
- 03 39 I ended up in a college. It was a real army life, especially after the Finnish war, everything was so strict, unbelievable! Army service was hard. I had a little regret then. 04 00
- 04 00 It was like this: there were officers serving in line and technical officers who taught us. During the training time... outside of the college... you were completely subordinate to the training officers. But once you were outside of the college going to practical instruction at an airdrome etc. the instructors were closer to us, they were more real. 04 26
- 04 26 And so he said to us: you can quit the army only through the court. There weren't at the time... So if you are messing around or something in order to

**Grinberg, Shulim Sonovich**

**Russian Vets**

**Interview date Aug 29/2012**

- be dismissed, you'll go to a battalion of military offenders... they were created before the war. 04 44
- 04 44 And the term you served at the offenders battalion will not be counted as your service time. You will still have 3 years to serve, as it was the term of army service. That's how it was. After that I graduated from the college and so on 0501
- 05 01 (When the war began what happened to you?) The war? Oh! As I have already told you, and I don't want to repeat myself... The thing is, after graduation from the college we were sent to Kalinin. Our regiment was formed over again. 05 22
- 05 22 Our regiment was to participate in an air parade near Moscow which was to take place on May 1<sup>st</sup>, '41. The new technical personnel came from the college, while the flying personnel were sent to us from the Far East. 05 40
- 05 40 The guys had medals, they had fought in Khalkhin Gol, etc. And so, after the May parade, the summer camps time began. Our regiment flew to Staritsy, Kalinin Region. 05 59
- 05 59 There was a big clearing in the forest. As a matter of fact, there had been nothing there before we came. A big clearing...And our regiment... there was an academic squadron in it, they came there for practical instruction. 06 18
- 06 18 And so the first days of the war...as I told you before...I'll say it again...We equipped the airdrome, made canvass tents, toilet trenches, etc...and placed airplanes. 06 42
- 06 42 We learned how to set up camouflage, etc. We placed airplanes all over the field. And all of a sudden there was an alarm. We went, each crew to its airplane. We sat and waited. An hour, 2, 3 4 hours passed. There was nothing, nobody came to tell us what was going on. 07 08
- 07 08 Suddenly, we saw a car approaching the field. He announced something near each airplane. We heard "Hooray, hooray". He approached us: the regiment commander, the commissar and others. 07 20
- 07 20 He said: "Comrades, the war has begun and we will teach them a lesson". And we too shouted "Hooray!" Our crew commander was... our aircraft was SB - High-speed bombers. And the crew commander... he didn't come down, he was delayed in his cockpit, up there. 07 52
- 07 52 I looked at him and saw the tears in his eyes. He was crying. He had participated in Khalkhin Gol. When he came down, I asked him: "What's wrong? We are going to teach them a lesson". He said: "What do you know? It's not going to be the way you think it will". 08 14
- 08 14 And true, the first day, the first bombardment, the first missions, very big losses, many casualties among gunners/radio operators. And I was on 16 missions as a gunner. 08 37

<b>Grinberg, Shulim Sonovich</b>	<b>Russian Vets</b>	<b>Interview date Aug 29/2012</b>
08 37	And a month later, nothing was left of our regiment... well not exactly nothing... That was my first impression. There were bombardments... there were jokes told, etc...Kind of military jokes, you see... 09 00	
09 00	Afterwards the unit was formed over again, we were given other aircraft, again in combat, etc. those were my first days at war, you know. Just the first day at war, as on the second day we were in combat. 09 16	
09 16	(Where were you in combat?) It's hard to say, you know. Well, I have never taken interest in that. When recently it started to be of interest, I wasn't able to make ends meet. 09 31	
09 31	We were in Kalinin region. As I understand it was the Central Front. Afterwards I was at the Bryansk, Voronezh Fronts and near Moscow. And the last one was the Baltic Front. 09 54	
09 54	But I don't exactly remember the locations, etc. I know for sure we were near Kursk. However, our regiment wasn't in combat there. I worked as part of communications team for U-2 aircraft. And we were sent on missions to fly to that area. Probably to set up communications, they didn't tell us for what purpose. 10 23	
10 23	We participated in that battle. And that's when I was awarded Medal for Combat Merits. Afterwards, on and on and I ended up at the Baltic Front. (Where did the end of the war found you?) 10 41	
10 41	That I can tell you. The end of the war found me in Kruspils, Lithuania, rather Latvia. That was when the war ended officially. In fact the war was going on. Our regiment went on fighting against the Kurzeme Army Group. 11 02	
11 02	However I was in Kruspils. The fact is, our field aviation repairs shops were located in Kruspils. I serviced U-2 aircraft. You know what I'm talking about -- the wooden ones. Do you have an idea? 11 22	
11 22	We had to repair them very often. The thing was: they were assembled... they didn't manufacture new ones, we used to assemble an aircraft out of several ones collected from aero clubs. 11 38	
11 38	I lived in a hotel, in Kruspils. I heard shooting in the street. We ran out. The hotel house keeper said: "Guys, the war ended!". Everyone ran out as they were: in underwear and with guns. We started shooting in the air: with rockets, with whatever we had. 12 03	
12 03	That's how the Victory day saw me. (Your medals). Well, I have 3 combat medals. Please don't look at those I'm wearing. They are: Combat Merits for Kursk; Order of Red Star, which I was given in '43 or '44. We weren't just communications. We also delivered medications and food to partisans. 12 44	
12 44	Sometimes we carried paratroopers, you know what I mean. That was the reason why I was awarded that medal, I think. And the third medal was given to me for participation in the Great Patriotic War, and it's considered a combat medal. So I was awarded 3 combat medals. 13 03	

**Grinberg, Shulim Sonovich**

**Russian Vets**

**Interview date Aug 29/2012**

- 13 03 The rest of them are commemorative anniversary medals. (The most memorable war episode or a story) I can't say. You see, a mechanic's job is working day and night. No quarters, no barracks, just working day and night servicing airplanes. 13 37
- 13 37 Rain or snow or freezing cold. That's how it was. And I can say I did my job, see? Sometimes I was sent on missions, especially in the winter time. The thing is the airplanes ran on skis. And when it landed water was under the skis because of the friction. 14 09
- 14 09 Should the airplane stop, the ski got frozen up and the airplane was like a useless box. I went on missions. My task was to jump out of the airplane at landing and to put wooden sticks under the skis. That was just one of thousands examples, putting wooden sticks under the skis to prevent them from freezing up. 14 42
- 14 42 (Laughs) Another example is the testing of U-2 aircraft. Its tail was very lightweight, very lightweight. If the tail wasn't kept before the take off or during the test run... it wasn't like starting a motor and off you go, he had to test run it in order to test how it performs...I had to keep the tail.15 21
- 15 21 During the take off he couldn't steer properly: U-2 just had a handle going back and forth, accelerator and a couple of instruments...that was all it had. I had to run alongside the airplane, keeping to its planes and if he wanted to turn around on the ground, not in the air, I had to...15 46
- 15 46 after that, if I went on mission, I had to jump into the cockpit. It was ok in the summer, but in the winter, wearing an overall, I had to run like crazy, sweating all over, and jump into the cockpit. The cockpit was just a visor. 16 10
- 16 10 there was nothing, except the visor, it felt like you were riding a bike. And in freezing cold you're freezing through, and then you have to run... (laughs) That's how it was: working head and ears. 16 29
- 16 29 (Do you consider yourself a hero?) I'm not a hero. I was just doing my job, see? Of course it was a lousy and dirty job. War is a dirty job as it is. But basically it's just a job, no matter who - we just did our job. 16 48
- 16 48 (did you feel that you're a Jew? Or did they make you feel that way?)I'm going to tell what. My name at birth is Shulim Sonovich and I have never changed it, never. During the college studies there were incidents. Once a guy started picking on me and both of us were sent to the disciplinary cell. 17 20
- 17 20 They used to make fun of me because I couldn't pronounce "r". And that's where he taught me to pronounce "r". But when I got to the field forces, and there in the regiment... you see my "family" was small: 3 airplanes, 3 pilots and I was a mechanic for the 3 airplanes, two assistants, that's it. 17 44

<b>Grinberg, Shulim Sonovich</b>	<b>Russian Vets</b>	<b>Interview date Aug 29/2012</b>
17 44	I didn't feel it at all. And not long before the end of the war, one day we were talking about marriage. Before that I met a guy from Poland. He worked at aircraft repair shops after the liberation of Poland. 18 17	
18 17	We became friends. He said: "Promise me you don't marry a Russian girl, a "goyka". Just talking. One day we were talking about marrying after the end of the war. I said, I would only marry a Jewish girl. 18 41	
18 41	And when the war ended we were sent to the East, but we didn't make it there. We returned to Krustpils where I had been before when the war ended. I was busy working. The crew commander went to town. 19 11	
19 11	When he came back he said: I saw a girl, a Yiddish girl (cries) and I will introduce you to her. We met and she became my wife. (speaks in a broken voice). But while in the regiment I never felt it, never. 19 40	
19 40	Our regiment commissar was a Jew, his name was Kozlov. There were some engineers and technicians. But each had his own airplane, you see each one had his own job to do. Sometimes we sat and talked etc. 19 53	
19 53	But it was him who introduced me [to my future wife]. (and after the war?) Well, after the war...I saw the end of the war in Latvia. Well after the war, you see... the war was still going on there. 20 15	
20 15	There were "isergi", beating the Jews... those who came back... the "isergi" killed them on the roads. I was still in the army. We were sent to fight against those bandits. There was a strict order, 2 persons from our regiment were shot, the order was not to touch Latvians, as they were... that was a former Soviet republic. 20 53	
20 53	Allegedly they were not guilty, you know how it was. What they did? There were isolated farmsteads there. They were farmers. When they saw a military man passing by what did they do? They had guns by their sides. They shot the military, put away the gun and went on working. 21 18	
21 18	We were sent there from our units. The war was over, the airplanes didn't fly. We were sent to the forest to fight against them. I had settled there more or less well. We were thinking of staying there. 21 47	
21 47	Before the release I took an assignment for Riga, thinking of settling there. Afterwards it happened so that our house was robbed when we were out. It wasn't just me. And so we left. I left for Rubnitsa where my mother lived. By the way when Rybnitsa was liberated... I wrote a letter... there had been a ghetto, and I thought my family were dead. 22 23	
22 23	I wrote a letter to the Town Council and received a response from them. At that time I was at repairs. The airplane was in such a condition that it needed a repair every 6 months. 22 37	
22 37	When the letter came to the regiment, they sent an airplane to me to let me know about it. What I'm saying is that there was nothing of the kind in the regiment. 22 54	

**Grinberg, Shulim Sonovich**

**Russian Vets**

**Interview date Aug 29/2012**

- 22 54 After that I came to Rybnitsa (laughs). I realized there was no chance for me to find a job and get settled properly. My uncle lived in Chernovtsy. My wife and I went to Chenovtsy, we had no possessions, no food to eat. 23 14
- 23 14 We stayed at my uncle's for a week. At that time my wife found a job and I found a job too. We were given a temporary apartment. It happened like this. We went to the military commandant's office. There was a job for a woman typing and cleaning. 23 35
- 23 35 And they gave us an apartment. When I was released, I got a reference letter saying that I was recommended... you know the Soviet stuff. I was referred to a job. When I came to Chernovtsy, I started one job, then I started another job, and there was nothing else to do. 24 01
- 24 01 "If you want to get a good job you have to pay for it". I hadn't money at all. I decided to drop by a party district committee. I had a reference letter and I would accept any job: I needed a coupon for rationed food. 24 19
- 24 19 I dropped by the party district committee and asked if they could give me a job. "What job do you want?" I said "Just any job, whatever vacancy is available. I am a mechanic"... Before that I dropped by the airport there -- (laughs)...24 36
- 24 36 No way. He said: "Well go and get yourself a job". I went "They want money". He went "Pay". The district party committee secretary! I thought "fuck you!" And so I went... Well my friends told me that there was a vacancy of a metal worker or an electrician at the electric power plant. 25 02
- 25 02 I went to the electric power plant. There was a vacancy of a controller for electrical supply. The controller's job title was that of a metal worker. A man had just been hired for the position. He had paid for it and was hired.25 21
- 25 21 However I was told there wasn't any vacancy there. I thought to myself: fuck you! I went to the manager's office. I saw a lieutenant colonel of aviation sitting in his office. 25 31
- 25 31 I talked to him. He said "No problem, we have a vacancy, if you're willing to take this position". He hadn't been told that somebody had already been taken to fill that position. I went "Yes, I do, but he told me there was no vacancy". 25 47
- 25 47 He called him into his office and said "You see this man? Hire him". "But somebody has already been hired" "I don't care. I want you to hire this man right now". And so I was hired. 25 59
- 25 59 I worked at the electric power plant for 43 years until I left the country. I went to finish a college and then some more training programs. In any case I got a very good job there. Besides, the party line, if you're interested to know. 26 24

<b>Grinberg, Shulim Sonovich</b>	<b>Russian Vets</b>	<b>Interview date Aug 29/2012</b>
26 24	6 months later a letter from my unit was received, saying that they were looking for me. I was called to the office and asked why I hadn't registered with the party organization. 26 38	
26 38	I said I didn't want... rather not really didn't want...I said I didn't have a chance because I had been unemployed for some time. I couldn't tell them about a real reason. 26 49	
26 49	They started trying to persuade me. They said they would pay the membership fees, which were 15 kopeks a month. The thing was, the electric power plant was located in a western town. 27 06	
27 06	Those who worked there... specialists who came to the town weren't interested in "low" jobs like that. They were interested in better paid jobs. They didn't speak Russian, nor did they have any education. 27 22	
27 22	They needed a man. I worked and demonstrated that I... well, they persuaded me and I registered with the party organization. Afterwards... well I think I was well respected...I was promoted to foreman and to shop manager. 27 48	
27 48	Years passed by. One day my daughter and son-in-law told me they wanted to leave the country for Israel, well for Canada. Do I take too much of your time? (No. Should young generation know about the Jewish veterans' heroism in WWII?) 28 25	
28 25	What can I tell you? Of course they should. My children and grandchildren know. The children are interested in knowing, while the grandchildren do not understand. They should know, because history repeats itself. 28 50	
28 50	People think: Canada is a democratic country and everything is ok here. They are mistaken. Because the instinct of anti-Semitism and the instinct of stealing, especially here in Canada, when so many people came here from southern...you see what happened in Vancouver? Robbing. 29 25	
29 25	Students come to the streets of Montreal, they are educated people. They are humanities students. They make uproar, shattering window glasses. It would be wrong not to be prepared for that. 29 43	
29 43	(What should be done for the young generation to know about your heroism?) They should know the truth. They should know the truth about what happened. 30 00	
30 00	That's all, there is nothing more to it because embellishing will be wrong. Look at what happened to me. "Going to the army, getting stripes, flying, getting a medal, getting to places with a medal" I didn't realize... well I did... I was told about bands: Denikin's, Petlyura's... my parents had gone through it all. 30 29	
30 29	I saw the consequences. I saw survivors...What was I thinking when I was young? I thought it would be ok. I didn't realize that if I went to the army I would have to be around airplanes day and night. 30 49	

<b>Grinberg, Shulim Sonovich</b>	<b>Russian Vets</b>	<b>Interview date Aug 29/2012</b>
----------------------------------	---------------------	-----------------------------------

- 30 49 Carrying everything on my shoulders. If somebody pours water from up high, you would freeze and you cannot walk. Or if you fix a screw, you spit on it, it freezes up to your finger and you fix it. Nobody thought about that. 31 04
- 31 04 You have to know the truth. We should educate them to know about the traditions. I am not talking about being religious. But the traditions! They should know about our people's traditions. 31 23
- 31 23 (Thank you very much) (Background conversation) (Close up of medals). ... Percale. I know about that. We carried bombs on them. At first the bombs were small, we carried them into the cockpit and threw them down. 33 11
- 33 11 Afterwards, there used to be cradles for holding the bombs. There was a cradle under the wing for injured soldiers. 2 injured soldiers could be carried by an airplane. 33 31
- 33 31 There were bomb holders. But there was no need in hanging a 50 kg bomb. I lie down underneath. A bomb was put on my back. And I move up with the bomb on my back. 33 47
- 33 47 That's when he fixed it up there. It wasn't adjusted for this purpose. There were regiments, women's U-2 regiments. They went on night missions and all. It was assembled from the remnants. 34 07
- 34 07 (Background conversation). (Thank you). 37 22

End of interview