

Yurii Iakren

Russian Vets

Duration 23:48

- 00 00 (Background conversation)00 08
- 00 08 I was born on March 3, 1924 in Saratov city. At the age of 7 I went to school like every other child. In '41 I graduated from 10-grade school. The war broke out right away. 00 29
- 00 29 My friends and I were eager to enlist in the military to be sent to the front. We were told that we were too young. "We'll manage without you. Go on and study". 00 48
- 00 48 Where would I go study? Applying for a University didn't seem a good idea at the time. I applied for Aviation College in Saratov. They admitted me to the 3rd year taking into account I hadn't shown a great progress at school. 01 07
- 01 07 I enrolled at Aviation College, engine assembly program. Under the war time circumstances we, the students, were transferred to the evening department. At the same time we were hired by Saratov Aviation Plant. 01 31
- 01 31 I worked as an assembly fitter at Saratov Aviation Plant. But still I was hoping to leave for the front soon. After awhile I applied with Saratov Tank College. I was admitted to Saratov Tank College. 02 05
- 02 05 It was the beginning of '42. Afterwards...I left the College before graduation. I joined a drafts company. The company was in training before being sent to the front. 02 31
- 02 31 At first we belonged to a reserve regiment in Tatishchev, Saratov Region. Later we were sent to Milikes, Ulyanov Region where we were involved in initial training before being sent to the front. 02 53
- 02 53 At the end of '42 we were ready... I mean we had been through initial training period. Our life was very hard. In Milikes we lived in dugouts. At the end of the year we were ready to go to the front. Where? They never told us. 03 24
- 03 24 We knew we were heading to the front. In fact we were about to go south, to Stalingrad. When we arrived, at the beginning of the month, the Battle of Stalingrad had been over. We were sent to the west. 04 00
- 04 00 I was in a motorized infantry battalion, 111th tank brigade, 25th tank corps. We were advancing in the western direction. At first we were in the Russian steppe area. 04 31
- 04 21 Afterwards we fought our way through the Ukraine's territory. We reached the Donbass area. Before reaching Donbass and while in Donbass we were in action. We were engaged in a serious battle near Pavlograd, Dnepropetrovsk Region as far as I remember. 04 47

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- 04 47 In February '43 our units hit the direct road to the river Dnieper. We got into a trap. As far as our rear lines were far behind... as we found out later...we were surrounded. 05 18
- 05 18 On February 21, '43 I was wounded near Pavlograd. Fortunately, it was a light wound. I was sent to a medical battalion. On my way to the medical battalion I was told that there was no way for all the medical battalion to be evacuated. 05 50
- 05 50 There was no communication. We were left on our own device to save our lives. And so our group started walking where our feet would take us. Anyway I was lucky. 06 10
- 06 10 I joined a Ukrainian family of Grigory Fedotovitch Cherednichenko. He asked me what my name was. I said my name was Yurii. "Oh Yurko! What's up?" I was a soldier in a uniform. 06 32
- 06 32 We had a very warm clothing. It became very warm at that time. Anyway, he allowed me to enter his house where his wife was. I was with their family during the hardest time of my life, when I was unable to walk. 06 56
- 06 56 After awhile...when I was able to get up I used to help them around the house. Anyway, one day he said "Yurko, our villagers say you're a Jew. We're in danger and you're in danger to stay with us any longer". 07 27
- 07 27 I go "Well, I'm going to leave you". "Where would you go?" "Any place. I don't want to cause you any trouble". "OK. You go to village Chaplino. My sister lives there. I'll write to her. You may stay with them for the time being". 07 52
- 07 52 Well it was quite a distance to walk. I walked along the road... I can't recall the name...Well I walked and walked and walked along that road. I reached Chaplino. I was with his sister's family now. 08 11
- 08 11 They knew who I was. Everything was well. Anyway, I can tell you I'm grateful to those 2 Ukrainian families for saving my life! I had to travel around in Dnepropetrovsk Region. 08 34
- 08 34 I was wandering a little longer than 6 months. At last our army came to that area. I joined one of the units. There was an immediate order: all those who just joined the unit were to be sent to Guliay Pole, Zaporozhye Region. 08 54
- 08 54 I knew from my school years reading that Father Makhno's army had been there during the Civil War. And again I had to walk as far as Guliay Pole. I reached Guliay Pole. We were placed into a filtration centre. 09 15
- 09 15 They didn't give us food for several days. They functioned on a self-support basis. Anyway, I went through the filtration centre. I mean I told them everything about myself and the units I had been in. 09 33

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- 09 33 Afterwards I was sent to a new unit. This time it was 948 infantry regiment. That was 4th Ukrainian Front. I ended up in Melitopol area. There is river Molochnaya there. 10 01
- 10 01 The river's name was very nice, but the stronghold was too serious. The fighting was very hard. We had to cross the river several times: advancing and retreating. 10 23
- 10 23 Finally on October 15, '43 I was seriously wounded. After that, I stayed in the battlefield for a very long time. Being wounded I stayed under fire. Anyway, at night I was evacuated: medical train, initial treatment – and I was sent to Russia. 10 59
- 10 59 The train was forwarded to Central Asia, via Saratov. As far as I was seriously wounded and a bed patient... while other guys on the train were able to walk...I asked someone to get off the train and call... we didn't have a phone at our house...11 23
- 11 23 Our neighbours did. Their son had been my class mate... I remembered their phone number...I asked them to call my family and tell them I was in Saratov. My mother hadn't been getting my letters for 9 months. 11 46
- 11 46 It was quite understandable. My mother came to the hospital. She arranged for me and other seriously wounded men to be taken off the train and placed in Saratov hospital #360. 12 08
- 12 08 That appeared to be a sorting hospital. I was transferred from that hospital to another one, #2982, Saratov. I was released from that hospital at the end of March, '44. I was given the status of a 2nd group invalid. 12 34
- 12 34 Afterwards I ended up at home. The guys, and mainly the girls had already had jobs or did their studies. As for me I hadn't graduated from the college and had nothing to do. 13 03
- 13 03 In the fall of '44 I felt better. At first I used crutches for walking. Later I used only one crutch. And finally I started walking without crutches. Where to go? What kind of job was I able to do? 13 25
- 13 25 In the fall of '44 I got a job as a secretary with garrison's military prosecutor's office. I don't know what kind of a secretary I was. I performed technical work. 13 45
- 13 45 I learned the basics of law. At that time I found a newspaper advertisement. It said that a law school was going to be opened in the fall of that year in Saratov. The admittance conditions seemed quite special. 14 12
- 14 12 In particular, only those who were 23 or older were to be admitted to the school. I was only 20 years old. Nevertheless I applied and was denied. I wrote letters to the Council of People's Commissars in Moscow. 14 42

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- 14 42 Here's what I had to say: I had been in action at the front. That's what had happened to me. There was a law school opened. I'd like to enrol but was denied admission. 14 52
- 14 52 The classes had already begun. There were lots of war vets among the students. I used to walk into a classroom and had an intention to stay during classes. I used to be told to leave as soon as they saw me in an auditorium. 15 14
- 15 14 That's what happened to me on several occasions. The guys were ok, but still I used to be told to leave. I kept on writing letters to Moscow. Finally I got a letter from People's Commissariat of Justice. 15 33
- 15 33 It said "By way of an exception and taking into account that you've been at the front, you are permitted to enrol under the condition that you successfully pass all the 1st semester examinations in January. 15 52
- 15 52 The college director sent a message to me with a courier asking me to come to his office. They didn't know I had already got the letter. They go "We have considered and decided to give you our permission, by way of an exception, to enrol if you pass the exams successfully". 16 20
- 16 20 I go "Thank you! I'll do my best". I got mark "5" for all of my end of semester exams. I was enrolled with exhibition scholarship. I graduated from the law school in '46. I got an honours degree with high distinction. 16 43
- 16 43 However there was no way for me to get a job with the attorney's office or a court. I was underage. What to do? I was told the only way for me to get employed was to join the Bar Association. 17 03
- 17 03 I said "I'm ok with joining the Bar Association". I was assigned to the Bar Association in Volgograd. Taking into account that I had graduated with honours, high distinction I was given a voucher to a sanatorium in Saratov. 17 22
- 17 22 While in the sanatorium in Saratov I was thinking of enrolling at a grad school. There were lots of evacuee teachers from Leningrad, Kiev etc. In particular I remember one of the teachers' name was Elena Filippovna Zeliger. 17 46
- 17 46 She was an elderly lady from Leningrad. She said "Yurochka! You should continue your studies by all means! Go on and enrol at a grad school. I go "What do you mean grad school? How am I going to provide for my family and myself?" 17 59
- 17 59 My father was still at the front. "I can't go to the grad school", I said. "I'm going to join the Bar Association, I'll try my best. Well, you mentioned go on to the grad school". 18 13
- 18 13 And so I enrolled at Saratov Department of the National Correspondence Law University. I combined my studies at the University with work at the Bar Association in Volgograd. 18 36

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- 18 36 In '47, that is just one year later, I took an external degree with high distinction on graduating from the law school. At first I worked as a trainee lawyer. 18 52
- 18 52 That way I was able to continue my studies. I used to prepare for the semester examinations, take an unpaid leave, go to Saratov, and pass the exams. That was how I combined work and studies. 19 06
- 19 06 Afterwards I worked independently at a legal counselling office in a district centre Salocha, Volgograd Region. While in Saratov I was given a reference to a grad school's state examination board. 19 27
- 19 27 However I didn't go for it. The chairman of the state examination board advised me to apply with Saratov police school. He recommended me as a teacher. 19 42
- 19 42 I went to the office and spoke with them. They told me to fill out and leave my application. "We'll call you if we need you. Please leave your address". I received a letter from them, was it the year '48? Yes, it was '48. 20 10
- 20 03 I had been working for 2 years already... almost 2 years. "You can come to us". I came to Saratov and was hired as a teacher. I worked as a teacher. At first I worked at a high school. 20 40
- 20 40 Afterwards, a department of the USSR Ministry of Interior University was opened in Saratov. I got a recommendation to work there. I came there and was hired. 21 06
- 21 06 Soon a Saratov department of the USSR Ministry of Interior Academy was opened. I got a recommendation to work there. I came there. While working at a high school I was promoted to junior lieutenant. 21 29
- 21 29 On retiring from the Academy I was promoted to colonel. I served in the Ministry of Interior for 40 years. (As a Jew were you mistreated during the war?) There was no mistreatment at all while 1st time at the front and the 2nd time at the front. 22 06
- 22 06 There was no anti-Semitic harassment at all, never! Never while in hospitals for that matter. I was hospitalized due to a serious wound. (While in Canada have you ever shared your war stories with the youth?) 22 36
- 22 36 While in Canada I've never had a chance. While in Saratov I was a member of the Regional Veteran Organization. I have a medal from Moscow's Veteran Organization. 23 00
- 23 00 I was awarded the medal for educational work for the youth. I often had chances to give lectures in educational institutions, production sites, and Ministry of Interior departments. 23 19

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23 19 (Thank you. Please introduce yourself.)Introduce myself? My name is Yurii Ilyich Iakren. That's all. (Thank you) Thank you.

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