

<b>Zinoviy Ofsei</b>	<b>Duration: 49:04</b>	<b>Russian Vets, Interview date Nov 30/2010</b>
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- 00 00 (What's your name?) **Zinoviy**: My first name is Zinoviy. (What's your full name?) You mean my father's name? (Your first and last name) Zinoviy Benediktovich Ofsei. 00 21
- 00 21 (Your date and place of birth) June 5, 1919. I am 91. (Where were you born?) Donetsk Region, Ukraine, in an industrial centre of Yenakievo. There is a major Iron and Steel Works and coal mines there. 00 52
- 00 52 The town is remarkable for 2 distinguished persons who were born there: cosmonaut Georgiy (Zhora) Beregovoy and current president of Ukraine Yanukovich – those were two famous men who were born in my home town. 01 22
- 01 22 (Our director says that you are a distinguished man too). That's not what matters. Am I really distinguished? Just an ordinary resident of the town. I graduated from Donetsk Medical Institute. It happened so that I became a military surgeon when the war began. 01 56
- 01 56 (Tell us about the time you were sent to the front). OK. When I was a 5 year student at the Medical Institute military draftsmen visited our dean's office. They took interest in male students. We received letters informing that on graduation we would be drafted to the army. 02 37
- 02 37 We knew that we would be drafted to serve in the army. After the war began we were called to the military commissariat. We were put on a train and taken to the north – to Kiev. 03 05
- 03 05 We were very young – 22, 23, or 24 years old. We were in a good mood. We were singing popular songs: "If the war begins comrade Stalin and the first marshal will lead us." We expected to fight in foreign territories. 03 36
- 03 36 We were very patriotic. We were cheerful. We were taken to Kiev. The first horrible thing happened during the trip. When passing the railway station Bakhmach we saw rockets... I mean spies and subversives were signalling the pilots where to throw bombs. 04 29
- 04 29 German planes came flying... We knew they were Germans by the crosses painted on their wings... they utterly bombed down Bakhmach. Buildings and warehouses were on fire. Our first question was "Where is our aviation?" 04 54
- 04 54 "Where is our anti-aircraft artillery?" Our seniors tried to calm us down saying "Shut up guys, that's none of your business." That's what we saw in the first place. That's what made a bad impression. We were expecting to be helpful saving injured people. 05 28
- 05 28 However, people were dying in front of us and we were not in a position to help them. We were scared. I saw a heartbreaking picture: we stopped at a railway station with a park and a dance floor nearby. 05 55

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05 55	We saw young people dancing to popular songs Rio-Rita and Spray of Champaign. Those young people didn't realize that other people were being killed in Bakhmach nearby. That's how sure people were that nothing bad was going to happen. 06 22	
06 22	They were sure the Germans would be defeated by all means. That was a dissonance. When we arrived at Brovary near Kiev we got our uniforms and were sent to our new units. My friend and I were appointed regiment doctors. 06 47	
06 47	We were given the rank of senior lieutenant, with 3 cube tabs. That's how we became regiment doctors. (Please tell us about a battle you were involved in and what your job was). Um...well...uh... I was a regiment doctor, 304 <sup>th</sup> division...The division just went into action... there weren't many injured men...07 38	
07 38	We had no difficulty providing medical aid. Later on the division was moved to the rear and disbanded. I found myself in the reserve where there were many doctors like myself. 08 02	
08 02	I was lucky they sent me to a medical battalion which was a major medical facility, part of 13 <sup>th</sup> Guards division. The commander was a famous man, a Spanish war veteran and Hero of the Soviet Union. His name was Rodimtsev. 08 34	
08 34	Serving in the medical battalion, 13 <sup>th</sup> Guards division I saw a big number of wounded men to be operated on under difficult circumstances – in the forest, under a canvass, in a deserted hut, in a village, with scarce lighting, etc. 09 18	
09 18	But as they say, necessity is the mother of invention. We were operating under a canvass. Our truck drivers used to arrange the lighting in an original way: they took a truck headlight off with the truck motors running and fixed it inside the operating rooms. 09 49	
09 49	The light was sufficient for us to attend to the wounded men. There were many wounded men, a flow of them. It's difficult to recall how severe the wounds were and how heavy fighting was. What I remember is that there were many wounded soldiers when our 13 <sup>th</sup> Guards division was given an order to capture a high point. 10 31	
10 31	The Germans were sitting on the high point using it as a convenient place to fire at our positions. We were ordered to capture the high point. We, the young medical servicemen, didn't quite understand why engage significant forces to capture the high point when it could be just turned. 11 03	
11 03	But the commanders decided otherwise. We had a lot of operations to conduct. Sometimes we spend days and nights at the operating table. Sometimes we had quiet periods – when there was no offensive, no wounded men, we had a chance to relax a little. 11 41	

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11 41	(What was your working schedule: how many days a week and hours a day? Did you have time for a lunch break?) (chuckles) You know working days and nights were not limited. All depended on the arrival of new patients. If my division was on the defensive, there weren't too many patients. It happened when the division was retreating or fresh forces were coming in. 12 31	
12 31	On the contrary, during offensives, our medical instructors who removed the wounded men from the field, used to have hard times. There happened to be quiet times at the front though – especially in the winter time, when it was relatively quiet in the south-west front.	
13 02	There were some random shootings and bombings. I remember when the first Katyusha's started coming in. One of them accidentally fired at our medical battalion – a friendly fire. 13 18	
13 18	We had quiet days too. (When you had many patients, how many days in a row did you work?) I'll tell you. It depended on the types of injuries sustained by commanders and soldiers during offensives. 13 50	
13 50	The most severe cases were immediately sent on to evacuation hospitals, while mild and moderate cases were operated on site. An operating team included 2 surgeons, 2 surgical nurses and 6 hospital attendants. 14 18	
14 18	We used to work 6, 8 or 10 hours in a row. Sometimes we were replaced when they saw that we were too tired. We worked many hours on end with little rest time during offensives. The most important position was a so called "assorting room". 15 05	
15 05	The doctor in the assorting room was selecting those who needed to be attended to immediately and those who were to be sent on to the evacuation hospital. That job was very important. 15 35	
15 35	We, the ordinary surgeons worked many hours in the operating room. It was kind of medical conveyer. It was a hard and exhausting work with little or no smoking breaks. But we were young – 23 or 24 years old. We endured it quite easily. 16 30	
16 30	At some points we were short of medicines and dressing. Those were normal war time shortages. (You have mentioned a war hero. Was he Jewish?) Which war hero? (Rodimtsev) No, he wasn't. He was a Russian, a Siberian. No, he wasn't Jewish. 17 20	
17 20	I must tell you there were no Jews in the HQs. Yes please. (Were the wounded men brought to you or did you have to pick them up from the battlefield?) No, no, no. That was the job done by our medical instructors. 17 49	
17 49	Most of medical instructors were young girls. It was a hard job dragging the wounded men from the battlefields. They provided first medical aid on the go: dressing the wounds, applying tourniquets, etc. They delivered the wounded men to the facility where the doctor with 2 nurses took care of the wounded men. 18 19	

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- 18 19      Next step was taking the wounded person to the medical battalion where they were getting qualified medical aid, including operations, as I mentioned before. I didn't go as far as the battle field. 18 45
- 18 45      (What were the circumstances of your getting wounded?) Let me tell you. Our medical battalion commander's name was Pustovoytov. He invented a mini medical battalion, including 2 surgeons, 2 surgical nurses, about 4 hospital attendants and a driver. 19 24
- 19 24      We were moved closer to the front line to provide medical aid before the wounded person got to the medical battalion where more qualified aid would be provided. Our responsibilities included fighting the pain shock and bleeding, wound dressing, etc. 19 54
- 19 54      As a surgeon I was with the wounded persons on their way to the medical battalion. We had a special truck with a red cross on top of it. The truck contained 3 or 4 stretchers and a room for 3 or 4 wounded persons who were able to sit. 20 41
- 20 41      I was the only doctor there. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, 1942, a sunny and clear day, I was on the truck with the wounded soldiers when an air raid started, the Germans fighters firing at us. Despite seeing the Red Cross on top of our truck, German pilots fired at us. 21 41
- 21 41      2 wounded soldiers got wounded. I got both legs wounded, the left leg bone damaged. That's how it was. The German pilots violated one of the international conventions by firing at a vehicle with the Red Cross on top. 22 18
- 22 18      That was inadmissible. That's how I sustained a severe wound which knocked me out for a long time and I wasn't able to return to my unit. That was the end of my field surgery. 22 53
- 22 53      (Which of your medals is the most important and how did you get awarded?) Are you interested in my medals? I have many medals. My first unit – 812 rifle regiment, 304 division where I served as a regiment doctor at the beginning of my military service, defended Kiev. 23 27
- 23 27      My dearest medal is "For the Defence of Kiev". (Tell us about the Battle of Kiev. What did your regiment do there?). It's difficult to answer this question because I did not directly participate in combat operations. 23 51
- 23 51      I was a regiment doctor. I have never made a single shot. All I did was providing medical aid to the wounded men and women. I don't know much about the battle my division was involved in. 24 14
- 24 14      I didn't directly participate in combat action. The only thing I can recall was the Kiev Operation before my division's first action. We were in a forest near Brovary. We had just received our new uniforms and were ordered to line up. 24 53

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24 53		You know, that was a dreadful sight: 2 deserters stood in front of the lines of soldiers and officers. They had white underwear on. Those were the so-called deserters who had tried to run away from the front. 25 16
25 16		They were executed in front of everyone. You know obviously they weren't experienced executors. They managed to shoot them down at the third attempt. My friend almost fainted. He couldn't see that. 25 41
25 41		2 middle aged deserters were executed in front of young men. That was scary. That's when we realized what the war was like. It wasn't an easy promenade. These are the sad memories that I have. 26 10
26 10		(Do you know why the Battle of Kiev was so important?) You know, as I see it, the Battle of Kiev was important because of the river Dnieper which gave us the possibility to stop the German troops from advancing. Kiev was Ukraine's capital city. 26 53
26 53		The General Headquarters in Moscow issued an order to hold Kiev by all means. That's where general Vatutin was killed. We fought to hold the strategic territory and to keep the Germans from capturing the Ukraine's capital city. 27 28
27 28		(Was that general a Jew?) No, he wasn't. Vatutin was a "pure-blooded" Russian. There were a few Jewish generals in the Great Patriotic war. I didn't have a chance to meet them. (Did you face anti-Semitism during your service?) 27 56
26 56		No, not at the front. I must tell you there wasn't anti-Semitism at the front. In our medical battalion at 13 <sup>th</sup> division we had a Tursunov, a Uzbek, a Russian from Penza, a Jew – our pharmacy's manager, 2 Jewish nurses, another Jew – a sorting department manager. The war united the people in close ranks. 28 45
28 45		There wasn't any anti-Semitism. Not at the front where I was. (Interviewer talks to Len). (Tell us about the episode with 2 surgeons you've just mentioned. Was that an order or did you volunteer?). 29 34
29 34		No, that was the decision of the medical battalion's commander. He decided to move the medical service closer to the front line where the fighting was. Medical instructors were supposed to pick up the wounded men. A more qualified team was supposed to provide medical aid. 29 50
29 50		That's what he did. I was the team leader, and my colleague was the other team leader. We changed places. We got closer to the front line to be available for the urgent medical aid. 30 10
30 10		(When you were a last year student did you volunteer or were you drafted?) I was drafted. When we were 5 year students the military commissariat let us know that on graduation we were going to be drafted to the army. 30 31
30 31		At the time we didn't know whether or not the war was going to start. That was the beginning of June, '41. The war didn't begin until June 22 <sup>nd</sup> . I didn't

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		volunteer, I was drafted. (Do you know that many Jews were in the army during the war? Why do you think so many Jews were in the army?) 31 00
31 00		There were many Jews in the Army, both rank and file soldiers and commanders. There wasn't any anti-Semitism at the front as I said. I didn't know all the Jews. I only knew about my unit. 31 41
31 41		I read in the newspapers about heroism of the Jews at the front. (What was the reason that so many Jews were willing to serve?) What was the reason..? (Repeats the question). It's difficult to say. All I know is that when the war began everyone capable of carrying a weapon was drafted. 32 32
32 32		A general mobilization took place. Some 15-16 year olds made attempts to enlist. There was a general mobilization in the Soviet Union. Everyone was supposed to go to the army to defend the country. 33 11
33 11		There were volunteers; however I can't say anything about them. Our media wrote about them. I can't add anything. I must tell that not only military men – soldiers and commanders fought against the Nazis. Everyone made contribution. 33 54
33 54		Those who worked at the Home front manufacturing weapons, ammunition, food... Ordinary people made their gifts to send to the front. Performers visited the troops. A popular singer Ruslanova performed for our 13 <sup>th</sup> Guards unit. You may remember her hit "Valenki" 34 41
34 41		Writers and play writers visited the troops, including Korneichuk and a Polish writer Wanda Vasilevskaya. Many famous performers visited the troops, as well as writers and poets. 35 12
35 12		I am trying to say that not only military units fought against the Nazis, but the whole nation did – because the war united the peoples of the nation. (Do you know of any Jewish performers visiting the troops?) 35 50
35 50		Yes, I do. I knew of violinists and pianists, including pianist Gilels. They were in front teams. There were also Jewish stand-up comedians. Everyone participated. I can't say that those participated and those didn't. There were a lot of celebrities. 36 33
36 33		Let me see... Utesov's jazz orchestra. As you may know Utesov was a Jew. (Did those performers come to the front...?) They gave concerts to boost troops' morale which was very important. 36 59
36 59		From time to time units were moved from the front to stay in reserve. The performers lifted their morale. It was very important. As I understand the entire nation fought against the Nazis. 37 36
37 36		15-16 year old teenagers worked at factories, manufacturing shells to be sent to the front. Famous actors and performers came to the front to give concerts – they were called "front teams". 38 02

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38 02		I was my impression that the entire nation fought against the Nazis. (Do you see your contribution as important?) As a human being? I did my best to contribute. I provided medical aid in a timely manner. 38 47
38 47		I treated those who had severe and moderate wounds. Every man is individual. I will never forget some of the psychological manifestations. When I operated on patients who suffered severe pain they used to ask me: "Doctor, am I going to recover to be able to fight?"39 27
39 27		Psychologically they were eager to go back to the front to fight the Nazis. Or a man whose hand was torn off by a shell: he didn't ask if he was going to live. All he was concerned about was his "Sidor" – a knapsack. 39 56
39 56		He worried about losing his knapsack full of food supplies. You see the different psychology? One man wanted to know if, despite the injury, he was going to be able to get back to the front to fight the Germans. While the other one was concerned about his 3-day food supplies. 40 22
40 22		That kind of strange men. Basically most of the troops were highly patriotic. Everyone knew they had to defend the country against the Nazis. (Some people say that the Jews avoided fighting against the Nazis. Do you think that the Red Army Jewish soldiers really fought against the Nazis?) 41 11
41 11		No doubt they did. There was no ethnic/nationality differentiation in the Soviet Army during the war. Everyone fought. My late wife's 2 brothers were killed in the war. One brother was in communications and the other one was in the engineering troops. 41 43
41 43		So many fought, and so many were killed. I'm sure I'm right saying that there wasn't any differentiation. Some people say that many Jews went to evacuation not to get to the front. 42 08
42 08		That's not true. Only those who were not fit for military service went to evacuation – that's different. There wasn't ethnic/nationality differentiation. Jewish soldiers were as good as other people. 42 37
42 37		I had an acquaintance – a colonel Vilensky. He was Hero of the Soviet Union, and a Jew. He was a regiment commander in 16 <sup>th</sup> Lithuanian division. There were many Jewish heroes, those who were decorated with medals. 43 04
43 04		Those were well deserved decorations. I never heard of any Jews who tried to hide. (Do you think that Russian and Canadian youth have an idea of the Jewish contribution to the victory in the Great Patriotic War?) 43 44
43 44		Do you want me to give a direct answer? No, they don't. That's for sure. They absolutely don't. And that's the fault of educational institutions, including your organization. Youth should know the price paid for the life they live. 44 14
44 14		Millions of victims – that's the price paid for the happy life of our youth that live a happy life, study, have a good time – live a full life. In my opinion, the older generation should enlighten the youth, reminding them of the past history. 44 58

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- 44 58 Including patriotic films. It's a shame that our Canadian youth don't know about heroism of their fathers, grandfathers, even grandmothers who fought at the front. 45 25
- 45 25 (background conversation) (Would you like to add anything about the end of the war?) What can I say? As I have mentioned, after the injury I was considered unfit for military service. I married and moved to Vilnius, Lithuania. 46 09
- 46 09 I worked as a surgeon in a walk-in-clinic and a hospital. At 8 am on May 9, '45, when I was about to leave for work, I heard shooting in the street. People were shouting and shooting from their guns. 46 54
- 46 54 At first we didn't understand what was going on. When I went out to Mindangasa Street I saw hundreds of people running to the Opera Theatre, hugging and kissing each other. 47 13
- 47 1 3 At first I didn't understand what was going on. I asked "What's going on?" "End of the war! The Germans signed the capitulation. End of the war!". You can't imagine: nobody worked that day. 47 29
- 47 29 I didn't go to the hospital. We ran to the downtown area, the Cathedral Square where thousands of people gathered. I heard music playing. People who didn't know each other were hugging and kissing each other. 47 45
- 47 45 They were crying. It was so touching, so touching! That's how I remembered the Victory Day. And everyday life started: work, family, and children. (Would you like to add anything?) I think that would be all. I am a little tired, I think that would be all. 48 26
- 48 26 Thank you. (Thank you, it was very interesting) (conversation. Shots of the medals.)49 04
- 49 04 End of interview.