

Mikhail Rivkis	Russian Vets
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Rivkis 1

Duration 11:58

- 00:00 (Interviewer) Mikhail Tsezarevich, please state your full name, date and place of birth. 00:12
- 00:12 (Rivkis) [sighs] Um...Can I begin? (Interviewer) Yes, please. 00:23
- 00:23 I was born in Moldavia... (Interviewer) Introduce yourself. 00:39
- 00:39 Um... My name is Mikhail Rivkis. I was born on January 29, 1915 in Moldavia. When I was 3 years old, my parents moved to Odessa, that is 100 km away from Odessa. 01:14
- 01:14 There, I grew up and went to school. After finishing school, I went to a college. I graduated from the college as a tools mechanic. Further into my career, I became an equipment mechanic. 01:48
- 01:48 In '36 I was drafted to the army... in 1936. I served in Zhitomir Region. On finishing my active army service, I was immediately sent to officers' training school. 02:22
- 02:22 I finished the officers' school in '39. In '39, I was promoted to the position of a platoon commander in anti-aircraft artillery. In September a campaign started. We were sent to liberate our Ukrainian brothers from Polish oppression. 02:50
- 02:50 Our regiment was stationed in Ternopol, West Ukraine. In '40, rather at the end of '40, I was discharged and went home. I would call it a leave, because in '41 the war began and I was drafted. 03:31
- 03:31 Our regiment... (Interviewer) Where were you when the war began? (Rivkis) I'll tell you where. 03:50
- 03:50 When the war began, I was drafted to the army. We went to Dneprodzerzhinsk where an anti-aircraft regiment was to be formed. I was there when the war began. 04:16
- 04:16 In midsummer, the Germans approached Dneprodzerzhinsk. My battery crossed the river Dnieper to the left bank. We took a fire-ready position; and 2 batteries remained in the city to hold an anti-tank defence line. 04:50
- 04:50 Well, naturally, those 2 batteries were destroyed; however my battery remained unscathed. We continued our retreat. We remained in the Donbass area throughout the '41-'42 winter season. 05:24
- 05:24 In '42 we resumed the retreat. We retreated as far east as Maykop. We took our positions in Maykop. We were given our orders... At that time, I noticed that German motorcyclists were already in the town, not far away from our gun lines. We had to fire back at them. 06:05

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- 06:05 I was wounded. A shrapnel is still in my left shoulder. The remains of the battery's men crossed the river Belaya to the left bank. We ended up in the Caucasus territory, the Tuapse area. 06:43
- 06:43 While in Tuapse area, I was assigned to a reserve regiment. At the end of the year, I was sent to Moscow where a new unit was to be formed. I was ordered to report to the Head Artillery Department. 07:01
- 07:01 In the fall of '42 our regiment was transferred from Moscow area to the Leningrad Front. We got there via the ice road on the Lake Ladoga. We got our orders and took the fire-ready position at the front line, the right bank of the river Neva. 07:43
- 07:43 In January, '43, after the breach of the siege of Leningrad, I was wounded. After the hospital, I was sent back to Moscow to report to a new unit that was to be formed there. 08:14
- 08:14 In '44 we went from Moscow area to the Southern Front; our destination was Rokossovsky's Army. Soon we found ourselves part of a front offensive operation. 08:34
- 08:34 In January, '45, while in action in Szczecin area, I was wounded in the leg and sent to the hospital. At first, the doctors wanted to amputate my leg, but I fought for it. I hated the idea of being an invalid for the rest of my life. 09:11
- 09:11 I argued with the doctors trying to persuade them not to amputate my leg, despite the fact that the doctors threatened that there would be a [inaudible] and the leg would have to be amputated all the same. 09:32
- 09:32 I went, "We'll see when it comes to that". And that was how I saved my leg! I quit the army in '46, to live a civilian's life. I went to my home town of Odessa. 09:54
- 09:54 My first job was not in my line of business: I had a shrapnel in my shoulder and a shrapnel in my leg. I had to retrain to find a lighter job. 10:19
- 10:19 (Interviewer) Tell us about the most memorable episode. 10:31
- 10:31 Here is one of the episodes. At the beginning of the war, I was stationed in Dneprodzerzhinsk. A German intelligence airplane flew at 7,000 m altitude. It was a Heinkel 111. 11:04
- 11:04 I was trained to take an aim at a target with my eyes... my binocular... By the time the instruments zeroed in, I would have ordered, "Fire!" Our ability to aim was the most accurate and dangerous. 11:40
- 11:40 Afterwards, during a staff meeting our regiment commander said that my battery had fired most accurately and hit the target. The air plane was...11:58
- 11:58
End of file

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Rivkis 2

Duration 11:58

- 00:00 ...50 km away from the artillery fire location. The plane crashed down. 2 airmen were caught, and the other two ran away. The command found out about that later. 00:23
- 00:23 The regiment commander send a vehicle to the location. The soldiers picked up and brought back the plane's tail, to show the townspeople that we had shot down an airplane flying over the town. The episode was reported at the staff meeting. That was one episode. 00:51
- 00:51 Here's another episode. This episode is quite difficult. It happened in '45, near Szczecin... no, I'm mistaken. During an attack... not sure which area it was... I took with me an orderly. We went to check a bridge that could be used for crossing the river. 01:28
- 01:28 I can't recall the name of the river. It's not important. At that time I saw a group of airplanes bombing our front lines. We were 3 to 5 km away from our lines. [inaudible]determined that they were bombing our lines. 01:57
- 01:57 When we returned we saw that the communications dugout had been bombed down, the radio operator was dead, the soldiers were dead too. Those who survived the bombing told us what had happened. That was one of the episodes. 02:36
- 02:36 In '45... it was in the summer or fall of '44. In January '45, I was wounded near Szczecin. The war was over for me. I spent 8...7 months in the hospital: from February to August '45. 03:12
- 03:12 2 months after being wounded I was sent to a unit to continue my military service. In '46... I don't remember what month... I was discharged from the army. Afterwards I began to live a civilian's life. 03:43
- 03:43 (Interviewer) What happened to your family during the war?03:52
- 03: 52 My family was evacuated. My 2 brothers went to the front and never came back. I had an idea where they had been: one of them had been in Sevastopol, the other one - in the area of Kerch Isthmus. 04:16
- 04:16 They never came back. When I was in Tuapse area, there was a reserve regiment there; that was where the remaining surviving officers gathered. I met some of them. One of the officers came from the military unit where my youngest brother had served. 05:02
- 05:02 He explained to me that only 8 men of the regiment had survived. He didn't know about the fate of the rest of the men. That was how it was during the war. When I became a civilian... well of course, it wasn't the same: I was unable to work in my line of business. 05:45

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- 05:45 My sister... my family...came to Odessa after evacuation. Everyone settled down, trying to make ends meet. My mother put on the wall the photos of the boys who hadn't come back from the war. 06:28
- 06:26 She used to mourn over them all her life. I took the portraits off the wall to keep her from wailing in vain. In '74 we evacuated to Israel. I had lived in Israel with my family for 7.5 years before moving here, to Canada. 07:09
- 07:09 My wife, younger daughter and I came here in '81. My older daughter with husband and son were already in Canada. In Canada, I tried to learn English to no avail. I decided to find myself a job. 07:42
- 07:42 Everyone was amazed here, how I managed to find and keep a job at the age of 66, while the local youth did not want to work. My son-in-law used to say, "Look at papa, he has no language skills, no nothing...and managed to find a job!" 08:10
- 08:10 Everyone was amazed. Well, of course it was difficult to work with no language skills. I figured out I should keep a dictionary in my pocket; when it was necessary I figured I'd write a Russian text and, using a dictionary, replace the Russian words with the English ones. That was how I worked for 5 years. 08:42
- 08:42 (interviewer)... (Rivkis) I quit at the age of 71. 10 years later, when I was...what was it... not pension...doesn't matter...I received a paper. I looked at it and didn't understand what was in it. 09:21
- 09:21 My kids translated it for me. "Don't pay attention". Nobody wanted... The pension department was sending new papers on a regular basis, every 4 to 5 years. 09:40
- 09:40 I was thinking, "What's that?" I was told this and that. They hadn't made pension deductions because I had been older than 65. But still they wrote to me, "You are entitled to a pension. Just fill in a form and everything will be taken care of". 10:15
- 10:15 And from then on they would add little by little: \$2, \$7, etc. 10:28
- 10:28 (Interviewer) Where were you on the Victory Day? What did you do on that day? 10:37
- 10:37 On the Victory Day, I was in a hospital, recuperating after another surgery. We were 4 officers in the ward. The hospital was located in Kuntsevo. It occupied a premises... or were they school classrooms? I don't remember. 11:00
- 11:00 It was midnight when we heard a radio broadcast, "At 2 am, be sure to listen to a special broadcast", or something like that. On hearing that we started shouting "Hurray!" 11:33

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11:33 Our hospital manager's office was in the room next to our ward. It was a woman, I don't remember her name. On hearing such a noise, she turned her radio on. At night, she came to our ward to congratulate us. 11:58

End of file

Rivkis 3

Duration 10:28

00:00 I stayed in the hospital January or February, '45 to August, '45. When I started walking freely, only using a cane, I was discharged from the hospital and granted a 2 months' long leave. Afterwards, I went to Odessa 00:36

00:36 (Interviewer) As a Jew, were you mistreated during the war?00:47

00:47 There were some episodes... episodes...I was mistreated by senior officers... or by peer officers...Once, not sure what year it was, on the Day of October Revolution, the regiment commander gathered the officers at his command post to mark the Day of October Revolution. 01:23

01:23 The chemical service commander was present in the room. He had the same rank as I did. He was already a little boozey. He said, "Why!..." Oh, and I approached him with a glass in my hand. 01:44

01:44 "Let's drink". As he was already drunk, he said, "I don't want to drink with you, you Kike!" I said, "What a fool you are! A drunken man's words are a sober man's thoughts". I turned around and left him standing there. 02:15

02:15 The regiment commander noticed that something had happened. "Rivkis, come to me". I did. "What has happened between you two?" "Nothing. He's drunk, what can you expect from him?" I just didn't want to start a mess. 02:42

02:42 Here's another episode. I had men of several nationalities in my battery. There were Tartars, Uzbeks, Kyrgyzes, and Russians. Some of the men avoided to go on night guard duties, they were afraid; we were supposed to be on duty 24 hours a day. 03:27

03:27 One man...one man, a Tartar... said, "I can't see anything at night, I am unable...". I said,.. oh and when they reported to me about this man, I talked to him. He went on giving me excuses, as if he was unable to see at night... 04:03

04:03 He was afraid to go on a night duty. Every morning, our regiment commander was taking reports on battery condition. I said, "A soldier, a Tartar is trying to cheat; he doesn't want to stand on guard at night. 04:32

04:32 The regiment commander goes, "Is there a man in the regiment who would be able to outwit you? Did he say anything?" "No, he didn't". Well, sometimes I sensed it, sometimes not. 05:08

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- 05: 08 Here's one more episode. A sergeant came up to me. "Permission to speak, comrade captain!" I go, "What happened?" He goes, "Comrade sublieutenant says, that Jews are not seen at the front". 05:45
- 05:45 Well, where do you think this sublieutenant had come from? He was a graduate of a Tashkent officers' school. "He says that all the Jews are in Tashkent". 06:05
- 06:05 He goes, "That is why I came to you, I wanted to talk to you". Eventually, I just asked him a question. "You are a sergeant. How many Jews are there in Russia? Do you know what the percentage of Jews who live in Russia is?" "Yes, I do". 06:38
- 06:38 "What is the percentage of Jews in our regiment?" He goes, "There are 5 or 6 Jews in our regiment". "What percentage does it make?" He answered the question. "So the Jews are all here". 06:59
- 06:59 "Who is in Tashkent then?" "People who were evacuated from the West of the country". He goes, "That's right, that is why I came to you". 07:16
- 07:16 (Interviewers talk to Rivkis) 07:46
- 07:46 After the war, the Jews were mistreated... I was told stories of how it was. Jews were not hired on an equal basis, etc. etc. especially after the "Doctors" case. 08:11
- 08:11 Sorry, the proverb goes, "When fish is spoiled the smell comes from its head". That's right. Where did the persecutions against the Jewish doctors start? People in white smocks. All persecutions started in the high spheres. 08:35
- 08:35 I was very much interested in getting a job at a typewriters manufacturing factory. That was a factory in Odessa. I read an ad in a newspaper saying that there was an opening for an equipment mechanic. 09:05
- 09:05 I always had a job, I had never been unemployed. I came to the HR department. He goes, "I don't know anything about any opening". I go, "Here's the ad, here's the ad". "Go to the shop manager". 09:28
- 09:28 I came to the shop manager. He said this, he said that, finally he goes, "We've already hired someone. There's no opening any more". I go, "How come? This is an ad from today's newspaper. How come you've already hired?" 09:43
- 09:43 That was the end of the story. That's why I said to myself, "Ha, that's true". (Interviewer) You knew? (Rivkis) Yes, I did. (Interviewers talk to Rivkis) (Rivkis) I told you everything.10:28

End of interview