

Grandparents. Grand Stories: My Great-Grandfather Alexander Ivanovich Manik

Having grandparents is one of the best gifts given by God to their grandchildren. Through their memories, they pass down lessons of courage, sacrifice and perseverance helping us, younger generations, realize the impact of history on our present lives. Today, I want to share with you a story about my great-great-grandfather, Alexander Ivanovich Manik. He lived during the Second World War, and half of his large family was killed by the Germans. Through this story, I want to bring to life the realities of war and to highlight the tragedy of war that our grandparents experienced in the territory of Bessarabia.

There is a town in Republic of Moldova called Hincesti (known as Kotovsk during the Soviet era). To the southwest of Hincesti lies the Babenyasa area, and that is where my story takes place.

Once, a man named Alexander Ivanovich Manik—my great-great-grandfather, the father of my great-grandmother—served as a forester in this area. A native of these lands, he lived with his family in a government-owned house in a cozy valley at the edge of the forest. He had held the position for many years, performing his duties diligently and valuing his work deeply. He lived with his elderly parents, his wife Maria Pavlovna, and their six children.

Alexander Manik was well-respected by his superiors, but that did not diminish the regard in which he was held by the local villagers. Even after the return of the royal occupation forces to the right bank of the Dniester, his reputation as a reliable worker remained intact. When the authorities required all foresters to report any signs of Russian partisans in the area, the forestry department was certain that if anyone were to notice a threat first, it would be Alexander Manik.

One morning in March 1944, deep in the forest near an old oak tree, Alexander Manik discovered a hastily buried parachute and boot prints on the path. He quickly determined that the footprints did not belong to peasants, nor to Romanian or German soldiers. He counted ten men and one woman.

That very day, as required, he went to the forestry headquarters to report. Standing before the chief administrator, hat in hand, he confidently stated:

— Everything is in order in the Babenyasa area. No illegal logging, no fires. No strangers have been seen. No leaflets have been found...

On his way home from Hîncești, about five or six kilometers from his house, he encountered a man and a woman. The man, smiling, introduced himself without hesitation:

— I am Viktor Alexandrov, commander of the Kutuzov partisan detachment. We landed three days ago. Looks like we'll be neighbors. And this is Katya, our chief of staff.

Manik instinctively shook hands and introduced himself.

To his great surprise, Alexandrov and Katya knew a lot about his forestry work and his past. They even knew he had discovered partisan tracks in the woods. Katya spoke:

— We are sure, Alexander Ivanovich, that in your report, you declared everything to be in perfect order. A man who once hid the village council chairman from the fascists and saved his life could not have done otherwise...

Manik thought to himself, "They know everything. There's nothing to hide from them..."

And so, for the first time, the forester of Babenyasa met the partisans. During this meeting, they arranged everything—where and when to meet in the future, where to direct new parachutists, how to maintain contact with the detachment's command, etc.

In their letters, the partisans often remembered Alexander Manik with gratitude. Here's an excerpt from a letter written by Yekaterina Mikhailovna Yushko—Katya:

"The Manik family helped us immensely. The forester himself acted as our primary guide. I personally often stayed in his house, even living there for several weeks after I was wounded. One night, the Germans stormed the house while I was sleeping in bed with his children, my documents and weapons by my side. He risked his family, but he saved my life. I owe him everything."

The partisans used to joke with the forester:

— You, Alexander Ivanovich, have your own detachment. We should call you commander.

That joke was not far from the truth. The entire Manik family, including the elderly parents, helped the partisans in any way they could. The three daughters—Daryna, Natalya, and Maria—and the three sons—Fedor, Nikolai, and Semyon—eagerly carried out any task assigned by their "commander" father.

Meanwhile, Manik continued to report to Hincești, claiming that everything in the Babenyasa area was as it should be. At first, the chief listened with mild suspicion, but over time, his distrust became more evident. Then, one day, Manik changed his report.

— In the Babenyasa area, I found eight parachutes buried in a pit and three empty tin cans. I have brought them with me. Would you like to see?

The chief immediately called the German commandant. A Nazi SS officer arrived. They confiscated the items, examined them, and then ordered Manik to show them where he had found the parachutes. He was praised for his vigilance and was required to report to the commandant's office more frequently. Manik had no choice but to obey. With each visit, he provided new "evidence" of partisan presence in the forest.

It is not hard for the reader to guess that Manik's "double game" was well known to the partisan detachment. In fact, it was orchestrated by Viktor Alexandrov himself. More than once, Manik's reports lured the Germans into partisan ambushes.

But eventually, the occupiers' trust began to wane. Though they had no concrete evidence against him, their suspicions grew. Manik couldn't understand how they had begun to doubt him—he had always been careful. Then he thought of Barkar. This man, from the village of Sarata-Galbena, had never visited before but had recently started dropping by frequently. Manik realized: "Something's not right with this Barkar..."

To throw off the gendarmes' suspicion, Alexandrov advised Manik to move from the forest outpost to Bolcana. Manik followed this advice, and the gendarmes did not object. The house at the forest outpost was abandoned, leaving only four people behind—his elderly parents, Pavel and Elizaveta, and two of his children, Daryna and Fedor. It was essential to keep the outpost as a storage site for food supplies for the detachment.

Meanwhile, the partisans, now well established in the forests around Hincesti, controlled an area with a 35–45 km radius. Their strikes against the enemy became increasingly effective. Thanks to strong intelligence networks and the support of the local population, they successfully ambushed and attacked enemy units.

But Barkar did not stop his visits. He continued to show up around midday, just like before. What neither Manik nor Alexandrov knew was that the gendarme informant had started sneaking up to the outpost at night—this time with armed reinforcements.

Manik noticed that moving to Bolcana had not dispelled the gendarmes' suspicions. Several times, they stopped him and his sons on the road, interrogating them about their movements. It seemed that Alexandrov's fears were justified—the occupiers, unable to stop the growing partisan activity, were preparing a massive crackdown.

Out of caution, the partisans stopped visiting the outpost. The doors were locked. The once-lively house, filled with a large, united family, now stood silent. But the worries and thoughts of the Manik family never left the abandoned home in the forest.

One Sunday, despite the danger, Pavel and Elizaveta decided to check on the house. Not long after they arrived, their grandchildren—Daryna, Fedor, Nikolai, and Semyon—appeared. They had convinced their father to let them visit. The elderly couple was overjoyed. Grandmother Elizaveta lit the stove and began cooking *mamaliga*, while the children picked ripe tomatoes from the garden. It was a simple but joyful meal.

Suddenly, Daryna froze—she heard dogs barking and shouting in the distance. The barking grew louder, closer. A gunshot rang out, followed by bursts of automatic fire. Everyone at the table stiffened.

A raid!

There was no time to escape. The Nazis nailed the door shut, doused the house with gasoline, and set it ablaze. Flames consumed the building, and through the inferno, screams and cries could be heard.

That day, in the fiery hell, before the eyes of merciless invaders, six members of the Manik family burned alive—two elderly grandparents, three young men, and a girl.



This story was also written in one of the communist newspapers as well as in the „In the battles for Moldova” book.(the photos are here 🖐👉)

В БОЯХ ЗА МОЛДАВИЮ

КНИГА ВТОРАЯ

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