



# **A Dance with Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II**

*Anne Noggle*

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In their own vivid words, the women members of the Soviet air force recount their dramatic efforts against the German forces in World War II. These brave women, the first ever to fly in combat, proved that women could be among the best of warriors, withstanding the rigors of combat and downing the enemy. The women who tell their stories here began the war mostly as inexperienced girls - many of them teenagers. In support of their homeland, they volunteered to serve as bomber and fighter pilots, navigator-bombardiers, gunners, and support crews. Flying against the Luftwaffe, they saw many of their friends - as well as many of their foes - fall to earth in flames. Their three combat Air Force regiments fought as many as one thousand missions during the war. For their heroism and success against the enemy, two of the women's regiments were honored by designation as "Guard" regiments. At least thirty women were decorated with the gold star of Hero of the Soviet Union, their nation's highest award. But equally courageous were the women's efforts to show the Red Army that they were entirely adequate to the great role they sought. For even though Stalin had decreed equality for both sexes, the women had to grapple initially with deep distrust from male pilots and Red Army officers, against whom they eventually prevailed. War, Stalin-era politics, and human emotion mix in these gripping, first-person accounts. Supported by photographs of the women at war, the stories are unforgettable. Portraits of the women as they are now taken by award-winning photographer Anne Noggle, add the perspective of time to the experiences of the survivors of this great dance with death.

## A Dance with Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Details

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## **From Reader Review A Dance with Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II for online ebook**

### **Becky says**

Unbelievable heroic women. This read more like a report; but very interesting.

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### **Debeehr says**

Five stars -- an amazing story!

Anne Noggle was a member of the US Women's Air Service Pilots (the WASP) during World War II. The WASP were charged with ferrying planes within the boundaries of the continental US, but were not allowed to fly overseas and not allowed to participate in combat. After writing a book about the WASP, Noggle decided she wanted to meet and interview women who \*had\* flown in combat: Soviet airwomen.

Arising out of the interviews Noggle did with the surviving Soviet pilots (and female mechanics who worked on the planes), this book is a collection of their war stories, told in their own voices. The pilots and mechanics tell about their accidents and triumphs, about the fear and danger that attended every flight, about their near misses, and about those that didn't come back. The planes they flew were outdated, flimsy, often made out of cloth and plywood, crash and fire-prone and it took every bit of their skill, courage and endurance to carry off their missions successfully. The bonding and camaraderie of the pilots comes through as well, as they emphasize they were sisters, and their grief and pain whenever one of their own didn't make it.

I will say that for those who want an overview of the Soviet female squadrons, this book is probably not what you're looking for. The pilots and mechanics speak in their own voices, telling their own stories based on what they saw of the war at the time, rather than stepping back to describe the big picture. That approach lends the book great dramatic immediacy; however, it necessarily limits the scope of view. Nevertheless, I found it impossible to put down. I got this from the library, but I'm going to order myself a copy off Amazon right away. A must read.

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### **Laura Edwards says**

This is my all-time favorite book. I've read it numerous times. It is about the female Soviet pilots who flew in combat in WWII. A collection of interviews introduces the reader to these brave and fascinating women. I highly recommend this book.

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### **Stephanie Bearce says**

The history of the world's first fighter pilots is an inspiring read. The personal interviews make history come to life. I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys history.

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## **Kaycee says**

Great collection of interviews from a group of fascinating women!

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## **Megan says**

Great read about an extraordinary group of women. I loved that each woman told her story; it really highlighted their personalities and how brave they were. Also really enjoyed the 'then and now' photos. These women were just remarkable, and I'm glad this book was able to showcase that and pay homage to their selfless service during the war.

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## **Jeff says**

'A Dance with Death', Soviet Airwomen in World War II, Anne Noggle, 1994. Eager to embrace the Marxist ideological doctrine of equality between the sexes, Joseph Stalin ensures that thousands of young Russian women are able to receive flight training. By the late 1930's the Soviet Union can boast that one third of all licensed pilots are women. Following the Nazi invasion of 1941, thousands of young, patriotic, female pilots rush to join the military. Most are just girls. - university students barely twenty years old, many only teenagers. Entire Squadrons are formed comprised almost exclusively of women. Fifty years later in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, author Professor Anne Noggle, herself a retired, WWII US Airforce captain, travels to Russia and interviews the survivors of world's first female combat pilots. The women are frank, honest and completely uninhibited in sharing their experiences. All express their fears. - the fear of being killed, the fear of seeing their friends die, the fear of letting their country down. Almost all speak of crying, missing their families, insomnia, some experience anxiety attacks. They describe flying missions, hands and knees shaking, barely able to function. A common thread expressed over and over again is the unnaturalness of woman in combat. They feel that they are intrinsically nurturers, peacemakers, unsuitable for killing. For many, instead of becoming callous and hardened, their war time experiences have made them more compassionate, more affectionate, more caring. -more human. The combat record of the female squadrons rivaled that of their male counterparts. Over thirty female pilots received the Red Army's highest award for valor, "Hero of the Soviet Union". Reading the first hand accounts of these brave and courageous women has been an enlightening experience.

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## **Rosemary says**

Fascinating series of interviews with the women who flew combat in Word War II. Didn't know women flew combat missions? They did, and in biplanes without navigational instruments or parachutes against well-armed and prepared Nazi troops. Night bombing runs, dogfights, forced landings, escapes across minefields, and other amazing feats accomplished.

Luckily Noggle was able to meet with many of the surviving Soviet flyers and get their accounts first hand before time silenced them forever.

The library demanded that I give this book back, but I'll probably be hunting down my own copy soon.

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### **Jane says**

The Night Witches . . . Die Nacht Hexen . . . Young Soviet women in an all-female squadron who flew tiny, outdated planes on bombing raids from 1942-45. Could it get any more fabulous and exciting? These girls kicked serious ass. It's an emergency - someone has to make a movie about them! Alas, this book doesn't do their story justice. The author gets lost at the outset in a thicket of changing squadron names, and tells the story as if she's copying it out of the Moscow phone book. The first person interviews with surviving pilots that follow are more engaging, but they quickly become repetitive. Someone like Susan Orlean could make a spectacular book from this material, but I'm holding out for the Spielberg movie version.

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### **Leanna says**

So dense and so good. The organization and brief historical introductions were extremely helpful, but mainly I was just blown away by the breadth of interviews and voices contained in the book. An ethnographic tour de force.

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### **João Martins says**

This book is a compendium of content from each interview directed by the author with Soviet airwomen of WW2.

I was very disappointed by the book. Without any disrespect, but most of the experiences from each regiment and from each position (pilot, mechanic of armament, etc) are essentially the same. There are minor differences, but the entire book could've been regarded as source material to be digested into a far more streamlined and informational account of the women's experiences. Reading first-hand accounts does have its interest, but by the 10th near-identical story it becomes too much.

Still, it is an interesting read with very interesting insights into Stalin's rule, of the only women to engage in air combat in WW2 (to the best of my knowledge!), and of their different mentalities.

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### **Alana says**

"Life is life" must be a common Russian phrase, as often as it appeared in this collection of interviews. I'm curious to know more about the phrase and language after hearing all these stories.

They are all tidbits of what life was like during the war for these pilots, navigators, gunners, mechanics, etc., some of them sprinkled with their own shy (or not) political opinions of the past and (then) present. Some of the stories are astonishing: attaching metal bombs to planes in -40 C, getting bleeding hands from skin sticking to frozen metal, extreme lack of sleep, perilous flight conditions.... and that's just the basics!

The stories are all interesting, although it's not exactly a gripping page-turner. Read if it's a topic of interest, easy to pass by if not.

3.5/5

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## **Pandem Buckner says**

Somewhere, in the ever-fluctuating meta-topographical landscape of the collective human consciousness, there is a line. It's not a big line, and it too fluctuates, but it's an important line.

It's the line between selfless bravery and complete bats\*\*t insanity.

The women of the Soviet Union's three female air regiments (99% of which were volunteers) lived on that line for four years. They lived on it, slept on it, danced across it in whichever direction the situation called for as needed. Take, for example, the tale of a navigator forced to walk out on the wing of her aircraft and fix it when it was damaged by anti-aircraft fire, 600 meters in the air. Or the tail-gunner of a bomber that was blown out of her seat by an anti-aircraft shell exploding, through a hatch, and onto the fuselage, saved only by her parachute harness getting caught on a machine gun.

There has to be a whole hell of a lot of patriotism, and more than a little insanity, behind being willing to face Germany, a country with rapidly-advancing technology, the world's first jet fighter planes moving five times faster than you, and an incredible war machine, while strapped into a World War I-era biplane made of wood and cloth. . .oh, and without a parachute.

Make no mistake, these women are extremely patriotic. Even knowing their country was flawed, unfair, and intolerant of dissidence, they still went to arms when their homeland was attacked. Every page of this book is filled with first-hand amazing, harrowing, hair-raising accounts of around-the-clock bombing raids, crash-landings in enemy territory, and terrible conditions; these brave, crazy women went years on only 2 to 4 hours of sleep a day, sleeping in trenches, in pits, under their planes, wherever they could find some space. After the war, many of them were forced to retire from health due to health issues left over from frontline combat, meaning doing the very flying that they loved so much had brought their careers to a halt.

I'm very glad to have read this book. The bravery, courage, and pure patriotism displayed by these pilots, navigators, and mechanics are things this world needs more of.

One pilot spoke of the attitudes towards the war. None of them wanted to fight it, she said, but they knew everyone had to fight the invaders and only wanted to do their part. (Contrast that with the US Women's Air Corps, which had female pilots but kept them away from any actual combat.) Having seen the horrors of war, she and many of her compatriots felt they wanted no more of it. In her words, "If all the women of the world united, there would be no more war!"

That's a wonderful sentiment, and a wonderful dream. . .

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