

Barsht, Abrek Arkadyevich

Major

Abrek Arkadyevich Barsht was born into a military family in the village of Starozaburevskoye in Kherson oblast. His father was a political worker and his mother an army doctor, both holding the rank of captain. The family moved to Odessa, and after completing his secondary education, young Barsht entered the Serov Pilots School in Bataisk.

The outbreak of war found him on the western front. One day, while he and a fellow pilot were flying their Hawks over Soviet positions, he suddenly saw a Junkers close by. The two Soviet fighter planes gave chase. Barsht fired but missed. He then opened fire with his machine gun and continued shooting until he saw trails of smoke pouring out of the Junkers as it crashed to the ground. Only then did he glance back to see how his colleague was faring. He froze in his seat. The other pilot, in an effort to cover Barsht, was engaged in battle with six Messerschmitts. Barsht hastened to his aid by firing his cannon but his ammunition was used up. He then decided on ramming tactics, but the Germans had fled. The fight was won.

On another mission, a convoy of assault aircraft being escorted by Barsht ran into enemy anti-aircraft fire. Barsht dived 400-500 meters and opened fire on the German battery. The Germans fled in panic. Thus the firing ceased, and Barsht was able to catch up with his convoy and return safely to base.

Barsht flew 403 missions during the war, sometimes 5 or 6 in one day. By 1943 he had shot down 18 German planes. A crack marksman and expert in aerial reconnaissance, he helped the artillery destroy enemy batteries, tanks and infantry. The squadron commanded by Barsht flew 1032 missions and lost only one plane.

On April 10, 1945, at the age of 24, Major Barsht was awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

When the war ended, Barsht enrolled in the Air Force Academy. After his graduation, he served in various units of the Air Force, ultimately reaching the rank of regiment commander.

Winner of ten orders and medals and the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, Barsht retired from the Air Force with the rank of colonel, settled in Leningrad, and flew for civilian airline routes.

Source: Gershon Shapiro (Ed.), *Under Fire, the Stories of Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1988 pp. 31-32