

**Soviet Women and World War II:
Experiences of Warrior Women, Soviet
Gender Policy, and Involvement in the Male
Field of War**

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Introduction

A hundred years ago, the concept of women being mass mobilized for war would have been laughed off as insanity. Yet, at the height of World War II, the Soviet Union had an estimated 800,000 women who served in the military, 500,000 of whom served in active combat roles.¹ These women would make up almost 8% of the Soviet army contributing to it in both meaningful and diverse ways.² This is the first instance of women in widespread combat roles, thus marking the transition between women individually volunteering to a widespread mobilization of women at both the state and individual levels. These women fulfilled a variety of roles, from the more traditional medical personnel to bringers of death such as, "Night Witches", tankers, and snipers. These women also brought their own unique traits, training, and personalities that either helped or hindered their pursuit of military roles. Women would challenge gender norms and try to establish what it was to be both female and a soldier, often depending on what part of the military they served in. Soviet Women contributed in meaningful ways to the war. These Soviet women were not just figureheads or propaganda producing pawns. Still, even with state sanctioned mobilization and employment of women in combat roles, after the war, many of these women were demobilized, denied recognition and even publicly ridiculed for their services.³ Hence, when women engaged in the traditionally male role of war, they came back ridiculed, sometimes even untouchable.

¹ Roger Markwick and Euridice Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 14, 18.

² K. J. Cottam, "Soviet Women in WWII: The Ground Forces and the Navy", *International Journal of Women's Studies* 3, no. 4 (1980), 345 as cited in Samantha Vasjskop, "Elana's War: Russian Women in Combat" (Undergraduate thesis, Ashland University), June 2008, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://ashbrook.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2008-Vajskop.pdf>, 28.

³ Nicole Dombrowski Risser, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century: Enlisted With or Without Consent* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 150-154.

A variety of secondary variables and one primary factor influenced women's choices to join the military and participate in the war. These auxiliary factors included early Soviet defeats, temporary manpower shortages, encouragement to join medical corps and Lenin's idealized gender rhetoric. The main stated motivation of these women was their patriotic drive. Researching deeper, though, showcases that while patriotic duty was stated highly among most women, some other more personal motivations such as revenge, loss of family, to make up for past familial transgressions, and to escape peasant life, were evident. Thus these women, who almost unanimously volunteered for the war, were not pressed into military purely for the purpose of solving mid-war manpower issues, nor were they pressed for significant propaganda reasons.

Women tried to fulfill the "idealized" rhetorical gender ideology of Lenin, that sex did not matter, for whatever career option they pursued. Of all the pre-war fields the military was one of the few closed off to Soviet women. World War II, allowed women to make leaps into the military, demanding their place in this very masculine environment and often proving themselves worthy warriors. Unfortunately, these views of equality between the genders were not universal, especially in Soviet politics and in the military. By joining the military these women received heavy criticism and resistance from many men, Soviet high command, and sometimes other females. This was one of the largest challenges women faced, and while they made progress in participating in the masculine field of war, this progress was far from perfect. Women tried to gain a foothold in joining the military and trying to establish their legitimacy as warriors. This foothold though was imperfect, temporary, and after the war, many of the gains made by women in order to permanently join the military were denied and lost. Because of this dichotomy between what was the idealized gender rhetoric, to the reality of Stalin's regime,

women were temporarily allowed to fight with Stalin's support, and then denied or dismissed when his presence or support diminished. It is key to remember the importance of Stalin's approval, especially in the very recently purged military. Nevertheless, these women's war contributions were a step towards the dominion of war being transformed from solely a man's duty to possibly a women's job as well.

This thesis seeks to address the following, broken down into three sections: The Soviet women's World War II preparation and analysis of gender rhetoric, Soviet women's involvement in the war, and the legacies and propaganda of women's involvement. The first section will answer the following questions. Did the Soviet Union prepare women to fight in a future war? What were some reasons they did or did not? It is important to understand the complex Soviet gender rhetoric and war perception in order to see the potential of Soviet women in the military.

The second section will focus on the different military services, and how women's experiences and support differed from service to service. The following are questions that I will address while exploring these nuanced differences between the services. Was the Soviet state willing to use these women to fight in World War II? How did the Women who became soldiers view themselves in this war? Did they reconcile traditional female identities with war, or did they create a separate unique identity? Did they try to blend in with the male units? Did they want to be separate from male units, and did this depend on the armed service they served in? How did males treat this identity, and how did they interact with women? These questions and their answers will differ from service to service, and not enough study has been done to try to differentiate these experiences and answers.

The third section will look at the Soviet government's propaganda and the legacies of these women. It will ask whether the Soviet State continued to support these women after the

war. It will address state crafted heroines and various propaganda methods from movies to posters. It will also provide some context to why finding these sources was difficult. It will also reflect how the Soviet government fails to adequately support women in warfare and the effects on these women's postwar jobs, status and memory.

This analysis of Soviet women in combat will contribute to the limited scholarship and public knowledge. It will provide much-needed insight into the mass mobilization of women in warfare, a trend that has become a debate in many developed countries. While other scholars have analyzed Soviet women's contributions they almost all fall into two categories. The first being devoted to one military service branch, the most popular of which being the Soviet Air Force. The second category covers the wide range of publication on the Great Patriotic War (the Soviet Union's official term for World War II), which often only cover women as an afterthought, often devoting less than a chapter to them. Therefore, this thesis seeks to create original research in analyzing gender relations, women across the Soviet military branches, the propaganda rhetoric of women, and these women warriors' legacies.

This conflict between Soviet women's role in war and peacetime in World War II reflects current struggles many women face in the modern military. This research is relevant to the modern times, with arguments of whether women should be involved in war and combat being discussed across a range of countries. At a time when women are being allowed into combat across much of NATO and now the U.S., the study of large-scale usage of women in warfare is especially pertinent.⁴ The recent nude picture scandals in the US Marine Corps showcase the

⁴ "A Purple Heart Warrior Takes Aim At Military Inequality In 'Shoot Like A Girl'" NPR. March 02, 2017. Accessed March 04, 2017. <http://www.npr.org/2017/03/02/517944956/a-purple-heart-warrior-takes-aim-at-military-inequality-in-shoot-like-a-girl>. This is a pro-integration article that argues for women's place in the military. Lee Bockhorn, "Women at Arms," review of *The Kinder, Gentler Military: Can America's Gender-Neutral Fighting Force Still Win Wars?* & *Breaking Out: VMI and the Coming of Women.*, Policy Review, Hoover Institution, July &

present day resistance to women engaging in a traditional male dominated field.⁵ Also, the current arguments for the United States registration for the draft for females provides further reason to analyze how women can best serve in the US military.⁶ This research will provide insight into many of the pitfalls these women faced along with how important full government and public support is for combat women in the war effort.

In order to understand the combat roles of women, its nuance and ultimate reversal after the war, it's important to look at individual stories, memoirs, and diaries. Through these women's stories, we see the struggle presented in these 800,000 women soldiers who served and tried to defy gender roles and the masculine history of war. Surviving women's testimonies only further complicate the reasons for their involvement. Some of these women joined out of necessity, others to protect their families, others for the "higher purpose" of serving the motherland, while some joined to prove themselves to others.⁷ Thus, the motivations and goals of these women were different, and because of these differences, we can further understand why these women fought, if they did challenge the masculinity of war, and what ultimately happened to them. Women were able to join the war effort in a small, yet meaningful way. The lack of complete gender equality and resistance from both the public and government meant that women's military service was limited and, after the war, and these women warriors were dismissed and demobilized. Ultimately their contributions would be officially constructed by the Soviet Union, either through a few highly publicized selected heroes, or more often erased and hidden.

aug. 2000. Which is an analysis of the possible problems concerning women in the military.

⁵ "Top US Marine vows action on nude photos scandal." BBC News. March 14, 2017. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39270693>.

Bill Chappell, "Sharing Of Nude Photos Of Female Marines Online Prompts Pentagon Investigation," NPR, March 06, 2017, , accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/03/06/518767235/sharing-of-nude-photos-of-female-marines-prompts-pentagon-investigation>.

⁶ Eugene Scott, "Obama signs onto women registering for Selective Service," *Cable New Network*, December 2, 2016, , accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/02/politics/women-selective-service-obama/>.

⁷ Svetlana Aleksievich, *War's Unwomanly Face* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 10-18.

Therefore the details of the grunt service women would be hidden and misconstrued as selfish and sexual by the general public and military men.

Historiography and Sourcing

World War II put the Soviet Union in a fight for its life. Yet, in this fight, was Stalin's regime willing to use women in active combat roles? The Soviet Union's ideology and people were challenged and almost brought down. Because of these trying conditions, some have argued that it was only because of the threat of imminent destruction that women were allowed to serve in the armed forces. Roger Cardona and Euridice Markwick, Professors at the University of Newcastle, in *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War*, argue this, emphasizing the state's role or lack thereof in preparing women for the role of being a soldier in the war.⁸ They also discuss the rapid demobilization of these women after the war, how women rarely challenged gender rhetoric and how women's war rhetoric never featured women in prominent military roles - except for rare heroines who had a very carefully crafted public image.⁹ In short, Cardona and Markwick argue that women were a temporary solution to manpower shortage and were not intended to serve as full-time warriors. Thus, they seem to agree that the identities of woman and soldier were to remain two separate entities. Reina Pennington another scholar in the field, in the academic journal *Slavic Review*, praised the intense research and well-rounded focus of the book. She further states, "The research conducted for this book is outstanding. The authors deftly combine published and archival materials, wartime diaries and letters, and recent interviews with veterans."¹⁰ This is important because it is one of the few secondary sources that has such a breadth of primary material helping to filter out biases and providing translation

⁸ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 12-23.

⁹ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 19-21.

¹⁰ Reina Pennington, Book review of Anna Krylova, "Soviet women in combat: a history of violence on the Eastern Front", *Slavic Review* 73, no. 1 (2014): 202-03.

to a large quantity of previously secret documents. Marwick and Cardona in, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, argue that challenging gender roles was not the main focus of these women. Instead, these women volunteered patriotically to preserve the Soviet Union, fighting and serving, with gender concerns and harassment as a secondary thought. Not all agree with Markwick and Cardona, Professor Anna Krylova argues that gender identity and reconciling feminine mother/wife images with the masculine warrior image was a priority for women, and connected to state literature. They argue that the state did well to prepare the women rhetorically, and on these women's own initiative they genuinely believed they were able to reconcile the identities of woman and soldier into one. Anna Krylova of Duke University favors the idea of women being able to integrate themselves into the military and that they actively strove to create their own identities within it.¹¹ These arguments, along with the women's individual stories and statistics, showcase how both rhetoric and policy regarding the role of women in warfare changed over the course of the war. All three scholars have weight to their arguments, but the Soviet government's slow change and apparent resistance to women initially, along with the lack of continued government backing seems to support Markwick and Cardona's view that the Soviet Government only lukewarmly allowed women into combat roles. This along with the issue of identity and the issues of health and sexual assault, the selective use of imagery, resistance by males, and the consistently attributed "womanly" traits to warriors showcased the lack of full acceptance of women as soldiers.

The rarity and classification of subject material of this thesis, made it difficult to obtain sources. This study of Soviet women in combat in World War II is a relatively new field with

¹¹ Anna Krylova, *Soviet women in combat: a history of violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 18- 21.

most major secondary sources being published within the last fifteen years.¹² This has to do with the politics, access to archives and government interference. Unfortunately, the recent political climate between Russia, Europe, and the United States seems to be closing this window into access of sources. Another issue is the usage of Soviet sources, some of which have serious biases, or edits which make it difficult to get an accountable understanding of what transpired and what these women truly thought. These biases, however, do offer insight into the official Soviet Policy and how it tried to steer the conversation and release of information to show women warriors in a certain feminine aspect yet still as very capable warriors. Another issue is the sources coming out of the Soviet Union. A prime example is BBC reporter Bruce Myles' *Night Witches: The Untold Story of Soviet Women in Combat*. While an interesting read of oral history and an attempt at scholarship, it made serious errors. In the academic journal. *Military Affairs*, Kazimiera Cotom, one of the original scholars in studying soviet combat women, comments upon the multiple inconsistencies and lack of fact checking by Myles.¹³ As Catherine Merridale notes in *Ivan's War* "The search for Ivan, the Red Army soldier, involved more than one journey... before I could begin to find the true Ivan".¹⁴ This difficulty in finding the thoughts and feeling of the true foot soldier stem from the attempted absolute control of the Stalinist state. This, paired with the Soviet banning of war diaries, seriously hampers the efforts to find original primary sources.¹⁵ These issues persist over earlier sources (pre-1990) and the propaganda and information controlled by the state can cause an unwary reader to misinterpret

¹² See Bibliography almost all of my secondary sources are published 2002 or later.

¹³ Cottam, Kazimiera Janina. Book Review of *Night Witches: The Untold Story of Soviet Women in Combat*. By Bruce Myles, *Military Affairs* 47, no. 1 (1983): 50.

Military Affairs Journal review that criticized the Myles book, Cotom herself has written and recorded biographies of similar women, and has some very rare books and article on the subject of Soviet women in world War II. Most of her work is from the 1980's and 1990's and is one of the earliest pioneers in this field. Unfortunately there are only a few copies of her works and these were not made available to me in a timely manner.

¹⁴ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 10.

¹⁵ Merridale, *Ivan's war*, 8.

what is being said. Another weakness of sourcing is that most of these come from memoirs after the war, which may cause certain facts and roles to be downplayed in order to achieve a certain ideal. The lack of discussion of love, sex, and treatment of women by male officer's point to women's unwillingness to go into full detail about their personal lives. Overall, this study of Soviet Women's involvement in World War II is an exciting, yet minimally researched field that merits further study. Even with these limitations, there exists a great possibility to understand the trials and contradictions these women faced in warfare and gender equality. With these women veterans advancing age and souring relations with Russia, more must be done to record and open these sources to the public for further research.

The Definition Combat and Noncombat

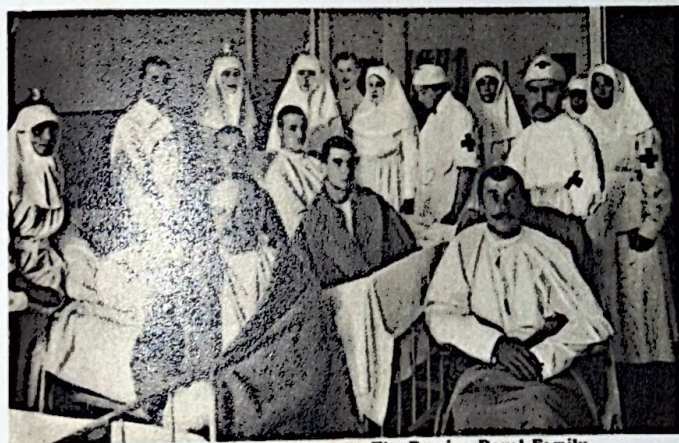
The discrepancy between combat and noncombat labels between sources and numbers has made it challenging to create an accurate picture of women's roles and experiences in the war. It is easy to say that Soviet women pilots and snipers engaged in active combat, becoming frontline warriors. It is much more difficult for other roles, such as paramedics and signalers, who were stationed on the front line yet did not usually carry weapons. What definition do these positions deserve? Even more contradictory are those who served in reserve, support roles deemed "noncombat" yet were encircled, captured, shot at and strafed resulting in large numbers of deaths and getting the very real experience of combat. While these questions present interesting further study and analysis, for the purpose of my paper I will define their context. Whenever the words combat or frontline are utilized, they mean women who served in roles that either engaged in direct fighting or in duties that required them to run towards enemy fire (i.e. Snipers, paramedics, signalers, ammo runners). Noncombat, reserves, or support roles will mean those women whose jobs required them to assist combat troops, but if attacked they were

supposed to retreat from enemy fire, (i.e. surgeons, medical assistants, mechanics, laundresses, cooks, etc.) While these definitions are not perfect and there is still some crossover, they will help convey numbers, deaths, and shared experience between different roles in the war.

Women's Pre-World War II Preparation and History

Women's World War I and Civil War Involvement

A comprehensive study of Soviet Women's involvement in World War II, must start with the history of women in World War I and the Russian civil war. The Russian Tsarist government officially denied women entry into combat roles.¹⁶ The only acceptable role was enlistment with the Russian Red Cross as "Sisters of Mercy", nurses and medical assistants.¹⁷ It is important to understand that nursing became a highly publicized and almost fashionable trend among the higher classes of tsarist Russia. For example, many of the women in the royal family became nurses and volunteered, albeit far from the front lines.¹⁸



Splendid work is being done by The Russian Royal Family
1. Empress of Russia 2. Princess Tatiana 3. Princess Olga

Figure 1

¹⁶ Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 26 - 28.

¹⁷ Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 20 - 29.

¹⁸ Figure 1 Of Red Cross Nurses and Royal Family <https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101611717-img>

Women auxiliaries, employed through civil means, often served in the rear as cooks, supply clerks, drivers. Overall, though, this female involvement was fulfilling more traditional roles, rarely challenging the status quo, or even engaging with the government to let women into the service. There were a few individual women who disguised themselves as men or served when circumstances dictated, but this number was relatively low. These women who volunteered, though, did receive some publicity. When discovered, they were often forced from their positions in the military. The women who were able to stay active when their true sex was discovered was likely caused by the degradation of the Russian army in 1916, 1917 and its loss of large numbers of troops. Another reason was the Cossack units had a strong military culture, and Cossack women who fought were more accepted by their units.¹⁹ Also, some individual commanders allowed women to fight on even when their sex was discovered. However few Russian women fought in World War I because of the Russian government's condemnation of women's direct combat involvement in the war effort.²⁰ Thus pre 1917 Tsarist Russia meant that women would not be serving officially in combat roles, only serving in the traditional nursing roles and occasionally in support roles of cooks and laundry maids.

The transition and relative chaos of the Provisional government, (Russian government in 1917 after the Petrograd revolt) provided a short opportunity for women military involvement and recognition. About 5,000 women would serve in all female combat units, which were borderline militias.²¹ The Provisional government seized this opportunity, needing any propaganda value and credibility to continue the war. This Provisional government was in no position to resist the pleas of women who wanted to fight. They needed to balance the demands

¹⁹ Jeffrey Tayler, "Russia's Holy Warriors," *The Atlantic*, Jan. & Feb. 2005. A current day perspective, chronicling the Cossack's warrior tradition. Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 44-48. The Cossack background for World War I

²⁰ Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 30-32.

²¹ Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 53.

of both conservatives and liberals, while also trying to win over the masses. The women's combat unit provided a way of gaining new support for the continuation of the war. These units took decidedly fatalistic names, with the first being "1st Russian Women's Battalion of Death," led by the very masculine Maria Bochkareva. She was described as "stocky, with short-cropped hair and a pockmarked face, she smoked, drank, spat, and swore".²² Her mannerisms were overly masculine, she acted and portrayed herself as a man. She was one of the very few women who were allowed to serve openly in combat in World War I and these experiences and exploits made her a respected soldier. This made her a highly qualified candidate to lead the first female regiments. Still, these women units would be small and have little direct impact on the war. A quote by Florence Farmborough an English teacher and nurse showcases the relatively small size and wonder of the women's battalion

"13th August 1917: At dinner we heard more of the Women's Death Battalion.

It was true; Bochkareva had brought her small battalion down south of the Austrian Front, and they had manned part of the trenches which had been abandoned by the Russian Infantry. The size of the Battalion had considerably decreased since the first weeks of recruitment... slowly dwindled to 250.²³

Thus while women served in all women units during World War I their numbers were small, partially due to the rigor of training and the masculine ideals of Bochkareva. This idea of women not being able to serve for long periods of time, or in larger numbers would play a part in the initial resistance to Soviet Women joining the war effort in World War II. Even the existence of women regiments demonstrated women's empowerment. When women organizations

²² Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 70.

²³ Florence Farmborough, *With the Armies of the Tsar: A Nurse at the Russian Front in War and Revolution, 1914-1918* (Briarcliff Manor, NY: Stein and Day, 1974; Cooper Square Press, 2000).

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/p/226.html>

petitioned for women battalions some considered it to be a part of women's social movement for equality.²⁴ A total of fifteen women units were officially created and endorsed and they were often made by female committees and movements. These units were minimally equipped and served as propaganda tools for the provisional government. While some served on the front line, with Bochkareva's regiment performing admirably, their main focus was on propaganda, used to shame men from deserting and to increase morale for the war effort. The fate of these all female regiments was to be either decommissioned with the fall of the provisional government, or to fight with the white armies in the civil war. Thus, the short-lived all-female regiments coincided with the fleeting Provisional government. Their involvement in the wider war effort would be minimal and ignored by the Bolsheviks.

The Bolsheviks ironically did not use all-female units in warfare in an official capacity. This was because the female soldiers served in units that sided with the Whites (Imperial government). The red guards hunted down these white units and either forced them to surrender or destroyed them. Maria Bochkareva herself was captured and executed.²⁵ Thus women units were first used against the early Bolshevik government, creating an understandable weariness of using women in combat units later on.

Overall, the minimal usage of women in World War I did help lay some groundwork for the acceptance of women into World War II, especially in the more traditional support roles such as nursing, cooking, and driving. The creation of a few female war heroes and their use as propaganda would be copied by the Soviet Union, both to inspire and shame men into fighting harder, while also showcasing the supposed "complete" gender equality of the Soviet Union.

²⁴ Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 114-116.

²⁵ Sergei Droko, "organizator zhenskogo bata'ona smerti," (The organizer of the female battalion of death). *Voprosy istorii* (Questions of History) 7 (1993): 168. As translated in Stoff, *They fought for the Motherland*, 281.

Soviet Government's Prewar Preparation, Komsomol

Did the Soviet Union in the interwar period, 1918 - 1939 prepare women to fight in a future war? In comparison with every other modern nation, the Soviet Union did prepare its women better and made a conscious effort to include them in traditionally male roles. These roles included heavy industry and, higher education, but even with all this progress, two career options were still difficult for women politics and the military. Overall, Soviet planned policies, such as the Soviets' progressive policy on women's healthcare and education, youth propaganda and paramilitary organizations (i.e. the Komsomol) helped allow women to volunteer but did not actively encourage it. To say that the Soviet Union was fully willing to use women in warfare would be false. It took the initiative of these Soviet women to become a part of the war effort. Other factors that were not state planned and that led 800,000 women to join include how badly the Soviet Union suffered during the first years of war and the private motivations of the women concerned.²⁶ While the state made significant rhetorical changes in women's roles during the interwar period, many of the actual actions of the state were too shallow or were overshadowed by preparing men for the next coming war. Thus, the Soviet state did tacitly accept the "Woman Warrior" but failed to adequately plan for or actively embrace more than a few females in the prewar military. Still, this rhetoric had an important benefit. When the war started, many women, despite having only a short introduction into military matters volunteered and patriotically believed that women could serve as soldiers.

It is important to realize that many of the women who served were young, single women, between the ages of 16 - 25. These women were born between 1914 - 1923 and grew up in a country with the ideology of Leninism. Outside influences were minimal, and these women grew

²⁶ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 6-7.

up and went to school with Lenin's very progressive views on gender equality. These new policies created new almost equal opportunities, unlike previous generations, where women were forced into a subordinate lifestyle often maintaining the home. Lenin's policies were directed towards creating equal work for women, along with equal pay.²⁷ Encouraging women to get involved in industry allowed women to bring home pay and demand a more equal say in the housing chores and leadership. Leninism also allowed women more control of their health by letting women get abortions and better overall health care. In the Soviet Union, abortion was legal from 1920 – 1936. Giving women these controls over their reproductive rights shrank family sizes and allowed women to become more career-oriented.²⁸ Family size was also reduced by the great famines and failures of the first five year plan, as evidenced by the infamous 1937 Soviet census.²⁹ This allowed younger women greater freedom, especially in the cities, allowing them to work and attend higher educational institutions. These new policies and women's higher education marked a rapid departure from past Russian culture and gender roles. While these very liberal policies were somewhat short-lived due to Lenin's death in 1924, these women grew up and were educated during the peak of these policies in the 1920s and early 1930s. By the mid-1930s, many of these policies had been halted or reversed because of Stalin's

²⁷ Anna Krylova, *Soviet women in combat: a history of violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), -31-35.

²⁸ Finding academic sources for Soviet Abortion is difficult due to its sensitive nature. Biases are common and much of the discussion is on the reinstatement of abortion in the USSR in the late 1950's. The following three Academic journal entries both give some context and laws of Soviet abortions. Michaels, Paula A. "Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1936 Abortion Ban." *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 2 (2001): 307-330. Savage, Mark. "The Law of Abortion in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the People's Republic of China: Women's Rights in Two Socialist Countries." *Stanford Law Review* 40, no. 4 (1988): 1027-117. Popov, Andrej A. "Family Planning and Induced Abortion in the USSR: Basic Health and Demographic Characteristics." *Studies in Family Planning* 22, no. 6 (1991): 368-77.

²⁹ "Демографические катастрофы XX века - ПОЛИТ.РУ." Полит.ру. January 16, 2006. Accessed March 16, 2017. <http://www.polit.ru/article/2006/01/16/demography/>. Translated by Google translate, discussed a bit about the disastrous 1937 census, its data contrasted the predicted population growth (thus success of Stalinism). Both this along with the abortions, showcased smaller families, and more possible female mobility.

more conservative policies.³⁰ However, even with Stalin's more conservative policies on women, the Soviet Union still had one of the most progressive gender policies of its time. Thus, while these women had rights given and then some of those rights taken away, the overall place of women in society was much more equal with men than elsewhere. In schools and through propaganda, these young women were told they could do men's jobs. These expanded rights thus set the groundwork for women to challenge the solely male role in the conduct of war.

Youth and paramilitary organizations provided most of the opportunity for Women's pre-war involvement and basic military training. The Komsomol (All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) was like many other national youth organizations of the time, such as Hitler Youth, in that it promoted the party line while giving teens and young adults, ages 9 -28, a means of recreation and training. The Komsomol taught young men and women how to shoot, fly and drive. Komsomol political officers "exhorted young women to participate as fully as men in production and social life: 'Women join the Komsomol!', 'Women to the tractor!' Women take up flying!'.³¹ Thus the Komsomol was a way of breaking down the gender barrier around the use of the gun. It helped break down any lingering gender barriers amongst youth and encouraged women to learn skills that in the past were deemed masculine. This practice helped set the foundation for female recruitment in war, as women now had some skills in shooting and confidence in their ability to do what had originally been a man's job.

A subset of the Komsomol was the paramilitary organization, *Osoaviakhim*, or "Society of Friends of Defense and Aviation control," founded in 1927.³² As the name implies, the goal of this organization was to train young adults in all things related to aircraft. By 1939, as Markwick

³⁰ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 23.

³¹ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 37.

³² Anne Noggle, *A Dance with Death* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1994), 6.

and Cardona point out, "Osoaviakhim boasted nearly two million women members," which showcased its wide appeal to train women in aspects of aviation.³³ While women did face some resistance to joining these predominantly male organizations, many could become full members and often trained as pilots or navigators. For instance, when Senior Lieutenant Nina Raspopova attended flight school one of the head trainer's told her "he wouldn't admit us because we were girls, but the government said they must admit us".³⁴ Thus, women's motivations paired with the government's policies allowed women the training needed to be pilots. This training, along with the success and fame of heroic female pilots, allowed them a few years later, during World War II, to demand their way into the Soviet military. This was instrumental in preparing women to become part of the air force later in the war. This path, paired with the flying circles and casual air clubs, helped lay the groundwork for women's integration into military flying. The clubs also had another huge boon: they produced female celebrity pilots. Like the US's Amelia Earhart, the Soviet Union had women role models in aviation. The most known of these celebrities was Major Marina Raskova, who was made famous as a prewar navigator. She, along with two other pilots, tried to make a trans-national flight across the Soviet Union, the plane crash landing in Siberia. Raskova parachuted out and lived in the wilderness for some time until rescued. This story made national headlines, and her hardiness impressed many.³⁵ Stalin personally presented her the nation's highest award, the Gold Star of Hero of the Soviet Union. This popularity later helped her establish an all-women air combat bomber regiment. The widespread popularity of flying and its possibility to help conquer the rugged and vast Soviet soil caused flying to become an exciting career prospect to which both women and men aspired. Thus, both government policy and women's own achievements and motivations helped lay the

³³ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 15.

³⁴ Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 21-22.

³⁵ Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 15.

groundwork for women's participation in the air force.

While the government did make many youth programs to encourage women to get involved in military matters, many of these were shallow or induction courses, potentially, militia-like training. If the Soviet government had truly been interested in integrating women into the military, then why did so few women go to military colleges? Between World War I and II, only 85 women graduated from Soviet military academies.³⁶ Even wives of military officers were expected to serve in subordinate roles and positions in society. *Kulturnost* was the idea that the wives of military commanders would make the social contributions to the military. During a 1939 military speech to military wives the continued usage and preference of *Kulturnost* was expressed.

The caring women's hand is felt everywhere in the Red Army. In the barracks, which the commanders' wives put in order, in the crèches and kindergartens which they conduct, in the literacy schools where they teach, in the libraries and clubs where they encourage soldiers to pursue culture and creative activities, encompasses the vast scope of the work conducted by the movement of commander's wives.³⁷

This mentality was echoed in 1941 and would evolve during the war into an almost derogatory usage. It would be used to attack women who served as soldiers and villainize their ability and contributions. The wives of these soldiers did get some basic paramilitary training, about things such as shooting and first aid.³⁸ Thus, the seeming contradiction showcases the nuance of Soviet policy as opposed to rhetoric. Ultimately, though, Soviet policy for allowing

³⁶ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 17.

³⁷ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 18.

³⁸ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 17 - 19.

women in paramilitary organizations and conditional entrance into the military was revolutionary for the time and helped give women some preparation along with skills they needed to become soldiers.

The Soviet Union did try to prepare its women for war, giving them basic training in military matters involving them in paramilitary and youth programs. While it wasn't complete equality, the Soviet Union prepared its women for combat roles better than its contemporaries. Thus the Soviet Union was accepting of women in military training and paramilitary roles, but still preferred using men for war and women in the war industrial complex. This preference will be further proven through the propaganda posters made by the Soviet Union in World War II.

Section II - Women in Combat during World War II

Overview & the Recruitment of Women

On Sunday, June 22, 1941, the Nazis launched Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union. News flooded into the streets and "[w]ithin 24 hours of the Axis invasion, thousands of Soviet Women flocked to meetings and military recruiting posts."³⁹ This pattern was reported across the Soviet Union. Tamara Nankina, a second year history major would state the following "Many fiery speeches were made [at Moscow State University] about love of the Motherland, of readiness to defend her, to stand up for her freedom and independence... A resolution was adopted in which the students and teachers declared themselves mobilized."⁴⁰ This patriotic fever among all the students both female and male reflect the patriotic drive of many of these students. It also showcases the perceived Soviet gender equality, where both women and males

³⁹ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 33.

⁴⁰ T. Pankina, unpublished recollection, n.d., MGU, courtesy of Vladimir Bogdanov, Translated by Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 33,34.

could serve the motherland in an equal, militant way. This passion and patriotism did not just affect the young college age females. A 53 year old World War I nurse, Ye. Artamnova stated "I cannot sit quietly on the home front while my Motherland goes through such a terrible time. I must be where the blood flows and the wounded groans. Can I really work quietly here, when my only son is defending the Mother?... I beg comrade commissar, do not reject my request, because I am a military nurse."⁴¹ The outpouring of patriotic support by women for the war, would result in them attempting to join in the war effort. Another integral part of Artamnova's statement is the declaration of "I am a military nurse" this comment showcase the deep belief that she would again be a part of the military. While this was in the traditional role of nursing, it still signifies the belief of these women, young or old, that they could become and deserved to be involved in the military. Still not all these women volunteered for purely patriotic reasons, an example of this Was Junior Lieutenant Alexandra Boiko, a female tank commander joined when her husband was called to serve.⁴² Two sisters, Olga and Zinaida Alexeyevna became medical orderlies after running from their homes "We were being bombed and everything was burning".⁴³ They would eventually meet up with a retreating army group and join them.⁴⁴ From these words of the women we see that while patriotic duty was a prevalent motivation, there were other reasons for joining. Still even with the outpouring of support and volunteering most women were met with resistance to joining the military initially. Still as time progressed, these women became more persistent and as the war worsened officials were allowed to recruit women. This change is evident in the official numbers of recruited combat women, thus excluding the large female medical personnel from prewar recruitment, starting to appear in January 1942 with

⁴¹ *Rol zhenshchin v Velikaya Otechestvennaya voine*, http://www.a-z.ru/women_cd2/12/5/i80_453.htm, translated by Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 33-34.

⁴² Aleksievich, *War's unwomanly face*, 92-93.

⁴³ Aleksievich, *War's unwomanly face*, 111.

⁴⁴ Aleksievich, *War's unwomanly face*, 111.

8,683 women. By the end of 1942 alone it is recorded that 161,172 women joined combat roles that year.⁴⁵ As the war continued, and worsened, women were officially incorporated into the military in greater numbers. While women were patriotically motivated and joined on their own accord, their official incorporation into the military increased as the Soviet Union struggled in the Great Patriotic War. The Soviet Union officially mobilized women during parts of the war, thus asserting the fact that while reluctant to use women, the Soviet Union still did call upon them to serve. About 245,000 women would serve in air defense forces (PVO), where they would serve as anti-aircraft gunners, radio and searchlight operators.⁴⁶ Thus many women were directed towards roles that while dangerous, were still near major cities and the home front. These women often served under male officers and were recruited by the Komsomol.⁴⁷ But not all of these women would serve as air defense protectors of their homes and towns. Many would take the fight directly to the enemy. The Soviet Union would have one all-female regiment of women who served as night bombers. These women were commanded by women, and their entire regiment (including support staff) was composed of women as well.⁴⁸ Thus, the Soviet Union made a conscious effort to recruit women as pilots and support staff. But this bomber squadron was an exception to the larger rule. Often traditional gender roles would exert themselves in the recruiting of the Komsomol, sending women to medical/nursing crash courses in order to serve as medical personnel. Therefore, women were directed towards nursing roles, which many took, where they served in almost all male units.⁴⁹ On occasion, women would either prove themselves or demand to go to the front lines. Some even bolder women were so fed

⁴⁵ Krylova, *Soviet women in combat*, 13-14. Krylova cites official combat women numbers. Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 180. Would give the higher number 235,025 but this would include all service women, combat and non-combat.

⁴⁶ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 155-157.

⁴⁷ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 155-157.

⁴⁸ Reina Pennington and John Erickson. *Wings, women, and war: Soviet airwomen in World War II combat*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 12-19.

⁴⁹ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 121.

up with noncombat work that they "deserted" to the front.⁵⁰ The Soviet Union's mobilization efforts for women were haphazard at best. They accepted volunteers but almost no efforts were made to include them in their own distinctive units, like they had in World War I. Excluding three majority female air regiments, there was never a concerted effort by the Soviet Union to create all female-units on a large scale. Once again, we see how the Soviet Union steered women into non-combat roles and encouraged them first to provide for the war effort, or if so inclined to join the war as nurses. These mixed messages toward women probably helped keep the numbers of volunteers low, but still enabled women to join the war effort. Overall, the Soviet government was reluctant to ask for women's help in directly participating in the war, yet the women themselves demanded to go to the front. With instances of huge setbacks or the threat of German advancement prompted the Soviet Union's leaders to involve women directly in the war effort. Even then, the Soviet Union tried to keep these women as non-combatants or in secondary roles such as anti-aircraft defense and trench building.

The Soviet Union did, however, set the groundwork for the mass mobilization of women for war if the need should arise. Early communist rhetoric, paired with the gender role breaking and military training of the Komsomol, could have created a huge rush of female volunteers and soldiers. What ultimately lowered the number of Soviet women soldiers was the reversal of rhetoric in the mid-1930s, along with the use of propaganda posters and literature to encourage women to work at the home front, and the redirection of women into non-combat roles (or out of the military all together). Thus, the complexity of the Soviet Union and how its rhetoric and policies changed over time did allow women to participate in war, but they also limited their numbers and tried to relegate them to non-combat tasks.

⁵⁰ Aleksievich, *War's unwomanly face*, 68-69.

Gender Dynamics, Sestrekva vs. "PPZh's"

When Soviet women went to war, they faced the criticism and judgments of the men in this field. They were often held to the masculine standards of war and were ridiculed if they showed any femininity. How did women respond to these expectations of masculinity? The primary sources showcase a wide variety of women's responses to the masculinity of war, from outright rejection to acceptance and embracement of it. Yet there are patterns and trends that women followed, key nuances of displaying femininity in the war when they could. This varied from service to service, which affected the expectations of women and the degree of masculinity they should display. Scholastically, the debate of how these women saw themselves is new and contested. There is a fine line between analyzing these women's actions (and how they viewed their own masculinity and that of war) and putting modern day language and ideas in these women's mouths. Professor Krylova argues that these identities of women and soldiers do not have to collide over masculinity. Her argument is that these young females "built up their unconventional identities by using a *nonoppositional though still binary* concept of gender. In their universe, the choice to be a 'soldier women' choice of self-identification did not constitute a contradiction in terms because the very notions of womanhood and soldier-hood did not stand in self-evident, intuitive disagreement with each other."⁵¹ Krylova argues that because of the Soviet rhetoric of gender equality with which these women grew up they did not necessarily view being both a soldier and a woman as problematic. While this argument is intriguing and does go along well with the gender rhetoric, it is contradicted by some of these Soviet women soldiers' words. Vera Safronova, a historian, and medic in the war, claimed that "[a] woman is a mother and nature has seen to it that she is capable of protecting and preserving her child... women could

⁵¹ Krylova, *Soviet women in combat*, 13-14.

not get accustomed to the war."⁵² This statement contradicts the argument of the identity of women being able to adopt the identity of a soldier. Though Krylova's theory works in the heat of the war, it does not matter if you are a female or male--a bullet kills both equally well. That question of whether a woman can be both a soldier and a woman is dashed when the combat begins, and when the survival of a soldier is key. Modern war has been defined to be "months of boredom punctuated by moments of extreme terror".⁵³ The key part here is the months of boredom, which cause soldiers to think and consider themselves in the war. This is where Krylova's theory becomes flawed since the stories of women asking if being a soldier hurt their femininity and marriage prospects after the war are common. Being a soldier hurts their femininity and womanhood, thus these identities could contradict each other. A commander told his female snipers, "You have everything going for you but few would dare marry you after the war."⁵⁴ The risk of mutilation and becoming a cripple were huge fears for these women as well. While all soldiers feared disability, the world for disabled women after the war would be much worse than for handicapped men. A doctor commented on this phenomenon to his nurse as they amputated a male soldier's leg.⁵⁵ His statement is best summarized as it was better to be a male cripple, since he could find a wife after the war.⁵⁶ The doctor further added "If you [woman] were a cripple no one would find you beautiful and marry you".⁵⁷ Thus even in the realm of war where bullets do not discriminate, ideals of womanhood contradicted with the values of being a soldier (i.e. preserving beauty vs. self-sacrifice). Senior Lieutenant Vera Shevaldysheva a surgeon with the 4th Guard Army talked about a young captain who fell in love with her and his

⁵² Aleksievich, *War's unwomanly face*, 68.

⁵³ Old Military Adage from World War, no clear attributed and has been modified by each language and war. Closest we have to original use is in the Guy's Hospital Gazette (1914) "Months of boredom punctuated by moments of extreme terror." or in The New York Times Current History of the European War (1915)

⁵⁴ Aleksievich, *War's unwomanly face*, 19.

⁵⁵ Aleksievich, *War's unwomanly face*, 118.

⁵⁶ Aleksievich, *War's unwomanly face*, 118.

⁵⁷ Aleksievich, *War's unwomanly face*, 118.

comments on a women's place in it. "He spent the whole night standing in my carriage. He was a man who had already been singed by the war; he had been wounded several times. He looked at me for a long time and then said: "Verochka, please don't let yourselves become course. Stay the way you are. You are so delicate now".⁵⁸ Thus we see this theme of women not belonging in war, which their gender, both "delicate" and life-giving should not engage in the destructiveness of war. To remember this encounter almost thirty years after the war signifies that importance of one's womanhood identity. She would be reminded of this identity and told that because of it, the war would ruin her, and that she shouldn't participate. Therefore unlike what Krylova theorizes, women could not just set aside the identity of being a woman with being a soldier. Thus being a woman did interfere with how they were treated and acted as soldiers. Also, other scholars have criticized Krylova's work, arguing that her use of sourcing and modern feminist thought is out of place when considering this literature. For example, Katherine Jolluck, a Soviet Historian at Stanford, in a book review criticized Krylova's overreliance on upper-class women and official Soviet sources (instead of going to directly to these women).⁵⁹ She also does not consider the perspectives of younger males and if they thought women could be soldiers, which would reflect how widespread this Soviet gender rhetoric was. This along with the downplaying of sexual assaults and overreliance on the idea that these women set out to challenge gender roles showcase the main criticisms Krylova faced.

Most Soviet women did not set out to challenge gender roles during wartime. While there are exceptions, especially within the air force who demanded that women be able to command and fight, with some becoming very militant (thus possibly embracing the masculinity of war), a

⁵⁸ Aleksievich, *War's unwomanly face*, 51.

⁵⁹ Katherine R. Jolluck. Book Review of *Soviet Women in Combat* by Anna Krylova, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 90, no. 3 (2012): 571-73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.90.3.0571.pdf>

vast majority of women combined their femininity with the masculinity of war. These women faced difficult challenges of aligning their female identity with the identity of being a warrior. They did not simply set aside these differences. One of the biggest issues these women faced was their femininity in a very masculine environment. For example, the Soviet government did not provide women specialized uniforms or even material to make or modify the uniforms so women could use them.⁶⁰ Again, womanhood was a very real issue that sometimes prevented a woman from being a soldier (or at least a more effective one). These women made do with what they had and were extremely resilient trying to downplay their femininity in the war, but many could only do so much to repress biology. In a postwar interview, Vera Malakhova, who was a combat medic during the war, said, "many women ceased to menstruate altogether... because of the fear and stress."⁶¹ The issues of sexual attraction and assault of these Soviet women soldiers have been downplayed and ignored by both scholars and the women themselves. Krylova fails to even mention the issues of sexual assault on women and the pressures these women faced from commanders and peers. Most of the women interviewed discuss the concept of *sestreichka*, or "little sister," thus using the idea of incest taboo to prevent unwanted attention by men.⁶² What has become evident is that the rank and file male soldiers treated these women well, being both gracious and appreciative of their company.⁶³ This is probably due to the fact of the still very traditional views on sex and relationships by the Soviet public. That, along with the everyday struggles and comradeship of war, made these men view the service women as soldiers in arms. A male serviceman was quoted saying that "[w]e looked upon them [servicewomen] as friends.... They were our friends who carried us from the battlefield.... You don't marry your own sister, do

⁶⁰ Risser, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century*, 142.

⁶¹ Risser, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century*, 143.

⁶² Risser, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century*, 143-144.

⁶³ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 80. & Risser, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century* 143-144.

you? They were our sisters.”⁶⁴ Thus, the use of the incest taboo helped keep the relationships as friends and comrades as arms for the common soldiers. By contrast, officers both political (i.e. Commissars) and military, used their power of rank to demand unwanted sexual favors from these women.⁶⁵ These men commanding women could use their power and rank to make these women's lives miserable if they resisted the unwanted attention. Women responded to these advances in different ways, sometimes trying to have the support of other officers, while others defied the officers' demands. Still, others tried to transfer or move commands. Women warned each other of certain commanders who abused their power and often encouraged and supported each other.⁶⁶ Overall, the danger of women being sexually assaulted or at least harassed was a fact of life for many of these female soldiers. Often these facts and the consequences go unmentioned. Not all women soldiers rejected these advances, however, and some accepted them and became the wife or mistress of these officers. While this was not common, a stereotype developed around women who joined the war effort to find a husband. Women who became the lovers of officers received a negative nickname, “PPZh (*Polevaia Pokhodnaia Zhena*, “Mobile Field wife).⁶⁷ These women often served as nurses and wives and took considerable criticism from other women. Because of the privileges of being an officer's wife, others often claimed that these women only married for the gifts and easier life. While PPZh's were not common, the idea that many women became romantically involved with officers not out of love but out of greed became a stereotype. These women could not just separate their identities of woman and soldier, they often had to balance these two identities and sometimes trade one for the other. These women did not embrace the masculinity of war, and they did not destroy their connection to their

⁶⁴ Risser, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century*, 144.

⁶⁵ Risser, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century*, 147-149.

⁶⁶ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 288-89.

⁶⁷ Risser, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century*, 147-149.

emotions of femininity. While many did try to hide it, they were often confronted by men because of their womanhood and took steps to make themselves seen as soldiers. While they may have won the respect of their male comrades in arms within the rank and file, they were viewed as the *sestrechka* "little sister", where their womanhood was always tied to being a soldier.

The Military Branches

Woman in the Air Force

"To join the ranks on the frontline
For us was no easy task.
Fight, girls fighting friends,
For the glory of the women's guard regiment.
Fly forth
With fire in your breast,
Let the banner of the guard blaze to the fore,
Flush out the enemy,
Strike the target,
Don't let the fascists escape their reckoning"⁶⁸

218th Night-Bomber Division – Female Aviator Natalya Meklin, composed when the regiment was honored with the "Guard designation".

Of the three Soviet armed branches, the Air Force presented unique opportunities for women, including all-women regiments, varied female leadership positions and statewide recognition and rewards. I argue that this Soviet Military branch came the closest to the gender equality originally proposed by Lenin. While the Soviet Air force service made the greatest strides in gender equality in the military, its breadth and impact were relatively short lived. The memoirs of many of these women discussed demobilization and loss of commands after the war. The demotions Soviet women faced after the war parallel the women who served as WASPS in the United States Army Air Force. Ultimately these women who served in all aspects of the air force, from the pilots to ground personnel fought to defeat not only the German enemy but also

⁶⁸ Redneva "letter to her parents" June 3rd translated by Roger Markwick and Euridice Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War*, 99.

stereotypes of what women's roles should be.

While mentioned earlier in woman's prewar preparation, the female air celebrities helped set the foundation for females serving in the air force along with creating full female air regiments. One of the most influential women was Major Marina Raskova. She received the Gold star of Hero of the Soviet Union, the highest civilian award in the Soviet Union, promoting her to national celebrity status. Noggle argues that Raskova's "fame and influence were crucial to the formation and training of women's combat regiments in World War II."⁶⁹ This seems to be true, as Raskova's popularity paired with her good relationship with Stalin helped create these air regiments. For example, Stalin himself signed secret Order No. 0099 creating three women's air regiments by December 1, 1941.⁷⁰ Furthermore, it was Raskova's initiative to go to the highest ranks that made her plan a reality. Nina Ivanka, an organizer of the 586th Fighter Aviation Regiment during the war, told Soviet Journalists in 1975

I showed you this picture [of Raskova] to remind you that it was Raskova who initiated our three regiments. The day after Nazi Germany's sneak attack on the Soviet Union Raskova began receiving letters from women air club trainees with the request: "Help me get to the front, into an air force unit." With a briefcase full of these letters, Raskova, a deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet, went to the Defense Ministry. After hours of discussion, she was authorized to form the three regiments.⁷¹

Additionally, according to A. Skopintseva, an anonymous female war veteran, Raskova's prestige and drive were integral to the formation of the women air regiments:

Upon the initiative of Hero of the Soviet Union Marina Raskova ... three

⁶⁹ Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 38.

⁷⁰ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 84.

⁷¹ Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 39-40.

women's aviation regiments were formed ... It was not easy for Raskova to convince those who came out against her idea for the creation of women's aviation regiments, who tried to prove that war was not a woman's affair. Coming forward on behalf of one thousand women and girls, who appealed to her at the beginning of the war with patriotic letters, Raskova stubbornly demonstrated that if the war had become a nationwide matter, then it was impossible not to reckon with the patriotic feelings of women.⁷²

In short, the character of Raskova, paired with the direct interest of Stalin, were two of the main driving forces to get the Soviet Union to utilize woman in combat roles. Major Raskova, along with other top pre-war female aviators, would go on to create the three female aviation regiments. Though Raskova can be credited with pioneering women in air combat roles, the women who followed her were capable, experienced flyers who were able to live up to the expectations thrust upon them. Unfortunately, Major Raskova would never lead her regiment. When she was piloting her plane to the front she was killed in an attempted night landing.⁷³

With Raskova's death, many thought the women air regiments would collapse. Without her charisma and personal connection, how could these regiments succeed? This brings us to another reason why the women air regiments were successful, training. The infatuation the Soviet public and military had for air flight caused many people to be trained as pilots. This with the number of prewar aero clubs and civilian flyers created skilled female pilots and navigators who needed little training to adapt to military flight. This skill set made the inclusion of women into the air force an advantage the Soviet Union sorely needed in the 1942 winter of World War

⁷² A. Skopintseva 'knigi o ratnykh podvigakh sovetskikh zhenshchin' (Books on the Feats of Arms of Soviet Women') *Vestnik protivovozdushnoi oborony* (March 1978), 89. As cited by Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 24,25.

⁷³ Amy Goodpaster Strebe, "Marina Raskova & the Soviet Women Aviators of World War II", (January) 2003 *Russian Life*; Jan/Feb 2003, Vol. 46 Issue 1, 42. <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/8961191/marina-raskova-soviet-women-aviators-world-war-ii>

II. But the need for Soviet air pilots was not necessarily dire. In fact, the Soviet Union needed more aircraft than pilots in the first three years of the war.⁷⁴ Still it is common military procedure to include more pilots than aircraft in an air unit.⁷⁵ While the Soviet Union could use extra pilots and trained navigators, it was not out of truly last ditch desperation. There had to be another reason to utilize women. It is argued that propaganda was the main reason, and there is some evidence of newspaper stories featuring these new female aviators. While this moral raising propaganda was used to show the patriotic fever, to devote significant resources just to create these air regiments and to use them for pure propaganda uses, seems unlikely. Instead, the Soviet government was besieged by women who wanted to serve, calling on the equality of the genders. This fact along with the recognition of many famous female aviators encouraged Soviet command to create these all women air regiments. The propaganda was an additional factor to keep them in service and helped raise morale, but was not a primary motivation for the creation of three female air regiments. Thus, the determination of Raskova, and the persistence of pilots created and justified the need for three female air regiments.

The greatest difference between the Air Force and the other branches of the military was the initial creation of all-female regiments. The air regiments themselves were the 586th, 587th, and the 588th. While they all experienced overall success, some regiments fared better than others and all operated in different theaters and used very different aircraft, making direct comparison difficult. Ultimately while all regiments went through some difficult times, these female aviators were the closest to achieving gender equality in the armed forces and were a force to be reckoned with over the battlefield. Also, the degree of militancy, masculinity, and

⁷⁴ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 2.

⁷⁵ Interview Bruce Renne ROTC and Air Force Veteran, Conducted by Steven Tragarz 12.22.16

discipline in these regiments is an interesting topic, because of the large concentration of female warriors in close quarters, expectations and ideals could be established. Unlike the other military services where only a few women served together, the female air regiments had the ability define what a woman soldier would be. Each regiment had a unique take on what they defined was the expectation of women in combat role. These often took place as negotiations between leaders and the personnel themselves, with the pilot's skills and egos often adding to the complexity of these identities. Just having this argument, though, showcases the ability that women had in choosing their identity in the air force. In other services, women struggled to overcome pre-existing identities from men, yet in the Air Force women now struggled and debated their place within the military with other women. Breaking each regiment down will showcase their own identities and the struggles they faced, both within and without and their military successes.

The 586th Fighter Aviation Regiment

The 586th Fighter Aviation Regiment was activated on April 16, 1942, engaging in over 4,419 combat missions.⁷⁶ It never received an honorary, or guards, designation and produced zero Heroes of the Soviet Union.⁷⁷ This regiment flew the modern Yak-1/7b/9 fighter and contained some of the highest trained and capable female pilots the Soviet Union had.⁷⁸ Of all three air regiments, the 586th fared the poorest, and there is still significant disagreement over why this regiment only met lukewarm success. Its first commanding officer was Major Tamara Kazarinova, a tough, qualified prewar, aerobatics pilot who also had positive connections with Soviet high command⁷⁹. But not all of Kazarinova's sister airwomen were as formal as she was. In contrast to Major Kazarinova's masculinity and discipline, Lilya Litvak was decidedly

⁷⁶ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 104.

⁷⁷ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 104.

⁷⁸ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 105.

⁷⁹ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 104-106.

feminine, playful and unruly. A pilot originally of the 586th she was a double ace, shooting down 12 fighters within a year. She along with eight other top female pilots who opposed Major Kazarinova's style of leadership were transferred to an all-male fighter regiment by September 1942. Historians and her fellow pilots debate the reasoning of this action, but all agree that it was an illogical choice. The regiment that these eight female pilots transferred to was of a different fighter class, making already thinly stretched supply lines more complicated. Personal reasons and disagreements over the direction this all female regiment seem to be the more likely reason for the pilot transfer. Lilya Litvak's femininity and flirtations with male pilots flew in the face of Kazarinova's goals for a disciplined, masculine, and traditional air regiment. This is fascinating, and shows one of the very few instances, of direct disagreement between women and how they should portray themselves in the war effort. Due to this transfer many women ground personnel, especially mechanics, had to be transferred along as well, to this new majority male regiment out of Stalingrad. Her personal mechanic, Senior Sergeant Inna Pasportnikova, reported the following in a 1993 interview.

Lilya bleached her hair white, and she would send me to the hospital to get hydrogen peroxide liquid to do it. She took pieces of a parachute, sewed them together, painted it a different color, and wrapped it around her neck. Lilya was very fond of flowers, and whenever she saw them she picked them. She would arrive at the airfield early in the morning in the summer, pick a bucket of flowers and spread them on the wings of her plane.... She put the picture of roses on the left side of the instrument panel and flew with it.⁸⁰

This shows that Lilya cared little for fitting into the masculine, discipline field of war. She was arguably one of the best female fighter pilots of the time, yet did this while keeping her

⁸⁰Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 196.

femininity. Litvak's transfer from the women's regiment also signals that a women superior officer would not have treated a women regiment any differently from a male one. Litvyak's embracing of more traditional feminine gender roles in an important example of how some women decided that they would keep their own identity and did give into the masculine environment. It is also representative of how women were not uniform in their approach to military matters. Some like Kazarinova would become as masculine as possible, evaluating the male roles and actions of the military. Others like Litvyak would be feminine, keeping ideals of traditional womanhood. It is important to note that this almost luxury of deciding one's identity, especially if being feminine was reserved to groups of women. The air force provided time and most importantly a concentration of women, who could discuss and define amongst themselves, both comparing and contrasting identities. While still facing considerable danger these two factors would lead to the most discussion and the decision on how masculine they would become. Ultimately, Litvyak and Kazarinova are two more extreme examples of the debate of female soldiers' attempt of fitting into the traditional, masculine, frame of war. Most women that served in the air force defined themselves somewhere in the middle of this spectrum trying to balance both roles. To be feminine on the very front lines surrounded by all males, and directly threatened by Nazi aggression was a dangerous and an unnecessary risk. Thus most women would become masculine in order to discuss their identity from the Nazi military, while also playing down sexual advances by officers. It is important to realize that a few women when introduced to large concentrations of men, would embrace parts of their femininity that would later lead to the dangerous stereotype of Pzmmh's (Mobile Field wives). These, while rare, would create a negative legacy. Litvyak herself would come close to this line in the eyes of others with her relationship with the male regimental commander. Her mechanic would comment on Litvyak

aerobatics, lack of discipline and love.

When Lilya approached the airdrome after a victory, it was impossible to watch her; she would fly at a very low altitude and start doing aerobatics over the field. Her regimental commander would say, "I will destroy her for what she is doing, I will teach her a lesson!" After she landed and taxied to her position she would ask me, "Did our father shout at me?" And he did shout at her, and then he admired what she had done.... Men pilots tried to stop her from flying because they wanted to save her, but it was impossible...Lilya flew as wingman with the squadron commander Alexei Salomatin. They loved each other... Something had happened to his plane, and he didn't have time to bail out. We buried him, and after this happened Lilya didn't want to stay on her ground, she only wanted to fly and fight, and she flew combat desperately.⁸¹

Only three months later Lilya Litvyak, one of Russia's' most decorated female pilots would be shot down a third and fatal time. Litvak shows both the nuance and dangers of being feminine at the front. She represents women who wished to keep their own identity and engage in typical female relations. Amy Strebe in *Flying for her Country*, perhaps states this the best "No one could have predicted that this petite blonde pilot (she had to have the pedals of her plane adjusted so she could reach them), who liked to fashion colorful neck scarves out of parachutes, would prove to be such a deadly adversary in the skies."⁸² Litvyak also embodies the danger of engaging in sexual feelings ending with her feeling and love for another probably cost her to lose her life. This symbolizes possible dangers of women joining an armed forces, with cardinal relationships between the sexes, occur, emotions can take hold and cause soldiers to lose their

⁸¹Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 198.

⁸² Amy Goodpaster Strebe, *Flying for her country: the American and Soviet women military pilots of World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2009), 27.

cool reasoning. It is important in modern warfare to be detached and Litvyak's own stories symbolize this affection for another causing one to do almost irrational acts. Still blaming Litvyak for this is unreasonable. She her fellow pilots were in the fight to the death to preserve their nation, it is hard to fault finding love in such a dire circumstance. It is also important to note that males who engaged in these relations are just as equal in blame for these breaches in protocol. Still these judgements were passed by both her women peers and Soviet high command, turning these relationships into more derogatory stereotypes. In a higher organized less desperate fight, these issues of cardinal relations would be diminished.

Kararizona's leadership after six months warranted concern, and those higher up removed her from command. There is some dispute as to why she was transferred from the regiment Lyuba Vinogradova in *Defending the Motherland* claims the accidental death of the famous Lieutenant Khomyakova resulted in the need for a scapegoat and thus the subsequent removal.⁸³ Pennington with more background information and interviews states that many pilots believed that Kararizona had a feud with Lieutenant Khomyakova, and may have played a part in setting up the circumstances of her death.⁸⁴ Pennington also adds that Karaizona's personal relationship and friendship with General Osipenko saved her from further disgrace, and she was swiftly transferred to his staff, while also preventing further investigation.⁸⁵ This disputes about the reasons for removal showcases the lack of sources, power of soviet command, and the secrecy that exists even today. It also showcases that these women were independent figures who had power struggles and differences of opinion just like other male regiments would. It also shows that these women pilots and ground crews would not just ideally fall in line if they believed their

⁸³ Lyuba Vinogradova, *Defending the motherland: the Soviet women who fought Hitler's aces*, trans. Arch Tait (London: MacLehose Press, an imprint of Quercus, 2016), 186-187.

⁸⁴ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 110-111.

⁸⁵ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 111-112.

commander to be incompetent. Just because they were women, did not believe another women made a good commander, like their male brethren they expected competent officers and pilots, and their morals and effectiveness depended on these very characteristics. Still, these women were at first disheartened that Karaizona's replacement was a male commander.

Major Aleksandr Gridnev was transferred to the 586th on October 14th, 1942.⁸⁶ This change in command also coincides with the death of Raskova, hinting that her prestige and connections with Stalin did have a role in maintaining female leadership. This shows that the approval and attention of Stalin was important in the condition of female regiments. This evidence shows that Soviet high command was still wary of using women in top leadership roles. The new leadership of Grindnev was inspirational and he soon found a balance between discipline and the needs of the pilots. He would recall many fond memories and stories of the regiments. The effects of Karizona's leadership would be permanent; many of the top fighter pilots were transferred to the male regiment above Stalingrad. Because of the transfer of the best pilots, and their subsequent deaths over the dangerous skies of Stalingrad, the regiment lost both parts of its identity and capability. These handicaps would haunt the 586th and Grindev believes that Karizonva's influence on Soviet command would prevent the regiment from ever attain guards designation.

The 587th Bomber Aviation Regiment

The 587th Bomber Aviation Regiment was activated in January of 1943, and engaged in 1,134 combat missions.⁸⁷ It was honored with the 125th "Guards" designation, and thus considered to be an elite, combat proven unit. It produced five heroes of the Soviet Union and its

⁸⁶ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 113.

⁸⁷ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 90.

pilots flew the modern and challenging Petlyakov Pe-2 ground attack bomber.⁸⁸ They originally trained in the lighter two seat Su-2 but were given the new three seat Pe-2 right before combat. Because the Pe-2 required an additional crew member (a gunner) and there were insufficient women for that role, it became a semi-integrated regiment, with males serving as gunners and some of the ground personnel. Its first commander was Raskova, but with her death on the unit's flight to its mustering area, a temporary commander Evgenia Timofeeva was appointed and was well respected by her fellow female pilots. Only a month later, the 125th would gain its new permanent commander, Major Valentin Markov, an experienced pilot, but also a male, signifying the end of head female command in the regiment. Markov in a postwar interview would remark "When I was told that I was to lead a female regiment, the order was like a cold shower to me - I was shocked".⁸⁹ He would further comment upon his worry and distaste for his new command "I couldn't visualize how I could command women during war flying bombers... When I left the office, angry and pale, and told my friends waiting for me at that door... their hair rose in surprise and indignation. They believed I would have to go through hell in that regiment."⁹⁰ Captain Valentina Saviskaya-Kravchenko reflected the resistance our women "we woman wouldn't even hear of a man coming to command our regiment".⁹¹ Needless to say Markov's arrival on February 2nd 1943, was going to be ill received. He arrived, inspected the planes and called out to fix a problem "Who's the armorer"? He asked "I am," said a girl, who ran up to the airplane smiling. "Quit smiling and explain why the machine guns are greased like this. They won't be able to fire." Tears filled the armorer's eyes. Markov, accustomed to military discipline

⁸⁸ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 90.

⁸⁹ Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 102.

⁹⁰ Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 102.

⁹¹ Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 102.

was non-pulsed".⁹² He then gave the following speech.

I am your new commander. I warn you that I will be holding you strictly accountable. There will be no sort of allowances made because you are women, so don't expect them. I ask you to make it a point to remember this. You, of course, have already fulfilled combat mission, but still too few to consider yourselves experienced fighters. We will begin with discipline.⁹³

Markov's reliance on discipline did give them some results, especially in flying in formation, but many women at first opposed him and were reluctant to accept him. Valentina Kravchenko would tell interviewers that "behind his back, we called him 'bayonet'".⁹⁴ Markov's and his mostly female regiment would reach a common ground, between strict traditional military discipline and common connections. In fact some pilots argue that "Markov gained the trust of the regiment because he became more 'like a woman'".⁹⁵ The regiment proved itself fighting and rebasing from South of Moscow to Grislinen in North-Eastern Poland by end of the war.⁹⁶ After the war Markov would marry Galina Dzhunkovskaia, his navigator in the war.⁹⁷ Though Markova and Dzhunkovskaia's romanced blossomed during the war, both Markov and other female pilots would comment this would only cause Markov and Dzhunkovskaia to work harder and be more diligent in their training and combat.⁹⁸ This romance would again display that the close proximity of male and women in war, paired with the desperation of the fight would cause these relationships. In this context it seems this relationship did more to welcome Markov into the ranks of the women while also improving the relationship

⁹² Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 96.

⁹³ V.V. Markov, "Gorzhus' boevymi druz'iami," in VNF (2nd ed.), 29. Translated by Pennington *Wings, Women, War*, 97.

⁹⁴ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 96.

⁹⁵ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 97.

⁹⁶ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 92.

⁹⁷ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 103.

⁹⁸ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 103.

as a whole. Like the other female regiments it would soon be disbanded after the war in 1947.⁹⁹

The 588th Air Regiment

The 588th Air regiment was the first of these all women units to be activated in May 1942.¹⁰⁰ It flew over 24,000 combat missions and produced 46th Guards designation it flew the Po-2, an extremely outdated and old open-cockpit biplane. These were the famous "Night Witches," and they were awarded the 46th Guards designation.¹⁰¹ These women were extremely proud of the fact that they reminded the only female regiment that stayed women led, and manned.¹⁰² In fact, when they were sent a male radio operator, they borderline hazed him "After about a week... sent him some women's underwear... He couldn't take it, and requested to be sent back to his home unit".¹⁰³ Since the Po-2 bi-plane had such short operational ranges the 588th was tasked extremely close to the front lines often making up to ten combat missions in one night.¹⁰⁴ While these woman provided heroically because of the close proximity to the front lines that often had primitive camps. Still these woman faced problems similar to their army sisters. Junior Lieutenant Olga Yerokhina states "Hygienically, it was a hardship. We didn't have enough soap or water. Sometimes we used water from puddles to wash ourselves... We had to always remember we were women and take care of ourselves."¹⁰⁵ Again we see the underprepared Soviet state caused struggles, making the women realize that being that their sex did play a part in making more difficult to fight and stay healthy. Still it was always doubted if the woman would be able to lift the heavy bombs, especially in the poor Russian winters. Senior Sergeant Nina Karasyova would respond to these criticisms

⁹⁹ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 103.

¹⁰⁰ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 72.

¹⁰¹ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 72.

¹⁰² Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 74.

¹⁰³ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 74-75.

¹⁰⁴ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 75-78.

¹⁰⁵ Nogge, *A Dance with Death*, 60.

The bombs weighed 25, 32, or 100 kilos each and we lifted them into place manually. Some nights we lifted 3,000 kilos of bombs ... there was some question as to whether we mechanics could bear children after the heavy work and the overstraining of our strength during the war, but it didn't affect us. We were very small and slim during the war... but no one complained. I never even felt tired.¹⁰⁶

While the claim of never feeling tired was probably exaggerated, it displays these women's patriotic drives and commitment to each other. Also the question of children birthing reflects that society at large was still worried and placed a high value on women's ability to create life. Of all the air regiments, the 588th drove itself the hardest, they had to prove themselves. When the pilot Irna Rakobolskaia was asked these women worked so hard she replied "Out of enthusiasm. In order to prove that we could do anything".¹⁰⁷ The regiment was extremely effective in disrupting troops and light vehicles movement at night crushing German morale. It's worth noting that the all-female regiment was given some of the worst equipment in the war, flying planes that would by the end of the war be over 15 years outdated. While they proved to use these aircraft in effective, and unique ways, it does showcase the Soviet command's lack of enthusiasm for these pilots. The commander of the Soviet Air group containing the 588th, D. D Popov commented "We've seen everything now they're giving us some sort of little girls, and in Po-2s to boot."¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, the 588th would prove itself, and become one of the most renowned women units in the war. They would be demobilized

¹⁰⁶ Noggle, *A Dance with Death*, 86.

¹⁰⁷ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 80.

¹⁰⁸ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 77.

one month after the war's end in October of 1945.¹⁰⁹

The Army

Unlike the female Air Force which was founded with heavy involvement from Stalin and Raskova, a very top-down approach, the army was much more from the ground up. The army, while having a few pre-heroes, for the most part, was filled and led by volunteers demanding to be a part of the Soviet army. These women became soldiers partially because they were needed, especially in roles where their gender was considered an advantage. This lack of a clear leader cohort also meant that women often on an individual basis became part of the male dominated army. Because of this more organic approach with volunteering and heavy individual petitions, the opportunities and lives of these women who served in the army varied much more widely. Even with this more ground up approach, the Soviet government did tenuously support these women, especially snipers. Like the Air Force, they established a women's regiment, which in contrast to the Air Force was a failure. The army took in around 400,000 women compared to the Air Force's 40,000, creating a much wider range of experiences and roles for women to serve in. While the women serving in the army often had the high enthusiasm and beliefs in themselves as warriors, the Soviet government's usage of them in the war was tempered. Overall the women that served in the army received much less support than their sisters in the Air Force. This, paired with the integration of women into everyday male forces, created many issues, such as lack of equipment, lack of promotion opportunities and sexual assault, which would cripple the legacy of these women while also preventing the continued integration of women into the Soviet military after the war. It would also lead to many of these women being labeled as whores and

¹⁰⁹ Pennington, *Wings, Women, War*, 72.

accused of not actually contributing to the war effort.

Over 230,000 of these women would serve in Air-defense forces (Anti-Aircraft gunners) often behind the front line.¹¹⁰ Around another 53,500 would serve "more traditional" reserve or support roles such as cooks, laundry maids, and ground transport drivers. This left approximately 120,000 female soldiers who would partake in frontline duties. It is worth noting that even these support roles in "safe territory" could result in direct combat and immense danger at times. Often the support areas and units became the frontline in the early months of the war because of the rapid collapse of the Soviet army in the first two years of the war. This is evident in many women's diaries and memories, of at first being given seemingly non-combat roles, suddenly finding themselves in the thick of the fighting just as they arrived in their respective zones of operation.¹¹¹

Medical Personnel

A common role of Soviet women serving in World War II was in the medical corps often serving as nurses and paramedics. Exact figures of how many women served in the medical corps is difficult to attain. Our best estimates say around 60 percent of the 700,000 medical corps were women, thus pointing to about 420,000 women serving in medical roles. Of the 420,000 about 300,000 would serve in the official "noncombat role" of surgeon, medical assistant, and nurse, though they were still subject to the war, through air raids and rapid catastrophic retreats and encirclements.¹¹² This role was the most accepted and women were actively encouraged into the medical field. Nursing in warfare was commonly a women's task,

¹¹⁰ Roger Markwick and Euridice Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 154-156.

¹¹¹ Aleksievich, *War's Unwomanly face*, 59-60.

¹¹² Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 154-156.

especially in the age of mass casualties. During the Napoleonic wars we see the first instances of Triage and the need for minor to moderately trained personnel who would sort those who would die from those who could be saved. With the formal use of female nurses beginning in the Crimean War with the British, Florence Nightingale, a precedent was set for women to become officially integrated into armed forces. Imperial Russia, and other European powers, would soon adopt this practice. Thus nursing in the Soviet army had already been a tradition, and was carried over from the Imperial era with almost 99% of nurses being women in the Soviet army. This tradition though decided that nurses tend behind the lines, or only appear after major battles. This changed with the nature of World War II, especially on the Nazi front. Most armies tried to keep their nurses off the front line, but the Soviets treated their nurses differently, often having them serve as paramedics and frontline stretcher bearers. German propaganda treated these women as monsters undeserving of mercy, often shooting nurses on sight. Nazi troops were ordered to shoot women combatants on sight.¹¹³ Because of these circumstances, these female nurses adapted. For instance, these nurses often became part time soldiers in the heat of battle, or when capture was evident. Valentina Zhdanova was 19 years old when she became a nurse with the 149th Rifle division; her diary reveals the common experiences and duties of nurses.

She wrote on February 10th 1942 "Deep snow... hard fought battle lasted all day.

Under fire, I dragged from the field 26 wounded with their weapons. Senior

Lieutenant Doroknov was the last one...at last I reached a ravine where the

bullets could not get my wounded soldiers. I was overjoyed that I had saved a fine

soldier from certain death. At that very moment a mine explosion deafened me.

When I regained consciousness, I stretched out to my wounded soldier to see if he

¹¹³ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 75-81.

was alive... The senior lieutenant was dead. The Monsters had got him."¹¹⁴

This is a prime example of the dangers paramedics faced and both their resolve and ability to sacrifice everything to save their fellow soldiers. The familiarity that Zhdanova had with these soldiers, knowing their name rank, displayed her closeness and inclusion within their unit. While not officially a soldier, she lived with, and experienced the same, as her male brethren. Later on in the war she was trying to help a machine gunner who had his right hand shot off, and he implored her to "Get behind the machine gun!"¹¹⁵ She then jumped up to start shooting at the soldiers. By the end of the War, Zhdanova had recused 287 wounded soldiers, and was awarded the Red Banner, an award only given those who had shown extreme bravery in a combat situation. Zhdanova's experiences were well received by the public, but only certain parts of her diary were published¹¹⁶. Nursing provided an interesting transition between the past and current views on women in warfare. Often picking more feminine lines from the diary to publish in the Pravda.¹¹⁷ On one hand the Soviet Union kept the idealized female mother figure who would heal the men and fulfilled the ideal of women as givers of life. Yet often these nurses contradicted these vary images by picking up unused guns, and actively fighting back. Also these women were very aware of their own sex, especially when it came to interactions with Nazi's. They knew the extra dangers that being a female on the front meant, and many carried poisons or pistols to prevent capture, or commit suicide. Nurse Vera Gallaninsnkaya, who was also attached to the 304th Rifle Infantry Brigade, writes about the fears these nurses faced. "We were unarmed; there were not even enough weapons for the soldiers. And the Hitlerites were particularly monstrous towards women soldiers. The only weapon I had was a tablet of mercuric

¹¹⁴ Valentina Zhdanova's diary trans. by Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 75-76.

¹¹⁵ Valentina Zhdanova's diary trans. by Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 77-78.

¹¹⁶ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 78-79.

¹¹⁷ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 168.

chloride, secreted in the collar of my uniform: 'If I was captured, I would not allow myself to be humiliated'.¹¹⁸ With the unique usage of female medical personnel so close to the front, we see examples of these women sometimes forced into the act of war. We also see the tragic repercussions of this practice, we have no clear records on death of female medical personnel but Markwick and Cardona have "estimated that there was around 210,600 medical personnel perished".¹¹⁹ Furthermore "since women were estimated to be 60 percent of the medical personnel ... we can presume that approximately 126,000 women medical personnel were killed."¹²⁰ Thus we see the very real risk female medical personnel faced and how combat and noncombat roles were often blurred. Overall the medical field was deemed as an acceptable role for women in the war, and many of those who joined faced little resistance when they adopted these roles. The Soviet government even went as far as giving these women combat war medals for their efforts, thus publicizing these roles. For example "In 1942 Order No. 281 was issued concerning decorations for saving the lives of wounded soldiers: for fifteen seriously wounded soldiers carried from the battlefield... awarded the medal For Combat Services: for saving twenty-five soldiers, the Order of the Red Star; for saving forty soldiers, the Order of the Red Banner, and for saving eighty men, the Order of Lenin."¹²¹ This experience of paramedics, being able to receive war medals which were traditionally reserved for male soldiers, exemplified the paramedics' contributions to the war effort. The act also signaled that those women paramedics' actions were worthy of fellow combat serving brethren. Propaganda posters also depicted the nursing theme often, thus signifying a role that the general Soviet populace felt comfortable putting their women into.

¹¹⁸ Vera Gallaninskaya's Diary trans. Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 72.

¹¹⁹ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 66-67.

¹²⁰ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 66-67.

¹²¹ Aleksievich, *War's Unwomanly Face*, 64-65.

Women's Volunteer Rifle Brigade

In contrast to the success of the three female air regiments, the Women's Volunteer Rifle Brigade expressed the darker side of female involvement in the war. Few records exist of these women and what happened to their regiment, testament to the Soviet Union's propaganda machine's ability to control any negative press. Another reason for the lack of information was the NKVD, the KGB before the cold war, co-opted the brigade into its shadow army. Thus even today records are sealed and few historians have been able to see or even know the full extent or ultimate fate of the brigade. What we have are only a few letters, records, and reprimands. Here is a letter from a trainee in the Women's Volunteer Brigade, pleading to be moved to the front lines.

Dear Kliment Efremovich Voroshilov,

I have been in the ranks of the RKKA [Women's Volunteer Brigade] for 8 months.

Now I am in an anti-tank gun training battalion and I am learning to be a tank destroyer. However, Kliment Efremovich, I am beginning to doubt that we will ever get to the front. I beg you therefore to enlist me in any active unit, but only at the front. There I cannot only save the lives of the wounded but also succeed in destroying fascist tanks. I know exactly what to do and I love my gun. Dear Kliment Efremovich I implore you to help me.

Trainee Shyroкова, Training Battalion, 1 OZhDSB 29.7.1943 ¹²²

This plea showcases the desire of women to fight and serve on the frontlines. The imploring language and the demand to destroy fascist tanks means that Shyroкова wanted to

¹²²Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*. Translated Letter to Kliment Voroshilov, July 29th 1943, 192.

engage in the masculine art of destruction, not just serve as some nurse or in a reserve unit. The plea to a higher power reflects the confidence in their ability yet also the desperation of these women. They willingly put themselves in the danger of reprimands, or worse, if their letters were ever found, yet still demanded that they should go to the front. There are other records of these letters and pleas asking for transfer or reprieve. Looking at what records of desperation we have, also proves the lack of support and degradation of women in this regiment. We have records of desertions up until its reassignment to the NKVD. In the span of one year and three months, there were 188 desertions or about 2.7% of brigade strength.¹²³ The reasons for these desertions were officially blamed on the ineptness of women, their inability to adjust to harsh military life, and bad attitudes. The brigade contained around 6980 members and was to be treated as a normal, if slightly scaled down, infantry brigade.¹²⁴ While this was the intended goal, for the most part this brigade stayed in the back lines digging trenches and earthworks, repairing roads and doing manual labor. This took a toll on morale since many of these women were promised frontline duty, some of whom were already front line nurses and now volunteered to train to be active soldiers. This betrayal of trust caused the degradation of morale and many of these desertions were "desertions to the front" where these women ran away to serve on the front lines. This low morale was also paired with the lack of female leadership, unlike the female air regiments where is was mostly, or all, female leadership. This lack of both upward mobility tied to the blaming of desertion on "weak willed" females, only compounded the problem and kept morale low and made the brigade a disaster.¹²⁵ In addition to the desertions, this brigade also suffered from a pressing suicide rate. The disheartening story of Senior Sergeant, Nadezhda Leonteva, and a 20-

¹²³ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*. Translated Letter to Kliment Voroshilov, July 29th 1943, 192-193.

¹²⁴ Letter to Kliment Voroshilov, July 29th 1943 trans. Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 181-184.

¹²⁵ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 192-195.

year-old reflects this absolute hopelessness "On November at 15:00.... Taking advantage of the absence of the company that had gone to lunch, used a moment when the guard on duty was not looking, took a rifle and shot herself in the chest. She was taken to the doctor but due to her penetrating chest wound passed away at 17:20".¹²⁶ A friend of Leonteva, would report that Leonteva wanted to desert earlier in that month was persuaded not to.¹²⁷ This tragic suicide brings up a larger issue in this communal Soviet society. Kenneth Pinnow in the academic journal *Kritika* analyzes the meaning of suicide in the Soviet Union. In his conclusion he states:

Where the individual is conceived as an autonomous being, murder can be thought to reflect the love of the self while suicide can suggest a desire to destroy it. By comparison, the Bolsheviks understanding of the individual as a social entity made suicide appear the result of an excessive love and concern for one's self. This is not to suggest that the individual mattered less in Soviet Russia; rather, it mattered differently within the context of a regime that encouraged its members to think about themselves as collective, rather than autonomous, beings.¹²⁸

Thus in the context of these women in the volunteer rifle brigade, who grew up at the height of Bolshevik education committing suicide in society was committing a grave crime. The act of these women's suicides was an individualist "bourgeoisie" action that attacked the communist party and the integrity of the regiment. These women knew that. It was in their education, their upbringing, and the prevailing propaganda. Therefore to commit such an act

¹²⁶ Russian State Military Archive, 38694/1/43/59. As cited by Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 194.

¹²⁷ Russian State Military Archive, 38694/1/43/59. As cited by Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 194.

¹²⁸ Kenneth Martin Pinnow, "Violence against the Collective Self and the Problem of Social Integration in Early Bolshevik Russia." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, no. 3 (2003): 653-677. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed March 7, 2017), 674.

would both be a direct challenge to their brigade's leaderships while also a protest against Stalinism. But these suicides were not done directly as a protest, which was their effect, they came from more tangible concerns. These suicides would be echoed through the regiment, both among the female noncommissioned officers (NCO's) and rank and file female. Reina Pennington adds some reasoning for these suicides in the *Journal of Military history* "The officers assigned were mostly male, and apparently were poor leaders who created an atmosphere of harassment".¹²⁹ Instead of trying to change the goal of Rifle Bridge or changing the leadership, the blame was just shifted unto the women serving, growing until the NKVD co-opted the brigade. Another reason for the lack of direction was that there was no woman role model or leader, like they had in the air force. Instead, women were thrown into a male led brigade with little equipment and their motivations unmet. What happened next is uncertain but many of the other NKVD co-opted regiments would work on infrastructure, pacify partisan movements or serve the political interests of the NKVD. Overall unlike the women's air regiments which would receive medals and some public recognition, the women in the volunteer rifle brigade would be ridiculed, punished, and denied recognition. While the women's volunteer rifle brigade was just one brigade, it showed the failure of an all-female regiment. While this was barely the fault of the women themselves, it did leave a black mark against creating further all female brigades. It was stated that there would be 50 created, and with the failure of the first one, combined with the better Soviet fortune in the war, there was a lack of agency by the Soviet high command.¹³⁰ This lack of direct involvement and support from the top down, paired reluctant belief that women could be capable of warfare, shows the reluctance of the Soviet Union to

¹²⁹Reina Pennington, "Offensive Women: Women in Combat in the Red Army in the Second World War," *The Journal of Military History* 74, no. 3 (July 2010);,

<http://www.reinapennington.com/rjpPDFs/Pennington%20Offensive%20Women.pdf> 798-800.

¹³⁰Reina Pennington, "Offensive Women: Women in Combat in the Red Army in the Second World War," *The Journal of Military History* 74, no. 3 (July 2010);,

<http://www.reinapennington.com/rjpPDFs/Pennington%20Offensive%20Women.pdf> 798.

utilize women in direct combat. Thus while for the most part women were allowed access to the battlefield, some roles were "more" officially supported and not everyone believed in the ability or right for women to serve on the frontlines.

Snipers

As evidenced by the earlier medical personnel, and later all female volunteer regiments, gender roles and views on women still played a part in how women should serve in the war. Thus Soviet command's views on what women's roles in the military should be would again influence how well the sniper movement would do. This also paired with the celebrity status of earlier female snipers to assist the female snipers' creation and success. Thus, the Soviet government endorsement and training of these snipers would make it the most successful and publicized part of the army. The female sniper movement can trace its roots back to the Komsomol shooting training and competitions, creating a class of women who were already trained and well-versed in the art of long range shooting. Like the Air Force, they also had their leader, Lyudmila Pavlichenko. During the war she is credited with 309 kills making her one of the top snipers of all time. By 1943 she would be withdrawn from active service. She would tour the United States to raise support and funds, returning to the USSR and leading a female sniper school. She was popular enough worldwide that Woody Guthrie, a popular US musician, wrote a song to her tribute.¹³¹ She was a strong advocate for getting women to the frontline especially in serving in combat roles. When she enlisted she made it clear she would not go to the front as a nurse.¹³² Lyudmila was one of the earliest Soviet women to serve in direct combat and her exploits were noted internationally. Much like Raskova, Lyudmila won the admiration and support of Stalin. Stalin boosted the women's sniper movements hailing them as the "glorious

¹³¹ Alouette87. "Woody Guthrie - Miss Pavlichenko." YouTube. May 28, 2009. Accessed March 23, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHKjOI9ocR0>.

¹³² Henry Skaida, *Heroines of the Soviet Union 1941-45* Oxford: Osprey Publishing 2003, 31.

executioners of the German occupiers".¹³³ This support from Soviet leaders along with earlier sniper role models helped establish official training camps for females to become snipers. This good foundation along with the selective choice of volunteers made sure that the female corps received high quality candidates who would continue the success of female snipers. The good publicity of celebrities, kept public opinion positive and ensured the continued usage of women snipers throughout the war. While the support from the government and the female role models parallel the women's air regiment, there is a unique aspect of the sniper movement. This aspect was that the women's biology made them better at being snipers than men. It was argued because that female attributes such as smaller sized, patience and better stealth provided those advantages in the sniper field of war.¹³⁴ This was lacking in the air force regiment, since little was mentioned about women's biology affecting their ability, and if it was it was usually negative. The sniper movement on the other hand, embraced the idea that women might be better suited to the tasks of being a sniper. Thus even with this seeming Leninist equality between males and females, the idea of divorcing gender from soldiering was absent. People claimed that women would be better snipers, because of their female talents.¹³⁵ Thus the idea that women were more naturally inclined for certain roles, still played a role in the acceptance of women in combat roles. Thus, the biological limitation or in the case advantages, of being female were weighted in favor of certain roles. Therefore, the complete disregard of gender did not happen, the equality of sexes was not achieved in the army. The women's gender was used as arguments for roles, especially snipers. The sniper movement while allowing women to serve on frontlines, was partially justified because of their sex. Overall the sniper movement was successful, joining the combination of government support (both army hierarchy and Stalin), female role models,

¹³³ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 209.

¹³⁴ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 209.

¹³⁵ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 208- 212.

Pavlichenko, and reusing older gender rhetoric arguing for the talents of a certain sex made them good at certain roles. Still even with the success of the sniper movement and its publicity there were relatively few women snipers produced. Only about 1,100 women snipers would serve and like their air force comrades many were demobilized after the war.¹³⁶ Still the snipers proved that women could be enormously successful combatants in warfare.

The Navy

The Navy had one of the smallest mobilizations of women with only around 20,000 females serving.¹³⁷ It also had the most "tradition" and was most opposed to women serving in its ranks. This paired with the relatively limited role of the Soviet navy in the war, would mean that few women would serve and be recognized for their heroism. According to naval tradition "cats and women" were thought of as bad luck for the ships and their male crews.¹³⁸ The navy showed this lack acceptance of women into the ranks and while this chilled with time, the lack of information and recognition of these women is reflective of the Soviet Navies reluctance to recruit women. Often the woman who joined the navy were directed into ancillary roles, such as electricians, medics, signalers, and typists.¹³⁹ This is further evidence by the three naval women who achieved the Hero of the Soviet Union (HSU). Yekaterina Mikhaylova, Galina Petrova, Mariya Tsukanova, all served as paramedic's within the Navy. They served in amphibious assaults either on the Black sea or in Manchuria.¹⁴⁰ These women served gallantly in their roles as paramedics, two of the HSU's being awarded posthumously.¹⁴¹ Still, unlike the other branches of the military who produced HSU's in aggressive fighting roles, the navy's HSU's were

¹³⁶ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 210 -212.

¹³⁷ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 56.

¹³⁸ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 165.

¹³⁹ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 165.

¹⁴⁰ Cottam, *Women in war and resistance*, 265- 277.

¹⁴¹ Cottam, *Women in war and resistance*, 265- 277.

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¹³⁸ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 165.

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¹⁴⁰ Cottam, *Women in war and resistance*, 265-277.

¹⁴¹ Cottam, *Women in war and resistance*, 265-277.

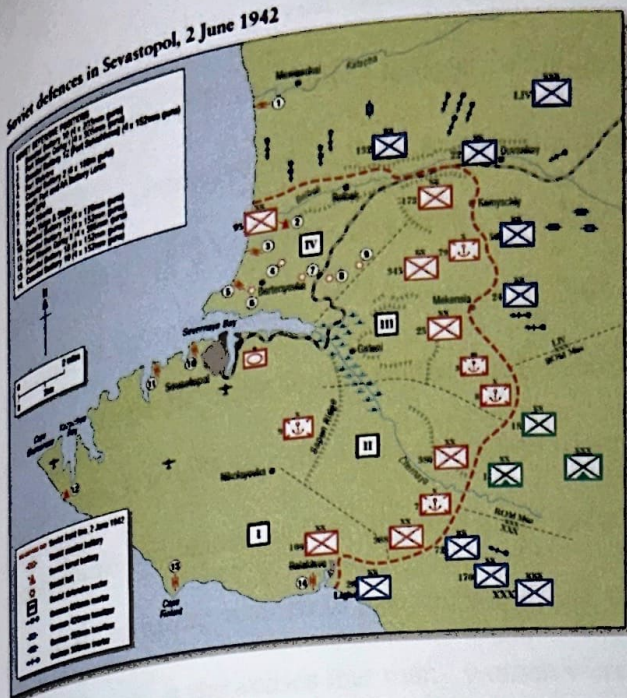
awarded for rescuing men from combat. Another issue of the female navy recruits was their class in society, with about 60% of the volunteers was from the "highest stratum of white collar workers" and only 25% coming from the blue collar class.¹⁴² The problem with this patriotic recruitment of women is that they lacked the necessary skills that were so desperately needed, electricians and other industrial professions.

It is also important to understand the navy's war contributions and involvement. While the Eastern front was primarily a land war, the navy would be used to provide support in two large delaying battles, Odessa and Sevastopol. These battles would make some women legends, as stated earlier Lyudmila Pavlichenko would fight and earn her fame at Odessa. Sevastopol served as a thorn in the Axis powers side, and delayed further invasions of the Caucasuses, and the much needed oilfields, until the late summer of 1942. The battle of Sevastopol would be a joint cooperation of Navy and Army thus giving these naval women a chance in a full scale battle. The following image would showcase the desperate last stand effort of the battle, and the cooperation of naval and army units (see Map 1).¹⁴³

¹⁴² Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 169.

¹⁴³ <http://histomil.com/viewtopic.php?t=21170>

Soviet defences in Sevastopol, 2 June 1942



While the naval elements survived and provided supporting roles, it is assistance in evacuating the wound and delaying the war would ensure the survival of some female war heroes, such as Lyudmila Palvicheko. The last stand that many of the army units partook in around Sevastopol though would create another heroine of the Soviet Union. Nina Onilova who would serve in the famous “Black Death” battalions near Odessa.¹⁴⁴ She would first be assigned here as a medical NCO, but demanded to apart of a machine gun platoon. She would model herself after the famous “Anka” a machine gunner from the famous Soviet propaganda movie Chapeav.¹⁴⁵ Her male comrades would name her “daughter” after her “frail looking, short simple” woman who always seemed to have a sly grin on her face.¹⁴⁶ She would become famous for her exploits, being extremely patient and waiting for Nazi’s soldiers to be in the worst tactical position before

¹⁴⁴ Sources Disagree weather or not the “Black Battalions” and the 25th Rifle brigade (Chaepev) (made up of both naval marines and red army soldiers) would be under naval or army control. While it was most likely under the army’s control I included under the naval category, because its subsequent actions and defense of Sevastopol best fit within the specific context of the navy’s involvement.

¹⁴⁵ Cottam, *Women in war and resistance*, 180 – 186. Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 171.

¹⁴⁶ Cottam, *Women in war and resistance*, 182.

unleashing her machine gun on them.¹⁴⁷ She would also be credited with destroying a tank, and was injured twice, yet still wanted to fight on the front lines.¹⁴⁸ When she was found badly injured after an intensive battle, the commanding general I. Ye. Petrov reportedly came to her bedside telling her "You fought gloriously, daughter. Thank you, on behalf of the whole army, on behalf of the entire nations."¹⁴⁹ The story of Onilova is crucial for it tells us the sacrifice many women would make for the motherland, showcasing courage equal to or beyond their male counterparts. It would also showcase the power of soviet rhetoric on these women. Onilova, was tremendously influenced by that film and given great patriotic fever from it. Thus Soviet prewar rhetoric did influence women to join the war effort, supplement and increasing the already high patriotic fervor. It showcases that many women were not just content with serving in the medical support war, wanting instead to serve on the front lines. Still with the Soviet defeat at Sevastopol the Black Sea fleet was reduced to harassment mission until the momentum of the war shift back after Stalingrad and the battle Kursk.¹⁵⁰ Because of this overall limited impact of the Navy upon the war after, and its underutilization of women in warfare, it makes direct comparison difficult. We can conclude that because of the Soviet navy's tradition, women were often relegated to support, non-combat roles, except in the cases of Odessa and Sevastopol. This lack of direct effort would result in a lack of opportunities for women to contribute to the heroics that many of their sisters in the Air Force and Army achieved. The rhetoric and glamour of the Soviet navy would also attract a large pool of educated women, hence the high recruitment of Soviet white collar women. These under skilled, women, in the industrial fields needed, would frustrate naval command initially but would be forgiven because of the dire need of manpower.

¹⁴⁷ Cottam, *Women in war and resistance: selected biographies of Soviet women soldier*, 183.

¹⁴⁸ Cottam, *Women in war and resistance*, 183-184.

¹⁴⁹ *Gevroini Sevastopol'skoy kreposti*. Simferopol, 1965, 89-94 as cited by Cottam 184. Translated as (Gevroini of the Sevastopol fortress) original source material seems unclear, possibly memoir.

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a212034.pdf> The true turning point of the Eastern front is still debated amongst scholars, though the consensus is either the lifting of the Stalingrad siege or the battle of Kursk.

While, Soviet women served in the Navy their contributions and stories for the most part would be forgotten and under recorded. They would receive demobilization orders near the end of the war and the navy would return to its male dominated environment.¹⁵¹

Section III – Propaganda. Images and Legacies

Propaganda

The propaganda machine of the Soviet Union produced a wide variety of images often for very specific purposes. In regards to women they tended to focus in two ways. The first was the home front, portraying Soviet women as strong and capable but partaking in either industry or farm work. For example the following figure portrays a woman in a bomb factory or production line.¹⁵² Her clothes are decisively masculine, long overalls and sleeves, haired laid back short, with a serious expression. She stands almost ramrod, like at attention in the military, while placing her arm around the bomb she has created. This entire image highlights the seriousness of women working in the factories and the effort they can contribute to the war effort. The seriousness of this photo is in contrast to the much flirtier, beautiful women in Western, especially US, propaganda. Figure 3, is the famous Rosie the riveter. While also decidedly masculine for the time, it has certain aspects that still portray feminine aspects.¹⁵³ The long eyelashes, the popped collar, the red lipstick and blush, display a more feminine take on working in industry. From this we can see the more supposed equality of Soviet Russian, and how the focus was even more on women's contribution to the war effort, over their beauty in doing it. The Soviet women look hard and worn, representative of the hardships they have faced over the last ten years, from collectivization, the purges, to this total war environment.

¹⁵¹ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 232.

¹⁵² Hoover Institute Political Poster Online Database: Poster ID: RU/SU: 2402

¹⁵³ <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/rosie-the-riveter>



Figure 2



Figure 3

This propaganda is very much in the idea of passing the work from men to women.

Figure 4 represents this well, with a strong, capable Soviet Women clutching a bundle of wheat, while handing a gun off. The caption reads "Warrior, Answer to the motherland's victory." Thus women were shown as capable of taking over the men's duties while they fought. This image of women being capable was the primary usage of female propaganda, strong, capable, masculine and serious. Women would provide their best work for the motherland, as long they served on the home front. Both figures 5 and 6 would reflect, this, showcasing men dressed as soldiers, partaking in the fighting, while woman supported them on the home front. Therefore women were integral to war effort, especially on the home front, yet where were the propaganda picture ensuring women to go to war? The "idealized" Lenin gender equality did not exist in Stalin's wartime propaganda; women were not regarded as warriors. While given new and more masculine roles, women were directed to the home front, freeing up men to go to the war.

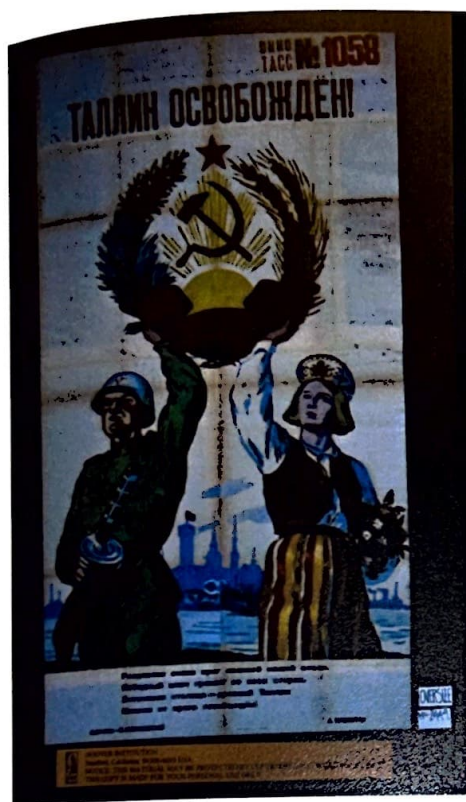
¹⁵⁴ Hoover Institute Political Poster Online Database: Poster ID: RU/SU: 2402



Figure 4

ВОИН, ОТВЕТЬ РОДИНЕ ПОБЕДОЙ!

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Figure 5

Figure 6

While the first type of Soviet propaganda was empowering women to work in the factories and industries, the second form of propaganda was decidedly more victimizing in approach. Soviet women were portrayed as helpless against Nazi aggressions. Some of the following images will be gruesome examples of the Soviet propaganda machine. The next two

¹⁵⁵ Hoover Institute Political Poster Online Database: RU/SU: 1921.23

¹⁵⁶ Hoover Institute Political Poster Online Database: RY/SU 2449 (OS)

¹⁵⁷ Hoover Institute Political Poster Online Database: RU/SU 2399 (OS)

1941, she would be captured and mutilated by Nazi's soldiers, then hung in front of the Russian village. German soldiers took pictures of this event and were later captured thus providing the Soviet government with shocking propaganda material. Figure 9, displays a propagandized version of the actual photo. It is brutal imagery and was a call to action to attack and demonize the Nazi's. This woman was a courageous partisan, who fought for the motherland. But they used this and added beauty to her take makes a propaganda statement, portraying her much more as a vulnerable woman who was butchered by the Nazi devil figure. The next image will show a women and her child being threatened by a Nazi soldier. The goal of these posters was to help with the faltering morale of the army and desertions. It was to embolden and impassion the men to fight on.



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161

¹⁶⁰ 1941: Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya," ExecutedToday.com, May 09, 2015, , accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.executedtoday.com/2007/11/29/1941-zoya-kosmodemyanskaya/>.

¹⁶¹ Hoover Institute Political Poster Online Database: Poster ID: RU/SU

Figure 9 "Kill Fascist

Figure 10

Therefore the majority of propaganda posters which contain women, would portray them as either excellent capable, Homefront workers, or as victims of Nazi aggression. This apparent conflict showcase how the views of women in Stalin's Soviet Union where both complex and nuanced. It also shows the different appeals that the Soviet Union made to the differing sexes. The goals of these posters were twofold. The first to get women further involved into the Soviet economy, and the second to impassion men to join, and fight harder. Therefore while some prewar rhetoric did feature woman in combative roles, notably the war film Chapayev, most War propaganda posters would showcase women serving on the home front, and as victims of Nazi aggression.

As with all Soviet Propaganda and polices there was some nuance. While for the most part women were portrayed in the above stated categories, there were occasional deviations. The exceptions though did not show women as grizzled, masculine soldiers, instead favoring feminine and more light-hearted photos that were less popularized. Therefore there are many posed footage of Soviet women soldiers, but they often bordered on glamorizing and beautifying these females. The image of Sniper Roza Shania is a prime example of this beautification of women in war¹⁶². While she was a striking lady, why pose her in a dress uniform instead of a more combative masculine pose, wearing her usual sniper (a modified men's uniform)? The same goes for the pilot Capt. Mariya Dolina of the Pe-2 dive-bomber.¹⁶³ While getting extra footage would be difficult, these photos portray these woman in a way to evoke the almost glories aspect of war, with dress uniforms and medals. There was little effort made to show

¹⁶² <http://rarehistoricalphotos.com/roza-shanina-1945/>

¹⁶³ <http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/night-witches-soviet-female-aviators-in-world-war-ii/>

these women soldiers as gritty, and worn instead they were portrayed to shield them from the worst of war. While it is important to note that many of the roles women played in the war would make it difficult to obtain raw footage, the seeming lack of women in direct combat photos, or after battle footage showcase the regimes lack of will to portray its women in this way. Therefore, Soviet Propaganda and images of women, dictated that they should serve on the home front, and that men needed to protect them from the scourge of war. Those images of female warriors were more often glamorizing the cult of heroes/heroines Stalin tried to develop, while also downplaying the horrors of war that these women experienced.



Figure 11 Roza Shanina 1944



Figure 12 Capt. Mariya Dolina

Legacy

"For some reason we never told our children about the war" Olga Vasilyevna grew pensive. "I didn't even wear my battle ribbons. I took them off on one occasion and never pinned them back".¹⁶⁴ Olga Vasilyevna's quote from a post war interview epitomizes the legacy of Soviet combat women. The hiding of woman's contributions in the war effort become almost common place. While many women, especially those in the air regiments, would attend their own private reunions, the majority of women's sacrifices for the motherland were hidden from the larger public.¹⁶⁵ Almost universally these woman kept their stories to themselves, and few outsiders bothered to ask or record their achievements. A variety of factors would influence this silence, many of them relating to Stalin's further retreat from women's rights. After the war in 1946 the Soviet Union had an approximate population of 96 million women and 75 million men.¹⁶⁶ This skewed gender ratio, paired with the Heroine of Motherhood campaign and other reproduction initiatives, encouraged women to go back into the home front.¹⁶⁷ These woman would no longer be soldiers, but because of the population crisis many would become both mothers and full time workers. Unlike women in the US who would lose employment to make women for the American G.I.'s the Soviet Union's women would keep their jobs, yet now have the extra tasks of creating large families. Thus the business and struggle to return to normally would make recording and telling of these stories a secondary thought. Thus the focus towards recreating a Soviet society and Stalin increasing family polices greatly influence woman's demobilization and return to industry and homes. The goal was almost to forget the war existed, for all of its tragedies and destruction .A second and more insidious reason for the lack of discussion about women involvement of the war comes from Mikhail Kalinin, who in a speech

¹⁶⁴ Aleksievich, *War's Unwomanly Face*, 79.

¹⁶⁵ Noggle, *A dance with death*, 121.

¹⁶⁶ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 232.

¹⁶⁷ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 232.

one month after the war to woman veterans would say the following.

Equality for women has existed in our country since the very first day of the October Revolution. But you have won equality for women in year another sphere: in the defense of your country, arms in hand. You have won equal rights for women in a field in which they hitherto have not taken such a direct part. But allow me, as one grown wise with years, to say to you; do not give yourself airs in your future practical work. Do not talk about the service you have rendered, let other do it for you. That will be better.¹⁶⁸

This statement epitomizes the complexities of Soviet gender rhetoric. While the gender equality of the Soviet Union is stated and praised, the realizations of this double standard shine through with his last three sentences. This dichotomy was reflective of the entire war, woman can do anything a man can do, but the Soviet State really wants you to serve in a support role, or stay on the home front. Even with the numerous women who earned Heroes of the Soviet Union the views of women's roles barely changed and after the war were even further repressed. Women then "demobilized were required to sign a pledge 'not to talk about the services they had rendered'".¹⁶⁹ Because of these silences imposed by the state and respected, possibly out of fear, few records would exist of the average women in war. Still many servicemen would remember and respect their sisters in arms, but often were unsure if these women should have even served. The husband of Olga Vasilyenva said "As for the girls who had been able to go through such a war, we can't do enough for them. Any front-line man would tell you that. I don't know whether young girls should have been allowed to take part in the war. But they did take part in the war

¹⁶⁸ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 232.

¹⁶⁹ Ed. Robert Thurston and Bernd Bonwatsch *The peoples War: Responses to World War II In the Soviet Union*, 227

and their contribution was immense. Like us, they wore tarpaulin boots and heavy greatcoats, slept in the snow and were hit by bullets."¹⁷⁰ Overall though both male and female voices regarding the war are lacking, partially due to the pledges of silence, but also to a negative stereotype of women's services. As mentioned earlier the PPZh's, would cast a long shadow. This stereotype continued long after the war, leading many women veterans to be labeled as "some kind of front-line "W" [Whore]".¹⁷¹ Thus the issues of being a woman in the masculine field of war carried over into the romantic and public view of these soldiers. Catherine Merridale best summarizes the post-war general view of women "It was assumed that woman slept with officers.... Women veterans with medals were treated with suspicion for year after the war. When the coveted medals 'for military service' (*za boevye zaslugi*) was worn by a woman, it was jokingly said to be "for sexual service" (*za polevye zaslugi*)."¹⁷² Thus the portrayal of woman's actions during the war was sexual in nature, and because of the silence instilled upon them by the soviet state, these rumors were allowed to fester and further shun women from speaking up. Even, today's popular opinion, still sees Soviet combat women as people who were there to find, or because of love. The 2015 film "The Battle of Sevastopol", is a war movie loosely based on the extremely famous, previously mention sniper, Lyudmila Pavlichenko. The movie boils down this extremely successful and complex woman, who is credited with over 309 kills, into a woman who fought because of her lover. The movie features prominent romance scenes and its cover and trailer blatantly feature Pavilchenko and her lover in Figure 13.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Aleksievich, *War's Unwomanly Face*, 81.

¹⁷¹ Risser, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century*, 144.

¹⁷² Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army*, 241.

¹⁷³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzCOFER-4hl>



Figure 13

All of these factors have led to the legacy of Soviet combat women to be, an under studied, almost unknown, and seemingly dishonorable subject.

Conclusion

All told, there were significant differences and experiences in the way women were involved in World War II. The Soviet Union would accept women tentatively in the war effort but the Soviet Union did not encourage them to be involved in combat. Often these differences were showcased by what roles the Soviet women were offered and accepted in. More traditional roles such as nurses, laundry maids and cooks were more accepted, and actively encouraged by the Soviet government, via recruitment campaigns, mobilizations and selective propaganda posters. More aggressive roles of signalers and paramedics, were allowed and somewhat encouraged in times of need, their heroisms were rewarded with medals and recognized, but with the war's end, so

Overall the dire population circumstances of post-war Soviet Union, Stalin's retreat on female equality. Soviet High command's orders of silences, and the stereotypes of the sexual nature of the female warriors, meant that their wartime actions would become hidden. Those who did speak up would be ridiculed with the PPZh stereotype, and told that they did not belong as a part of the war effort. Even the male comrades of the time were unsure if women should have fought in the war.

too would their military careers. The most aggressive combat roles such as pilots, snipers and infantry women often required strong support from the top, Stalin himself, paired with the prestige of Soviet women heroines. When these two factors faded, tragedy would befall these all-female regiments, and thus decrease their usage and believed effectiveness. This lack of support and usage would create morale crises and disuse of women units. Still when the Soviet Union's need for manpower was greatest, its women stood up and vowed to fight, using their skills and prestige that had to try to fit into the Soviet military, while sometime even creating their own sphere. Soviet gender rhetoric also played a role in women involvement and personal views of themselves. Even though women were supposed to be able to everything a man could do, they often had double standards thrust upon them, and certain expectations of femininity. Often positions that fulfilled traditional femininity and gender roles were favored for women to partake in (i.e. nursing). But this rhetoric was taken to a new level, especially in the sniper schools where the women's sex played an important role for justifying and arguing for why they were such good snipers. This combined with the poor treatment of grunt women soldiers as whores after the war exemplified the complicated nature, and lack of full equality of the Soviet Union's gender policies.

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