

Liya Liberova	Duration: 41:05	Russian Vets, Interview date Nov 16/2010
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- 00 00 (Interviewer) **Liya**: My name is Liya. My maiden name is Vilenskaya. I was born in the town of Novozybkov, Bryansk Region. My date of birth is June 30, 1923. (interviewer). Please speak up, I have a hearing problem. 00: 33
- 00 33 (Long pause) 00 49
- 00 49 (Interviewer) During the war? During the war I was drafted, the call-up paper came in on April 27, rather March 27, 1942. I was ordered to show up at the Military Commissariat on April 3. I was sent to MPVO forces, which is Local Anti-Aircraft Defence. 01 19
- 01 19 At first I was in an operation platoon. We didn't have ranks, in fact we were hardly in the military at the time. Our duty was to watch at VNP, which was a watch tower located at a local high-rise building. 01 50
- 01 50 My post was a watch tower on top of a 6 storey building. There was a glass tower there, with a wooden wall. There was a diagram with German aircraft silhouettes on the wall. 02 09
- 02 09 Our duty was report on the phone about the types and the moves of aircrafts. German planes were different from the Soviet ones. Their noise was intermittent. That's why it was easy to identify them, even without looking at them. 02 28
- 02 28 Besides, we had ground watch posts. Our squad was located on Petrovskaya Kosa, in Leningrad. We had a special device for a field telephone. We reported information about casualties, etc.. I witnessed a woman being killed by a shell. 02 57
- 02 57 She was killed by a blast wave. She was pushed to the ground and then died. This is how it was. Several months later we were sent to be trained what to do during bombings and how to deal with civilians, I mean how to ensure their safety. 03 23
- 03 23 After several months' training we were given military ranks. I was given the rank of a senior sergeant. My girlfriend from my school who was my neighbour, had lost her parents early and lived in our family. She was given the rank of a sergeant. 03 50
- 03 50 By that time the entire city was divided into sectors. We became military. We were part of 34th battalion, local anti-aircraft defence. The sectors matched the militia divisions. One or two years later we became 351st detached municipal battalion. 04 26
- 04 26 I was appointed a staff chief for a small sector, which was a square with one side being Zhdanovskaya Naberazhnaya, another side being Shchorsa Street, then the Krasnykh Kursantov Street and Koltovskaya Naberazhnaya. My girlfriend Marina and I were responsible for that sector. 04 57
- 04 57 First of all a plane was sending messages on missing black-outs. That was one of our responsibilities. Secondly, we searched buildings hit with a bomb,

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		looking for casualties in order to provide them the first medical aid. And thirdly, we called sappers if a bomb didn't explode. 05 17
05 17		By the way, that happened quite frequently, especially when bombs were a large size. Shall I expand on this? (Long pause) Can you hear me? 05 36
05 36		(Interviewer) Speak up please. (Interviewer: What were your responsibilities at the anti-aircraft battalion?) As I said that wasn't for a long time. We were trained and sent to the sectors. What were the responsibilities at the sectors? As I said: black-outs; first aid following artillery bombardment and shelling; and reporting to the HQ if something was wrong. 06 25
06 25		For example, once a 250 kg bomb didn't explode. I had to call the sappers. I called Khanukaev, who was a well-known sapper in Leningrad, a Tat Jew. What else would you like me to tell you? 06 45
06 45		(a long pause) (Interviewer: did you shoot?) At whom?! There were no Germans in Leningrad!! Only POWs. There was nobody to shoot at. (Interviewer: did you shoot at planes?) I wasn't an anti-aircraft gunner!! They were in special military units. 07 13
07 13		They were anti-aircraft gunners, some of them were female gunners. What else would you like me to tell you? Can I tell you... (long pause) (Interviewer: I apologize, tell us what your responsibility was at the anti-aircraft defence?) 07 43
07 43		OK. We lived with no electricity, no heat, no water and no food in Leningrad. Suppose an air-raid alarm was announced. Or an announcement was made about an artillery bombardment in a certain sector of the city. 08 19
08 19		We were supposed to be at our posts. Some of us were on duty. Besides, there was a curfew: nobody was supposed to be in the street after 10pm if they didn't have a pass. Those were our responsibilities. When an alarm started we were to be at our posts. 08 45
08 45		We were at our phones getting information on what was going on. Once a shell fell into a small river Zhdanovka near the place we were stationed. Rather a bomb fell down. I called the HQ reporting that a bomb fell down. To tell you the truth they weren't happy with my report because I couldn't determine the size of the bomb. 09 07
09 07		The bomb went under the water. Another example: a bomb fell down in my sector. It didn't explode. I called the HQ asking them to send the sappers. In the dark time of the day I patrolled my sector making sure there was a perfect black-out. 09 27
09 27		I was to make sure there was no light seen. Once a bombardment started; a shell fell down in my sector. All the windows were shattered. I had to comb the building from the ground floor to the top floor looking for casualties because the shrapnel was scattered all around. 09 52

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09 52		During one of the artillery bombardments a shrapnel hit in my head. Our responsibility was to make sure everything was in order in our sector. On several occasions we had to escort 5 or 6 military people who were found in the building without a special pass. 10 13
10 13		We escorted them to the commandant's office. They were military people who were not supposed to be in buildings without a leave. Do you want me to be more specific? Besides, we were safeguarding military warehouses. In that case we were given arms. Otherwise we didn't have arms. 10 46
10 46		We were given Canadian rifles. They were had been during the WWI. If someone approached the military warehouses, not knowing the secret password, we had orders to shoot. Once I was safeguarding a warehouse in a burial vault at Smolenskoye cemetery. 11 14
11 14		At first I was scared: that was a cemetery full of monuments; during the white nights the monuments looked like figures of living people. Besides, we safeguarded military garages. That was at the end of the war after the Germans had been pushed away from Leningrad. 11 45
11 45		(Long pause) (Interviewer: Please tell us the circumstances of your being wounded). As you may know Leningrad is situated on numerous islands. Our military cafeteria was located in a school on Krestovsky Island. It was approximately 6 stops from where we were stationed. 12 23
12 23		The street cars didn't operate at the time. There wasn't any municipal transportation. We had to walk there. It happened after the street cars started operating – around 1944. I was on a street car on my way back from the cafeteria. 12 43
12 43		At that moment an artillery bombardment was announced. I was in the Bolshoy Prospekt and Zhdanovskaya Naberazhnaya Intersection. I was 3 or 4 blocks away from our unit. At that moment a shell hit the top floor of a 5 storey building. 13 14
13 14		A fragment fell down and hit me. There was a pharmacy nearby. People from the pharmacy ran up to me and dressed my wound. When I came to the HQ they found that there were small pieces of glass in my wound. I had to go to Erisman's hospital which was 4 stops away. 13 49
13 49		There was a long waiting line in the hospital. What struck me was that most of the people had big stomachs, because they ate grass not to starve to death. I was taken in and had 2 stitches put on my wound. After that I went back to the HQ where I was examined by Major Guseva, our battalion doctor. End of story. 14 22
14 22		A week later the stitches were removed and I went on working the way I used to. Well, what else are you interested to hear from me? (long pause) (Interviewer: What is your most important medal?) My most important medal is "for the Defence of Leningrad". 14 48

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14 48	(Shows) Here it is. It was given to me for being in the Siege of Leningrad. My happiest day was the day the siege of Leningrad was lifted. (Interviewer: were there many women in the Red Army?) In our 551 st battalion all of us were women, except for the male commanders. 15 25	
15 25	The male commanders had a feeling it was beneath their dignity to command women. Our political instructors were also women. (Interviewer: Why do you think there were a lot of women in the Red Army?) Our Leningrad Local anti-aircraft defence consisted entirely of women. All the anti-aircraft gunners were women. 16 01	
16 01	One of my co-workers at school, a biology teacher, was a former anti-aircraft gunner. Her unit was located in Pargolovo, Leningrad. Besides, medical battalions consisted entirely of women. There was a major hospital in my sector – the Voroshilov Military Air Force Academy’s hospital. 16 30	
16 30	It consisted mainly of women. (Interviewer: why do you think so many women were in the Red Army?) I would like to add something: the winter of ‘41 and ‘42 was severe and freezing cold, many people died during that winter. Most of those who died were men. 16 53	
16 53	More women survived. Take my neighbours – the Shekhters family: mother, father and 4 children. The entire family died. Nobody survived! Or my co-worker Shura Shpitalevskaya. They were 6 in their family, even more: father, mother, 4 kids and grandfather. 17 31	
17 31	Shura served in the local anti-aircraft defence. Her mother was in prison, she had stolen a spool of thread. Her mother survived and so did Shura with her sister. The rest of the family died. There were many vacant apartments. That’s why the women replaced those who died. 18 04	
18 04	(Interviewer: did the women shoot from anti-aircraft guns?) (Chuckling) Only from anti-aircraft guns! There was no one to shoot at in the city. There were no Germans in the city except for the POWs. 18 27	
18 27	We had arms as safeguards. As for the shooting you’re asking about – we didn’t have anyone to shoot at. (Interviewer: did the women shoot from anti-aircraft guns?) Yes, they did. 18 49	
18 49	They did shoot from anti-aircraft guns. Besides, at the beginning of the war the women were in people’s volunteer corps, those women shot at the Germans too. They were volunteers. 19 17	
19 17	(Interviewer speaking with Len) 19 36	
19 36	(Interviewer: Please confirm that the women shot from anti-aircraft guns) The women who operated anti-aircraft guns did shoot at German planes. I can tell some of the names. (Interviewer: were there Jewish women among them?) 20 08	

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20 08	Probably. It didn't make any difference – Russian of Jewish. In our battalion there were many Jews. (When you were in the Red Army did you suffer anti-Semitism?) Pardon? (Interviewer repeats the question) No, no! 20 35	
20 35	No, not in the Red Army. One of our girls started saying something about the Jews and was reprimanded by the Komsomol leader. Our political instructor was a Jewish woman. Her name was Vidrevich, Bella Israilovna. 21 03	
21 03	(Interviewer: do you consider yourself Hero of the Soviet Union?) No, I don't. I was just doing my job. Chuckling: am I a Hero? That's ridiculous. My entire family was involved in the Red Army, to be honest with you. 21 25	
21 25	(Long pause) 21 37	
21 37	Can I tell you about it? (interviewer speaks with Len) We had a big family: father, mother, sister, I, father's sister and brother – we were 6. When the war began my uncle volunteered to the army on August 1 st , 1941. 22 18	
22 18	2 weeks later he was killed near Kingisepp. We don't know about the circumstances of his death. He didn't have to go to the army due to his health condition. However he volunteered to the army. He was 41 years old. 22 35	
22 35	During the war my father was appointed a factory manager. He didn't have to be in the army and he wasn't a party member. He was admitted to the party and appointed a factory manager. They manufactured cast-iron movable wood stoves. Do you know what those stoves were like? 23 04	
23 04	They were used by the soldiers in the trenches. As I mentioned it was very cold in the winter. Also they manufactured shell cartridges. Do you have an idea of what they were like? He was a factory manager until around '49 or '50 when the anti-Semitic official campaign started and all the Jews were dismissed from managerial positions. 23 47	
23 47	He quit on his own. It happened during Stalin's anti-Jewish campaign. There were 2 more Jews in his company: chief engineer Rabinovich and chief mechanical engineer Kozak. There was an instruction to dismiss them. My father quit on his own. 24 10	
24 10	He reached the retirement age. My mother was well known in our building. We lived in a 5 storey building. She was well respected by all the neighbours. She was elected the self-defence group leader. Those groups worked shifts extinguishing firebombs on the roof of the building. 24 52	
24 52	They also closed shelter entrance doors. She was well respected as an organizer of self-defence during air raids. My aunt was working in the self-defence group. My sister was a school student while the schools were still working. 25 39	
25 39	The school director Alexandra Legkova, a former actress of Komissarzhevsky theatre, organized young talents' groups, sending them to military units where they performed and were fed. Those were 7 or 8 grade students. Thus my entire family was involved in the defence of Leningrad. 26 18	

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26 18	What else? (Interviewer) Please speak up. (Interviewer: let's have a 2 minutes break. Would you like some water?). No, thank you. (Interviewer speaks with Len) We had a graduation party on June 21. I brought a photo. 27 13	
27 13	Here we are at the graduation party. We were planning to go to the Central Park on Kirov Islands on June 22. That was an amusement park with beaches, there was a parachute tower there too. So we decided to go there on the 22 nd . 27 44	
27 44	In the morning we went to Kirov Islands. When we returned in the evening the streets were empty. We were wondering what was going on. When I got home my mother told me that the war began. She was optimistic, saying that Stalin would not spare efforts and the war would be won soon. 28 12	
28 12	That was how I learned that the war began. (Interviewer: Do you know of any Jewish war heroes?) Yes, I do. I know about many heroes I can tell you about. I can tell you about a Jewish partisan group in the area of town Mglin. 28 42	
28 42	The group was mainly Jewish, although there were some Russians too. My husband's brothers were there. The leader was a Jew and Hero of the Soviet Union, a man by the name of Galkovich. 28 57	
28 57	(Interviewer: tell us more about Galkovich) The town of Mglin was in Bryansk region. Many Jews lived there. Soon after the war began the Germans invaded Belarus. My husband was a student of Forestry Academy in Leningrad. 29 38	
29 38	He had 3 brothers and 3 sisters. 2 brothers and 2 sisters were married. 2 or 3 weeks after the war began, the women were evacuated. The men organized a partisan group. Galkovich was the leader of the group. His monument was erected in the Unecha railway station. 30 10	
30 10	He was a Hero of the Soviet Union. His wife was my husband's friend's sister and that's how I know about him, Israil Khaikin and his sister. If I'm not mistaken her name was Rosa. Rosa was Galkovich's wife. There was a fight. The Germans almost captured his wife. 30 46	
30 46	Or did they capture her? He tried to liberate her but was killed by the Germans. His wife and he were killed. His wife's mother was in the same group, Israil Khaikin's mother. He told me their story. 31 07	
31 07	I came to Mglin via Unecha station. I saw Galkovich's monument. I visited Partisan's Memorial there. A traitor showed the Germans where they were, they were killed, all of them. I saw 2 ditches they were thrown to by the Germans – alive or dead, I don't know. 31 44	
31 44	My husband's 2 brothers and sister's husband were buried in that grave, the 3 of them. His brothers' names were Leo and David. One of them was fabulously strong. They were 30 to 45 years old. That's what I know about	

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		their partisan group. Also I know that the traitor was put in prison and the surviving partisans demanded that they would be given a chance to take the justice in their own hands. 32 37
32 37		They wanted to look in his eyes. (Interviewer: when you were a participant in the Victory Parade in Leningrad, what were your feelings at the time?) Victory? I first heard about the victory over the radio. I wasn't demobilized at the time. I was at my unit. 33 16
33 16		Our commanders gathered those of us who had 10 grade education. We served as guards at the cemetery and the garages where degassing units were kept; we know that the Germans didn't use gas to attack civilians; however we had degassing units just in case. 33 39
33 39		When we learned about the victory we hugged and kissed each other. I ran home. Many people cried: only then they realized how many people had lost their lives. (Interviewer: tell us about your husband and family). 34 15
34 15		My husband is 3 years older than me. He was born in 1920. He was the baby of the family. After he finished 10 th grade he moved to Leningrad to enrol in Leningrad Forestry Academy. By the time the war began he had completed 3 years of the Academy. Once the war began he enlisted in the army. 34 44
34 44		He finished 3 rd Leningrad Artillery College and was given the rank of sublieutenant. At first he was sent to the Western front to fight against the Germans. Before the war was over he was sent to fight against the Japanese. 35 10
35 10		His unit was fighting in Manchuria, which was part of Japan. Later he fought against the Japanese in the territory of Korea. He stayed in the army until 2 years after the end of the war. I'll tell you a story. The commandant of Pyongyang said that he needed a Jew. 35 52
35 52		He needed a commandant for an alcoholic beverage factory, and he needed someone who didn't drink. They found that my husband was the most suitable person for that post. And so he was appointed a commandant of an alcoholic beverage factory. 36 03
36 03		He occupied that position for 2 years. After 2 years he wrote a letter to the high command requesting to be demobilized, otherwise he would start drinking. He was eventually demobilized. He came to Leningrad in '47 to continue his studies at the Forestry Academy. 36 17
36 17		He managed to cover 2 years' course in 1 year to graduate from the Forestry Academy. He was about to be sent to some remote place to work as a forester. He told them that he had already been to all the remote places. And he was left in Leningrad. 36 37
36 37		(Interviewer: do you percept your husband as a hero of the Soviet Union?) In fact he was in long-range artillery and he didn't have any contact with the Japanese or the Germans for that matter. He was far from them. He operated long-range artillery. 37 04

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- 37 04 (Interviewer: but in your perception...) He was awarded the Order of the Red Star and other medals, like Medal for Courage, Medal for Victory and so on. (Interviewer: do you consider him a hero?) I think that everyone who was in the war was a war hero. (Long pause) 37 36
- 37 36 I knew a hero – our battalion commander. He... (recording stopped) (Interviewer: My last question. Why do you think so many Jews were in the Red Army?) Why in the Red Army? Because Hitler considered Jews his enemy number one – that’s clear! Remember the “Crystal Night”, etc.? 38 07
- 38 07 In my opinion, Hitler was Jewish people’s enemy number one and Stalin was enemy number two, or vice versa. (Interviewer: why do you think so many Jewish boys and women went to serve in the Red Army?) Had Hitler won, we would have perished, all of us! 38 31
- 38 31 Everyone knew that very well. (Long pause) (Interviewer asks to repeat the last sentence). Say it again? (Interviewer confirms). The Jews knew that Hitler was a notorious enemy of the Jewish and other peoples. Had Hitler won the war the entire Jewish population would have been annihilated. 39 16
- 39 16 Especially in the USSR where Hitler would have found a “good” support. Can I add something? (Interviewer) anti-Semitism is a tradition in Russia. (Repeats 2 times). First it was Ivan the Terrible, followed by all the Russian Czars, except for Alexander II. Take Nicholas II who provoked a pogrom where my maternal uncle and his young family were murdered. 40 18
- 40 18 He, his young wife and a small child were murdered during the pogrom inspired by Nicholas II and the gendarmes. During the Lenin’s regime anti-Semitism disappeared for awhile. But during the Stalin’s regime... you know what was going on. 40 41
- 40 41 I don’t put the blame on the Russian people, it was a matter of official policies. (Len: thank you very much!) 41 05.
- 41 05 End of interview.