

Yakov Krenin	Duration: 39:52	Russian Vets, Interview date Nov 16/2010
00 00	Yakov: At the beginning of the war I was a student at Moscow Artillery College. On graduation I was given the rank of Guards lieutenant, Katyusha platoon commander.	
00 21	A few Jews were Katyusha unit commanders. Normally they were 3 or 4 because there were no all-Jewish units. All Jews were distributed between different units.	
00 39	In our 303 Guards mortar regiment our regiment commissar's name was Zelinsky, a battery commander Sigay, battalion assistant commander Yudelshon, electrician Chudnovsky, and I, Krenin.	
01 10	Those were all the Jews. The rest were Russians. The Red Army units were not formed based on nationality; they were formed based on profession, age, etc. Each battery and battalion had 1 or 2, or 3 Jewish officers.	
01 43	In the infantry, aviation and tank forces there were more Jews. It's difficult to say. Obviously that was a coincidence. Twice Hero of the Soviet Union colonel general David Dragunsky was commander of a tank brigade.	
02 12	He was a very well known commander. (Interviewer: Was he a Jewish Hero of the Soviet Union?) He was a commander, he committed a heroic feat for which he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.	
02 27	Some time later he was wounded. After the recovery, he became a brigade commander. Near Berlin, he was wounded again. Later he was awarded his second title of Hero of the Soviet Union.	
02 52	There are 2 Heroes of the Soviet Union among the Jews: marshal of the Soviet Union Malinovsky. (Interviewer: What did you say about the marshal?). Marshal Malinovsky was known by the name of Rodion Yakovlevich. His mother's name was Leya, she was a Jewess. His father's name was Yankel Krymchak.	
03 32	The parents were divorced and the son lived with his mother. She remarried. Her second husband was a Jewish man. He didn't want to adopt Ruvim. Ruvim got on a train and went to the front in 1914. On his way to the front, he introduced himself as Rodion Yakovlevich, a Ukrainian.	
04 07	Since then everyone thought he was Ukrainian. In '95 the Russian Military Encyclopaedia's researchers went to Odessa. They discovered that Ruvim Yakovlevich Malinovsky was a Jew.	
04 30	Thus the Jews have one Jewish marshal. (Interviewer: Why was he a hero?) First of all, there was over a million people under his command. His task was surrounding and destroying the Germans troops, subsequently capturing a city.	
04 55	He was given tasks by the Red Army General Staff. He successfully carried out a task, for which he was awarded an Order and promoted to the marshal's rank.	

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05 14		At the beginning he was Major General, commander of 48 th infantry regiment. Later he was commander of 66 th army. After that he was commander of 2 nd Guards army at the Stalingrad Front. He defeated an infamous German marshal Manstein.
05 46		By joint efforts of Rokossovsky, Zhukov, Vasilevsky, and Malinovsky, German 6 th army was encircled and destroyed near Stalingrad. The 6 th army capitulated. The Red Army captured 91,000 soldiers and 2,000 officers and generals.
06 12		You, see, that's congenial. They acquire an enormous experience making it possible for him to plan an offensive, encircle and destroy the enemy. An enormous experience! Who were the geniuses? Russia knows 4 great marshals: first Zhukov, second Rokossovsky, third Konev and fourth Malinovsky.
06 58		Those were the greatest Soviet Army commanders. On graduation, in May, '41, from the 2 nd Specialized Artillery School, I was sent to Moscow Artillery College. We were trained to become artillery officers.
07 22		On June 22 nd , '41, all the students were gathered in front of the building. We were told that Viacheslav Molotov, our Foreign Minister, would be making a speech. At noon sharp, radio terminals were turned on all across the country.
07 55		At that time there were loudspeakers, there weren't radio receivers. Molotov made his radio speech after a meeting with the German Ambassador in Russia. In his speech he said "Today, at 2 a.m. the German Nazi troops attacked, without declaring the war, our border squads and peaceful cities. Many cities and garrisons were bombarded. The German troops crossed our border.
08 45		A week before, Stalin was told that a war is about to start. He persisted ignoring the facts. He trusted Hitler and ignored the possibility of an all-round war. Fierce fighting started. The Germans concentrated a large number of troops - 180 divisions - to invade the USSR unexpectedly.
09 18		The Red Army wasn't prepared because Stalin hadn't ordered to get prepared. His idea was that seeing our preparations Hitler would certainly start a war. But Hitler attacked all the same. Heavy fighting started.
09 38		The Red Army was retreating. First of all the border troops were less numerous. They had to approach the border, while the Germans were already there. They had 180 divisions, aviation - everything had been worked out. They had had 2 years' war experience in the West.
09 59		They started the offensive. The Soviet army resisted fiercely. There was a corps commander by the name of Khoskelevich praised by Zhukov. He was commander of the 6 th mechanized corps. Despite the German dominance, he attacked Guderian's corps.

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10 26		He defeated Guderian's corps. But due to the German superiority, he was killed and the corps was destroyed. The Red Army had to retreat. It was a hard retreat. After the war we discovered that in '41, the German surrounded and captured over 3 million men.
10 59		There was one more reason why the Red Army was weak. Before the war Stalin thought that the military commanders were plotting against him. He decided to clean the army up.
11 22		He arrested and killed 44,000 best commanders and marshals of the Soviet Union, Marshal of the Soviet Union Tukhachevsky among them. He was Voroshilov's assistant, and a more talented commander.
11 44		First of all I'd like to tell you about my participation in the military parade on the Red Square on November 7 th , 1941. I'd like to refer to my notes. Where are they? Where is my bag? The Battle? You know you don't think about it during the war.
12 13		Are you or are you not going to be a hero? The situation was hard, with shooting around you. You could lose your life in the next minute. We didn't think of heroism. Our goal was to protect our country's freedom and independence.
12 37		That goal was inspirational. We were trying our best to aim our Katyushas at the targets and to make an accurate strike at the enemy. I was impressed by the parade on November 7 th '41. Do you want me to tell you about it? Do you need it?
13 01		I was awarded Order of the Patriotic War, 2 nd class. Also I was awarded Order of the Red Star. I was awarded Order of the Red Star in '43 for the liberation of Kharkov. In '44 I was awarded Order of the Patriotic War, 2 nd class for the liberation of Poland and for capturing Berlin.
13 31		Every soldier and every commander was awarded medals for being in battles. We had a male nurse in our regiment who wasn't in battles, he was receiving those wounded at the medical battalion.
13 55		Oh, I was on top of the world! I was only 20 years old. At the beginning of the war few men were awarded: the Red Army was retreating, 3 millions were captured, and we were leaving cities, lots of POWs. I was so happy when I was awarded Order of the Red Star.
14 26		I have a photo where I am wearing Order of the Red Star. There was an immense feeling of joy: we knew that the war was about to end. We started saluting, drinking vodka, feeling happy to have survived and won the war.
14 55		At that time we didn't realize how important the moment was. We saved the whole world! Had the Germany succeeded, there wouldn't have been anyone here. They Germans would have turned everyone into their slaves.
15 14		They wanted to capture Russia with its 200 millions, leaving 50 millions and sending the rest of us to hard labours or to death. We were overjoyed. The

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Germans thought of themselves as the nation of rulers and the rest of the world as their subhuman slaves.

- 15 41 All Jews were planned to be annihilated. That is why I fought to protect my life, my family, my friends and my country. Hitler said that Berlin would never be captured by the Soviet Army.
- 16 06 They wrote an inscription on the walls "Berlin bleibt Deutschland" – "Berlin stays German". He prepared the 6th army and other armies to defend Germany. He ordered not to fight against the Allies in the West, instead to fight against the Soviet Union to stop it from invading Germany.
- 16 47 Hitler wanted a tie up – leaving Germany as it was. But Stalin and the world community, Roosevelt and Churchill decided to destroy Germany's military power. Stalin wanted the German people to be engaged in peaceful activity, like the rest of the world.
- 17 21 When we were in Berlin we saw it in ruins because it had been bombarded by our artillery, Katyushas, aviation, and Allies' aviation. Berlin's streets were in ruins. They got what they were planning to do to other nations. We were happy to have survived, to have our comrades with us.
- 18 09 The nations survived while the instigators perished in their own fire. Hitler killed himself on the 30th of April, his body was found. He was burnt. He ordered to wrap him and Eva Brown in a carpet, to pour gas and to burn them down.
- 18 36 The order wasn't carried out in full. Stalin ordered to capture him while he was alive. His body was found. His jaw remained. The dentist was found who confirmed Hitler's identity. Afterwards he was burnt down, his ashes scattered over the river.
- 19 10 I was among the units who came to liberate a concentration camp Majdanek, Poland. It looked like a huge settlement of barracks painted green. Do you want me to go on speaking? I saw rails near the gates. "Arber macht frein" was written on the gates: "Labour makes one free". Those words were targeted at those who were about to be annihilated.
- 20 09 Each barrack inside the camp contained 200 people: men, women, children. The prisoners were ordered to bare themselves; they were given water to wash themselves. They were then squeezed into huge boxes, 200 in each box. The prisoners started screaming.
- 20 50 After a while several blue crystals were put inside through a hole in the roof. It was the "Cyclon" gas. Have you heard about it? The "cyclone" evaporated and the noise calmed down after 2-10 minutes.
- 21 16 The gas was too powerful, everyone was dead. Some days they killed 20,000 people a day: Jews, POWs, Gypsies, others. After that they opened the door, put the bodies on a truck. We saw the cement floor, everything had been cleaned up.

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22 00	The Germans had POWs clean up the dead bodies. The dead bodies were put on trucks and took to a huge furnace with 3 pipes. There was a stink of dead flesh.	
22 22	A German was opening dead bodies' mouths to take out gold teeth. They then sent the gold to the German National bank. The German National Bank was involved in the crime.	
22 52	I saw them. They were behind the fence looking very exhausted and famished. We exchanged words with them. But our task was to move further. They were happy to have survived.	
23 12	They were famished. I also saw the German prisoners taken by the Soviet guards going through all this, through skulls, hands, pieces of bones that were stinking.	
23 45	They burnt 20,000 people a day. When the German soldiers saw all this they were shaking. They started running. Our 303 regiment along with other regiments liberated Majdanek in August, '44.	
24 20	They were in rags and famished. However, their faces looked happy. They were saying: "Red Army, thank you for saving our lives". Those were the atrocities conducted by the Germans.	
24 50	Most of the prisoners looked Jewish. There were other nationalities, but most of them were Jews. The Germans killed 20,000 in 3 furnaces in one day. They were "smart" making them wash themselves. They took off their clothes. (Interviewer: wait a sec).	
25 41	They put the clothes in piles before washing themselves. Of course knowing all that we hated the Germans. At that time I didn't know that my uncle and aunt's family had been killed in Ukraine.	
26 06	My friend had been killed in Minsk too. Soviet mass media didn't stress on the fact that the Jews were killed. The authorities were hiding that fact. We know that 6 million Jews were killed in WWII.	
26 38	They put their cloths in piles. Other prisoners took the clothes to warehouses to be sorted out, sent to Germany and distributed between Germans. In July, '42 I was in 71 st Guards Mortar regiment.	
27 23	The Germans started an offensive. Our intelligence failed to collect adequate information. The Germans were dominating. We had to retreat. Retreating was the worse: you never knew how far away from you the Germans were.	
27 51	We retreated, stopping to fire back at the Germans. We weren't able to stop for a long time, because the entire front was retreating: we were only 10 or 11 divisions, while the Germans were 100 divisions.	
28 15	The Germans dominated, that's why we were retreating in '42 near Kharkov. There was a major battle near Berlin too. We were firing from the Easterns bank of the Oder river.	

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- 28 36 We were positioned on the Eastern bank of the river Oder. The Germans fired back. They were still well armed at that time. I remember talking to my commander, shouting in his ear. He wasn't able to hear me and I wasn't able to hear him.
- 29 04 That's how loud all the shooting was. We saw aviation overhead, we knew that was the Allies' aviation. Soviet troops dominated near Berlin. We were beating the Germans with might and main. Are we going to speak about my book?
- 29 35 I loved war games and wanted to become a military man. The Red Army was in the focus of mass media's attention before the war. Wide propaganda was conducted regarding the Red Army.
- 29 53 Young men, including Jews, were responding to the patriotic appeal. We joined military schools and colleges, and enlisted in the Red Army to give our lives to defending our country.
- 30 15 I'd like to say that it wasn't an easy choice: military service involved many hardships. But we ignored the hardships. In '38 I applied with the 2nd special artillery school in Moscow.
- 30 33 The program was 3 years long: 8 to 10 grade, including math, physics, and military studies. In the summer we went to summer camps for a practicum in the military studies. Our commanders enjoyed respect on the part of the students.
- 31 14 School director Vladimir Iosifovich Krein, a Jew, and school military head, artillery lieutenant Efim Ilyich Levit, a Jew. Efim Ilyich stayed in the army during the entire war.
- 31 28 He was an artillery brigade commander and an artillery division commander. He ended up Chief of Operations, 1st Belarussian Front. [shows a photo]. Here he is with his friends. It reads: veterans of artillery staff of the front, having gone from Stalingrad to Berlin.
- 31 58 Levit [shows the picture], Nadosev (Interviewer: wait a sec.) Levit, Nadosev, Klimenko – veterans of artillery staff of the 1st Belarussian Front. (Interviewer: show one more time). Levit, Levit.
- 32 29 (Interviewer: which one is Levit?) Levit is the first one. (Interviewer: why is he Hero of the Soviet Union?) He isn't Hero of the Soviet Union. He was a staff officer. He was just doing his job. He was acting depending on the situation.
- 33 03 [reads from the book] People of various nationalities contributed into our victory: first of all Russians and Ukrainians. According to the Russian's military archives, there were 501,000 – many or few? [reads from the book]

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33 51		During the war against Germany the rate for the Jews was 24% as compared to the average rate of 20%. 1 in 5 men was drafted compared to 1 in 4 Jews drafted during the war.
34 19		1 out of 4 Jews was drafted which was more than 1 out of 5. 198,000 Jews were killed in the war. 170,000 Jews were awarded medals for their courage. 147 men were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. The Jews are 5 th highest group of holders of high awards.
35 17		12 Jews were awarded Order of Glory, all the 3 classes, for heroism at the front. I have a book about soldiers' courage. (Interviewer: Which nationality was the largest group in the Soviet Army?) Russians and Ukrainians. (Interviewer: what about the Jews?) The Jews were 3 rd largest group.
36 01		501,000 Jews out of 34 million who were drafted in the army. 501,000 divided by 2.8 million Jewish population. It makes 24%. The Jews in the army made a high percentage of the entire Jewish population.
36 35		Professor Sverdlov made the calculations. It wasn't just made up. (Interviewer: Why?) it's not 3 rd biggest. It's called a ratio of mobilization tension. The mobilization tension ratio for Jews was higher than the country's average.
37 00		I don't know the Belarusian's ratio. (Interviewer: why was it so high?). Because many Jews ran away from Hitler and also because every Jew liable for call-up enlisted in the army.
37 20		I know stories about girls who served as nurses. A girl by the name of Slautinskaya participated in the assault of Berlin. I wish I could have my book published, it has a lot of interesting materials. I collected the materials grain by grain.
37 51		I have always had a great interest for the topic. Grisha doesn't have as much as I do. (Interviewer thanks the interviewee. We have to end our interview as the next veteran is waiting). No problem, he can wait.
38 16		[reads from the book] Bulat, Daniel Davidovich. Holder of Order of Glory, three classes. He committed 3 heroic feats. He was a reconnaissance man. He killed several Germans. It was a complicated procedure – to be awarded 3 Orders of Glory. One more.
39 03		[shows a photo from the book] He committed 3 heroic feats: killing a soldier or capturing a submachine gun. He had many merits. Here's a photo of Fedor Davidovich Sverdlov. [shows a photo] He was a professor at Frunze Military Academy.
39 36		He is a reserve colonel and a war invalid. He was awarded with 6 orders. He is the author of all these books about the Jews: a yellow book...
39 52		End of interview.

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