

Yevgeniy Vesoli 15/2011	Duration: 26:04	Russian Vets, Interview date Mar
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Part 1

- 00 00 (Please state your name, date and place of birth) **Yevgeniy**: I was born on April 15th, 1926 in town Rechitsa, Gomel Region, Belarus. (Your name) My name is Yevgeniy Vesoli. 00 27
- 00 27 (b/g conversation) (say again). Yevgeniy Samoilovich Vesoli. (What did you do in the army?) Um...in 1943 I was drafted to serve in the army. It was in Chkalovsky Region. We were lined up at the military commissariat. An officer wearing an air force uniform asked: "Those who have 7-grade and higher schooling please raise their hands". 01 24
- 01 24 I raised my hand. I was asked "Would you like to become a pilot?" I gave my consent. We were sent to an aviation college in Altaisky Region where I subsequently studied for 6 months 01 47
- 01 47 ...and we graduated as pilots. But because of the state of my health I wasn't able to fly. I was sent to the Normandie-Niémen regiment where I worked as an armament- and photo-equipment mechanic. 02 09
- 02 09 I served in the region until the end of the war. We made it to Berlin. When the war was over Stalin gifted the airplanes to the French, and they flew to France. 02 27
- 02 27 I was transferred to town Kobriy near Brest to serve in 139 Guards Fighter Regiment, attending to the aircraft MiG-9, where I served until '51. In '51 we were sent to China. 02 52
- 02 52 In China we stayed for a year, retraining Chinese comrades to operate the aircraft. I demobilized in '52 and came back to my hometown of Rechitsa, Belarus.03 13
- 03 13 I got a job with a furniture factory. I finished a program as a woodturner. At the same time I enrolled in a driving school. I got a call from the military commissariat offering me to continue an extended service. I accepted. 03 47
- 03 47 I was sent to a military unit to serve as a manager of a compass locator at a reserve airdrome. My total service period, including the war years, made 25 years. 04 06
- 04 06 (Tell us about training Chinese soldiers). When we were sent to China we were dressed as civilians. When we got to China we trained, through interpreters, Chinese mechanics to operate the aircraft. 04 40
- 04 40 Those were the first jets MiG-9 Stalin gifted to China. (Interesting stories about training) I... the Chinese were very good people. They treated us very well. They were so grateful. 05 26

Yevgeniy Vesoli 15/2011	Duration: 26:04	Russian Vets, Interview date Mar
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- 05 26 They were very friendly. We picked up many Chinese words. After a year in China we were demobilized and went back to the Soviet Union. (Heroic stories during the war) The war? 06 01
- 06 01 We made it to Berlin with the Normandie-Niémen regiment. The last point was a town of Heiligenbeil. The regiment of three times Hero of the Soviet Union Pokryshkin and a women's aviation regiment of Grisodubova were at the same airdrome. 06 34
- 06 34 It happened in the night of May 8th. I was guarding the airplanes. That night the Germans attacked and fired at us. I was on my own at my post. I fired back all night, running from one place to another. 07 04
- 07 04 I was trying to make the Germans think that I wasn't alone there. In the morning other soldiers came to help me fire back at the Germans. It happened on May 9th after the war was announced to be over. 07 28
- 07 28 However, they hadn't surrendered yet. That's how our exchange of fire ended. (Give more details). We guarded our planes ourselves – the mechanics, not the pilots. 08 03
- 08 03 We guarded at posts, 4-hour long shifts. The Germans attacked in the night of the 8th of May. Not a single airplane was damaged. In the morning the announcement came that the war was over. We hugged and kissed each other. 08 32
- 08 32 Some shot in the air, some shot at pillows, we were overjoyed. That was how the war ended. (What was your responsibility as a mechanic?) My responsibility was charging the guns and threading a film into the photo camera. 09 06
- 09 06 Each airplane that was shot down was captured on film. When the pilots came back we took out and developed the film to verify whether or not they had shot the airplane down. 09 30
- 09 30 That was my responsibility. Also preparing the airplanes for the next flights. (Interviewer. Did you protect the airplanes?) Yes. (did you always protect the planes?) Under normal conditions special soldiers called a guarding company...10 09
- 10 09 As there was a shortage in personnel at that time, the mechanics went on guard to watch the airplanes. We went on guarding 4 hour-long shifts. We weren't in combat action. 10 40
- 10 40 We were involved in preparing the airplanes for flights. That was very important: not letting the crew down, so that the pilots are safe. There were aircraft mechanics and motorists who took care of engines. 11 02

Yevgeniy Vesoli 15/2011	Duration: 26:04	Russian Vets, Interview date Mar
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- 11 02 And those who filled tanks with fuel. I charged the guns and threaded the film into photo cameras. Motorists prepared the airplanes, filled with gas and took care of the engines. 11 15
- 11 15 The pilots always shook hands with us before going on missions. They thanked us for preparing the airplanes well. (Did you meet any Jewish heroes?) 11 36
- 11 36 Yes, I was stationed at an airdrome... three times Hero of the Soviet Union Pokryshkin, who was a very well known pilot. We were stationed at the same airdrome. 11 56
- 11 56 I saw him, and I saw women-pilots who were stationed at the same airdrome as we were, in town Heiligenbeil, near Berlin. We were stationed at the same airdrome. 12 13
- 12 13 (Any stories?) All I know is about the Normandie. The pilots were very um... capable. I have a photo of the French pilots. (Pokryshkin? Was he a Jew?) Pokryshkin. 12 59
- 12 59 (Was he a Jew?) No. (Jewish stories) Not in our regiment. (Where were you in China? Any interesting stories about China?) Not in particular. We were in Beijing, Tsindao, Shanghai... (were you in combat in those areas?) 13 41
- 13 41 Well, personally I wasn't in combat. We just retrained the Chinese: the pilots retrained the pilots, and we retrained the mechanics, we taught them how to operate the aircraft. 14 06
- 14 06 (Which of your medals are you most proud of?) I am proud of all of them, especially Medal for Victory over Germany. I have a French one, the Normandie. (did you capture Normandie?) Eh? (Repeats. Did you land in Normandie?). 14 56.
- 14 56 No... what do you mean? I don't understand you. (What was your Normadie medal for?) It was our regiment. The name of the regiment was Normandie-Niémen. 15 08
- 15 08 French pilots flew our airplanes Yak-3. (b/g conversation) (say it again: French pilots used Soviet airplanes) Planes. (Say it again). When the war began French pilots expressed their willingness to help the Soviet Union fight against the Germans. 16 01
- 16 01 They expressed their willingness to fly our airplanes fighting against the Germans. Some of them were awarded a title of Hero of the Soviet Union. They were very reckless. 16 26
- 16 26 They were very brave pilots. Afterwards Stalin gifted them the airplanes. They flew those airplanes to France. Our mechanics flew with them in order to retrain French comrades in preparing the airplanes for flights. 16 57

Yevgeniy Vesoli 15/2011	Duration: 26:04	Russian Vets, Interview date Mar
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- 16 57 (Where were French pilots trained to fly the airplanes?) It started in '43 in Tula, the city of Tula. That's where they started flying in '43. (Where is Tula situated?) Near Moscow, close to Moscow. 17 38
- 17 38 (b/g conversation)18 02
- 18 02 (Say it again). Well, French pilots expressed their willingness to help the Soviet Union in fighting against the Germans. They expressed their willingness to fly to the Soviet Union and help in fighting against the Germans. 18 49
- 18 49 The squadron's name was the Normandie. And they shot down lots of airplanes. There were Heroes of the Soviet Union among them, very reckless pilots they were. When the war was over Stalin gifted them the airplanes and they flew to France. 19 21
- 19 21 (Why did they use French pilots, weren't there enough pilots in Russia?) Why, there were... in the Soviet Union but not enough...the war was so hard. The Americans also helped, not just the French. 19 43
- 19 43 Those were the most reckless among the pilots...The Normandie squadron was very well known in France. It still exists, the name Normandie still exists and the pilots... well those pilots are old now, but all the same there are new ones, and the regiment lives on in France. 20 15
- 20 15 (Tell about the Chinese pilots). The Chinese pilots were very capable and reckless. They were very brave. They learned the aircraft in a year and flew it very well. 20 42
- 20 42 That was the Mao Tse Tung era, a minister or what...the president in China... What he said went with them. They paid much attention to the studies. They did their best to learn the aircraft and start flying it. 21 15
- 21 15 Same goes for the mechanics. They were very capable, reckless and brave pilots. (Which pilots were the best?) In the Normandie, I remember (inaudible), Marcel, Andre, the regiment commander, those who were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. 21 54
- 21 54 It's difficult to recall the other names, so many years have passed by. It was in '43. After so many years it's hard to recall. (relationship between the French and the Soviet pilots). 22 20
- 22 20 Very good, very much so. (Say a full sentence). The French and the Soviet pilots were good friends. When they were retrained by our pilots, they listened carefully and were grateful... they were very civilized, cultured. 23 03
- 23 03 They thanked the Soviet pilots for sharing their experience with the French pilots. (b/g conversation) (any more stories?) (shrugs shoulders) Not too much to add. 23 39

Yevgeniy Vesoli 15/2011	Duration: 26:04	Russian Vets, Interview date Mar
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- 23 39 (Do you think of yourself as a war hero?) I don't think of myself as a war hero. I was in the war and... and... sometimes there were night flights, and we didn't get enough sleep and food. 24 05
- 24 05 The Soviet Union won the war. I don't think of myself as a hero. I gave my all to win the war. 24 27 b/g conversation) close up of medals. 26 04
- 26 04 End of part 1

Yevgeniy Vesoli 15/2011	Duration: 26:04	Russian Vets, Interview date Mar
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Part 2

- 00 00 (Which airplane models did you work with?) Yevgeniy: During the war...Yak-3... um after the war...MiG-9, afterwards, when I was back in the army serving in a communications company, the models were MiG-15, MiG-17 and MiG-23. 00 52
- 00 52 I was a manager of a compass locator, directing... I would turn on the locator to lead an airplane, for instance, from Moscow to a Belarusian reserve airdrome. 01 10
- 01 10 I would give... my compass locator would give a call signal to let the pilot follow it flying directly to the airdrome. During the night time my responsibility was airdrome's lighting. _01 31
- 01 31 I would lighten up the airdrome similar to the way they do it here in Canada, that was my responsibility. I had 2 jobs: compass locator manager and manager for regiment's light equipment. 01 55
- 01 55 Those were my jobs. (Which models did you work with during the war?) During the war... Yak-3, an aircraft model Yak-3. After the war, when the war was over I was in 139 Guards Fighter Regiment. 02 28
- 02 28 The regiment was the first to receive jet airplanes. We worked with those airplanes before they sent us to China... with those airplanes. Stalin gifted the airplanes to China. 02 46
- 02 46 And so we flew to China. (Say a full sentence). During the war I worked with airplanes Yak-3 as an armament and photo equipment mechanic. 03 17
- 03 17 (b/g conversation). (Repeat) 03 58
- 03 58 The pilots were French. The airplane model was Yak-3. Guns and photo equipment cameras were mounted on the airplanes. We would prepare them for flights. 04 18
- 04 18 I charged the guns and threaded film into the camera. When the pilots were back, we developed the film to verify how many German airplanes had been shot down. 04 35
- 04 35 That was my job during the war. (Thank you). 04 48
- 04 48 End of interview.