

The Rouged Army: Soviet Women Soldiers' Counternarratives of the Great Patriotic War

Victoria Paige

Edward F. Hayes Graduate Research Forum 2022

Introduction:

Recalling her military service on the Eastern front, Anna Timofeyeva-Yegorova wondered, “But how much sorrow can the Russian woman endure? And why must she? I doubt whether anyone could bear more.”¹ Timofeyeva-Yegorova was one of 800,000 Soviet women who served in the Red Army during World War II (WWII).² Soviet women volunteered for military service in droves. However, upon reaching the front, women quickly realized that they needed to combat misogyny from their comrades as well as fight the encroaching Germans. The Soviet public and state-controlled media, such as film and literature, misconstrued women’s service as either pitiable or as an insidious ploy to seduce male soldiers. • Rather than condone these misrepresentations, Timofeyeva-Yegorova, and other women veterans published memoirs that provided a different perspective of their service. They contradicted notions that their service was disgraceful by presenting narratives that depicted themselves as heroic soldiers.

Throughout their childhood, Soviet women learned that they held equal responsibility as men in defending the nation. In July of 1926, the Commissar for Military Affairs, Kliment Voroshilov, and Chief of Staff, Mikhail Turkachevskii, insisted on a better-funded army that

¹ Anna A. Timofeyeva-Yegorova, *Red Sky, Black Death: A Soviet Woman Pilot's Memoir of the Eastern Front*, trans. Kim Green and Margarita Ponomaryova (Bloomington: Slavica Publ., 2009), 213.

² Kazimiera Cottom, *Women in War and Resistance: Selected Biographies of Soviet Women Soldiers* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), xxi.

• State leaders routinely disregarded women soldiers. In his 27th anniversary of the revolution speech in 1944, Stalin snubbed women veterans by solely praising women on the home front. In July 1945, Mikhail Kalinin, the head of the Soviet state, even pleaded to women veterans, “do not speak of the services you rendered.” See Reina Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 60, 68.

encompassed the entire population of the Soviet Union, including women.³ Leaders of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) declared Soviet citizens born after 1910 as future soldiers in a forthcoming war, either with Germany or Japan.⁴ Young girls trained for battle by entering the Komsomol and the Union of Societies of Assistance to Defense and Aviation-Chemical Construction of the USSR (OSOAVIAKhIM). As Komsomol members, they expressed devotion for the communist system, learning to “be active fighters in implementing the policy and decisions of the Communist Party.”⁵ The paramilitary organization, OSOAVIAKhIM, trained three million members each year, with initiates receiving basic military training.⁶ Alongside entering youth groups, girls witnessed military women celebrated in film and literature.⁷ The film *Chapaev* (1934) featured Anya, a machine gunner in the Russian Civil War, who became a role model for young girls. In an interview with *Rabotnitsa*, the actress who played Anya stated, “I would consider my task fulfilled, if the picture were to persuade even a few women to go to the front if there were to be a war.”⁸ Anya motivated thousands of women to join the military, including machine gunner and Hero of the Soviet Union, Nina Onilova.⁹ As girls received military training through youth organizations and beheld women on the front via

³ Anna Krylova, “Stalinist Identity from the Viewpoint of Gender: Rearing a Generation of Professionally Violent Women-Fighters in 1930s Stalinist Russia,” *Gender & History* 16, no. 3 (2004): 626–53, 630; Adrienne Marie Harris, “The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2008), 31.

⁴ Krylova, “Stalinist Identity from the Viewpoint of Gender,” 630.

⁵ Vladimir Konstantinovich Krivoruchenko, *Youth and the Party: Documents*, trans. Yuri Shirokov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 8.

⁶ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War: The Red Army, 1939-1945* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2005), 33.

⁷ Dorota J. Wędrowska, *The Political Propaganda in the American and Soviet Feature Films 1939-1970* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2016), 35.

⁸ Harris, “The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture,” 36.

⁹ Zoya Smirnova-Medvedeva, *On the Road to Stalingrad: Memoirs of a Woman Machine Gunner*, trans. Kazimiera J. Cottam (Nepean: New Military Publishing, 1997), 129. The Hero of the Soviet Union was the highest distinction in the Soviet Union. This medal was awarded to those who conducted heroic feats in service to the Soviet state and people.

film and literature, they anticipated future roles in the coming conflict. However, despite the inclusion of girls in military preparedness, no legislation was taken to discourage the misogynistic beliefs that permeated Soviet society. Soviet popular media, both during and after the war, failed to grant women the same respect that was denoted to male soldiers.

Throughout most of the Soviet period, the presentation of WWII focused on the notion of Soviet sacrifice and perseverance. Undoubtedly, the war represented an unforgettable era of human suffering and resolve. However, the Soviet state consistently censored war narratives and military reports, fashioning an incomplete picture of Soviet people's experiences in WWII. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, historians reevaluated both the Red Army and Soviet women's involvement in the war. Multiple historians, such as Anna Krylova, Catherine Merridale, and Richard Overy, analyzed the conflict beyond Soviet propaganda. Other historians, like Reina Pennington and Lyuba Vinogradova viewed the once overlooked women's perspective in war. Several of these scholars analyzed memoirs and war diaries; however, they concentrated on Soviet censorship around war trauma.¹⁰ Vinogradova reviewed Timofeyeva-Yegorova's memoir, one of the veterans studied in this paper. However, Vinogradova focused on Timofeyeva-Yegorova's pre-war life, rather than on Timofeyeva-Yegorova's experiences in the air force and after the Allied victory.¹¹ Additionally, historians used women's writings to supply personal perspectives on the war. As historians focused on conveying women's experiences, they neglected to investigate why these memoirs initially came into existence.

This project diverges from prior examinations on the Great Patriotic War, as it studies both how and why women veterans depicted their conflict. While memoirs are not exact

¹⁰ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 232.

¹¹ Lyuba Vinogradova, *Defending the Motherland: The Soviet Women Who Fought Hitler's Aces* (London: Maclehose Press, 2015), 55.

illustrations of past events, due to the unreliable nature of memory and the author's bias, they provide an analysis of the author's objective. Within their memoirs, women veterans contradicted film and literature portrayals of their service and war, providing a different perspective to the conflict. The Ministry of the Cinema, the government body that controlled film production, promoted the state's approved account of the Great Patriotic War: a morally driven and male dominated conflict.¹² As the Soviet Union directed all aspects of life, it influenced the presentation and potentially, lasting memory of WWII. If women had quietly allowed the state to overlook their part in the conflict, the reality of their service could have been expunged from the public memory.

Official accounts, overly sanitized and often blatantly false, created a warped image of the war. These depictions failed to explain repercussions from the traumatic four years. Women's memoirs revealed the missing elements from censored narratives. Historians have already analyzed Soviet women's role in the war. However, examining women's memoirs will incorporate an understanding of women's ownership over their history within the study of the Great Patriotic War. Their written works demonstrate how women veterans fought not only for an Allied victory, but for their own public recognition and remembrance. During and immediately after WWII, Soviet state-controlled media crafted unrealistic representations of women soldiers that molded them into overly feminized and unwilling participants of the war. However, women veterans counteracted and amended this narrative by portraying themselves as patriotic Soviet citizens in memoirs written during the Soviet period, and then by sharing the horrific realities of war and sexual discrimination in memoirs written after the fall of the Soviet Union.

¹² Wędrawska, *The Political Propaganda in the American and Soviet Feature Films 1939-1970*, 35.

This project will interpret six memoirs: three written during the Soviet era, and three written after the fall of the Soviet Union. The three Soviet period memoirs include propagandist Maria Pedenko's *Фронтовой Дневник* [*Front Diary*] (1965), Sofia Avericheva's *Дневник Разведчицы* [*Diary of a Scout*] (1986), and Zoya Smirnova-Medvedeva's *On the Road to Stalingrad: Memoirs of a Woman Machine Gunner* (1997).[•] The memoirs written in the post-Soviet period are Anna Timofeyeva-Yegorova's *Red Sky, Black Death: A Soviet Woman Pilot's Memoir of the Eastern Front* (2009), Irina Dunaevskaya's *От Ленинграда до Кенигсберга: Дневник Военной Переводчицы* [*From Leningrad to Königsberg: War Diary of a Translator*] (2010), and Yulia Zhukova's *Girl with a Sniper Rifle: An Eastern Front Memoir* (2019). As the majority of published accounts belong to male superior officers, these memoirs offer a distinct interpretation of WWII through the perspective of Soviet women.¹³ The memoirs chosen for this project represent the available sources at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, as well as the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg.

While Soviet women have published biographies of comrades and letters from the front, there remains a lack of personal narratives.[♦] In her ground-breaking work, *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II* (2017), Svetlana Alexievich provided different views of the conflict by interviewing women who served in combat, as well as women

[•] Smirnova-Medvedeva originally published her memoir in the Soviet Union in 1967. The edition used for this project was translated and published abroad in 1997 by Kazimiera Cottam. As Cottam translated the work, allowing it to become more accessible for a broader audience, it is still able to be analyzed as a Soviet period memoir.

¹³ Smirnova-Medvedeva, *On the Road to Stalingrad*, ix.

[♦] These written works, although crafted by women veterans, do not focus on their own service. As I determined to examine memoirs and war diaries, I decided not to include an analysis of these works. However, they are still incredibly poignant and productive for studying women's perspectives in war. Here are a few examples: Irina Dazhina's *Девушки в Кирзовых Сапогах: Непридуманные Фронтовые Истории* [*Girls in Canvas Boots: The True Frontline Stories*] (2009) and Elena Dechman's *Сто Писем с Фронта, 1942-1944* [*One Hundred Letters from the Front, 1942-1944*] (2010).

who held non-combatant roles. The majority of published memoirs, however, come from women who both volunteered and participated in combat. Censorship laws in the Soviet Union prevented many veterans from publishing their memoirs, causing most written narratives to come from well-known and heavily decorated veterans. Due to the lack of available memoirs, the narratives chosen for English translation also tend to feature awarded snipers, machine gunners, and pilots. Veterans who served in non-combatant positions, as well as civilians, are now able to publish their works without the threat of censorship. However, the number of surviving veterans decreases with each year. Even with an increasing number of diverse narratives, publishers often choose more renowned veterans for English translation. Hero of the Soviet Union, Anna Timofeyeva-Yegorova, accepted an English translation two years after her memoir was originally published. Lesser-known Yulia Zhukova wrote her memoir in 2006 and was not offered an English translation until 2019. Although selecting more famous veterans is productive for sales, it maintains an incomplete picture of women's service. However, while the lack of personal perspectives is regrettable, it suggests that women who published memoirs strove to detail their service, rather than attain monetary gain or participate in a literary trend.

I will examine the significance of these memoirs in three parts. First, I will inspect how Soviet state media illustrated women soldiers in film and literature. This analysis will discuss depictions both during and after the war. The memoirs viewed in later sections contradicted these state representations of women and war. The second section will study how women compiled their memoirs during the Soviet era, with dates of publication ranging from 1965 to 1986. In this period, veterans emphasized their military skills, crafting patriotically charged memoirs. Finally, the third section will examine more recently published memoirs. These works, published from 2009 to 2019, displayed more brutal images of war. These authors refrained from stressing their

aptitude for battle, and instead revealed aspects of WWII that had been neglected by historians or Soviet popular media.

Martyrs and Maidens: Soviet State Portrayals of Women Soldiers

Contrary to the propaganda produced during the 1930s, the Soviet military never deemed women as potential combatants.[•] Despite including women in the Komsomol and OSAVIAKiM, the government failed to implement several factors necessary for women's service. Although flying clubs permitted both men and women, women could not continue to military academies.¹⁴ Even Marina Raskova and Polina Osipenko, celebrated pilots by the end of the 1930s, joined the air force illegally.¹⁵ Additionally, a peace-time draft was never constructed to standardize women's enlistment. By the second month of the war, the government requested the Komsomol to begin recruiting women.¹⁶ However, the organization only conscripted women as nurses and mechanics.¹⁷ In order to obtain these positions, women needed multiple years of schooling: four to be accepted as a mechanic and seven as a nurse.¹⁸ Even if women passed these educational restrictions, they also needed to prove their talent in culture, physical strength, and military specialties. These regulations did not exist for male enlistees.¹⁹ The military barred women from

[•] Women's magazines often portrayed military life as a popular trend, rather than as a career decision. From 1926 to 1941, *Rabotnitsa*, *Samolyot*, and *OSAVIAKiM* printed hundreds of images that featured women in the military. However, these pictures always reinforced traditional femininity. Women wore dresses and makeup, and some depictions featured mothers holding both infants and machine guns. See Harris, "The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture," 48-49, 51-53.

¹⁴ Krylova, "Stalinist Identity from the Viewpoint of Gender," 636.

¹⁵ Harris, "The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture," 41-42. These two women, alongside Valentina Grizodubova, gained national renown after attempting a flight mission from Moscow to the Far East in 1938. They became the first women to earn the distinction of Heroes of the Soviet Union. Thus, it was incredibly offensive that despite their achievements, they still could not legally enter the air force.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Roger Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought: The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 283.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 284.

combat until April of 1942, almost a year after the first German assault.²⁰ Orders 284 and 297 allowed women to attain positions directly on the frontlines as gunmen, pilots, and scouts; and an additional order called for the distribution of uniforms for women.²¹ However, women enlistees did not receive the appropriate supplies until 1943. Until then, women relied on their own domestic skills to adjust their oversized male uniforms, some sewing their own undergarments from captured German parachutes.²² The lack of governmental planning for women's service suggests that the state viewed women as prime material for war propaganda, but not as actual soldiers in the military.

Throughout WWII, male soldiers considered women's service as shameful. The orders for women's enlistment came as a last resort to counteract the invading German army. Despite receiving equal amounts of military training, many servicemen viewed women as unnecessary additions to the war. The military never implemented a policy that specified women's role in combat.²³ Even if women received combat positions, their ability to participate on the front depended on their superior officers. Often, commanders allowed women to enter combat based on spontaneous decisions or on a case-by-case basis.²⁴ Even after women obtained permission to partake in battle, they simultaneously received their unit's pity. As Alexievich presented in her collection of interviews, many male soldiers viewed women's service as an embarrassment. Officers spited themselves for leading women into combat, believing women could never survive the brutal campaigns.²⁵ During an interview with Alexievich, two male veterans remarked that

²⁰ Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 283.

²¹ Vladimir A. Zolotarev, *Velikaya Otechestvennaya [Great Patriotic War]* (Moscow: Terra, 1997), 214.

²² Vinogradova, *Defending the Motherland*, 208.

²³ Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 287.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Random House, 2017), 215.

they still felt ashamed that women joined the military.²⁶ The notion that women's service was a shameful blight on the memory of the Great Patriotic War persisted due to state representations of women soldiers. During the war period and after, the state promoted a plethora of war films and literature. The majority of these works depicted naïve women soldiers who often died in battle, perpetuating the idea that women's service was regrettable.

During WWII, Soviet popular media presented women soldiers as victims of war, rather than as active participators. After the German invasion, a special committee was established to produce films focused on the war.²⁷ These films did not highlight women's military achievements, but rather featured martyred partisans and women waiting on the home front. As films had to receive state permission before being shown to the public, the Ministry of Cinema approved these representations of women. The most recognizable Soviet woman of WWII remains Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, an eighteen-year-old partisan who was captured and brutally murdered by Germans in November of 1941.²⁸ The notorious image of her mutilated body was reproduced in multiple newspapers and magazines. Her final words, "I am not afraid to die, comrades! It is happiness to die for my homeland," became a rallying cry for men and women across the nation.²⁹ Multiple women, including Marina Raskova and Maria Oktrabrskaya, described Kosmodemyanskaya as an inspiration, and vowed to avenge her death.³⁰

Another partisan, Yelizaveta Chaikina, received similar posthumous acclaim. Working as a Komsomol leader, Chaikina spread Joseph Stalin's November 6, 1941 speech to fifteen

²⁶ Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 73-74.

²⁷ Wędrowska, *The Political Propaganda in the American and Soviet Feature Films 1939-1970*, 36.

²⁸ Harris, "The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture," 68.

²⁹ Sofia Avericheva, *Дневник Разведчицы [Diary of a Scout]* (Yaroslavl: Verhne-Volzhscoe Publishing House, 1986), 30.

³⁰ Harris, "The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture," 69.

villages, before being arrested and executed by Germans.³¹ She was killed one week before Kosmodemyanskaya, and like the younger partisan, twenty-three-year-old Chaikina became a symbol of German atrocities. After Chaikina's death, women who served as partisans went by the nickname 'Chaika;' and both Kosmodemyanskaya and Chaikina posthumously received the Hero of the Soviet Union.³² These two partisans undoubtedly deserve recognition for their service. However, the public attention given to their deaths overshadowed achievements from other women soldiers. Instead of directing awareness to notable women on the frontlines, Soviet news articles and magazines focused on women who had already died. Kosmodemyanskaya achieved a level of admiration unparalleled to any other woman throughout the war. Her death set the precedent that a woman's service was not prized for military ability, but for a willingness to die in battle.

During the war period, state-controlled media routinely produced stories that portrayed women as victims of the German army. The 1944 film, *Zoya*, portrayed Kosmodemyanskaya as a loyal Komsomol member. She was captured by the Germans, however, not before she could heroically burn down a barn in the village of Petrishchevo. Unbeknownst to the film's audience and many Soviet citizens who heard her story, Kosmodemyanskaya was turned over to the Germans by the villagers of Petrishchevo.³³ In the film, Kosmodemyanskaya was tortured by the Germans for information. Yet, no matter how severe the torture became, she never betrayed her partisan unit. Pavel Lidov's article, "Tanya," published in *Pravda* on January 26, 1942, ended by citing, "[Kosmodemyanskaya] died a prisoner of the enemy on a fascist rack, without betraying her sufferings by a single sound, without betraying her comrades. She accepted the death of a

³¹ Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance*, 282.

³² Ibid; Harris, "The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture," 72.

³³ Harris, "The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture," 100.

martyr like a heroine, like the daughter of a great people that cannot be broken. May her memory live eternally!”³⁴ Another war film, *She Defends the Motherland* (1943), similarly portrayed Praskovya Lukyanova as a victim of war. After losing her husband and toddler son to the Germans, Lukyanova rallied her village against the fascist invaders. Although she was directly involved in the attack, she was only able to survive due to the efforts of her male comrades. The emphasis on martyrs in popular media signified that war was an unsuitable realm for women.

Whereas film and fiction focused on martyrs and women in peril, some newspapers highlighted women soldiers. During the early years of the war, the women’s magazine *Rabotnitsa* often printed articles about women fighting on the frontlines.³⁵ Ace pilot, Lilya Litvyak, became relatively famous after the Tur Brothers, acclaimed playwrights, wrote about her feats in an article titled “The Girl Avenger.”³⁶ However, despite claiming Litvyak as “one of the Front’s outstanding pilots,” they also commented on her “fragile figure with golden hair as delicate as her very name.”³⁷ Some women soldiers, like Litvyak and renowned sniper Lyudmila Pavlichenko, earned distinction in several articles. However, most of women’s service was overlooked. Unless hoping to encourage enlistment like *Rabotnitsa*, magazines and newspapers rarely discussed women on the front.³⁸ As the Soviet Information Bureau controlled internal, external, and military reports, allowing nothing to be published without prior state permission, the lack of media attention on women soldiers was likely deliberate.³⁹ Often, articles omitted the

³⁴ James Von Geldern, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore, 1917-1953* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 344. When this article was first published, Kosmodemyanskaya’s actual identity was still unknown. During her interrogation with the Germans, she claimed her name was Tanya, which is why Lidov’s article referred to her by this name.

³⁵ *Rabotnitsa* no. 6 (1942), 14-15.

³⁶ Cottom, *Women in War and Resistance*, 257.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War*, 63; Cottom, *Women in War and Resistance*, 129.

³⁹ Karl C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War 2* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 13.

feminine ending to women's names, implying that only men had fought in the battles.⁴⁰ One pilot, Marina Dolina, received the moniker "The Liberator of Borisov, Belorussia" in a newspaper article printed after an air battle.⁴¹ The newspaper, unwilling to believe Dolina was a woman, referred to the pilot as Dolin.⁴² Many men remained unaware that women even served on the front; often only realizing that women could enlist in the Red Army when women joined their unit.⁴³

Even more popular than tales of martyrs was the promise of women waiting on the home front. Konstantin Simonov, famed author and poet, penned the 1940 poem "Wait for Me." First published in *Pravda* on January 14, 1942, the poem was quickly reprinted and spread amongst Red Army troops. The poem depicted a male soldier, earnestly hoping that his lover remain faithful to him throughout the war. No matter how many years passed, the soldier wished that his lover "Wait when from afar at last no letter come... Wait when all the rest have ceased."⁴⁴ The poem admonished women who abandoned their lovers: "They cannot know, who did not wait, how in the midst of fire your waiting saved me from my fate."⁴⁵ Simonov framed the women on the home front as responsible for men's ability to survive, belittling women who pursued other romantic or sexual relationships. Many men feared that their wives would become unfaithful at some point throughout the war, and even after men returned home, lingering suspicions of affairs tore families apart.⁴⁶ These illustrations of women on the home front, faithfully awaiting their husbands, gave men a sense of comfort. Authors and state publication houses promoted these

⁴⁰ Cottom, *Women in War and Resistance*, 129.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Vinogradova, *Defending the Motherland*, 173.

⁴⁴ Geldern, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia*, 335.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 273.

portrayals of women for the men on the front. Writers employed women as symbols for domesticity and safety, consequently failing to depict women's own experiences.[•] Much like representations of women on the frontlines, there was little attention paid to how women on the home front truly operated during the war.

After the Allied victory in 1945, Soviet popular media continued to prioritize a male audience. Despite the Soviet post-war era encompassing almost fifty years, many war narratives continuously infantilized women and diminished the importance of their service. Women soldiers featured in literature and film appeared to exist only as romantic interests for the male protagonists. Emmanuil Kazakevich's 1947 short story *Star* depicted a unit of reconnaissance scouts and an enamored telephone operator named Katya. Throughout the narrative, Katya served no purpose other than to represent a feminine and mothering figure for the group of men. She immediately fell in love with the lieutenant of the scouting unit, Travkin, and visited the scout's barn daily: tidying Travkin's living space, washing the laundry, and singing for the men. Despite her constant attention, Travkin dismissed her feelings as nothing more than a juvenile crush. When Katya requested to join the unit on a scouting mission, Travkin berated her for believing the mission to be a "walk in the park."⁴⁷ Instead of proving her commitment to the war effort, she sought out Barashkin, a former sexual partner. She longed for companionship, but when Barashkin embraced her, Katya felt disgusted with herself. In characterizing Katya as dependent on a man's affections, Kazakevich likened women's service as simply a means to

[•] Many male soldiers expected their wives to be adoring upon their return, often forgetting that the home front was also dangerous and impoverished. Some women carried displaced rage towards their husbands for leaving them behind to protect their home and to continue the farm work. If women pursued other romantic and sexual partners during the war, they often received harsh criticism. Mikhail Kalatozov's film, *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957), depicted a rape survivor experiencing a severe panic attack after hearing brutal insults towards women who committed adultery. See Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 316.

⁴⁷ Emmanuil Kazakevich, et al., *Soviet War Stories: A Selection of the Best*, trans. Leonard Stoklitsky, et al. (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1990), 49.

marriage. Travkin dedicated himself to the scouting mission, never once turning his thoughts to Katya. Conversely, the rejected telephone operator mourned his absence. After Katya confessed her love to Travkin via radio, Kazakevich compared her reflection in a mirror to the “solemn expression of a bride of a hero.”⁴⁸ When the scouting group failed to return, only Katya remained hopeful that the men remained alive. She continued to call out to them on the radio, evoking Simonov’s image of the ideal woman who eternally waited for her lover to come home. Kazakevich’s story received success among the public, and a film adaptation was produced in 1949. This short story, although impactful for depicting love and loss in war, reduced Katya into a two-dimensional figure focused on male attention.

Popular media often lessened the significance of women’s service by crafting them into child-like characters. Konstantin Simonov, author of “Wait for Me,” published two successful war novels: *Days and Nights* (1945) and *The Living and the Dead* (1962). Despite having an almost twenty-year publication gap, both novels infantilized women characters. The earlier work presented Anya, a seemingly courageous nurse who rescued injured soldiers during the Battle of Stalingrad. Despite her heroic efforts, the male protagonist, Captain Saburov, constantly compared Anya to a child. Upon their first meeting, Saburov pitied her for having to serve in the war and wished to pat her on the head.⁴⁹ Almost immediately after Anya told Saburov that she could not swim, their transport ship was conveniently sunk by artillery. By framing their meeting around this scene, Simonov positioned Anya as dependent on Saburov, and alluded to how she was not suited for war. Overtime, the two characters fell in love; however, Saburov was never able to understand Anya as a self-reliant woman. In every instance of Saburov looking upon or

⁴⁸ Kazakevich, *Soviet War Stories*, 90.

⁴⁹ Konstantin Simonov, *Days and Nights*, trans. Joseph Barnes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), 23.

thinking of Anya, Simonov emphasized her youth and naivety. When Saburov and Anya shared a drink, she was akin to a child “obediently taking medicine.”⁵⁰ Simonov’s characterization of Anya led to her eventual death. As if she was a child playing war games rather than an experienced frontline nurse, Anya was mortally wounded after picking up a German grenade in shock. The subsequent explosion tore open her tunic, exposing her breasts, and reminding the reader that femininity was an inherent disability in battle.

Simonov continued his notion of naive girl-soldiers in his second novel, *The Living and the Dead*. The child-like character in this work was a doctor named Tanya. Simonov’s first description of Tanya cited that she was “very young and so tiny that she looked like a girl.”⁵¹ When Tanya introduced herself to her love interest, Sintsov, and his unit, the men gazed at her with “tenderness and admiration.”⁵² The narrator quickly revealed that Tanya was merely a dental surgeon, who was forced to assume the medical role after the male doctor was killed in a German attack. Throughout the story, Tanya increasingly became a burden to the unit. She could not protect herself in battle, as exhibited when her revolver was “so heavy that she had to hold it in both hands when she fired.”⁵³ When German troops ambushed the unit, Tanya was forced by her comrades to flee to the nearby forest. Showcasing an ineptitude for battle, she quickly fainted and relied on her fellow soldiers to carry her to safety. None of the men in her unit respected her as a soldier or even as a doctor. One of the men, Zolotarev, referred to her as “lass,” because “Medical Officer Ovsyannikova looked too young and frail to him to be addressed as ‘Doctor.’”⁵⁴ Eventually, the men decided to entrust Tanya to a peasant family. They hid her army

⁵⁰ Simonov, *Days and Nights*, 86.

⁵¹ Konstantin Simonov, *The Living and the Dead*, trans. R. Ainsztein (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), 145.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

clothes and papers, and even took away her revolver. This novel was written almost twenty years after *Days and Nights*, yet Simonov still rejected the idea of capable women in battle.

These sexist depictions of women soldiers permeated all factions of Soviet media, including film. Even decades after the war, films continued to present women as burdens or victims instead of as actual combatants. The 1972 film, *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, focused on an all-women unit of anti-aircraft gunners. Much like other depictions, the film characterized these women soldiers as naïve children. The women teased their male superior officer, Fedot Vaskov, and routinely held dances in their barracks. When one soldier spotted German troops in the woods, Vaskov enlisted a scouting unit of five women to investigate. Over the mission, all five women eventually died. Only Vaskov survived the mission, alluding to the popular trope of martyrizing women soldiers. Liza, the first woman to die on the mission, perished because she was distracted by her growing affection for Vaskov. Another woman, Galya, charged towards a German soldier and was immediately shot. Only Rita, who had already lost her husband to the war, was presented as an adept soldier. When she became wounded, she chose to shoot herself rather than become a liability to Vaskov. Although the film highlighted women in battle, it continued the notion that women only became valuable soldiers through death. By relying on the martyr trope, the film likewise symbolized women did not belong in war. Boris Vassilyev wrote the short story that inspired the film in 1969 and indicated that women could not be effective soldiers because of their innate mothering nature. When teenager Sonya died, the narrator pitied that she would “never know the joys of family life,” and cursed the war for sending women into battle.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Boris Vassilyev, *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, trans. Hilda Perham (Moscow: Progress, 1975), 305-306.

The Soviet Union was not unique in infantilizing women in popular media; several other nations continued the trend throughout most of the twentieth century.[•] However, the Soviet Union had supposedly denounced gender inequality, and encouraged women to join the military via film and literature in the 1930s. Within their memoirs, women veterans contradicted the sexist tropes they witnessed in Soviet popular media. Instead of continuing the misconception that women either died in battle or prized love above victory, women introduced the notion that they made more dedicated soldiers than their male counterparts.

From Tramp to Triumph: Soviet Period Memoirs

In the immediate post-war period, the Soviet government crafted a sanitized history of WWII that excluded women veterans. Stalin and his regime appeared anxious of losing control over the public, as many citizens wanted economic and societal changes after the war.⁵⁶ Consequently, post-war propaganda praised the “soundness of Party policies and the strength of the system that these policies created,” as the basis for the Soviet victory.⁵⁷ The horrendous four years became known as the Great Patriotic War; a bloodstained crusade fought by noble communists against the fascist invaders. Information that challenged this interpretation of the war was suppressed by censorship.⁵⁸ The military required soldiers to sign confidentiality

[•] A notable exception to these Soviet authors was Yulia Drunina. A war veteran herself, she penned several poems that not only portrayed women as fierce soldiers, but de-romanticized the war. She was one of the only poets that praised women soldiers, let alone one of the only women veterans to achieve literary acclaim. See Harris, "The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture," 197.

⁵⁶ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 293.

⁵⁷ Matthew P. Gallagher, *The Soviet History of World War II: Myths, Memories, and Realities* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1963), 39. This quote comes directly from Stalin's speech to the people of the Soviet Union on February 9, 1946.

⁵⁸ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 313. Soviet media presented Stalin as the sole champion of the nation. Stalin demoted and imprisoned many of his generals, including the renowned General Georgy Zhukov. Instead of honoring veterans of the war, more reverence was allotted to the fallen soldiers. By 1946, lack of medical care forced 2.75 million disabled veterans to become homeless. In 1947, Stalin ordered the city streets to be cleared of disabled veterans and relocated them to rural villages in the north.

agreements, stating that they would not discuss their service with civilians.⁵⁹ The government was wary of war atrocities, committed by soldiers and the state, becoming known to the public.

Alongside promoting the war as a holy campaign, the state associated the conflict with masculinity. Instead of celebrating all veterans, women found themselves pushed out of the war narrative. After the victory, the military barred women from further enlistment.⁶⁰ Additionally, as many men struggled with returning to civilian life, women became tasked with a new role. After years of war, men had become habituated to violence. There was an outbreak of robberies, assaults, and property destruction within the first months after victory.⁶¹ Soviet propaganda encouraged women to nurse these traumatized men back to health, acting as psychological support and creating a renewed sense of belonging.⁶² Throughout the Soviet period, archives remained closed to scholars, and media depicted a noble war with little room for tales of brutality.⁶³ Although women veterans writing in the Soviet period could not discuss frontline atrocities, they could still contradict state portrayals of their service.

During the Soviet era, women veterans provided different depictions of women's service and war through publishing memoirs. Whereas film and literature presented adolescent girl-soldiers dependent on male affection, memoirists portrayed themselves as heroic combatants. Women's narratives discredited previous tropes, indicating a drive to shift public perception of women soldiers. These memoirists rejected the central themes of women's service in film and fiction: overt femininity, sexual attraction, love, as well as pity from male comrades. Whereas

⁵⁹ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 307.

⁶⁰ Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War*, 143.

⁶¹ Corinna Peniston-Bird and Emma Vickers, *Gender and the Second World War: Lessons of War* (London: Palgrave, Macmillan Education, 2017), 123.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Soviet popular media condemned women soldiers as weak and unnecessary casualties, these veterans portrayed themselves as deserving of honor and recognition.

Sofia Avericheva, Maria Pedenko, and Zoya Smirnova-Medvedeva contradicted the characterizations of their service within film and literature. Their narratives ranged in publication dates from 1965 to 1986, and presented the histories of a scout, propagandist, and machine gunner. During the Stalin regime, public remembrance of the war was generally discouraged.⁶⁴ Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin in the late 1950s, and commenced the process of de-Stalinization where the late leader's influence was slowly erased.⁶⁵ After 1965, Leonid Brezhnev encouraged veterans to discuss their service via school assemblies and memoirs, creating a notion of collective glory around the war.⁶⁶ Pedenko and Smirnova-Medvedeva printed their memoirs in 1965 and 1967 respectively, suggesting an eagerness to share their experiences. Additionally, these two veterans published under Voenizdat, the company that specialized in military literature, implying that the government recognized them as veterans. However, although women gained approval to print their memoirs, popular media never refrained from generating unflattering portrayals of women soldiers.

By challenging sexist notions of their service, these women penned strikingly similar memoirs. They crafted comparable narrative arcs, featuring a precise beginning, middle, and end that described their experiences of not only surviving the war, but obtaining respect from their comrades. These veterans never imparted overly personal information or complained about their situations. They presented themselves as fearless in the trenches, as well as in the male occupied

⁶⁴ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 313.

⁶⁵ Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet Effort: 1941-1945* (New York: Penguin Books; Revised ed., 1998), 323.

⁶⁶ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 322.

barracks. In commencing their memoirs, the veterans established themselves as patriotic citizens, prepared to defend the motherland.

These three memoirs began with the unwavering decision to participate on the front. Each of these women struggled to receive permission to enlist. They visited their recruiting office or Komsomol division multiple times before obtaining orders to report to the frontlines. Their determination to enter the military, despite having the choice to work on the home front, rejected notions that women should be pitied for entering combat. Upon learning of the German invasion, theater actress Sofia Avericheva described her resolve to volunteer. She attained a motorcycle license to become a motorcycle scout in the Yaroslav 243rd division.⁶⁷ Despite showing initiative to join the war effort, Avericheva was rejected from the unit. Whereas most of her theatre troupe enlisted in the Yaroslav division, the town officials doubted her ability to become a soldier. Days after the German invasion, Avericheva perched on rooftops, and aided in spotting enemy aircraft.⁶⁸ Although she showed ability and enthusiasm for service, Avericheva did not receive orders until a year after the initial German assault. When she reported for duty, the director remarked, “This is a joke, you’re going to be late for rehearsal.”⁶⁹ Propagandist Maria Pedenko likewise received rejection from combat. Despite requesting a frontline position, Pedenko was enlisted as a librarian and newspaper propagandist in the 255th Brigade Marines.⁷⁰ Eventually, in January of 1943, Pedenko joined a partisan unit to obtain a more active combat role. Both Avericheva and Pedenko emphasized their firm resolution to enter the Red Army, judging that they could better assist the nation on the front rather than at home.

⁶⁷ Avericheva, *[Diary of a Scout]*, 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁰ Maria Pedenko, *Фронтной Дневник [Front Diary]* (Moscow: Voenmirozdata, 1965), 8.

Zoya Smirnova-Medvedeva similarly described her efforts to assume a military position. As a young girl, Smirnova-Medvedeva desired to become a pilot. She was rejected from her town's flying club, as they already had an abundance of male students.⁷¹ When she later received training as a machine gunner and arrived at her post with the 25th Rifle Division, she discovered that she was the only woman out of one hundred and fifty soldiers.⁷² Her lieutenant was unwilling to accept a woman as a soldier, and Smirnova-Medvedeva was reassigned as a nurse. Despite her lack of extensive medical training, her lieutenant believed that she was better suited for the medical tent than for the trenches.⁷³ Smirnova-Medvedeva, alongside Avericheva and Pedenko, resolved to enlist despite skepticism from their male comrades. After entering the front, these women argued with their superior officers to receive combat roles. Unlike portrayals in popular media, these women presented themselves as willing to pledge their lives for victory, dismissing any and all attempts of favoritism and male pity

After they reached the frontlines, these women illustrated their devotion to the war effort by rebuffing sexist attitudes and advances from comrades. Whereas fictional portrayals presented women as routinely seeking male affection and sympathy, these women depicted themselves as fiercely self-reliant. On July 5, 1942, Avericheva's battalion set out to the front.⁷⁴ Upon arriving, she immediately asked her superior officer, Commander Turiev, to relocate her to Lieutenant Dokukin's motorcycle brigade.⁷⁵ Avericheva asserted that she could serve a more influential role as a motorcyclist. While at first reluctant, considering motorcycling to be too dangerous for a woman, Turiev eventually approved Avericheva's request.⁷⁶ Throughout her service, Avericheva

⁷¹ Smirnova-Medvedeva, *On the Road to Stalingrad*, vii.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁴ Avericheva, [*Diary of a Scout*], 46.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

consistently applied for dangerous missions. On one scouting mission, Avericheva was originally left behind; however, after pleading with her sergeant, she was allowed to follow her division.⁷⁷ When her sergeant reprimanded her for not recognizing the gravity of the situation, Avericheva replied, “and I don’t want to know, let me go to Dokukin!”⁷⁸ Even when Avericheva grew disheartened with her role in the war, expressing “All our hard work, exhausting forces, is in vain,” she never accepted an easier position.⁷⁹ Her comrade, officer Tretyakov, snidely remarked that women like Avericheva entered the frontlines merely for excitement, enjoying to “walk on the edge of a knife, play the game of death.”⁸⁰ Avericheva endured the same missions as men. Her bravery was only considered irrational since she was a woman. Avericheva determined to risk her life in pursuit of victory, diverging from the helpless women in fiction. She mentioned that her tenacity eventually impressed Dokukin, as he remarked, “We have no reason not to trust a fighter just because the fighter is a woman.”⁸¹

Even when women failed to persuade their officers for combat assignments, they depicted their commitment to the war effort. Unlike Emmanuil Kazakevich’s Katya or Konstantin Simonov’s Tanya, Maria Pedenko never presented herself as distracted due to an infatuation with a comrade. Throughout her service, Pedenko regularly applied for more involved positions. As a devout Komsomol member, Pedenko always carried her membership card and portrait of Stalin.⁸² In her memoir, Pedenko depicted herself as unafraid of death, vowing that if she died, she died for communism.⁸³ She respected Kosmodemyanskaya, and

⁷⁷ Avericheva, [*Diary of a Scout*], 64.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸² Pedenko, [*Front Diary*], 23.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

stated that the young partisan represented the spirit of all communists.⁸⁴ Yet, no matter how brave she appeared, Pedenko was never allowed a combat position. When her division was under a large artillery attack, she implored her superior officer to accept her aid. Instead, he refused her offer, remarking, “Are you sure you won’t cry?”⁸⁵ When traveling with partisans after leaving her division, she was still prohibited from scouting or joining hazardous missions. The partisan group tasked her with writing and publishing the army newspaper.⁸⁶ Pedenko depicted her desire to be beneficial to a Soviet victory. She worried about becoming burdensome and had to be convinced to visit a hospital after sustaining two concussions.⁸⁷

In focusing her narrative on the war effort, Smirnova-Medvedeva argued that women’s service was respectable. She prefaced that her male comrades did not view her as a weaker soldier, but that they expected more from her as a woman.⁸⁸ However, the descriptions of her comrades showed that they had little, if any expectations of her as a soldier. When she arrived at her division, the senior sergeant did not want to record her name, judging a woman to be bad luck in war.⁸⁹ Initially prohibited from assuming her position as a machine gunner, Smirnova-Medvedeva petitioned to her lieutenant on multiple occasions before being allowed to enter the trenches.⁹⁰ During combat, Smirnova-Medvedeva depicted herself as a brave soldier. Despite witnessing comrades dying in battle, Smirnova-Medvedeva penned that she forbade herself to focus on anything or anyone other than the enemy.⁹¹ When she discovered that she was slowly

⁸⁴ Pedenko, *[Front Diary]*, 39.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Smirnova-Medvedeva, *On the Road to Stalingrad*, 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

losing her eyesight, she worried that she would be dismissed from her division.⁹² Smirnova-Medvedeva was eventually diagnosed with blindness in her right eye and half blindness in her left eye.⁹³ Instead of retreating to the rear as a non-combatant, she hid her impairment and accepted an assignment to the Yeysk Machine-Gun School to become a machine-gun platoon commander.⁹⁴ In her narrative, Smirnova-Medvedeva portrayed herself as a loyal Soviet soldier, prizing victory over health. When she started losing her sight, she did not worry how it would affect her life, but rather how it would diminish her role in the war. Her self-representation opposed media images of women operating as romantic interests or burdens on the battlefield. She suggested that her service was not hindered by her gender, but rather by her officers' and comrades' disbelief in her abilities.

After depicting their struggles against sexism on the front, these memoirists finished their narratives with a hopeful outlook for the future. These memoirs concluded on a military battle, symbolizing the eventual Soviet success. Pedenko's memoir ended while she was recuperating in hospital in 1943. Although the war would last for another two years, she emphasized that she felt certain the war would end favorably for the Soviet Union.⁹⁵ In Avericheva's final pages, she wrote about the brutal death of her friend, Valentina Lavrova. Avericheva recounted the final actions of her comrade, sharing how mortally injured Lavrova was dragged into a German trench and shot at close range.⁹⁶ When Avericheva's division broke through enemy defenses two months later, she shouted, "We take revenge for you, Valentina!"⁹⁷ Avericheva's memoir was published in 1986, yet her narrative ended in early 1945. Hinting at the Soviet victory, she wrote,

⁹² Smirnova-Medvedeva, *On the Road to Stalingrad*, 66-67.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁹⁵ Pedenko, *[Front Diary]*, 55.

⁹⁶ Avericheva, *[Diary of a Scout]*, 268.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 270.

“I am witnessing the birth of a long-awaited victory, suffered at the cost of huge sacrifices of our people... Farewell, my diary, my comrade! Or rather, hello, to new – I hope, joyful meetings!”⁹⁸ Smirnova-Medvedeva concluded her narrative by describing her journey across Nazi-occupied territory to friendly troops in the town of Kizlyar.⁹⁹ She detailed the hopeful faces of Soviet villagers as she passed through war-torn settlements, penning, “Even though their joy was short-lived, it was nevertheless a moment of great faith in the future, for the sake of which it was worthwhile to live and struggle.”¹⁰⁰ Her account ended the moment she reached the Soviet front. None of these memoirists portrayed life after the war. Instead, they chose to ply their readers with optimistic attitudes towards the future and patriotic sentiment towards the Soviet Union. Whereas popular media presented women as victims of the war, these memoirs showed women as hopeful survivors. Their endings, contradicting the trope that women soldiers only perished in war, presented women persisting to victory.

In their accounts, these veterans challenged societal prejudices against women’s service. There was a common misconception that women only served in the military to seduce men. Although girls could enter paramilitary organizations, participation in the Red Army was treated as something akin to living in a brothel. Upon returning home, some women became ostracized from their communities. One veteran confided in Alexievich that although she returned home to her family with two medals of honor, her mother pleaded, “go away... You have two younger sisters growing up. Who will marry them? Everybody knows you spent four years at the front, with men.”¹⁰¹ Tamara Umnyagina, a medical assistant, overheard her husband’s mother berating

⁹⁸ Avericheva, [*Diary of a Scout*] 279.

⁹⁹ Smirnova-Medvedeva, *On the Road to Stalingrad*, 123.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, xl.

him for marrying a “frontline girl.”¹⁰² Many men respected the women in their units. However, some men some viewed women’s service as immoral, and believed women received medals not for military service, but for sexual favors.¹⁰³ In actuality, many superior officers abused their positions and coerced women into becoming frontline wives.¹⁰⁴ In the most corrupt divisions, staff officers lined women up as they arrived to the front to quicken the process of choosing new lovers.¹⁰⁵ In co-ed units, women and men often respected each other and sexual assault was less common. In divisions with few women; however, threats of rape and assault haunted the camps.¹⁰⁶ The People’s Commissariat of Defense (NKO) did not have any formal procedures to prosecute men for sexual harassment, forcing women to become frontline wives for protection against the hundreds of men in their units.¹⁰⁷ Many women worried that if they discussed their time in the military, their communities would view them as discarded frontline wives.¹⁰⁸ Soviet film and literature all but confirmed notions of soldier seductresses by churning out images of love-obsessed women.

These memoirists depicted themselves rejecting love and sexual relations, contradicting the notion of frontline wives. Smirnova-Medvedeva recalled the exact moment she decided to devote her life entirely to the military. Upon arriving to her division, she pledged to disregard her

¹⁰² Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 328.

¹⁰³ Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 208.

¹⁰⁴ Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought*, 229.

¹⁰⁵ Lyuba Vinogradova, *Avenging Angels: Soviet Women Snipers on the Eastern Front (1941-45)* (London: Maclehose Press, 2018), 93.

¹⁰⁶ Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought*, 229.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Similarly, The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) regularly failed to report rape cases. As NKVD records remained classified, few people would have had access to the information, alluding to the widespread notion of simply ignoring sexual assault. On the front, convicted rapists only started receiving sentences and punishments in 1945, and even then, they often found methods to escape prison time. See Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought*, 276.

¹⁰⁸ Vinogradova, *Avenging Angels*, 17.

“femininity.”¹⁰⁹ She vowed not to fret about her appearance until the war was won. When her comrade commented that the lieutenant would be taken with her appearance, alluding to frontline wives, she merely quipped, “Thank you for your interest in my welfare.”¹¹⁰ Until she displayed her ability on the battlefield, Smirnova-Medvedeva repeatedly received inappropriate comments from her unit. Neither Avericheva nor Pedenko ever commented on private relationships between them and their comrades. Despite serving in male-dominated divisions, they also never referred to threats of sexual assault. As they both received misogynistic remarks, however, it was likely that they also overheard countless vulgar comments.

These veterans diverged from state representations of women as they presented themselves as indifferent to romantic or sexual relationships. However, they also possibly left out these elements due to censorship laws. As the Soviet state controlled all facets of film and fiction, it dictated the presentation of the war. Tales of Soviet soldiers abusing their own comrades would have stained the memory of the Great Patriotic War. These women’s memoirs, like all other forms of literature, had to be approved prior to publication. Women could discuss their service if they confirmed the notion of collective glory, where all Soviet citizens valiantly fought for and defended the nation.¹¹¹ When Alexievich was preparing to publish her interviews in the late 1980s, censors removed several details and entire stories that they deemed inappropriate. It was impossible to share honest depictions of the war throughout the Soviet period, even up to years before the dissolution. The censors rejected Alexievich’s novel, remarking, “We don’t need your little history, we need the big history.”¹¹² Perhaps these veterans wanted to share their entire service, even accounts of threats and assaults. Their positive endings

¹⁰⁹ Smirnova-Medvedeva, *On the Road to Stalingrad*, 9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, xxxvii.

might have also been a result of state restrictions, as life remained difficult after the war. Later memoirists, uninhibited by censorship, discussed the crueler aspects of war. However, whether women always desired to reveal every part of their service, or whether the decades between them and the war allowed a new perspective, cannot be determined. Nevertheless, Soviet censorship had a silver lining, as it defined what warranted publication.

Women veterans depicted themselves in a similar fashion to how state accounts promoted male soldiers: heroic and devoted to the war effort. Popular media routinely deformed women into defenseless damsels, but praised men as noble Soviet soldiers. The men in fiction, when not protecting their love interests, scorned sexual and romantic desire. Lieutenant Travkin from Kazekevich's *Star* was too ingrained in the war effort to focus on Katya. In *Days and Nights*, while Anya slowly succumbed to her injuries, Saburov forced himself to concentrate on preparing for battle.¹¹³ The Soviet soldier, as presented in propaganda, never felt carnal lust. He was only supposed to contemplate sacrifice and war labor.¹¹⁴ Thus, the images of women yearning for male attention in media impeded actual women from gaining respect as soldiers and veterans. Within their memoirs, women veterans aligned themselves with the male soldiers from film and literature. Women denounced love in exchange for military victory. Moreover, women rejected the notion that they needed male protection, as they relied on their own abilities. Their self-representations resembled characters such as Travkin and Saburov, rather than Katya and Anya. Although most Soviet state media continued to diminish the importance of women veterans, women themselves persisted in providing counterexamples of their service. They could not expose sordid details, but they could still publish memoirs that presented themselves as

¹¹³ Simonov, *Days and Nights*, 419-20.

¹¹⁴ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 272.

respectable combatants. Their renderings disputed fictional portrayals and shifted the notion of women on the front from temptresses to soldiers.

Opening the Iron Curtain: Post-Soviet Period Memoirs

After the fall of the Soviet Union, women published memoirs that revealed the long-concealed realities of WWII. Anna Timofeyeva-Yegorova, Irina Dunaevskaya, and Yulia Zhukova published their works from 2009 to 2019, depicting their experiences as a pilot, translator, and sniper. Unlike earlier memoirists, these women wrote their narratives unsuppressed by censorship laws. They blatantly conveyed the sexist comments and lewd remarks made by male comrades and superior officers. Although these written works claimed to provide genuine accounts of military life, they also aimed to cultivate certain understandings of the war. Essentially, these writers hoped to convince their audience to view the war from their perspectives. Timofeyeva-Yegorova and Dunaevskaya revealed aspects of women's service that the state overlooked, while Zhukova appealed for a renewed sense of respect for veterans. Most likely, these women only intended their memoirs for the Russian public. Dunaevskaya's memoir has yet to be translated into English, and Timofeyeva-Yegorova passed away the year her memoir was printed abroad. Only Zhukova was able to address her international audience in the preface to her English edition. She penned, "I always experience a feeling of shame for those politicians, scholars, and members of the media...who deliberately distort the course and results of the Second World War," aligning her reasons for publishing abroad with her initial purpose to "tell the truth" to Russians.¹¹⁵ In crafting these memoirs, veterans shared the responsibility of providing a new comprehensive history of the war.

¹¹⁵ Yulia Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle: An Eastern Front Memoir*, trans. David Forman (London: Greenhill Books, 2019), xii, xiv.

After 1991, veterans continued to depict a firm resolution to protect the motherland in their memoirs. However, without the barrier of censorship, these women could discuss their experiences with misogyny. The analogous displays of enlistment between Soviet and post-Soviet era memoirs suggest that veterans writing in the Soviet period did not merely discuss their determination to join the military in order to comply with publication restrictions. Rather, the similarities between the two groups of memoirs indicate that women routinely chose to enter combat, despite any legal or social barriers. While Timofeyeva-Yegorova and Dunaevskaya examined sexism in Soviet society and the Red Army, Zhukova refuted its existence. Timofeyeva-Yegorova began her narrative by depicting sexist attitudes in the Metropolitan Construction and Metrostroy Aeroclub. Despite receiving the required training to become a steel framework fitter, the Metrostroy doctor was reluctant to allow Timofeyeva-Yegorova and other young women to work in the harsh underground conditions. The women petitioned to the head of state, Mikhail Kalinin; however, he merely fretted, “how on earth can a delicate female body endure such things... You won’t be able to have babies.”¹¹⁶ When Timofeyeva-Yegorova read an announcement for the Metrostroy Aeroclub and determined to enroll, she received similar pushback. Her brigade foreman opposed women in the air force, saying “Let men do the flying.”¹¹⁷ When the war announcement was broadcasted, Timofeyeva-Yegorova vowed to enlist, claiming, “our country must rise to mortal combat... We knew in that moment that we would not stand aside when the time came.”¹¹⁸ She travelled to the OSOAVIAKhIM headquarters in Moscow; however, she was swiftly rejected from service.¹¹⁹ Instead of returning, Timofeyeva-Yegorova insisted that she was a highly trained pilot, and thus was needed on the

¹¹⁶ Timofeyeva-Yegorova, *Red Sky, Black Death*, 19.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

front.¹²⁰ Ultimately, Timofeyeva-Yegorova persuaded herself into the 130th Air Liaison Squadron. As it was still the summer of 1941, Timofeyeva-Yegorova used her brazen resolve to secure a position on the front, before it was even legal for a woman to hold a combat position.

Dunaevskaya depicted her efforts to volunteer for service, but her account diverged from the common patriotic narrative seen in other women's memoirs. Whereas other veterans focused on discussing combat, Dunaevskaya shared a personal perspective that censored accounts neglected. She conveyed her emotional and mental state throughout the war. Dunaevskaya explained that she filed for enlistment alongside her husband, Volodya.¹²¹ Although the army accepted Volodya, Dunaevskaya was instructed to remain on the home front. On September 16, 1941, she received her husband's death notice, and resolved to avenge his death.¹²² However, like many women, Dunaevskaya was not admitted into the military until the spring of 1942.¹²³ On April 10, 1942, she mobilized to the front as a translator in the 268th division of the Red Army.¹²⁴ Unlike Timofeyeva-Yegorova and the other veterans discussed, Dunaevskaya did not portray her enlistment as a result of patriotic fervor. Dunaevskaya's memoir differed from Soviet era narratives as she did not disregard notions of love. Rather, her story focused on her lasting affection for her husband. Whereas Dunaevskaya's initial attempt to enlist might have been purely for the sake of defending her homeland, her second application was for revenge. Throughout her memoir, Dunaevskaya conveyed her journey of grieving and eventually accepting her husband's death. Perhaps her tale would have been belittled during the Soviet

¹²⁰ Timofeyeva-Yegorova, *Red Sky, Black Death*, 66.

¹²¹ Irina Dunaevskaya, *От Ленинграда до Кенигсберга: Дневник Военной Переводчицы, 1942-1945 [From Leningrad to Königsberg: War Diary of a Translator (1942-1945)]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010), 23.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

period for depicting a woman unable to solely concentrate on the war effort. Likely, she would not have been able to publish her memoir, as it did not portray the noble war that Soviet media propagated. However, Dunaevskaya's memoir revealed how she, and many other Soviet people, experienced WWII. Rather than function as a testament of loyalty to the Soviet Union, the war represented the loss of peace and happiness in their lives.

Hoping to inspire a renewed sense of admiration and respect for veterans of WWII, Zhukova denied gender discrimination in war preparation and military enlistment. She intended her writings for younger generations in Russia, introducing her memoir by writing, "It is my wish that there should be more young people among my readers; in the hands of our youth lies the future of our country, for whose freedom and very existence many millions of Soviet people gave their lives."¹²⁵ Zhukova described a relatively effortless path to enlistment. She remembered her youth nostalgically, depicting herself as a dedicated Komsomol member. She often dismissed her own health in favor of benefitting the war effort. She narrowly avoided death after contracting typhoid fever at fifteen, yet wanted to work at the local military factory.¹²⁶ Even when her mother suggested clerical work, Zhukova insisted that she "would acquire a working profession at all costs."¹²⁷ At the defense factory no. 321 in her hometown, Zhukova described workers, some as young as thirteen, shrouded in winter jackets since there was no central heating.¹²⁸ One fourteen-year-old boy missed a couple days of work and was sentenced to a year of corrective labor in a penal colony.¹²⁹ Zhukova, however, refrained from criticizing the harsh working conditions, and instead praised the strict discipline as a primary factor to Soviet

¹²⁵ Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle*, 3.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

victory.¹³⁰ In 1943, she underwent a two-week basic training program for women.¹³¹ As she was underage, she failed to receive the completion certificate.¹³² Zhukova was rejected from service, yet she alluded that only her age affected the commissar's decision, not her gender. As the commissar was familiar with her parents, he offered to accept her application if she received parental permission.¹³³ Much like her persistence in obtaining a factory position, Zhukova resolved to enter combat. She convinced her doctor that she was healthy enough to enroll in the Central Women's Sniper School, even though she had a heart condition from her bout with typhoid.¹³⁴ As she never mentioned sexual discrimination in her youth, either in the factory or in her application for service, Zhukova suggested that gender barriers did not prevent women from enlisting. Rather, she argued that the Soviet military was accepting of women, and that women could and did readily enlist in the Red Army.

Due to the end of censorship laws, these veterans portrayed the once suppressed realities of war in their memoirs. They included subjects previously prohibited by censors, such as war trauma, and provided a more comprehensive understanding of soldiers' experiences during and after the war. Timofeyeva-Yegorova divulged her time as a prisoner of war (POW) in a German concentration camp, alongside the suspicion and persecution she faced once she returned home.*

¹³⁰ Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle*, 18, 23.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 28-29.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

* Timofeyeva-Yegorova also discussed her experiences with sexism. Like many women in combat, she often received criticism from her male comrades. Some of her superiors considered women pilots as bad luck. Her squadron often mocked her, once cutting holes in her hat and putting it on the unit dog. In order to garner respect, Timofeyeva-Yegorova refrained from becoming too comfortable with her comrades. Like earlier memoirs, her efforts to gain respect succeeded once she displayed her abilities in battle. After leading a victorious mission, her comrade admitted to her, "when you made that turn over us and then came back to get us in the Po-2, I forgot my doubts about you and 'dames' in general. Please forgive me." See Timofeyeva-Yegorova, *Red Sky, Black Death*, 93, 104-107, 152.

The Soviet military was irrationally distrustful of POWs, assuming that all captured soldiers either exposed Soviet secrets or defected to the Nazis. When POWs returned to the Soviet Union, they faced further mistreatment from SMERSH, the Soviet counterintelligence agency that rooted out spies. After the Allied victory, 1.8 million former POWs remained incarcerated by SMERSH.¹³⁵ The majority of these prisoners served in labor camps for years after the war, living in similar conditions that they had already suffered in Nazi camps.¹³⁶ It was expected that Soviet citizens should rather wish to die than be captured, leading the state to suspect anyone who survived under Nazi persecution. In September of 1944, Timofeyeva-Yegorova's plane was shot down over Warsaw, and she was interned in the Nazi prison camp III-C.¹³⁷ In January of 1945, the camp was liberated, yet before returning home, all Soviet prisoners reported to Landsberg to be "checked."¹³⁸ Since she was a decorated pilot, Timofeyeva-Yegorova was sent directly to the commandant of the SMERSH Counterintelligence Department, 32nd Infantry Corps, 5th Attack Army.¹³⁹ She was questioned for ten days on whether she betrayed her nation.¹⁴⁰ She described how they shouted, "You're lying, you German dog," and only referred to her as "'Fascist Bitch."¹⁴¹ Timofeyeva-Yegorova later learned that the SMERSH commandant received a detailed account of her imprisonment from other former POWs, yet still doubted her because she had been able to protect her medals and Party membership card.¹⁴² After the war, Timofeyeva-Yegorova's time as a POW continued to blacklist her as a suspected traitor. In the Soviet period, Timofeyeva-Yegorova would not have been able to relate her experiences as a POW, as it would

¹³⁵ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 303.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Timofeyeva-Yegorova, *Red Sky, Black Death*, 184, 186.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 194-95.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 196

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 197.

have reflected poorly on the state and on herself. Her attention to the subject illustrated her determination to convey her honest experiences during the war.

Dunaevskaya's memoir related the more intimate aspects of war, providing discussions on sexual and romantic relationships that earlier memoirists omitted. Whereas memoirs written during the Soviet period refrained from depicting male-female relationships, Dunaevskaya unabashedly relayed her experiences with men. Dunaevskaya frequently reflected on her deceased husband. Dunaevskaya might have viewed the war naively, believing that military service would erase the pain of losing her husband. She wrote, "After Volodya's death, his bright life and my memories of him continued to live in my heart. But my heart is tired of all that I have experienced, the losses, the blockade, the hunger, danger, and frontline trials."¹⁴³ Unlike other women, she portrayed her decision to enlist as stemming from despair, not patriotism. In 1944, she became pregnant from her lover, Aleksei.¹⁴⁴ She was demobilized and gave birth to a girl, later raising her alone after separating from Aleksei.¹⁴⁵ Other women veterans did not discuss intimate relationships in their memoirs, causing Dunaevskaya's experiences to appear singular. Women likely did not want the public imagining them engaging in sexual relations with men on the front, and worse, leaving the military because of a pregnancy.¹⁴⁶ However, relationships frequently formed on the front.¹⁴⁷ Overlooking the innate need for human connection continues

¹⁴³ Dunaevskaya, [*From Leningrad to Königsberg*], 81.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 400.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 407.

¹⁴⁶ Vinogradova, *Avenging Angels*, 214; MayaLisa S. Holzman, "The Front Within: The Soviet Partisan Movement, the Komsomol, and the Ideological War on the Eastern Front, 1941-1944" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin – Madison, 2016), 54.

¹⁴⁷ Vinogradova, *Avenging Angels*, 24. Men and women often had casual trysts on the front; however, it is important to note the imbalanced power dynamic in these relationships. Officers believed themselves entitled to women, prohibiting male soldiers from creating relationships. Women who served as partisans received the nickname PPZhS (field partisan wives), a pun on PPSH, the coveted and very difficult to obtain sub-machine gun. This moniker alluded to the notion that women operated as commodities and rewards for the powerful elite. However, many loving and respectful relationships also formed on the

dishonest depictions of the war. During the Soviet period, women veterans forewent mentions of love and sex, challenging notions that women's service was immoral. However, modern understandings of the war need to note that there was not one uniform experience of the war. Women soldiers did not merely serve to seek out male companionship, but neither did they abdicate from sex.

Zhukova provided a more nuanced view of male attention than earlier memoirists, as she both admired and scorned her multiple suitors. Soviet era memoirists Pedenko, Smirnova-Medvedeva, and Avericheva appeared to maintain a distance from their male comrades, depicting limited interactions where they either confronted sexism or received reluctant praise. In writing her memoir, Zhukova "felt obliged...to write honestly and frankly about that tragic but heroic time," representing both her courtships and strained relationships with fellow soldiers.¹⁴⁸ Like most women on the front, she grew accustomed to sexist comments. Towards the end of the war, she was reassigned to the Alexander Nevsky Howitzer regiment where, as the only woman, she received the full attention of her comrades. Referring to one man as Captain G., she recalled a moment when she was ordered to his office, which was "followed by a scene which [she had] no wish to describe."¹⁴⁹ After their meeting, Captain G. "constantly humiliated [Zhukova] with petty vindictiveness and fault-finding."¹⁵⁰ Another Captain V.O. similarly made advances upon her; however, Zhukova "had warm feelings towards him...they were capable of becoming love."¹⁵¹ Despite her growing attraction, Zhukova did not align herself with the infatuated

front. Couples who met on the front often had happier and more understanding relationships than people who met after the war, likely due to shared experiences of war trauma. See Holzman, "The Front Within," 168; Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 95.

¹⁴⁸ Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle*, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 149.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 158.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 160.

women in film and literature. When Caption V.O. grew frustrated with their lengthy courtship, proclaiming, “Who are you keeping yourself for...nobody in civvy street will believe in your honour,” she slapped him with wet laundry.¹⁵² Zhukova recognized the threat of sexual assault in the military, and unlike earlier memoirists, she accepted male protection. Captain G’s “petty vindictiveness” was placing Zhukova on guard duty during nighttime. Earlier memoirists might have refrained from complaining, in order to portray themselves as capable soldiers. However, as Zhukova was the only woman, being on guard duty during night was dangerous. She garnered three admirers who became her “true ‘knights in shining armour,’” and who watched over her during the long nights of guard duty.”¹⁵³ Zhukova expanded on earlier memoirists’ depictions of the front, as she provided instances of caring relationships between men and women.

Zhukova also discussed her lingering fear and anxiety from the war.* The state and majority of the Soviet public overlooked veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). On the frontlines, the military regarded PTSD as a shameful weakness, not as a serious medical condition.¹⁵⁴ Those who exhibited symptoms of PTSD often found themselves in penal battalions or in front of firing squads.¹⁵⁵ After the war, battle fatigued veterans could either admit themselves to asylums or dismiss their symptoms.¹⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, many veterans, both men and women, failed to mention PTSD in their memoirs.¹⁵⁷ Zhukova, however, prefaced her

¹⁵² Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle*, 160.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 149.

* In the English forward to Zhukova’s memoir, Martin Pegler defined her mental state after the war as “post-traumatic stress.” Zhukova never used this terminology herself, perhaps due to the lack of information about PTSD in the Soviet Union. The details she provided about her trauma (reoccurring night terrors, residual anxiety, and efforts to repress war memories) indicated that she had war trauma to some degree. However, since she never specifically stated that she had PTSD, I will refrain from labeling her condition.

¹⁵⁴ Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 232.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle*, 314-15.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 232.

memoir with discussing her decades-long battle with war trauma. Immediately after returning home, she destroyed all evidence that she participated in the war, except for a few items.¹⁵⁸ She was afraid to “find [herself] once again plunged into war,” refusing to attend reunions or speak about her service.¹⁵⁹ During the 1975 Victory Jubilee, Zhukova witnessed a plethora of new films and plays emerging on the war. She began to think about her service, taking the few remaining photos out of storage, and regretting that she “had excised [her] front-line friends from [her] memory.”¹⁶⁰ Zhukova started attending reunions, and cited that reconnecting with comrades helped her to acknowledge and accept what she had experienced during the war.¹⁶¹ When she started writing her memoir, Zhukova again showed symptoms of severe anxiety. Her family worried about her health and urged her to stop writing. In describing her emotional and mental trauma from the war, Zhukova challenged earlier film and literature portrayals of irrelevant women soldiers; they had fought in war and bore their trauma for years after victory.

Unlike Soviet era memoirs, these works depicted the harsh return to civilian life after the war. The Soviet Union proved victorious, yet the nation was severely ravaged by German attacks. Upon returning home, women veterans encountered criticism for their service, alongside housing and food shortages. Perhaps memoirists in the Soviet period could not describe their experiences after the war, as arriving home only to contend with further difficulties did not follow the triumphant war narrative. Memoirists in the post-Soviet period, however, discussed their lives after the May victory, emphasizing how their war did not merely end after 1945. Timofeyeva-Yegorova, like most women in the air force, was declared medically “unfit for

¹⁵⁸ Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle*, xi.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, xii.

combat flying service” and was classified as an “invalid of the second degree.”¹⁶² After four years of military service, decorated pilot Timofeyeva-Yegorova was regarded as an enemy of the people and barred from aviation. Aimless and vulnerable, she was quickly urged to marry. While she was recuperating in Moscow, her former colonel, Vyacheslav Arsenyevich Timofeyev, proposed to her. Timofeyeva-Yegorova was initially reluctant to accept his offer, writing “Here was a man at least twenty years older than I was, who hardly knew me at all.”¹⁶³ Additionally, Timofeyeva-Yegorova would be his third wife, and she was still mourning the loss of her former partner, Viktor Kutov. However, Timofeyeva-Yegorova’s sister-in-law pleaded, “He worries about you, protects you, and helps you...Marry him and put the past behind you.”¹⁶⁴ Once married, Timofeyeva-Yegorova strove to reclaim her Party membership and honor as a veteran. Despite countless petitions, the Communist Party rejected her, citing, “We have no prisoners-of-war. We have traitors.”¹⁶⁵ One Party investigator even claimed that Timofeyeva-Yegorova “parachuted out of the airplane with some kind of special mission for the Germans!”¹⁶⁶ Eventually, Party leadership shifted and Timofeyeva-Yegorova was reinstated. In 1965, under Brezhnev’s new leadership, she was awarded Hero of the Soviet Union. Timofeyeva-Yegorova’s narrative did not end on her final battle, as her war continued to follow her for years after the Allied victory. Rather, she spent a sizable portion of her memoir depicting her journey of overcoming suspicion as a former POW and regaining respect as a war hero.

Dunaevskaya concluded her memoir by discussing the bleak conditions of the war-torn nation. Unique in this selection of memoirs, Dunaevskaya claimed she was glad to leave the

¹⁶² Timofeyeva-Yegorova, *Red Sky, Black Death*, 201.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 206.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

service, declaring “the separation from the military was definitely without sadness.”¹⁶⁷ She eventually became a single mother, and expressed that life remained difficult after the war. She penned, “returning to civilian life, we needed persistence in residence, perseverance for satisfying and meeting the most pressing needs of the moment.”¹⁶⁸ The war was won, yet many returned to find their homes and farms demolished by enemy assaults. Life for single mothers was especially challenging, as child and medical aid was sparse.¹⁶⁹ Dunaevskaya wrote that supporting her daughter was arduous: “It took all my energy and thoughts, and we had no time to look back, even to think about a recent frontline memory.”¹⁷⁰ Until the late 1960s, Dunaevskaya ignored her frontline life. Only in 1969, after hearing the voice of a commander on the radio, did she desire to reconnect with her former comrades. Eventually, Dunaevskaya received both the Order of the Red Star and Award of the Patriotic War for her service. Dunaevskaya’s focus on her post-war life demonstrated how repercussions from the war presented hardships for years after victory.

Zhukova’s conclusion to her memoir stressed her attempts to amend the current Russian perception of WWII. Rather than discuss her own personal life after the war, Zhukova focused on the negative opinion of WWII in Russia, and the need for people to respect veterans. After hearing a 1998 anti-Soviet broadcast that spoke against WWII, she determined to rekindle admiration for veterans.¹⁷¹ During the nineties, she stated that veterans became embarrassed and frightened to wear their military decorations.¹⁷² Anti-war protestors vandalized military exhibits,

¹⁶⁷ Dunaevskaya, [*From Leningrad to Königsberg*], 409.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 410

¹⁶⁹ Greta Bucher, “The Impact of World War II on Moscow Women: Gender Consciousness and Relationships in the Immediate Postwar Period, 1945-1953” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1995), 40.

¹⁷⁰ Dunaevskaya, [*From Leningrad to Königsberg*], 410.

¹⁷¹ Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle*, xii.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 192.

graves, and memorials, and injured veterans who marched in victory celebrations.¹⁷³

Additionally, when Soviet archives opened after the dissolution of the nation, historians exposed the countless sexual assaults committed by the Red Army, as well as the poor military leadership. Zhukova regarded publications that discussed Soviet war atrocities as disrespectful.¹⁷⁴ She asserted, “the entire world admired the feats of the Soviet people, who saved humanity from Fascism,” and demanded to know, “What is the point of belittling the role of...Soviet people...humiliating veterans of the war?”¹⁷⁵ Zhukova endured life on the front and suffered long-lasting trauma once she returned home. She appeared unable to accept the faults of her nation, and claimed to have no memory of Soviet soldiers committing rape and arson.¹⁷⁶ Instead, Zhukova insisted that “there were cases of unjustified brutality, but they were isolated cases and not systematic – unlike the Nazis, who waged war to annihilate everybody and everything.”¹⁷⁷ However, rather than striving to proclaim WWII as a righteous war, as it was depicted during the Soviet period, Zhukova appeared more focused on defending veterans. She penned, “It is my special desire that the dear girls with whom I traversed the arduous roads of war should be remembered and accorded respect,” and listed the names of her comrades and instructors from the Central Women’s Sniping School.¹⁷⁸ Zhukova made no mention of her husband, children, or even general life after the war. Instead, she concentrated solely on persuading her readers to admire her fellow comrades for the adversities they endured on the front.

¹⁷³ Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle*, 192-93.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 197-98.

Despite portraying the same conflict, these veterans crafted extremely distinct memoirs from Soviet era writings. In being able to compose their works without the threat of censorship laws, these memoirists pushed beyond the once clearly defined interpretation of the Great Patriotic War. Rather than printing under military publication houses, Dunaevskaya worked with ROSSPEN, an academic publisher, while Timofeyeva-Yegorova and Zhukova originally published under non-specialized companies.* Their war no longer assumed a singular grandiose image, with them as stoic soldiers. Instead, these writers presented their fear, shame, and anger at the war and at their comrades. Soviet memoirists all seemed to share a particular goal of relaying their heroic actions in war, and thus crafted exceptionally similar memoirs. These narratives highlighted three individual perspectives. Similar to earlier accounts, Timofeyeva-Yegorova showcased women's feats on the frontlines. Zhukova requested respect towards veterans and WWII. Perhaps most distinct, Dunaevskaya recalled a bitter war, where she longed for companionship and safety. During the Soviet period, only one version of women's service was recognized in state media: girl-soldiers dragged into war and ultimately massacred by German troops. These post-Soviet era memoirs, unrestricted in their depictions, presented a multi-faceted and complex war.

Although these memoirs appeared diverse, they shared a common thread as they reimagined the history of the Great Patriotic War. Each of these women provided a dismissed perspective. Timofeyeva-Yegorova revealed her experiences as a scorned POW, Dunaevskaya as a disheartened war widow, and Zhukova as a veteran with war trauma. In studying their

* Timofeyeva-Yegorova printed under Eskimo, and Zhukova worked with Tsentrpoligraf; two publication houses that publish various subjects. Interestingly, the two women published under academic houses for their English translations. Timofeyeva-Yegorova worked with Slavica, a company that specializes in Russian and Eurasian studies, and Zhukova published under Greenhill Books, a company that publishes military history.

memoirs, a new version of WWII emerges: a Great Patriotic War that was significant and worthy of nationwide admiration, yet also horrendously appalling. Timofeyeva-Yegorova and Zhukova remembered their service in disbelief, shocked that at such a young age they could accomplish immense feats. Dunaevskaya recollected the war with insecurity and sorrow. Unlike earlier memoirists, these women viewed the war with loss, not reverence. The war marked Timofeyeva-Yegorova's final years as a pilot and destroyed Dunaevskaya's peaceful existence with her husband. When Zhukova reported to the enlistment office following her demobilization, she requested that she be removed from the military entirely, despite having to remain enlisted as a sniper.¹⁷⁹ Their memoirs clarify why official accounts cannot be the sole narratives in circulation. State propaganda presented a peaceful transition from war to civilian life, discounting the millions who suffered in POW camps, trenches, and obliterated cities.¹⁸⁰ These veterans recognized the disconnect between reality and state accounts. Writing their memoirs allowed Timofeyeva-Yegorova, Dunaevskaya, and Zhukova to claim ownership over their roles in the war, empowering them as they finally vocalized the long-lasting consequences of their service.

Conclusion

¹⁷⁹ Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle*, 170. Snipers were a military profession subject to special control, meaning that Zhukova was required to remain on the army list. The military demobilized women immediately after the war, so it was unlikely that she would be called up to serve again. However, the act of her requesting to be taken off the list, especially after insisting on receiving sniper training, demonstrated how mentally and physically exhausted she was after her service.

¹⁸⁰ Peniston-Bird and Vickers, *Gender and the Second World War*, 123-25. In the immediate post-war years, a common theme in literature was men returning home from war. Authors depicted men slowly readapting to civilian life through finding wives, reentering the workforce, and mentoring young children. As Soviet society highly prized youth and fitness, many disabled veterans viewed themselves as damaged. By reinforcing traditional gender roles, these novels reassured men that they could create happy and successful lives after the war. Some notable examples are Pyotr Pavlenko's *Happiness* (1950) and Boris Polevoi's *Story about a Real Man* (1949).

Although these women wrote in different decades and held varying occupations, the similarities in their self-representations indicated how they wished women's service to function in the larger memory of WWII. None of these veterans described regret towards their time in the military. Rather, the majority remembered their service with pride. Memoirists writing in the Soviet period obviously would not have been able to speak ill about their service, as it would have been considered unpatriotic. However, veterans writing after the fall of the Soviet Union continued to praise women's actions during WWII. Many penned that women deserved greater recognition, as they did not traditionally participate in war. Zhukova celebrated women who participated in war, as "If a woman has been at the front and taken part in combat, she should get a special order for courage, endurance, and patience...it was hard for everybody in the war, but for women it was most arduous."¹⁸¹ Irina Dazhina, who served as a nurse in the 140th infantry division, recalled women's service as "not only, as many believe, the heroics of the weaker sex. This was dangerous and physically demanding services in extremely difficult conditions of fighting and battles."¹⁸² Women served in the same capacities as men, and with the additional threat of being vulnerable to sexual assault. Their memoirs emphasized that they could not act like the delicate girl-soldiers promoted in popular media; it was, after all, a time of war. In crafting their accounts, veterans positioned women's service on equal footing as their male counterparts.

By crafting their memoirs, women reclaimed a period of their life that was both socially and legislatively denied to them. Many men considered war to be unsuitable for women, and the government seemed unwilling to recognize women as veterans until the 1960s.¹⁸³ Some women

¹⁸¹ Zhukova, *Girl with a Sniper Rifle*, 200.

¹⁸² Irina Dazhina, *Девушки в Курзовых Сапогах: Непридуманные Фронтовые Истории* [*Girls in Canvas Boots: The True Frontline Stories*] (Novosibirsk: Novosibirsk Book Publishing House, 2009), 4.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 48.

desired a return to civilian life, and consequently enjoyed the release from being considered as soldiers.¹⁸⁴ Other women, however, viewed their dismissal from military life as an affront. Witnessing their service equated to little more than romantic rendezvouses in trenches via film and literature only added insult to injury. Through their own portrayals, women contradicted state accounts of their service. The Soviet Union regulated all factors of life: housing, news, and even entertainment. Through publishing these counternarratives, women provided a different understanding of their service.

Perhaps depicting women on the frontlines as vulnerable was meant to reinforce traditional femininity and comfort male pride after an era of uncertainty. However, state propaganda in the 1930s denounced sexism as a deficiency of capitalism. Sexism was not supposed to be a problem in a Communist system.¹⁸⁵ Despite publicly rejecting gender inequality, there was never any enactment of legislation that challenged misogyny or traditional gender roles.¹⁸⁶ The notion of promoting gender equality, yet offering no governmental support seemed to continue throughout the Soviet period in relation to women veterans. Publication industries allowed women to print their memoirs; however, popular media also persisted in crafting offensive portrayals of women's service. After the fall of the Soviet Union, veterans utilized the end of censorship laws to discuss sexism on the front. Instead of the state's version of innocent young girls participating in an honorable war, these veterans publicized brave, yet human soldiers fighting to defend their homeland.

¹⁸⁴ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 8-9.

¹⁸⁵ Choi Chatterjee, *Soviet Heroines and Public Identity: 1930-1939* (Pittsburg: Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburg, 1999), 3.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Under the 1928 five-year plan, women gained financial independence by entering the workforce. However, even though women became successful workers, they still occupied traditional gender roles. Stalin once claimed, "The Soviet women has the same rights as the man, but that does not free her from a great and honorable duty which nature has given her: she is mother, she gives life."

As the Soviet Union controlled the dissemination of information, it aimed to dictate the popular memory of WWII. Perhaps the public knew of women's service, but not to the extent that women desired. Even in a supposedly egalitarian society, Soviet women held a position inferior to men. Consequently, their service was viewed as secondary to men's role in WWII. Soviet women's struggle to gain recognition reflects a common pattern of women being written out of history or denoted less significance than men. Like their short-term allies, American women received momentary celebration for managing factories, but had their occupations replaced by men returning home from war. Women's history remains a relatively recent field and has yet to be fully established in Russian institutions. Appreciating and documenting Allied women's roles in WWII represents one aspect of this extensive history. Soviet women have embodied an interesting position in their own history, as they strove to reform public perception around their service and WWII. Their written works presented not how the state wished for the public to remember the war. Instead, Soviet women determined to play a decisive role in how, perhaps the most critical period of their lives, was to be remembered by their nation.

Bibliography

- Alexievich, Svetlana. *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Random House, 2017.
- Avericheva, Sofia. *Дневник Разведчицы [Diary of a Scout]*. Yaroslav: Verhne-Volzhscoe Publishing House, 1986.
- Berkhoff, Karel C. *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War 2*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Bucher, Greta. "The Impact of World War II on Moscow Women: Gender Consciousness and Relationships in the Immediate Postwar Period, 1945-1953." PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1995.
- Chatterjee, Choi. *Soviet Heroines and Public Identity: 1930-1939*. Pittsburg: Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburg, 1999.
- Cottom, Kazimiera. *Women in War and Resistance: Selected Biographies of Soviet Women Soldiers*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006.
- Dazhina, Irina. *Девушки в Курзовых Сапогах: Непридуманные Фронтовые Истории [Girls in Canvas Boots: The True Frontline Stories]*. Novosibirsk: Novosibirsk Book Publishing House, 2009.
- Dunaevskaya, Irina. *От Ленинграда до Кенигсберга: Дневник Военной Переводчицы, 1942-1945 [From Leningrad to Königsberg: War Diary of a Translator (1942-1945)]*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010.
- Gallagher, Matthew P. *The Soviet History of World War II: Myths, Memories, and Realities*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1963.
- Geldern, James Von. *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore, 1917-1953*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2007.
- Harris, Adrienne Marie. "The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture." PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2008.
- Holzman, MayaLisa S. "The Front Within: The Soviet Partisan Movement, the Komsomol, and the Ideological War on the Eastern Front, 1941-1944." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin – Madison, 2016.
- Kazakevich, Emmanuil et al. *Soviet War Stories: A Selection of the Best*. Translated by Leonard Stoklitsky et al. Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1990.

- Krivoruchenko, Vladimir Konstantinovich. *Youth and the Party: Documents*. Translated by Yuri Shirokov. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976.
- Krylova, Anna. "Stalinist Identity from the Viewpoint of Gender: Rearing a Generation of Professionally Violent Women-Fighters in 1930s Stalinist Russia." *Gender & History* 16, no. 3 (2004): 626–653.
- Merridale, Catherine. *Ivan's War: The Red Army, 1939-1945*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2005.
- Overy, Richard. *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet Effort: 1941-1945*. New York: Penguin Books; Revised ed., 1998.
- Pedenko, Maria. *Фронтовой Дневник [Front Diary]*. Moscow: Voenmirozdata, 1965.
- Peniston-Bird, Corinna, and Emma Vickers. *Gender and the Second World War: Lessons of War*. London: Palgrave, Macmillan Education, 2017.
- Pennington, Reina. *Wings, Women, and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.
- Rabotnitsa* no. 6 (1942).
- Reese, Roger. *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought: The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011.
- Simonov, Konstantin. *Days and Nights*. Translated by Joseph Barnes. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945.
- Simonov, Konstantin. *The Living and the Dead*. Translated by R. Ainsztein. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962.
- Smirnova-Medvedeva, Zoya. *On the Road to Stalingrad: Memoirs of a Woman Machine Gunner*. Translated by Kazimiera J. Cottam. Nepean: New Military Publishing, 1997.
- Timofeyeva-Yegorova, Anna A. *Red Sky, Black Death: A Soviet Woman Pilot's Memoir of the Eastern Front*. Translated by Kim Green and Margarita Ponomaryova. Bloomington: Slavica Publ., 2009.
- Vassilyev, Boris. *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*. Translated by Hilda Perham. Moscow: Progress, 1975.
- Vinogradova, Lyuba. *Avenging Angels: Soviet Women Snipers on the Eastern Front (1941-45)*. London: Maclehorse Press, 2018.

Vinogradova, Lyuba. *Defending the Motherland: The Soviet Women Who Fought Hitler's Aces*. London: Maclehose Press, 2015.

Wędrowska, Dorota J. *The Political Propaganda in the American and Soviet Feature Films 1939-1970*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2016.

Zhukova, Yulia. *Girl with a Sniper Rifle: An Eastern Front Memoir*. Translated by David Forman. London: Greenhill Books, 2019.

Zolotarev, Vladimir A. *Velikaya Otechestvennaya*. Moscow: Terra, 1997.