

SOVIET AIRMEN SALUTES THE R.A.F.

Captain Grigori Katseba, one of the most famous pilots in the Russian Air Force and hero of the Soviet Union - the highest honour which can be gained by Russian fighting men - has written to the Soviet Anti-Fascist Youth Committee, a letter of congratulation to pilots of the R.A.F.

His letter is as follows:-

My friends,

I am a pilot. I myself fly over the enemy armies, destroying their ranks, and therefore I can well appreciate successful bombing.

How can I find words to express my admiration for your brilliant raids on Cologne, Essen and other German cities.

At long last the German butchers know the horrors of war. Let them.

I have flown over the cities of my native Ukraine, seen the ruin the Germans have wrought in the Dniepropetrovsk, half burned Kharkov, as you have looked on the ruins of Coventry, Birmingham, Manchester. And I hope to see Cologne as it looks today after you have made such an excellent job of it.

I have 170 war flights to my credit. During these, I destroyed six enemy tanks, 134 cars, six heavy guns, 140 wagons with army supplies and over 1,500 Hitlerites.

Now that the warm weather has set in, battles are raging night and day. All day long we Stenovik pilots fly over the outermost fringe of the enemy rear and the foremost of his defence lines. So far we haven't summed up the results. In the heat of battle you don't make reports, you fight. The bulletins will come later. At present, we are building up tomorrow's victories.

Fascist corpses are stacked in common graves in the spacious Russian fields. Beneath the ruins of thousands of buildings you, my comrades-in-arms, will destroy the brown rats of Fascism. Strike harder!

Germany has lost not only millions of soldiers, not only her halo of invincibility, she is fast losing faith in herself, in her own powers. And even Germany finds it hard to substitute for self-confidence "ersatz faith".

I know the German tank-gun soldiers are still fighting and the muzzled German anti-aircraft guns are still pointing at us, that German airmen are still flying their junkers, but they are already doubting whether it is their calling to subjugate the world, whether the Fuehrer's star is such a lucky one, after all, and whether totalitarian war is quite successful.

It is still standing arrayed against us, this German army, still bristling with steel and belching forth fire and death. But the beast has received his death wound; his life blood is oozing away and our forces are steadily growing.

We feel certain that this year our Stenovik pilots will be flying over the Ukraine, further westward over land cleansed of Hitlerite foulness.

Stalin has said it must be done, and it will be so.

Coming out to meet us, we expect to see your squadrons flying over France, and Belgium delivered from Fascist slavery.

And together we shall tear the Fascist beast's base heart out, and burn him to ashes.

Then fight on, my friends, fight harder, remember our ruined towns and villages and don't spare your lead on the enemy. Remember our people, shot down, hanged and tortured and remember the incalculable suffering, the agony and tears of the peoples of Europe, friends, and fire another volley at the enemy.

Squadron Leader G.L. Cheshire, D.S.O., D.F.C., who leads a bomber flight replied on behalf of British pilots:-

My dear Captain Katseba,

On behalf of all of us who flew to Cologne and Essen and Bremen, no less than on behalf of all who stayed behind on those nights to do as necessary work on the ground, I write to express the joy and pride that your letter gave us.

Encouragement from a fellow airman is worth more to me and to all of us than any praise from any other source. And how much the more when such encouraging words are spoken by a man who has made his mark in an air force the fame of whose achievements has gone round the world!

I, too, am a pilot, a bomber pilot. I have flown 43 times over German cities in the darkness. I was not alone, but with me there were hundreds, sometimes thousands of other men.

As I watched Lubeck, Rostock, Emden, and Cologne in flames and saw my bombs and those of so many others crash into the war industries of the Ruhr, I knew that we were wounding Hitler's Germany in a vital part. And I pressed home my attack with the more persistence because I knew that to the east of Germany, to the east of where I myself was flying, the German army was being held and hit by the armies of the Soviet Union and German airmen worsted by you and others like you in the air.

I was proud to feel that I was fighting with you and for you. That I was helping to destroy the communications which feed the German armies on the Eastern Front and smash the weapons without which Hitler's mechanized hordes must in the end flee back to Berlin.

Be sure we shall make every endeavour to match our resolution and our endurance with yours. We who bomb Germany know that our attacks on Cologne and Essen and Bremen were no more than steps in the achievement of a mighty plan.

By progressive stages we shall break the savage economy of the German state. We shall strike hard, but also with forethought, just where each blow will have the most effect, we shall snap each successive link in the chain of German production for war.

And those who obey Hitler's orders in any part of Germany must and will be made to learn that they do so at their peril, as the German soldier on the Russian front must learn that he is fighting with his own country exposed to death and destruction far behind his lines.

Till the German people and the German army have learnt this lesson we shall have no mercy.

May the day come soon when you from the East and we from the West shall meet in Germany.

With sincere admiration and gratitude,  
Leonard Cheshire, Squadron Leader.

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