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Air Ministry Bulletin No. 6431

LADY MACROBERT'S FURTHER GIFT OF £20,000

FLIGHT OF "MACROBERT" FIGHTERS

The Air Ministry announces:-

Lady MacRobert, J.P., B.Sc., F.G.S., of Douneside, Tarland, Aberdeenshire, who last year gave £25,000 for a bomber to carry on the work of her sons in the R.A.F., has now given a further £20,000 for a flight of four MacRobert fighters.

Announcing her decision in a letter to Sir Archibald Sinclair, Secretary of State for Air, Lady MacRobert expressed the wish that the four fighters should operate on fronts where they would be helping Russia and be inscribed:

"The MacRobert Fighter"
(Sir Alasdair)

"The MacRobert Fighter"
(Sir Roderic)

"The MacRobert Fighter"
(Sir Iain)

"MacRobert's Salute to Russia"
(The Lady)

"The whole world has been astonished at the magnificent resistance of the Russian people," Lady MacRobert wrote. "They have not counted the cost. The fighting qualities of their men and women, united in their hearts and minds, strong in their unity, are beyond what the world might have considered their utmost or possible. The hardest continuous blows could not break them. No mere words can express my admiration for what has been done, and is being done under the magnificent and inspired leadership of Stalin. Hitler can never destroy such spirit and people, any more than he can destroy us. If we all do our very utmost to help now, the Allied victory may not be so far off.

"May this message reach Russia and her heroic women. I salute the indomitable heart of such a country, such women - the mothers, who, like myself have proudly given their sons, their all. I cannot go and be a pilot myself. Had I been a man I, too, would have flown on such service, but I wish to give a fighter, to be named "MacRobert's Salute to Russia" ("The Lady"), to let them know that we are with them to the very end - both materially and spiritually, until the victory and freedom lives again.

"As our family has long been associated with India, it is right that the name should be on the front nearest to India, where our R.A.F. would be helping Russia.

"I feel that my son Sir Roderic, when he fell attacking the German planes at Mosul, did something to upset their plans at that time. Somewhere in the Middle East, our forces might be closely associated with the Russians in fighting and defeating the common enemy. So there, where he fell, may there be three more fighters to join in the fray, bearing the MacRobert name."

/Lady

Former Gift of a Stirling

Lady MacRobert is the widow of Sir Alexander MacRobert, founder of the British India Corporation, who was created a baronet in 1922. She is the only daughter of the late Dr. William Hunter Workman and Fanny Bullock Workman, the noted Himalayan explorers, and is a director of the British India Corporation. (Full details of the previous gift are contained in Air Ministry Bulletin No. 4840 of 23/8/41).

When her third son was reported missing, Lady MacRobert wrote to the Secretary of State for Air:- "It is my wish to make a mother's immediate reply in the way that I know would also be my boy's reply - attacking, striking sharply, straight to the mark - the gift of £25,000 - to buy a bomber to carry on their work in the most effective way possible."

The Stirling bomber which was purchased with Lady MacRobert's gift was named, at the donor's wish "MacRobert's Reply." It has been on active service over Germany and enemy-occupied territory since last Michaelmas. A summary of its work is appended.

Sir Alasdair MacRobert, Bart., Lady MacRobert's eldest son, was killed when his own aeroplane crashed in this country in 1938, a few days after his return by air from India. He succeeded his father in 1922 as second baronet.

Flight Lieutenant Sir Roderic Alan MacRobert succeeded as third baronet at his brother's death. While serving with a Hurricane squadron in Iraq in May, 1941, he was ordered to carry out a low-flying attack on hostile aircraft at Mosul aerodrome. Information recently received from eye-witnesses of the attack is to the effect that Sir Roderic's and another British aircraft made runs over the aerodrome and machine-gunned German and Italian aircraft on the ground. Two enemy aircraft were destroyed - a Heinkel 111 and probably an Italian Caproni.

Sir Roderic's aircraft was apparently hit during his last run by the ground defences. He crashed 20 miles south of Mosul. He was seen by the pilot of the accompanying Hurricane to destroy one enemy aircraft and to attack another before he was killed.

Pilot Officer Sir Iain Workman MacRobert, Lady MacRobert's third son, succeeded Sir Roderic as fourth baronet. He was piloting a Blenheim of Coastal Command over the North Sea during a search for the crews of bombers on June 30, 1941, when he was reported missing.

Work of "MacRobert's Reply"

"MacRobert's Reply" first went into action in late September, 1941, and has since taken part in many raids on objectives including Stettin, Nuremberg, Hamburg, Bremen, Wilhelmshaven, Cologne, Munster, and Brest.

It took part in the daylight raid on Brest on December 18, 1941, when Bomber Command sent a mixed force of heavy bombers - Stirlings, Halifaxes, and Manchesters - into Brest in daylight after the German warships Gneisenau and Scharnhorst. The Stirlings led the way; and flying in one of the Stirling formations was "MacRobert's Reply."

Describing this raid the captain, Flying Officer Peter J.S. Boggis, said:-

"We were attacked five times by fighters. Just before we got to the target one dived on us from out of the sun. He attacked us twice, and the second time we reckon we got him. He went over on his back and dived straight down. We went on and bombed. Our bombs fell very close to, if not on, one of the ships. We were attacked again by fighters after bombing and just after we had crossed the French coast."

Flying Officer Boggis was awarded the D.F.C. for his part in this raid. He has captained the aircraft on most of its raids, though it has occasionally been taken out on some of its trips by other officers in the squadron when he has been on leave. Boggis was a Metropolitan Police Constable in the King's Cross area for two years before joining the R.A.F. "I was just an ordinary constable on a beat," says Boggis.

"MacRobert's Reply" has sustained damage on some of its trips.