

*Oleg Zaharchuk, Associate Professor,  
PhD (Historical Sciences)  
(National Aviation University, Ukraine)*

### **Aviator Ievgraph Kruten: known and unknown pages of his life and career**

*The present research analyzes the contribution of I. Kruten into the development of fighter aviation.*

His name became legendary during his lifetime. P. Nesterov's student and a successor, the author of theoretical works on the tactics of air combat, one of the best aces of the Russian aviation of the First World War, who was born and finished his earthly journey on the territory of Ukraine. (17 (29) 12.1890 Kyiv – 6 (19).06.1917 Ternopil region). At present some works feature the main stages in the life and work of I. Kruten [1; 2; 10; 11; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 22; 23; 24; 25; 26], although there is no complex monographic study on this problem. Proceeding from this, the author of the publication, limited in volume, focuses on individual fragments of his biography that appear to be controversial.

It must be noted that for a long time the name of the famous pilot was undeservedly forgotten. Only before the war of the USSR with Nazi Germany, in order to recall that at one time Russian pilots triumphed over the Nazi aces, the first mention of him began to appear.

I. Kruten's former colleague A. Shiukov, a famous glider pilot, military pilot, who later became a colonel, instructor of the tactics of the Zhukovsky Air Force Academy was one of the first who told in his book about the activities of his commander during the First World War on the basis of personal memories and documentary materials. In particular, he reported that among the Russian "aces" during the war, the young commander of the fighter group, I. Kruten, who was an excellent pilot and a remarkable shooter, was particularly distinguished [1]. The author told about tactics, which I. Kruten used during the air battle. Speaking of his victories A. Shiukov stressed that I. Kruten shot down no more than a dozen enemy aircraft during his short life [1]. In another work A. Shiukov gave more detailed information about the biography of the famous pilot. In particular, we learn that I. Kruten came to aviation from artillery under the influence of P. Nesterov and during the war was at first a pilot-scout, and then became a fighter pilot [2, p. 56].

A. Shiukov characterized I. Kruten as a first-class ace and experienced commander, who was highly valued by the military commanders. Evidence of this was I. Kruten's award for military merits by Cross of Saint George and sending him abroad to improve his flight qualifications (he visited France and Britain) [2, p. 57]. At the same time, the book of the famous fighter pilot A. Pokryshkin was published.

It ran that while studying at the Kachinsk Military Aviation School pilots got acquainted with the work by I. Kruten. Giving him a characteristic A. Pokryshkin wrote that I. Kruten was "a pilot of great courage and high military duty" [3, p. 10].

It must be noted that A. Pokryshkin successfully applied and developed in practice many of the provisions of the work by I. Kruten on tactics of fighter aviation during the Second World War.

For the record, these works laid the foundation for further study of I. Kruten's biography. Their characteristic feature was the significant availability of ideological clichés. The achievements of Russian aviation were generally praised, while the achievements of French, English, and especially German aces were ignored. In particular, some authors argued that large fighter groups were formed on I. Kruten's initiative in Russia for the first time in the world [5, p. 123]. We believe it to be a strong exaggeration. In fact, they were first created in France, and then in Germany. It is no coincidence that in November 1916 I. Kruten together with 14 best pilots of the South-Western Front was sent to France, where he took a course in the schools of aerobatics and air combat (in Poe and Kazo) [6, p. 513, 546].

In the early 60-ies of the XX century comprehensive memoirs of the history of Russian aviation (1910-1917) were written, which had been stored before for many years in the archives. Their author was the famous Russian military pilot, the author of the book «Material on the tactics of air combat», Major-General V. Tkachev, the first aviator awarded St. George of the 4th degree, commander of all Russian army aviation from June 1917 and in the army P. Wrangel [8, p. 22; 6, p. 564, 13]. It should be noted that in the USSR only a few excerpts from his memoirs were published in the Kuban journal [7]. Only in the beginning of the XXI century they were published fully [6].

Recalling the first acquaintance with I. Kruten at Darnytsky training ground in Kyiv in 1913, V. Tkachev wrote that “he particularly remembered the figure of the stocky, short young second lieutenant of the 2nd mounted artillery battalion, closely following the flights of airplanes. He ran up to me and said: «Mister military unit commander, take me with you to fly!» [6, c. 178–179]. Giving the characteristic of the famous pilot V. Tkachev wrote: «I. Kruten had enormous willpower; he was a talented leader-teacher, a skilful pilot and a fearless leader in air battles» [6, p. 550]. He was an air knight and one of our outstanding aces. Captain I. Kruten died as a consequence of the absurd case at his own airfield [6, p. 557].

The memoirs of one of I. Kruten's students, I. Spatarel, were published in 1967, who later became Major-General of the Aviation of the Soviet Army. Using little-known documents, mostly from personal archives, the author described the first Russian pilots in the context of the birth of Soviet aviation, including his famous commander. Speaking about I. Kruten's death, he stated the version according to which “he died, most likely because he was seriously injured and lost consciousness in the air”. Indeed, I. Kruten could land aircraft with a failed engine” [9, p. 191]. We should underline, that information on I. Kruten, submitted in I. Spatarel's memoirs was generally appreciated by contemporaries.

The 25th anniversary I. Kruten's death was commemorated in the newspaper «Stalinsky Sokol», in which a propaganda article of the doctor of historical sciences N. Volkov was published. Speaking of Russian aviators, the author noted that I. Kruten devoted all his conscious life to aviation, to which he gave all his strength [10]. Talking about the tactics of the famous ace, the author stressed that he had

previously treated the enemy using such a maneuver. In particular, «a cascade of specific figures influenced the opponent's psyche and thus demoralized, frightened him» [10]. According to N. Volkov, I. Kruten shot down 20 enemy aircraft. In giving his version of the reasons for his death, the historian noted that I. Kruten fell victim to an accident. At an altitude of 400 m, the engine failed [10].

In the early 50-ies of the XX century a former military photo correspondent, Colonel G. Zalutsky, placed in the brochure the first popular essay on I. Kruten during the war of 1941–1945 [11]. Using archival materials and the work of other authors G. Zalutsky significantly supplemented the biography of the famous ace with previously unknown facts. He reported that I. Kruten was present when P. Nesterov performed the figure of higher aerobatics – a dead loop. In the author's opinion, this may have decided his final fate [11, p. 62]

G. Zalutsky also analyzed the main theoretical works of an outstanding pilot [11, p. 69–71, 73–77]. Speaking of his victories, the author noted that I. Kruten shot down about 20 enemy aircraft, 6 of which were shot down in the location of Russian troops [11, p. 78]. At the same time, the statement of G. Zalutsky as well as some authors looks very doubtful [12, p. 212] in that by creating the advanced Russian school of air combat, I. Kruten left far behind in this area the theorists and practitioners of foreign aviation [11, p. 78]. As we have said, if this were true, then I. Kruten and other pilots would not have been sent to France to upgrade their qualifications.

At the same time scientific works on the military activities of I. Kruten began to appear. Among them a special place is taken by a detailed publication, written in 1960 by I. Spatarel based on memoirs. It wasn't published for a long time and eventually came out only in 2000. Making use of different documentary materials I. Spatarel managed to show little-known facts from the biography of the former commander and to objectively depict him not only as a pilot, but also as a person [14].

I. Kruten's activities remained interesting for researchers. December 18, 1972, the famous Soviet test pilot, candidate of geographical sciences, author of books and essays on the history of Soviet aviation, Hero of the Soviet Union A. Gratsiansky made a report for the first time, which was soon published, highlighting the unknown and little-known facts of I. Kruten's biography [15, p. 24]. Using extensive material, including archival documents, A. Gratsiansky reported that during his stay in France I. Kruten attended courses at the school of shooting and air combat in Kazo, and also took part in hostilities. In particular, he shot down a German plane for which he was awarded the Battle Cross with palm leaves [15, p. 27]. In the future, the author, being a native Kyivan, continued to be interested in the famous countryman. In particular, as a result of continuous research with A. Shiukov and other pilots A. Gratsiansky was able to find in Kyiv in July 1974 I. Kruten's grave and organize its reburial next to the grave of P. Nesterov [15, p. 30]. In the context of the history of aviation and aeronautics in Russia, P. Druz, a well-known expert on this problem, analyzed I. Kruten's activities on the basis of extensive materials, mainly archival data [16, p. 290–294]. In particular, we learn that in one

of the battles in which he shot down a German aircraft, he helped the wounded German pilots [16, p. 294].

The writers were also interested in the biography of the famous ace. Among the works of art in which the life and work of I. Kruteny was described, the most prominent is the story-chronicle written on the basis of documentary materials by a former military pilot and writer Yu. Galperen [17], as well as a documentary novel by I. Sorokin, published to commemorate the centennial of the birth of I. Kruten [18]. Please, take into consideration, that as well as the previous book it is written on the extensive material, in particular, the author used archival materials. In fact, this is the most complete biography of the famous ace. During the period of perestroika in the USSR, researchers began to give more balanced assessments of what was happening. The work by the readers of Kachen Higher Military Aviation School was significant in this respect. In particular, when assessing the contribution of the famous ace to the development of aviation, they noted that «I. Kruten was one of the initiators of the creation of special fighter units in Russia» [13, p. 34] and that he was the organizer of the Russian school of air combat” [13, p. 34].

It should be said that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the interest in the biography of I. Kruten did not weaken. There were works deprived of ideological stamps, characteristic for the Soviet era. In particular, essential scientific articles devoted to the life and work of the famous pilot were written in the reference books [19, 419-420]. Among them, it is necessary to single out a handbook which for the first time featured biographies of famous pilots, including I. Kruten in detail and reliably, based on documents, mainly on archival materials [20, p. 156–157].

At the same time, a number of works were published which, in the context of the history of aviation, also considered the activities of I. Kruten [4, p. 107–109; 21, p. 73; 22, p. 483–485, 657–658; 23, p. 159–182; 24, p. 29–41; 25, pp. 76–80]. However, in some of them there are a number of inaccuracies. In particular, one of the authors claims that at the time of his death I. Kruten’s officially registered number of shot down enemy aircraft was 15 (and according to unconfirmed reports – 20) and he was the absolute leader among Russian pilots [22, p. 484]. It is common knowledge that the most effective Russian pilot during the First World War was Lieutenant-Colonel A. Kozakov, commander of the First Combat Air Group, who, after P. Nesterov, did an air ram, destroying an enemy aircraft and remained alive. In particular, during the war years A. Kozakov personally shot down 17 and in group battles 15 more enemy aircraft [16, p. 295; 27, p. 36]. Some works indicate that A. Kozakov shot down a total of at least 30 aircraft, but there are no more than 20 registered victories [2, p. 56].

I. Kruten’s life and activities are still of interest in Ukraine. In particular, for the first time a brochure was published in which the course of life of the famous ace from birth to tragic death is described on the basis of various sources, including archival ones [26].

Based on existing literature, we believe, that adolescent years of the famous pilot require further study, as the process of his personality formation took place at that time. His stay in France and Britain should also be studied in more detail. This is possible if French and English documentary materials are studied.

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