

MEDALS AND BADGES OF JEWISH ORGANIZATION OF VETERANS OF WORLD WAR II IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE

By Dr. Vladimir Bernshtam

Jews took an active part in the fight against the Nazis. It is estimated that “at least 1.4-1.5 million Jews fought in the armies of the anti-Hitler coalition, including 556,000 in the US Army and 501,000 in the ranks of the Armed Forces of the USSR. Hundreds of thousands of Jewish soldiers died, more than 350,000 were wounded, one in three was seriously injured” (Wikipedia). Jewish veteran organizations in the United States have existed for many years and issue their own badges and medals [1]. There were never any organizations of Jewish war veterans in the Soviet Union, and the role of Jewish participation in the resistance to Nazism was hushed up. After the collapse of the USSR, the life of Jewish communities was revived in the post-Soviet space. Various organizations have emerged, in particular, Jewish societies of World War II veterans have emerged, some of which issue special badges and medals for their members.

In this article, the author describes the objects of phaleristic Judaica of the post-Soviet space known to him, produced by organizations of Jewish veterans of the Second World War. Unfortunately, for most of the items mentioned below, it

Continued

was not possible to obtain the information necessary to fully describe them. However, the author believes that even a simple listing of badges and medals will be useful for collecting and studying badges and medals of Jewish organizations in the post-Soviet space.



Fig. 1, Special badge issued.

1. The St. Petersburg public organization of Jewish disabled war veterans was organized in the fall of 1991. For the tenth anniversary of the organization, a special badge was issued (Fig. 1), which, in addition to the name of the organization, contains the inscription in Hebrew מזל טוב (congratulations). Members of the organization collected memories of Jewish front-line soldiers, ghetto prisoners, partisans, defenders of the besieged Leningrad, and published them in a three-volume "Book of the Living." They provided materials for the "Book of Memory," published by the Union of Jewish Disabled and Veterans of the War, led by the Hero of the Soviet Union Moisey Maryanovsky. Additionally, they curated a museum exhibition dedicated to the involvement of Jews in the war, the Holocaust, and the siege of Leningrad. Together with

Continued

the Hesed Abraham organization, they organize medical and social assistance to veterans in need [2].

2. The Latvian Association of Jewish Veterans of the Second World War was organized in 1992. At the time of the creation of the association of veterans, there were 760 war veterans. Members of the association donated materials and documents that they had preserved to the funds of the museum “Jews of Latvia”, gave lectures and memoirs in various audiences and in the media. In cooperation with the Russian Embassy, veterans took part in caring for the graves of soldiers who died in the fight against Nazism and in the procedure for reburial of remains. The association worked in contact with veterans' organizations in Latvia, Israel and the USA. The association also provided social assistance to veterans. In 2006, it consisted of 250 people living in Riga, Daugavpils, Liepaja, Jurmala and other cities. By 2017, the association had about 25 people, most of whom, due to age and health, did not participate in the work of the society, and after the death of chairman Zinovy Segal in January 2017, the association practically ceased to exist. The Association occupied a room in the house of the Riga Jewish Community, st. Skolas, 6. During its existence, three Chairmen of the association were replaced. Sholom Balkin served from 1992–2000; Semyon Shvets (1919–2007) served from 2002–2007; and Zinovy Segal (1923-2017) served from 2008–2017. To mark the tenth anniversary of the organization’s founding, an anniversary medal was issued

Continued

(Fig. 2 and 3). The medal is made of yellow metal. Its diameter is 38 mm, thickness 2 mm, weight 26.52 g. It is interesting to note that although the organization was called the Association of Jewish Veterans of the Second World War, the dates “1941 - 1945” are placed on the medal, i.e. the dates of the beginning and end of the USSR’s participation in the war with Germany and Japan, which in the Soviet Union received the name “Great Patriotic War”. On the obverse of the medal there is an inscription in Latvian: “The Latvian Association of Jewish Veterans of the Second World War is 10 years old.” On the reverse there is an inscription in Yiddish and Russian: “10 years of the Latvian Association of Jewish Veterans of the Second World War.”



Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, Anniversary medal.

Continued

3. The Union of Disabled Jews and War Veterans (SEIWV) was created on June 30, 1999. It is a public association that includes people who took part in the fight against fascism during the Second World War in the armed forces, partisan detachments, internal affairs agencies, state security and other organizations. SEIWV aims to unite the efforts of Jewish WWII veterans in the fight against the revival of fascism and anti-Semitism, restore the truth about the participation of Jewish soldiers in the Great Patriotic War and perpetuate the memory of Jewish soldiers who died during the war. One of the main tasks of the Union is also the publication of the “Book of Memory” of fallen Jewish soldiers. The founder of the Union and its long-term leader was Hero of the Soviet Union Moisei Maryanovsky (1919–2005). After Maryanovsky's death, the Union was headed by his widow, Marina Pilipenko. The Moscow Mint issued a badge of this organization (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4, Badge.

Continued

4. "Unidentified medal."

Recently, the American collector Ira Rezak sent me a photograph of a medal of a veteran of the Great Patriotic War (Fig. 5) (the fact that this is not a World War II veteran can be judged by the dates 1941 - 1945). Unfortunately, the author does not know the origin of this medal. Its relation to the Jews is unmistakable because of the six-pointed Star of David and the word "יהי". The author is aware of medals of veterans of other wars made in the same design.



Fig. 5, Veteran medal.

Continued

The author of the article asks readers who know about other medals and badges of Jewish organizations of World War II veterans operating in the territory of the former USSR or additional information about the items described in this article to contact its author at: fnbern@gmail.com. The author thanks them in advance for this.

In conclusion, the author would like to thank the Riga Jewish Community for the information provided and Ira Rezak for the photograph of the medal. ▣

Works Cited:

1. U.P. Federbus, American Jewish War Veterans, The SHEKEL Volume XIV, № 3, p. 8 -15, 1981.
2. А. Журавин, Мы солдаты одной войны, мы люди одной судьбы К 10-летию Санкт-Петербургской общественной организации евреев инвалидов-ветеранов войны, газета «Ами» № 19 (264), 15 октября 2001 г. <https://ami.spb.ru/A264/A264con.htm>