

NPS-16
IRVING MARKMAN
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TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: CHARLENE A. KEYLOR, 1/1979
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RUSSIA, (BORN POLAND) 1927
AGE 27
PASSAGE ON "THE ARABIC"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Markman is the husband of Betty Markman, Interview NPS-15. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director, Oral History Project, 3/28/1995

MARKMAN: My name is Irving Markman.

NASH: And where were you born?

MARKMAN: I was born Minski Gubernie Dockshitsy.

NASH: What does "Dokshitsy" mean?

MARKMAN: Dokshitsy, that means that little city. But used to be Minski Gubernie. I left there and I was oh, I believe about six or seven years, and we moved to Vitebsk Gubernie, Gorod Lepel. We were living there all the years till this time we came to United States.

NASH: How old were you when you came to the United States?

MARKMAN: (noise in background) Okay, Russia I left in 1923 and we came to go

to America.

NASH: Can you tell me a little bit about your life in Russia before...

MARKMAN: Oh, before?

NASH: ...you left?

MARKMAN: I was in the army, I was in the army.

NASH: In the Russian Army?

MARKMAN: In the Russian Army, yes, and I left the army, I mean, they discharged me in 1922.

NASH: For how many years were you in the army?

MARKMAN: Oh, in the army, was from 1917 to 1922.

NASH: And how did you get into the army?

MARKMAN: They took us.

NASH: How did that happen?

MARKMAN: How it happened? Because it was a revolution. They took everybody.

NASH: They came to your village?

MARKMAN: No, they announce and they took everybody, every youngster, fifteen years, seventeen years, thirteen years. Well, they didn't care and they took everybody. And the fact is, (cuckoo clock chimes) especially with me and with others, they didn't train us even. They didn't give us even to shoot the first time, and they send us to the front. We were traveling from Saratovs. In that time they took us and they send me to Saratovs. From Saratovs they send us to fight General Kolchak. Took us to come from Saratovs to Samara, about six weeks, by train, walking sixty miles a day, without a stop, and over there we started to fight. I didn't know how to shoot even. And I got sick for a couple of days. And then we were starting here to go further, and I become already more experienced. We took Samara and a lot of people got killed, generals from the White Army. It was tough. Then they took us from Samara to Ural. We were fighting the Cossacks. I was on a horse with Commander Chipayev (?). If people remember Chipayev was in the Fourth Army and the 25th Division, and I was under him and we were fighting the Cossacks till this time we finished over there. From there (background noise) on I'm just saying it short a lot of things. From there on, our army descended to Siber.

NASH: Siberia?

MARKMAN: Right, Siberia. We were took us to come to Ufa, Rika Byellia, that means the River White. That's how they used to call the River White. And in Ufa I had an aunt and an uncle and I want to see them very badly, but we couldn't go there. Over there was Kolchak, General Kolchak. We were close to a mile, less than a mile we used to see on the hill, we see there. Over three weeks, from this time we made bridges and we crossed. And I took my horse. I was the first one. I remember like today. I was riding and I waited other side the window to call the builders from outside and I was asking for that man was known by a couple of blocks. And I was riding alone I didn't see nobody and I find the house. I find my aunt's two little children. (he pauses) (he is moved) One was about seven or eight years old, the bigger one. The little one was about four years. And I

asked, "Where is mother? Where is father?" (he is moved) He said, "They are in the cellar." I said, "Go ahead and call them." My aunt came out and she said, "I knew you or Simon will come." That is another cousin, that was another, another sister's son. We were together in the Army. And she said, "You know, I knew somebody would come because the samovar--you know what a samovar, a samovar used to be, where we used to make tea and flames used to come out, and she said, "I had that feeling you would come here." They were all hungry. I took my horse and I brought them sugar and bread. (siren noise in background) We were there about six days and we went, we left it, to go further to Chelyabinsk, Tomsk, further. And then I didn't get wounded, but a bomb fell close to me and I fell down with my face up and the whole scent closed me up. They send me to a hospital and I couldn't speak over six months, far as I remember. And then they let me out and they send me back to the front. From there on, I believe it took us a year or two years, I couldn't remember, and they send us to the Polish front in 1919, at the end of 1919. And we were fighting with the Pollacks. We came across to Warsaw and they gave us a good beating over there. The French Army, I believe, and I was running and I wasn't far from my home. A couple hundred miles. and I came without shoes, what used to call "laptsi."

NASH: What were laptsis?

MARKMAN: Laptsi. You see they use to make shoes from the trees, from the trees' (in background, probably Mrs. Markman provides word "bark") bark, yeah, and with this I came home. And I didn't feel like going more. (he pauses) They arrest me, they put me in jail.

NASH: The Russians?

MARKMAN: Right.

NASH: Why did they arrest you?

MARKMAN: I didn't go. And I was sitting in jail quite a while. My mother used to come over and yell, "Don't worry, they will let you out." But they didn't. They send me away, in a different city, in a different city. And from there on they send me back to the front and I got sick and they send me for seven days home, and I didn't go back. The war ended with the Polacks. I believe, beginning 1922, and my age was already, I give in I'm two years older than I am. So my age came out in that time about twenty-three, twenty-four, and they started to let out from the Army that age. I may have served a year or a year and a half, ahead or before. I couldn't remember much. And then we started to get letters from America and my mother decided to go to United States, the whole family. We made out papers and then came in visas. And we left in 1923, I believe, I believe in May or before or after. (he pauses) We came to Vitebsk, from Vitebsk we went to Riga. We went over the Granitez and we felt so good. We weren't afraid very much, but was plenty anti-Semite too in Latvia. From Latvia we went, they send us to Cherbourg, but we went out beautiful cities, Belgium, Rotterdam, we were staying there for a couple of days, and then Cherbourg. In Cherbourg as we came, the quota was closed for the, the Russian quota be closed.

NASH: The Russian quota or the Russian Jewish quota?

MARKMAN: The Russian quota was a certain amount to come in America. So, they closed. So, the company White Star Line and Cunard Line kept us in Cherbourg from 1923 to 1927.

NASH: How did you live?

MARKMAN: They gave us wonderful food. They gave us where to sleep, used to call the Atlantic. This is our hotel. And over there used to be five or six hundred

people and maybe more.

NASH: For four years they kept you?

MARKMAN: That's right. For four years they kept us. They gave us food, the best food, and we felt good. We weren't afraid. It was a wonderful country. We were not afraid for the police, we were not afraid for anything. We were honest people. And then I start in, a lot of people start in to look for work and I find work. (dog in background) In Cherbourg I find work, to work by coals, to dig coal. We used to as bring coal in a big place and I used to sort them, smaller in one side, bigger in the other side, and they used to pay us twenty francs a day. That was, I believe, a dollar and a quarter a day. How many hours, I don't remember. Maybe eight or nine hours. And then I left to Paris. And I was living in Paris for a year and a half. And I used to peddle with a lot of things and I made a living. And then came out a law, a lot of Polish immigrants, who was born in Poland, they could go freely to America, not to wait for the Russian quota. I was born, in, really in Poland. I send away a letter they should send me my papers, if they have there, what year I was born and they should send me and the American Consul could give me a visa to go to America. Took me a couple of weeks or a month or maybe more and I got my letter with my papers. I really was born in there. And I came to the Consul and I give it to him, and it took me very little. And I got right away a visa to go to America on the Polish quota. My mother came on the Russian because she was old then. In that time the older people they let go first. My brother and my sister was still in Cherbourg. I took a small little boat, used to call a Arabic that's the White

Star Line Company, first class. Took me over ten days to come to Halifax. From Halifax we came to New York. It didn't take me long, a couple of hours, my brother-in-law and my older sister was here. They took me off and I gave a look to America. I kiss the ground. (he is moved) It was wonderful, was wonderful. How snow was, the snow was high, but apples, food, free, was wonderful. I came on a Sunday and my sister got a paper, the Jewish paper, Forwards, and I said, "I want to go to work." And she looked up in the paper and Monday morning, the Sunday night we came, and Monday morning my sister took me seven o'clock for a job someplace on Spring Street. And she was begging God. She used to say, a greina kind. So one boss send me to another and the other boss took me. And I worked there and he liked me. I worked there over a year and a half and the first week he paid me, I believe, fifteen or eighteen dollars. I was so happy. I didn't expect that, even that. I give to my sister right away twelve dollars a week and the rest I kept for myself. But, what could I tell myself, I was really happy. The people as wonderful, the country was wonderful and I kissed every piece of ground. Any place that I passed. And still I am happy. (break in tape) All right? I left out a little when we came, that's news from the war, in the wartime, when we came to Samara. Less than a mile, I believe, from Samara, was a river. That river-- they have that big bridge and the enemy destroyed, and you couldn't pass, but in the river was so many people and so many horses and blood. Wasn't no river, but blood and we used to--the soldiers I mean--we used to cross over the people, over the horses on the other side. And as we came on the other side half my body was with blood. Not my, somebody from the river.

NASH: How old were you?

MARKMAN: I was between eighteen or eighteen and a half years old.

(he pauses) I believe that the, was in 1918 or beginning 1919, far as I remember, not more. That's what I want (he pauses) to finish. That's what I want to finish. When we passed that river and we went from there on to Ural.

END SIDE ONE

BEGINNING SIDE TWO

MARKMAN: When they took me in the army, that was in the revolution. The revolution started in from 1917 and we were fighting to 1922 when they finished the Brest-Litovsk Agreement, then they stopped the war with the Germans and the White Army. And the Red Army took over the government. But, when we were fighting, like 1918, with the White Army and they pass by, before Samara, that's used to call a big city, Pskov, where the trains used to come from Pskov to Samara and our army, Chepievski Army, cut off that place where that they have to pass, all the generals, and we stopped the train and they didn't want to come out. So the whole train with all the people, far as I remember, none of them they took alive. And was quite a couple of wounded peoples. And was, in that train, gold money. Five rubles, ten rubles on the floor. A lot of soldiers pick them up and they put them in the pockets. And when we used to pass a little town, I remember myself when we came in Raow a little while later, I used to give out five rubles for a glass of milk and for a piece of bread. But, in Raow was already, was more bread than in Russia. Ural they used to call Uralski Kozaki that's near the

Russian, who used to have their own country, that's the Cossack. I remember before Samara, Trotsky came over with a little automobile. He was a commander for the Russian Army, for the Red Army. And he made a speech first in German because was an army from Germans, Czechoslovak, used to call the International Army. From the old war with the Russian Cordon, they went in the Red Army , and he came over and he made a speech and he said to the army, far as I remember just like yesterday was, he said, "Every soldier will get double pay when we'll get Samara." I believe that was on a Tuesday beginning 1919 or 1918, far as I remember. The soldiers, when he was speaking I was looking myself, I was sweating, but I was looking on them how they were sweating. His speech was wonderful. And what do you think? We took Samara. And at that time we used to get two-hundred fifty rubles a month. And we got five hundred rubles for that month. Beautiful money was, new money, but we couldn't buy nothing for them.

NASH: Were there other times you saw Trotsky? Other times...

MARKMAN: That was in the wartime. Then I saw Trotsky before the war in Petersburg. In 1917 he and Lenin. Lenin I saw in Smolny Institute in Petersburg. And we were in line and everybody used to go in and shake hands with Lenin.

NASH: (off mike) Did you shake hands with Lenin? Did you shake hands with Lenin?

MARKMAN: Oh, sure. With Lenin we used to stay there for an hour and a half, I believe, and maybe longer if the line was big. And we used to pass by inside Smolny Institute and everyone was shaking hands and he was sitting, short and with a smile. And

we passed by. That was in 1918, just after Karinsky ran away.

NASH: Why don't you talk a little bit about Anti-Semitism in the Russian Army.

MARKMAN: When we calling anti-Semite, anti-Semite in the Army, I mean in the Red Army was still plenty anti-Semitic too. Happens to me. We were in the same regiment and at night as we went to sleep, you know, where we used to sleep on the floors in little towns, (?) used to come in with a gun, "I'll shoot you Jew." And I used to look up and I didn't answer him nothing, but he knows I am not sleeping, so he walked away. But, if I would complain, they would shoot him. A fact is, I remember in a little town when we used to be Gurufa. Some soldiers used to go and steal eggs from the farms, and they caught them. And I remember one commander from my regiment, he was a Polish, and he ordered to shoot four people, and I saw myself the same people shoot the other four people for stealing. So, if I would complain, but that guy who wants to shoot me, they would kill him too, but I let this pass.

VOICE OFF MIKE: ...lots of stories.

NASH: You said you had met both Lenin and Stalin and the difference...

MARKMAN: When I met Trotsky and Lenin, the difference from their speeches was this way. Lenin used to speak more quietly, but used to come in your heart, every word. Trotsky when he used to speak, made a speech for the army. People couldn't go and take a shower. We were sweating like the dickens. Used to come in, the whole body his speech was wonderful in that time. (ends abruptly)

END OF INTERVIEW