Петр Иванович ХАРА

Home / Pilots & Crews / Fighter Pilots / Петр Иванович ХАРА

VVS SPANISH CIVIL WAR & GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR

FIGHTER PILOT

THE EARLY YEARS

Пётр Иванович Хара was born on May 15, 1908, in the Staromlinovka Staro-Kermechensky (now Velikonovosilkovsky) village in the Donetsk region, the son of a peasant Greek family. We do not know so far the family history or the actual Greek surname. However, a short story about Greek presence is vital to understand Пётр life. Greeks came to the Crimea — a dramatically mountainous peninsula that juts into the Black Sea — in the 5th century B.C., or maybe even the 7th, or just possibly, based on some archaeological digs there, the 9th. The Greeks arrived in present-day Ukraine before the Tatars, before the Russians, before the Jews, and possibly even before the Ukrainians themselves. In fact, maybe Ukraine's oldest existing ethnic group. What's indisputable, though, is that when they got to the region around today's Donetsk, in easternmost Ukraine they were most definitely the first settlers. The Crimean Greeks lived for about 300 years under the rule of the Muslim Khanate, and when imperial Russia made a move to conquer the Crimea they asked Catherine the Great to offer them her protection. She ordered them to leave the area they lived in for the past two millenniums and set up in a new land just acquired in her Empire, far to the east. She practically moved the entire Greek population there. She awarded lands to the Greeks and rescued them from the Muslims. Starting on the shores of the Sea of Azov, the Greeks settled in villages on the steppe. They were exempt from conscription and they prospered. When the city of Donetsk was founded in 1869 by the Welshman John Hughes, as a coal center, they began migrating into town. They kept their native language — or, actually, languages. Those whose families came from the coastal towns of the Crimea spoke Greek that were heavily influenced by the Turkish language of the Khans. Those whose roots were in the remote mountains spoke a language that descended directly from ancient Greek. In the 1920s, in the first blush of the proletarian revolution, the early Soviet Union strongly encouraged the development of ethnic cultures, a sort of de-Russification after czarist rule. Then in 1937, Joseph Stalin decided that this was, in fact, criminal behavior. About 20,000 Greeks were executed others were deported to Kazakhstan or Siberia. After 1937, people were afraid of saying they were Greeks. But deep in the villages, within their own homes, families kept the old memories, and the old languages, alive. Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Greeks were free again to express themselves.

Returning back to our story Пётр Иванович Хара graduated from 7th-grade school in 1927 and agricultural vocational school in 1930. He entered the Moscow Institute of Sheep Breeding, but after completing the first year he was drafted into the Red Army on May 26, 1931, after he joined first the Communist Party in the early days of that year. What is interesting and sometimes confuses the researchers (especially those of no Greek heritage) is the fact that in his military file, he states: "I speak and write in Russian, I speak Ukrainian, my native language is Tatar, nationality is Crimean

It seems that the pressure of the Communist Party against different ethnic groups was not only active but also being a member of an ethnic minority could block the way for serving in the Soviet Armed Forces as an officer, especially then as a pilot. However, it must be noted that his military file state clearly that his nationality is Greek. Belonging to either the Greeks or the Crimean Tatars did not promise anything good in Stalin's times! Until August 1932, he attended the Kacha Military Aviation School. He served in the Belarusian Military District until January 1935 as a pilot of the 4thFighter Aviation Regiment, (4th IAP) and later he was a senior pilot and Commander of the 107th Fighter Squadron(107th IAE) of the 83rd Fighter Air Brigade (83rd IAB) flying I-3s and I-5s fighters. Soon he married his sweetheart Praskovya Vlasovna Khara (Ponkratova) and was blessed with two daughters Lydia (Lidochka) and Galinka. In 1935, Πëτρ was among the first in the Air Force to successfully master the newest I-16 fighter and participated in an air parade over Red Square. On November 10, 1935, Xapa performed exceptionally, when he landed his plane without landing gear because of a malfunction, for which the People's Commissariat of Defense of the USSR gave him a personalized gold watch with the inscription:

"To the brave pilot from the People's Commissariat of Defense Клим**е́**нт Ефр**е́**мович Ворош**и́**лов."

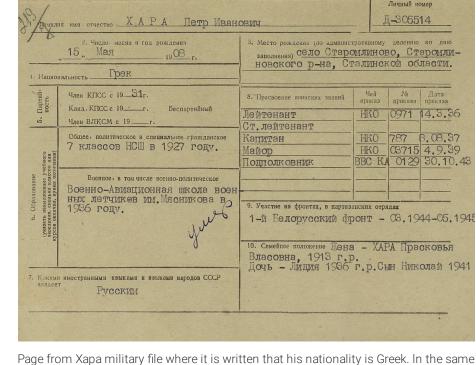
A few days later Пётр engaged in another mishap. His squadron was returning from a training flight when the commander ordered his pilots to drop their landing gears. However, Xapa right landing gear didn't He tried in vain to check for the malfunction without being successful. Meanwhile, the squadron landed and the pilots left their cockpits and looked at the sky for the lonely pilot. The Commander took off with another plane and soon flew on Xapa wing. He ordered the young pilot to proceed to some aerobatic maneuvers and barrel rolls hoping that the gear would drop. He was unlucky once more. He took out his notebook and wrote that he was going to land without landing gear. Soon his Commander flew once more beside him and told him to make 6 more barrel rolls and in case he was unsuccessful again he should raise the left gear, turn off the engine and make a crash landing on plowed soil. The young pilot was relieved knowing that his Commander trusted and believed in him. Xapa gained height, turned off the engine, shut off the fuel feeding pump, and prepared to land. The deafening roar of the engine was replaced by a monotonous wind whistle. The airplane was going down. His propeller now windmilling. He had to keep the minimum speed, to avoid stalling his kite while the ground was approaching fast. The outcome was about to be decided in the next few seconds. He aimed his landing point at a narrow strip of soft ground and skillfully landed and save his airplane. Despite the fact that he wasn't experienced, the obstacles he had to avoid during his gliding, and the danger to stall and crash to his death, the young Soviet Greek pilot acted calmly and skillfully. His squadron mates run to him and a joyful pilot came out from the cockpit of his completely unharmed airplane. The Krasnaya Zvezda newspaper, 16.11.1935 reported with great enthusiasm that: "His desire to fulfill his Commander's order at all costs, his high personal courage and his excellent

flight training, truly Bolshevik, and his care about the expensive military equipment allowed Comrade Xapa to perform this wonderful feat. His squadron is proud of his accomplishment which once more showed the courage and flying skills of our proud falcons." Пётр reported that: "I was absolutely calm and confident that I would succeed, I had about 1,000 landings, and I have

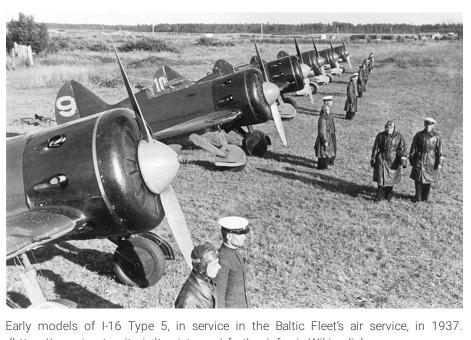
never had an accident."



Spain. He was one of the first pilots who trained in the Polikarpov I-16. The I-16 was a difficult fighter to fly. The pilots had poor visibility, the canopy tended to become fouled with engine oil, and the moving portion was prone to slamming shut during hard maneuvers, which caused many pilots to fix it in the open position. The front section of the fuselage, with the engine, was too close to the center of gravity, and the pilot's cockpit was too far to the rear. The Polikarpov had insufficient longitudinal stability and it was impossible to fly the aircraft "hands off". (www.1945.gr, further info



page information such us promotions, training and personal information also covered. (www.1945.gr)



(https://massimotessitori.altervista.org/, further info via Wikipedia)



in Spain showed that the turn radius was large and the I-16 could not hit lower-speed enemy aircraft in horizontal combat when maneuverability was the decisive factor. That's why they began using the boom and zoom tactics, preferring to make fast attacks, and diving from higher altitudes. Пётр Иванович Хара was quite successful with the small fighter claiming 3 kills and 2 more shared with other pilots. Other sources claim that the Greek parentage pilot shot down 16 enemy airplanes (5 personal and 11 shared). (Copyright Bertrand Brown aka Gaetan Marie, further info by https://victorymuseum.ru/ and http://airaces.narod.ru/) SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The I-16 type 5 and type 10 fighters, which received the Spanish nickname "mosca" (fly), received the baptism of fire in 1936 in Spain. By the end of 1936, the Spanish Republican Air Force had 62 I-16 type 5 fighters. Initially, only Soviet pilots flew them, successfully operating against Franco aircraft. I-16s were widely used during the Spanish Civil War (1936 - 1939), outperforming other fighters in speed. However, the air combat

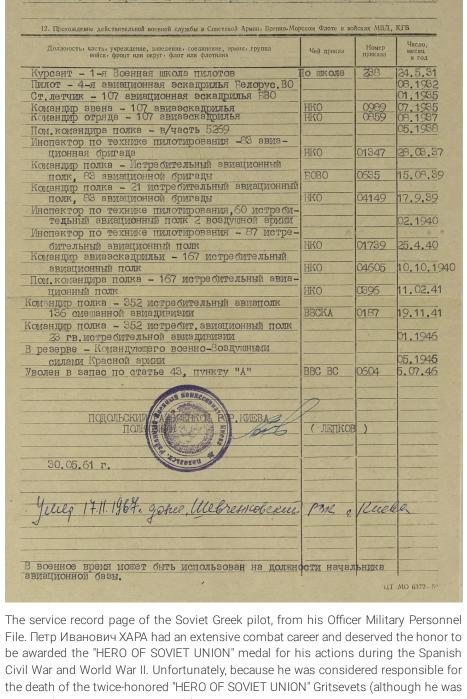


type near Madrid, and captured by Nationalists. Xapa belonged also to the first group of Soviet pilots in Spain. (https://massimotessitori.altervista.org/)



(https://warbirdsnews.com/) В мае 1931 г. призван по спецнабору Московским Горвоенкоматом

with four guns and dubbed the Super Mosca by Republican pilots.



relieved from that accusation later) he never got this award or was promoted to the higher ranks. Instead, he was released from service a few years after the war and his name doesn't mention frequently in the official history of the Soviet Air Forces (www.1945.gr) **GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR (WWII)** On September 4, 1939, he was promoted to Major. In the same month, he was appointed Commander of the 21st IAP and participated in the campaign of the Red Army troops to Western

On March 14, 1936, Пётр Иванович Хара was promoted to Lieutenant. In the autumn of 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out. The Soviet Union decided to help the Republicans in the fight against

Nationalists, who were actively supported by the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany. This help was provided secretly, and the military fought in civilian clothes under fictional Spanish names. They sent their best pilots to Spain. The first batch of 31 I-16 Type 5s was shipped from the USSR as part of a consignment of military aid supplied to the Spanish Republic. Accompanying the aircraft were 31 Soviet pilots, who arrived on 3 and 4 November aboard the transports Kursk and Blagoev. Led by Kapitan Sergey Tarkhov, they had been withdrawn from 83 IAB of the Byelorussian Military District. After assembly and flight-testing, some 16 I-16s left Alcantarilla on 8 November under Tarkhov's leadership and headed for Madrid. The unit, dubbed the Grupo de Caza by the Republicans, included escuadrillas headed by Vladimir Bocharov and Sergey Denisov. Lieutenant Пётр Хара arrived in early November 1936 and soon after joined the 1a/21 Escuadrilla Kolesnikov. On 10 November, the I-16s arrived safely at Alkalá de Henares airfield. The fighters were sent on

their first patrol shortly after their arrival, flying sorties over the capital in support of Republican forces charged with clearing enemy troops out of the Casa de Campo Park area to the west of the city center. During those sorties, Xapa flew his first combat mission. His first air battle took place on November 13. In the afternoon, nine He 51s from the German Legion Condor took off from Ávila to provide escort for five German-flown Ju 52/3ms and three He 46s, which were to attack the Republican positions on the west bank of the Manzanares. It seems that at least six CR.32s also were present. At 15:00, twelve I-16 type 5 and twelve I-15s intercepted them over Madrid. The I-16s were led by the Russian squadron leader Kapitan Sergey Tarkhov in their first combat while the I-15s (Escuadrilla Palancar) were again led by Lieutenant Pavel Rychagov. All Republican pilots taking part in this combat were Russians. The Republicans claimed four victories while losing four aircraft and pilots. It turned out that air parades and formations are one thing, and fighting is quite another. The combat experience would come by trial and error, with the cost of many fighters and their pilots in order to come up with a way to fight the enemy and develop new combat tactics. In a combat situation, the strong-willed, fighting qualities of pilots also came to the fore. On November 17, Xapa led six I-16 fighters to intercept a group of ten Italian and three German aircraft over Madrid. Two Moscas were shot down. On December 16, 13:30, a major dogfight took place over Madrid when 22 I-16s and 14 I-15s were scrambled against an approaching armada consisting of Ju 52/3m bombers, escorted by 25 fighters. Republican I-16 pilots claimed one Ju 52/3m and four He 51s without losses and reported that two Heinkels fell in the neutral zone near Madrid, and the rest in the greater Madrid area. According to the squadron operational books, Πëτρ claimed a Ju52, although in other sources the claim was shared between lieutenant Sergei Denisov and lieutenant Sergey Chernykh. However, there is also a possibility that the date on which the Soviet Greek pilot claimed his first victory was earlier than December 16. Xapa didn't claim a kill that day and wrote in his report: "We were called into action. A big formation consisting of 32 Junkers and Caproni escorted by many

who led the group. We had never seen such a big formation before, and no one attacked it. They turned around and left the Madrid area. The appearance of such a large group embarrassed every one of us and we knew that they were well-armed, and escorted. Rychagov refused to attack, I refused, Kovalevsky refused." Four days later, on February 16, in the afternoon, 24 CR.32s flew close escort to Ju 52/3ms out to bomb Arganda del Rey. Polikarpov I-15s intercepted them from '6 o'clock' high. The Republican fighters didn't attack the Nationalists' aircraft but over the target three I-15s broke formation and

raced toward the bombers. One I-15 and one I-16 were also shot down however Lieutenant Andrei

fighters approached, flying in smaller formations of four planes each. I was flying behind Rychagov

Morozov and lieutenant Πëτρ Xapa claimed a CR.32 each while Lieutenant Sergei Denisov claimed a Ju 52 3/m. It seems that Frank Tinker of the Escuadrilla La Calle was also shot down during this combat. One of the biggest air battles was fought over Madrid on February 18, The engagement began at 11:00 and the units which took part were I-15s of the Escuadrilla La Calle and Escuadrilla José and I-16s from Escuadrilla Kolesnikov (1a/21). The Republican pilots reported encountering six Junkers and 50 fighters (other sources state 85 (!) Heinkel He 51s) over the front. Immediately the Escadrillas went into a tight horizontal circle ("Lufbery circle"). The first enemy aircraft fired randomly at the I-15s as they dived past the Escuadrillas' defensive pattern. Unwillingly to challenge the Republican fighters, the remainder of the Nationalist pilots followed suit, executing a single strafing pass, and then flying lazily below the I-15s in hopes of enticing a few green Republican pilots away from the defensive protection. Four aircraft were shot down: 1 I-16 and 3 I-15. Soviet volunteers claimed six victories, these being claimed by lieutenant Ivan Lakeev, Konstantin Dubkov, Lieutenant Aleksandr Tarasov, Nikolai Nikitin, lieutenant Petr Kuznetsov and one shared between lieutenants Aleksii Minaev and Πëτρ Xapa (all of them from Escuadrilla Kolesnikov). In total, during his tour of duty in Spain, Xapa flew approximately 250 combat sorties. As of February 18, 1937, he shot down three enemy aircraft personally and two shared. According to other sources, he shot down 16 aircraft (5 personally and 11 shared). Of the group of fighters who arrived in Spain with Hara, eight pilots were killed and two were seriously injured; Seven pilots became Heroes of the Soviet Union, four of them posthumously. Peter Hara also deserved this high title, but most likely his personal record, and maybe his sharp, direct, hot-tempered nature prevent it to be awarded. However, he was awarded two Orders of the Red Banner (2.01.1937 and 4.07.1937). On August 8, 1937, he was promoted to Captain. On February 23, 1938, he was awarded the medal "XX Years of the Red Army". After returning from Spain, he commanded a detachment of the 107th IAE until May 1938. Then, until October 1938, he was appointed as Regiment's executive officer, and until August 1939 he was an inspector of piloting equipment of the Brigade.

Belarus. Xapa enjoyed great authority and respect. Everyone knew that in December 1937 his brother Nikolai, a student at the Fur Farming Institute in Balashikha near Moscow, was arrested and

sentenced to 10 years "for counter-revolutionary activities." Πέτρ not only did not abandon him, as many did in those years, saving himself and his family but also achieved his release from the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs. Unfortunately, Nikolai died in the dungeons of the NKVD before he was released. On September 16, 1939, he became responsible for the plane crash in which the twice Hero of the Soviet Union S. I. Gritsevets lost his life. That day, at 19:07, three fighters flew to Balbasovo airfield. And at 19:50 two landing planes (manned by S. Gritsevets and Пётр Хара) collided at the airfield. This catastrophe occurred because of Captain Пётр Хара. Не was lucky enough to survive, and Gritsevets died. As a result of this incident, Hara was removed from the duty of the Regiment's Commander. Although later in an investigation of the accident he was acquitted, Пётр Хара was "extruded" for many years. Even today his photos are very rare (something easily seen on our webpage). However the courageous Greek parentage pilot, knocked down by the heavy burden of the accusation of the death of Gritsevets, was able to get up, go through everything over again and again and become the Commander of the fighter regiment, which would become famous during the liberation of Belarus, receiving the honorary name "Minsk", and fight over the skies of Warsaw and Berlin. Until April 1940, he was an inspector of piloting techniques of the 60th IAP and later for the 87th IAP in the Kyiv Military District until October 1940. He was later transferred to the Central Asian Military District in the 167th IAP. From October 1940 to February 1941, he commanded the squadron, then until August 1941 he was assistant regiment Commander, after which he was appointed as the Commander of the 352nd IAP. He participated in the Great Patriotic War. On October 30, 1943, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. On February 25, 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Xapa and his Regiment left for the 1st Belorussian Front. The 273rd Division of the 6th Corps was then based near Gomel and was preparing to re-equip from Yak-9 fighters to the American P-39 Airacobra. Pilots of the 352nd Regiment also operated successfully during the entire Operation Bagration. Red-star Airacobras cleared the skies over Bobruisk, Berezino, Cherven, Pukhovichi, and Smilovichi. Пётр Хара Regiment, which distinguished himself in the battles for the capital of Belarus, and received on behalf of his unit the honorary name "Minsk". On July 6, 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Hara was awarded the Order of Alexander Nevsky for fighting in the sky of Belarus. From June 24 to June 30, 1944, he flew five combat sorties, including two ground attacks in which he destroyed one steam locomotive and three wagons. In total, in the spring-summer of 1944, he flew 22 combat sorties. Then the heavy fighting began for the liberation of Poland. The pilots of the 352nd Regiment distinguished themselves once more. On August 12, four P-39s Regiments attacked a group of 27 Ju-87 and 16 FW-190 and claimed 13 kills without losses! They also excelled during the strike of the Modlin airfield and the liberation of the city of Inovroclaw where the 352nd Regiment was awarded the Order of Suvorov. For Poland, Xapa himself received the Order of the Red Banner and medals "For Military Merit" and "For the Liberation of Warsaw". in January-February 1945 he flew 11 combat missions. He continued his fight with his unit over the skies of Berlin and he was one of the first pilots to conduct a reconnaissance sortie over the Reich capital. The Airacobras operated from the Eberswalde airfield and hit hard the German defensive positions until the end of the war. On May 5, 1945, at the Eberswalde Lieutenant Colonel Πëτρ Xapa received an order to cease hostilities. Together with the commander of his 273rd Gomel Order of Suvorov Air Division, Hero of the Soviet Union Colonel Nikolai Isayev, he was lucky enough to go to Berlin and sign on the wall of the Reichstag. He also wrote an inscription on behalf of Sergei Gritsevets. After the war, the experienced fighter pilot, Regiment Commander, and holder of 5 combat orders, Lieutenant Colonel Πëτρ Xapa, was simply out of business. In May 1946, he was transferred to Reserve Air Force, and on June 5 he was retired under article 43 of paragraph "a": "For the impossibility of use due to staff reductions" - while his friends from the Spanish Civil War continued their service and became Generals: Akulenko, Kondrat, and Evseviev. At the age of 38, it was very

difficult to enter a civilian's life. He settled with his family in Kyiv. He worked first as the head of the

workshop at the Kyiv brewery, and then as the head of the personnel department of a shoe factory.

He lived modestly and quietly. He died, according to some sources, on November 17, 1967, and according to others - on January 2, 1968. He is buried in the Lukyanovsky Military Cemetery. His personal documents, photos, and awards are exhibited in the memorial complex - the "Ukrainian State Museum of the History of the Great Patriotic War" in Kyiv. Until today, perhaps, no one has ever remembered him anywhere and only a minimum of Greek people heard of him, although his

name and action are memorized on Greek Ukrainian and Greek Russian websites.





Germans concentrated on relatively low-level flights, designed to support their armies. As a result the Soviet P-39s rarely needed to fight above 15,000ft which was most vulnerable to the German Me-109 and FW-190. (http://ava.org.ru/iap/352.htm)

We would like to express our thankings to Captain Dr. Dimitrios Vogiatzis (HAF ret.), former History Assistant of the Hellenic Air Force Museum for bringing Xapa to our attention and also to give credit to the websites which are responsible for the creation of this honoring page to the uknown Greek Uckranian pilot of the Spanish Civil War and

Sources

WW2. Lastly we would like to devote this page to the fallen HAF pilots, Captain Efstathios Tsitlakidis (31) and First Lieutenant Marios Michail Touroutsikas, (29) of 338 Squadron, who lost with their F-4E Phantom II (AUP) during a low level CPM flight over the Ionian Sea, on January 30, 2023. https://1945.gr/hara-petr-ivanovich/

Download PDF

- https://proza.ru/2019/02/11/594
- http://airaces.narod.ru/spane/hara_pi.htm http://sovpilots.ru/cards/48_h/khara_petr_ivanovich.html
- http://aces.safarikovi.org/victories/greece-sp.html
- https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Хара,_Пётр_Иванович https://www.sb.by/articles/dva-mayora.html
- https://www.academia.edu/44413581/Greeks_in_the_Azov_18th_beginning_of_20th_century
- https://textarchive.ru/c-2861853.html
- http://ava.org.ru/iap/352.htm
- https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/352-й_истребительный_авиационный_полк https://histrf.ru/read/articles/chatos-i-moskas-russkiie-zashchitniki-ispanskogho-nieba
- - https://victorymuseum.ru/encyclopedia/technic/voenno-vozdushnye-sily/samolet-istrebitel-i-16-sssr/ http://ava.org.ru/iap/352.htm

Design & hosting by Bravo Bravo Aviation

© 2017-2023 Dimitris Vassilopoulos - All Rights Reserved