

Moscow Victory Day Billboard Featuring Luftwaffe Pilots Taken Down

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A local politician apologized to the citizens of Ivanteyevka after a banner was erected in their Moscow region town that — though meant to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Allied victory in World War II — featured Nazi Germany's Luftwaffe pilots next to the slogan “They fought for the Motherland.”

“I am very sad, hurt, that this happened,” Ivanteyevka head Sergei Gridnev said in a statement. “I apologize to the veterans of the Great Patriotic War, and to the residents of the city, the region and the country, and I vow to search for those responsible for what has happened here.”

The billboard was pulled down 12 hours after it was erected in Ivanteyevka, according to the Ivanteyevka Today advertising agency, which created the banner, Govorit Moskva radio reported Monday.

The billboard featured a black and white historical photo of pilots in flying helmets inside an

aircraft's cockpit flanked by the black and orange St. George's ribbon that symbolizes Russia's military valor and a slogan that read: "They fought for the Motherland."

Trouble began when online users identified the image as a photo of a World War II-era German Ju-88A-1 bomber plane. The photo appears in a number of history books and publications available online.

A spokesperson for the Ivanteyevka city administration called the incident a "regrettable glitch," Moscow's Govorit Moskva radio reported.

But others took it less lightly.

"It is very painful and hurtful when such things happen in the heart of our Motherland, in the Moscow region," State Duma deputy, paratrooper colonel and Hero of Russia Andrei Krasov said in a statement.

"Such incidents cross out all the efforts of the people, of our Motherland, ahead of the 70th anniversary of the victory," Krasov said in comments posted on the website of the pro-Kremlin All-Russian People's Front coalition, which is led by President Vladimir Putin.

Yet others quipped that the apparent error carried a deeper meaning — for instance, that Nazi Germany's air force was infiltrated by Russian agents.

"Photos like this really give me hope," blogger Mikhail Pozharsky, one of those who posted the photo of the billboard online, wrote on his Facebook page. "I am starting to think that our people are everywhere and are carrying out quiet but relentless sabotage."

Similar issues have appeared amid Russia's May 9 Victory Day celebrations in previous years as well.

Examples compiled by the NewDayNews portal included a photo of American soldiers at Iwo Jima featured on a Russian Victory Day billboard that went up in the Chelyabinsk region in 2013 and a newspaper ad in Russia's western exclave of Kaliningrad that wished war veterans a happy Victory Day in 2006 with an image of a German Tiger tank.

Yet another example was a photo of German Panzer tanks that appeared on a billboard in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg in 2012 — although in that case, NewDayNews noted, "at least they [the tanks] had been seized by Soviet soldiers."

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