



The Girl Who Fought Napoleon: A Novel of the Russian Empire

Linda Lafferty

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In a sweeping story straight out of Russian history, Tsar Alexander I and a courageous girl named Nadezhda Durova join forces against Napoleon.

It's 1803, and an adolescent Nadya is determined not to follow in her overbearing Ukrainian mother's footsteps. She's a horsewoman, not a housewife. When Tsar Paul is assassinated in St. Petersburg and a reluctant and naive Alexander is crowned emperor, Nadya runs away from home and joins the Russian cavalry in the war against Napoleon. Disguised as a boy and riding her spirited stallion, Alcides, Nadya rises in the ranks, even as her father begs the tsar to find his daughter and send her home. Both Nadya and Alexander defy expectations—she as a heroic fighter and him as a spiritual seeker—while the battles of Austerlitz, Friedland, Borodino, and Smolensk rage on.

In a captivating tale that brings Durova's memoirs to life, from bloody battlefields to glittering palaces, two rebels dare to break free of their expected roles and discover themselves in the process.

The Girl Who Fought Napoleon: A Novel of the Russian Empire Details

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Linda Lafferty

From Reader Review *The Girl Who Fought Napoleon: A Novel of the Russian Empire* for online ebook

J. Else says

In 1803, Nadezhda Durova seeks to escape the tedium of a woman's life. She disguises herself as a boy and escapes home on horseback to join the Russian army. Meanwhile, Alexander I, grandson to Catherine the Great, is crowned Tsar after the assassination of his father, but the assassination haunts Alexander throughout his lifetime. Can these two stop Napoleon's march against Russia?

Linda Lafferty alternates narration between Nadezhda/Nadya and the Russian court, but each story moves at a different speed, with Nadya's a couple years after Alexander's, even though Nadya's chapters appear first. This slows the plot considerably. It would have worked better to establish the Russian court dramas first and then focus on our main character, so that both plots move forward together instead of rocking back and forth in time. Once the Russian court storyline catches up with Nadya's, the progression of the war with Napoleon makes much more sense.

The author eloquently questions the imprint heroes leave on the pages of history. Will they become a "smudge on the page until it is erased forever," or can the sacrifices men make during wartime be an everlasting and honored memory? Lafferty delivers another meticulously researched story with "The Girl Who Fought Napoleon." I noted many similarities in this novel to Lafferty's 2015 novel, "The Shepherdess of Siena." In both books, our main characters are horsewomen who defy expectations in a male-dominated society, possess an unwavering spirit, and are spitfires by nature.

Overall, I found Lafferty's book to be very engaging. With a character-driven plot that is both historically intriguing and emotionally weighted, this book is a very satisfying read once you get through the initial time-shifting sections.

Review posted via the Historical Novel Society at <https://historicalnovelsociety.org/re...>

Carrie Schmidt (Reading is My SuperPower) says

The Girl Who Fought Napoleon is really a book divided between two stories. On the one hand, you have Nadezhda's story – this brave girl who disguised herself as a boy and ran off to join the Russian cavalry in the fight against Napoleon. Her story is told from her perspective, in first person, and her voice is both compelling and haunting. The horrors of war, the harsh conditions of a military camp (especially for a female who can't reveal she's not a he), the bond between Nadezhda and her beloved horse... all will hold readers riveted with bated breath as we turn the pages, at once eager and dreading to learn her fate.

On the other hand, you have the story of Tsar Alexander, marketed from the back cover blurb as one who defied expectations like Nadezhda did. While she broke outside her role in life and became a brave warrior, he balked at the ruling position he was thrust into and became a spiritual seeker. However, even this isn't really the story we end up with in his case. His narratives are third person, which admittedly distances us a bit from him after Nadezhda's engaging first person accounts. But beyond that, the majority of his part of the book revolves around his open marriage – his affairs and his wife's affairs... and him encouraging his wife to have affairs. And then him complaining about how he doesn't want to be tsar. He visits a spiritual guide

twice – and mentions to him that he is open to all things religious – but that’s about the extent of the time given to Alexander as a spiritual seeker.

Bottom Line: I think I would have really liked this story if it had just been Nadezhda’s tale to tell. Instead, I felt disconnected from both stories and never really warmed up to any of the characters. The history is incredibly interesting, and *The Girl Who Fought Napoleon* has left me wanting to know more about all of it. But the book itself – as a story – just didn’t win me over. In fact, there are a couple of surprising twists at the end, including one that had me feeling a bit betrayed by the book, to be honest. So, maybe I’m still just grumpy about that lol but I have mixed feelings about the story as a whole.

Reviewer’s Note: This book has a very few mild curse words scattered throughout, and some intimate scenes that are more sensual than explicit.

See my full review at [Reading Is My SuperPower](#)

Melisende d'Outremer says

Again, another story that should have been fascinating yet the disjointed telling of the tale detracts from any reading pleasure. Even the author admits that the actual biography of the subject - Nadezhda Durov - is heavy with conflicting details.

Told in narrative form by Nadezhda and the future Tsar Alexander, the constant back and forth with the timeline (1783 - 1825) makes this story even harder to follow than it should have been - even with artistic liberties being taken. Alternating narrative would have been easier to follow if timeline keep in chronological order.

Jenny says

If you enjoy reading about history from various perspectives from people who were involved this is a book for you. The main character is Nadezhda Durova/Alexander Alexandrov, however the author had done a brilliant job of including the perspective from Tsar Alexander, his wife Elizabeth, and even Napoleon's internal thought process. The author uses the historical timeline to pull you along the series of events and help understand where different characters operating and what they were doing. The author also used simple phrases from other languages, but always managed to give a understanding of what the phrase meant. Also (since I read this as a kindle book) whenever I wasn't too sure of what a foreign phrase I could also use the kindle dictionary to look words and phrases up. I think there was only two french phrases that were not found within the book. This book is a wonderful trip through the mind of unique characters who did the unbelievable in history. The ending was the only part that was a little disconnected to me. It felt like suddenly we (as the readers) were dropped into the memories of an very old Nadezhda/Alexandrov. It was an

interesting way to wrap up some loose ends and unmentioned events in her life (such that she was married and had a child before she left to join the calvary). Overall a great read, I highly recommend it to anyone who likes historical events/ historical fiction books. Now the next thing to do is to decided which on of the authors book to read next :)

Brittany says

Wow. Phenomenal. This book was truly spectacular. I simply loved it. Excellent characters, superb historical references. The author's note and Epilogue that made the book even more real with a new reading list about Nadezhda Durova to look into now!

Nadezhda Durova is born in the harsh times of history, during the early 1800s when Russian Tsar's were changing like hot cakes. Her mother had disrespected her family name and wealth to marry a soldier and when she did not deliver the boy she had hoped for, she felt animosity towards the daughter. Some of these events made me cringe and hurt within my soul, but it ended up being for the best for all of the training and horse sense that Nedezhda learned because of it.

At the same time we are following the path of Alexandar Romanov is being groomed by his grandmother to take the throne and skip past his father, Peter which causes a plethora of familiar animosity, and he doesn't even want to be tsar.

This story is intricately woven and does a wonderful job of not jumping between characters and making the lines concise when it is told from different points of view. Nadezdha (under the guise of the name and identity of Aleksander) fights in the battles of Austerlitz, Friedland, Borodino, and Smolensk.

This was definitely an intimate look at both the life of the early 1800s Cavalry and also of the political intrigue behind the scenes of the Tsars. The characters and scenes are definitely brought to life for the reader.

My only real complaint was that in the beginning there could haev been more polish in scene setting and in the names. I know this is based on true historical personnel but the Alexander/Aleksander characters took some getting used to.

Overall, 5 stars easily. I can't wait to check out more of Linda's novels after this wondrous masterpiece.

** I received a copy of this book for free thanks to Netgalley & Lake Union Publishing

April Hamilton says

The book is well-written enough, but the storyline was a disappointment for me. I bought the book expecting the tale of a proto-feminist who goes to war and fights courageously and every bit as hard as her male peers, kind of along the lines of Joan of Arc (though without the religious aspect), but I didn't find it here. I don't understand why this woman is hailed as a hero and was repeatedly promoted when, according to the account in this book at least, she never did anything heroic. She didn't fight in battles, so much as survive them. While making plenty of stupid mistakes along the way. On the plus side, the audiobook narration is

excellent.

--SPOILER ALERT--

I haven't read the historical accounts nor the account published by the real Nadezhda Durova, but if this book is based on those accounts then Nadezhda Durova wasn't really a war hero at all. She didn't fight in the army so much as hide in it. There are no accounts of her actually engaging with the enemy personally, though lots of passages about her crossing huge, bloody battlefields where men are falling all around her. She repeatedly makes rookie mistakes, getting separated from her unit and losing her horse, tack, money, coat and weapons more than once, either due to not following orders or not thinking things through, and is repeatedly reprimanded by her senior officers for these mistakes. Yet amazingly, she is promoted to an officer's rank primarily because she rescued a couple of other officers on the battlefield---while in the process of crossing the battlefield and *not* fighting. She's also recognized as female more than once, so she was apparently not even very good at passing herself off as male.

I gave up about 60% of the way in to the audiobook, after she'd personally met the Tsar and been promoted to an officer's rank, despite having been a blow-it and not having actually fought anyone up to that point. I get that it takes courage to be on a field of battle at all, but those who are singled out as heroes and have books written about them generally have done more than just survived, and screwed up repeatedly along the way. I just couldn't keep seeing this woman the hero she's purported to be.

Patty says

I have to admit that when I took this book to review I had no idea it was based on a real person. Nadezhda Durova lived and did ride in the cavalry. She wrote her memoirs and this book uses them to create a richer, fictional tale about a woman who defied the normal path set out for women of her time.

There is so much possibility here for an amazing novel. Heck the truth is almost too amazing to believe. But the structure of the book makes it is very hard to get into from the start. Like an awful lot of books lately it uses the back and forth in time and alternate chapter/voice method for telling the tale but the chapter titles don't give you much more than a date. You have to figure out who is narrating the chapter with the reading of it. In the early chapters this proved, at times, challenging. It's also just getting old as a conceit. Seriously people – just tell your stories.

Nadya is a complicated character and like most of that type there are times you love her and times you hate her. She is very well developed and she really drives the story. The chapters where she is not telling the story are not as vibrant. They are not in a single voice as her story is and perhaps that is why.

I did enjoy the book; I always love learning about fascinating women in history and Nadya sure qualifies on that count. A woman who runs away from home to ride in the cavalry is a rare woman indeed. Russian history is a particular interest of mine as well mostly due to a wonderful professor in college. He brought the country alive while teaching. I think the book is certainly worth reading despite it's construction flaws. Nadya is a woman who deserves her attention.

Jessica says

I really wanted to like this one. It's based on a true story--Nadhezhdha Durova was a real woman who did fight for Napoleon--and that piqued my interest. I love books about strong, butt-kicking women in history. The historical and cultural information in this novel is accurate and interesting as well. Unfortunately, the writing and pacing left a lot to be desired.

The story moves between several viewpoints, with Nadya and Tsar Alexander being the main ones. Their storylines eventually do converge. I felt like not enough time was spent on Nadya's perspective, though. Tsar Alexander and his wife Elizabeth fill up a lot of the pages, with their affairs and fights and such, and it felt like just that--filler. Other perspectives--like a young Jules Verne, or the cavalry officer Empress Elizabeth had an affair with--were flat-out unnecessary to the story. None of the characters besides Nadya, Tsar Alexander, and Denisov were developed. Several secondary characters appear for only one scene, and they're pretty unmemorable. I never really felt connected to any of the characters in the novel.

The novel really speeds up towards the end, fast-forwarding through time, and several important events are mentioned in passing with no real emotional impact. The book was just trying to do too much. I also found it strange that the author chose to withhold important information about Nadya's life, slipping it in at the end in a confusing way. Overall: interesting subject matter, weak execution.

Annette Jordan says

What a fascinating story, and very well told. This is the tale of Nadezhda Durova, a young woman born into the army life, who grows up in the company of soldiers and decides to become one when she grows up. Eager to escape the clutches of her mother, she runs away one night, disguises herself as a man named Alexander and joins the army. Her only possession is her beloved horse, and she becomes part of the cavalry and serves in some of the bloodiest battles of the campaign against Napoleon's Grande Armee. Her bravery brings her to the attention of the Tsar, Alexander , and despite knowing her secret he presents her with the Iron Cross, and promotes her. He also renames her Alexandrov.

Although this book is called *The Girl who Fought Napoleon*, it is also the story of Tsar Alexander, grandson of Catherine the Great, and a somewhat unwilling ruler, who struggled with his duty ,and with his feelings of guilt at the murder of his father. As well as learning about life as a soldier , the reader is surrounded by the intrigue of the Russian Imperial Court, plots, coups and affairs abound, making for a dramatic tale.

The book is rich in historical detail, and the scene setting is particularly well done, descriptions of the smells of war had me wrinkling my nose, while those of the harsh Russian winter made me shiver in sympathy with the soldiers I was reading about.

I thoroughly enjoyed it, and would definitely recommend it to history fans, or to readers who like stories of strong , independent women. Learning that it was based on real events added an extra layer of enjoyment.

The Just-About-Cocky Ms M says

I snickered at the hyperbolic—and mostly inaccurate—title, and then threw up my hands at the plethora of historical whoppers from first to last. Indeed, I have said this very thing before, and should not have to keep repeating myself. Whatever happened to the learning curve? Whatever happened to honest, diligent research?

Back in the day, I read Nadezhda Durova's *The Cavalry Maiden: Journals of a Russian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars* in my Russian history graduate seminar. I remember quite well that it was a fascinating account of an unhappy daughter of a provincial official who wed too early and had a son too early abandoning everything and joining the cavalry. Her memoirs in translation read like an earnest, straightforward tale of boredom in bivouacs, high anxiety on the fringes of vast battlefields, unending woes of foraging for food, fuel, and shelter, finding companionship to make the harsh realities of life on campaign bearable, and, in Durova's case, managing a half-hearted attempt at camouflage in an all-male world. Taken as the more or less contemporaneous view of some of the major campaigns against the French, from Austerlitz in 1805, Friedland in 1807, and the invasion of Russia in 1812, Durova's account is about as good as it gets.

So why did the author feel the need to take Durova's yeoman-like but entertaining story and tart it up like some scantily clad, overly rouged and powdered femme du nuit strolling along the Nevsky Prospekt? Why give Durova a voice she never had—and probably never wanted—in favor of some garbled and mostly incorrect “romantic” version? Why leave out some rather startling and significant personal details about Durova that she wrote about herself, and squirrel them away in the “Author's Notes?” And where in all the mishmash is any indication that Durova ever “fought Napoleon?” She was never closer than the far right flank of the Russian Army at Austerlitz, further away than that at Friedland, and in 1812—well, Napoleon was in Russia with Durova, so I suppose that counts somehow. To me, it seems like just a cheap historical shot to make the book sell better. Durova never made such a claim.

But folks, it gets worse, much worse. The history gets more mangled, and the writing is awful, almost painfully so, and the alternating narrations the cause of more whiplash than Wimbledon or the French Open. Bad enough to do such a disservice to Durova, but to add the third-person narrative of Tsar Alexander and a whole Winter Palace stuffed with one-dimensional and inconsequential characters is just silly. It was certainly clear to me about three or four pages in the first chapter here Alexander holds forth that even Wikipedia is more accurate than this risible tale. I found wild swings in dates—most were flat wrong; inconsistencies and laughable inaccuracies in names and forms of address; and some pretty inane attempts at psychobabble regarding Alexander, much of which was debunked ages ago. The chapters featuring Napoleon were simply bad. On all levels. And by the way, don't bring up that banal canard about historical license allowed in historical fiction. It doesn't fly with readers with the slightest bit of discernment.

To sum up: read Durova. Skip this mess.

Jenny Q says

2.5 Stars. I was pretty excited to read this story based on the life of Nadezhda Durova, a young woman who disguised herself as a man to join the Russian cavalry in the fight against Napoleon. But while I really wanted to love this story, I found the presentation of it really held it back.

It is told alternately in Nadezhda's first-person point of view and an omniscient point-of-view style from the future Tsar Alexander I of Russia and the people who surround him. Short chapters jump back and forth in time instead of proceeding chronologically; for example, it's 1789 in one's story and 1799 in another, then back in time to 1795, and this goes on until nearly the end of the book when the two timelines finally converge. And the omniscient point-of-view style means that the reader gets thoughts from all sorts of characters, some of which are fleeting and really shouldn't have a point of view in the story, and others who just weren't compelling enough to warrant their own scenes. There is even a random scene from a young

Jules Verne's point of view that adds nothing to the story. And I did not think the inclusion of several scenes from Napoleon's point of view toward the end of the book were necessary. I thought he was already a looming presence based on the experiences of Nadezhda and Tsar Alexander, who does actually meet him in the story, and those scenes seemed out of place and off-track in a novel about the Russians' experiences during the war.

Another big problem for me is that this book has some serious continuity issues. For example, Alexander is twelve on one page and fifteen on the next; then on the next page, more than a year has passed, but he's still fifteen. At the end of one scene, Nadya informs the reader of a new presence in her life, her horse, but in her next scene when she actually receives the horse, it is five years later. Then another five years pass before she rides him for the first time, though she's still the same age she was when she acquired him! These may sound like minor errors, but when there are so many (and what I've listed here are only several of many), it becomes extremely distracting and confusing. I was constantly looking back for dates to see if I had missed something. What's even more frustrating is that these errors absolutely should have been discovered in the multiple rounds of editing this book had to go through to reach publication. This story could have been wonderful. Nadezhda is a little-known woman whose story deserves to be told, but not like this. The structure made this book more of a chore to read than a pleasure.

However, the story is not without some merit. The main characters are complex. Though Tsar Alexander is easily swayed by sycophants and is prone to weakness and insensitivity, he is still likable. Nadezhda is an engaging heroine, and readers will empathize with her calling to escape the societal expectations of women, but to me she came across as rather bumbling in her military exploits instead of the decorated hero she is supposed to be. And it is a tad uneven in characterization, or rather character portrayal. We get intimate views into some episodes of their lives while others that would seem to warrant inclusion and exploration are merely mentioned in passing. I did find it interesting to read about Napoleon's disastrous winter campaign from the Russian perspective. Having adored the BBC's new adaptation of War and Peace earlier this year, I recognized some of the events occurring. And the descriptions of Russia and Russian folklore are evocative.

Despite my issues with all of the above-mentioned, I kept reading in the hopes that the ending would bump this over the 3-star hump so that I could still recommend this to readers. But the ending actually ruined it for me. I won't spoil it with specifics, but I will say I am not a fan of the author's decision to leave out some pretty vital information about Nadezhda and spring it on the reader at the end, calling into question nearly everything the reader learned in Nadezhda's point of view, and I found her reason for doing so as explained in the author's note to be rather ridiculous in light of the purpose of historical fiction.

Overall, I did find portions of the story to be entertaining, and I think it may be worth a read to gain some insight into the Russian side of the war without having to slog through a reading of War and Peace. But I can't really recommend this to regular readers of historical fiction who expect to be transported by a tightly woven narrative constructed in a manner to make reading rewarding instead of challenging and without bait-and-switch tactics that make the reader wonder if they can believe anything they just read.

Krista says

I listen to this on audio. I first want to say that the narrator is AMAZING!!! She makes this book better, otherwise I probably would have given it 3.5 stars.

On to the book....

I love author Lafferty's writing, she knows how to make everything flow even when she has multiple

character stories. The research she does is wonderful.

If you are a historical fiction lover and love Russian history , (as I love it), you will not be disappointed in this book.

Maggie says

In *The Girl Who Fought Napoleon*, Linda Lafferty tells the story of Nadezhda Durova and Tsar Alexander I during the Napoleonic Wars. I was excited with the idea of reading about a real life maiden warrior and was anxious to read this book. The story of Tsar Alexander I was also intriguing, so I went for it with high hopes. Maybe my hopes were too high and that is always a problem when evaluating something, but I was disappointed, specially with the prose and the narrative.

The characters are compelling, the story is rich, but the book is, in its best moments, deficient. The story is told in the first person by Nadezhda and in the third person when it narrates Alexander I's (and even Napoleon's) parts, but in both persons the prose is lacking, and the characters don't really come alive with it. The worst for me is when a character is thinking something and it's transcribed into text, it seems really naïve or forced, as if they are acting on a stage. As a result, you really don't get to know these characters, and Alexander I and Alexander Aleksandrov (Nadezhda adopts the name Alexander when she joins the army, and Alexander I bestow his name on her too), who were great individuals, come out as flat.

The narrative also presented a problem for me, since it jumped back and forth in time for no particular reason. Every chapter starts with the year when the action was happening, but when you are constantly jumping from 1801 to 1805 and back to 1804 and again to 1806, it's not easy to memorize it. Alexander I's story was the most out of order, what made it more difficult to follow the character's growth. And the story of them both was not always in sync with one another, giving the impression that sometimes I was reading two different books. In the end, again, it just came out lacking and made the characters seem more artificial. It made it difficult to understand and empathize with them, as well as to admire the link between the two the author wanted to show. With this and the lifeless prose, the story doesn't flow.

With great real life characters and a great real story, I read the whole book and was even curious sometimes to read on, but it is far from being the captivating tale it could be, and it left me disappointed.

Many thanks to NetGalley for a copy in return for an honest review.

Jill says

This account of the life of Nedezhda Durova is fascinating. With her father being in the army the family moved around with the cavalry. She was spurned by her mother because she didn't conform to the traditional role of a daughter. Nedezhda found her "family" in the cavalry and went to extraordinary lengths to fulfil her dream and join the Russian army. Set In the time of the Russian tsars and the political intrigue that went hand in hand with that time, we are treated to a great history lesson. Thoroughly enjoyable, with some surprises along the way!

Catherine says

I love historical fiction. I love being taken to different places and times. This is the story of Nadezhda

Durova, a woman who fought as a Russian officer against Napoleon. The story is told from the alternating view of Nadezhda and Tsar Alexander I and eventually Napoleon and some other minor characters.

Changing from Nadezhda and Alexander showed different aspects of the war. Seeing Napoleon's and others sometimes made sense and sometimes was just confusing. There was one scene I had no idea why it was there. It was a fast read despite it's length and it was packed with information but...

Towards the end of the book is a section about the despair of the French army retreating. It made me realize why I hadn't been connecting with the book. I never felt like I was in the Russian court. I never felt I was riding with the cavalry. At least 5 times, Nadezhda's secret is found out and no one cares. I began to wonder why I should. She even has her leg crushed and the doctor says it has to be amputated but she refuses. Her leg throbs here and there and she is ordered to go home to recuperate. Shouldn't there be some long lasting consequences?

Tsar Alexander is hardly any better. We constantly hear what he thinks of his wife and what he thinks of his mistress but the reader never gets to meet the mistress. He comes across as a spoiled brat who wants all the benefits of wealth with none of the responsibilities of royalty. I'm not sure if that was the author's intent. I did enjoy this book. It is based on actual people. I just can't help but think it was short a rewrite or two. The book just needed more feeling.
