

## Makovski, Iosif Isakovich

### Lieutenant

Iosif Makovski was born in 1918 in Elnya in Smolensk oblast.

His father, Isak, was a photographer. Everyone in the town knew the lame photographer as an honorable man and skilled professional. Iosifs parents wanted their son to become a musician. He showed great talent in this direction — an apparent inheritance from his mother's side of the family. Her father, Avrum Raykhman, had been bandmaster of the artillery regiment in Vitebsk. It was said that during a visit to Vitebsk, Czar Nicholas II had been carried away by the orchestra and had even told the bandmaster: "You play beautifully; it's too bad you're a Jew." Iosifs uncle on his mother's side, Yakov Raykhman, was a professor at a conservatory in America.

Iosif had a fine voice, but he did not want to enter the arts. He had always been keenly interested in sports from childhood on. He was one of the best volleyball and football players around. He was an excellent diver, and no one could equal him on skis.

Iosif wanted to be a career army officer. He entered a tank school in Orel. This school played an important role in forming Iosifs character and in developing his will-power. At school he also engaged in sports.

In September 1939 he completed the tank school with high marks and started his military career at once. In November he was sent to Karelia to fight in the war with Finland.

It was a raw winter, with harsh frosts, winds and deep snow. The tanks were forced to operate on difficult terrain: forests, rocky ravines, roads that climbed high and descended low, numerous lakes covered with thin films of ice, pitfalls for automobiles and tanks. The fields, roads, and even houses were mined.

Once Makovski received orders to support an infantry unit. The tanks rolled along a frozen field under constant enemy fire, overcoming all obstacles. On the road Makovski was ordered to change his route. Radio communications were suddenly cut, and in order to transmit orders to all the men, he crawled across the field himself. On the way he stumbled onto a wooden box which

contained a mine. He raked the snow from the box, pulled out the mine and threw it onto the field. The explosion deafened Makovski but he remained otherwise unharmed. For two weeks he was deaf, but the mission was fulfilled and the company moved in the necessary direction.

In a battle with Finnish artillerymen Makovski's tank was hit at close range. He shot from his burning tank and destroyed the enemy gun and its crew. Then he jumped from the tank and, rolling over in the snow, extinguished his burning uniform.

Another time, Makovski was involved in a battle over a railroad station. Capturing the station would have enabled Soviet troops to disrupt enemy supplies to the front. The fighting took place under arduous conditions. Many Soviet vehicles and soldiers were buried in the deep snow. The Finnish soldiers were putting Soviet tanks out of action one after the other. Makovski understood that it would be impossible to bypass the station and proposed to the commander that he and a group of three tanks attempt a frontal breakthrough along a narrow road leading to the station. The commander looked at the young lieutenant with astonishment. He doubted that the plan could be executed successfully, but after thinking it over he gave his permission.

The three tanks moved along the road towards the station. Two were knocked out at once. Makovski's tank was also burning. Nearly all the crewmen were wounded. Makovski opened fire and shot from the burning tank, not allowing the enemy a second's breathing space. With his burning tank he rolled into the station, spreading panic among the Finns. Precise firing at the Finn's battery forced it to flee. The Soviet infantry took advantage of their flight and went onto the offensive.

For this daring operation, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR awarded Lt. Iosif Makovski the title of Hero of the Soviet Union on March 21, 1940.

In the first days of fighting against Nazi Germany, Makovski — now a captain — was named commander of a tank battalion. At the end of October 1941, the battalion was on the Kalinin front. The Germans had captured two villages between two Soviet infantry units. It was necessary to dislodge the Germans

in order to prevent them from breaking through the rear of these units. The operation was to be carried out in one night. This mission was entrusted to Captain Makovski. At his disposal were 6 tanks and 2 motorized infantry companies. Camouflaging the tanks, Makovski, at the head of the infantry companies, burst into the village. The Germans put up stiff resistance, and the battle raged all night. By dawn the village had been cleared of Nazis. The second village still had to be liberated. The Germans were prepared; for this reason, the tanks rolled in first, followed by the infantry. Makovski's tank was hit. He jumped out and, together with the infantry, fought with bayonets and grenades. In one house a German machine gunner was firing from the window. Makovski crept to the window and threw in a grenade. The Germans panicked and started to run out of the house, but they were met at the exit by bullets from Red Army men. From another house a group of Germans abandoned their positions and ran toward Makovski. He reached for a grenade but suddenly felt a strong blow to his back. He fell and looked up and saw a tall, red-haired German with gun in hand. Sergeant Major Lavrinenko saw the danger facing his commander and flung himself on the German, piercing him with his bayonet. He picked up the grenade and hurled it at the group of Germans running toward Makovski.

The enemy was dislodged from the second village. For the outstanding execution of this operation Makovski was awarded the Order of the Red Banner and promoted to the rank of major.

In this battle Makovski was seriously wounded: he received a bullet in his lungs and had 4 ribs broken. He was evacuated to a hospital in the rear.

After recovering, he returned to the front, to Voronezh. In July 1942 Major Makovski was named commander of a detached battalion of heavy tanks. The battalion received orders to halt enemy penetration and prevent their deployment of reserves. Under a hail of fire Makovski's tanks rolled up to the German's front line positions. In describing the military capabilities of Makovski, Major General Korol, Commander of a tank brigade, said: "Comrade Makovski led his battalion into attack against enemy forces more than once. He proved himself to be a courageous and versatile commander. The

enemy unleashed heavy fire but Makovski's tanks knew how to inflict great losses on the enemy."

In the fall of 1942, Makovski, by this time a Lt. Colonel, was in command of a tank regiment on the Stalingrad front. The fighting on the Volga had reached its zenith. Makovski's tank regiment was ordered to break through the enemy defense line. The commander drew up operational plans and reconnoitered the area. Each unit had its exact mission to carry out.

On November 19, 1942, Makovski's tanks were engaged in battle. He noticed a rocket flying high above, launched from an enemy anti-aircraft. On his order three high-explosive shells were aimed at the enemy position and within seconds all that remained of it was a deep crater. Makovski was wounded in the leg by a shell which hit his tank. The tank was burning, and the gun commander shouted:

"Comrade Lt. Colonel, your leg's been blown off!"

"No, I still feel my toes," replied Makovski.

Artemko, the tank mechanic, opened the hatch and carried out the wounded commander. Earlier, when Artemko had been assigned to Makovski's team, he had said:

"Comrade Makovski, with a commander like you we go into battle without fear. With you, we can go through fire and water."

Now Artemko ripped off his shirt and bound the commander's leg. In the meantime, the Germans launched a counterattack. The nearest dugout was 100-150 meters away. Makovski was weakening from the loss of blood. Feeling that his strength was running out, he said to Artemko: "You crawl forward. I'm finished."

"No way, Comrade Makovski. You have to keep going. You still have to beat the Fritzes."

As the Germans approached, Artemko covered Makovski with his body until the medics arrived and carried him on a stretcher to a safer spot.

Makovski was temporarily out of action but he knew that his regiment was doing its share, knew that he had played a part in the victory at Stalingrad.

After the war, Makovski graduated from the Armed Forces Academy and continued his service in the Soviet Army as a colonel.

**Source: Gershon Shapiro (Ed.), *Under Fire, the Stories of Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1988 pp. 363-367**