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Heroines of the Soviet Union

1941–45



Henry Sakaida • Illustrated by Christa Hook

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Consultant editor Martin Windrow

HEROINES OF THE SOVIET UNION 1941–45

INTRODUCTION

Giant Stainless steel statue (62 meters high) dedicated to the Motherland. It is on top of the building that houses the National War Museum Complex of Kiev, Ukraine. Visitors can climb inside the statue to the top of the shield to get a breathtaking view of the River Dneiper and metropolitan Kiev. The unique museum collection has over 300,000 exhibits and is constantly updated. First opened in 1974, it has had more than 19 million visitors from over 170 countries.



IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE SOVIET UNION was the only country during World War II to organize and use women in combat. Although the Allied Forces employed women in the military, their roles were limited to support in administrative, medical, communication, transportation, and technical fields, mostly behind the frontlines. However, many Soviet women took up arms and fought alongside their male comrades in some of the bloodiest battles of the war. Of the more than 10 million Soviet soldiers who took part in the Great Patriotic War (1941–45), roughly 800,000 of them were women.

When Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, hundreds of thousands of men rushed to defend the Motherland. Thousands of patriotic women surged into enlistment offices to volunteer, only to be turned away or directed to civilian home defense. They were told that fighting was a man's job.

To be brushed aside in such a cavalier manner was quite shocking and insulting to women, especially since Joseph Stalin had gone to great lengths to show the doubting world the virtues of Communism. He wanted to showcase the advancement of women in science and industry. His wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, headed the women's section of the Communist Party. She championed the rights of women in the areas of equal pay, divorce, and abortion. Under the Marxist-Leninist ideology, women were in theory equal to men.

Despite the official policy of equal rights for women, the Communist regime became more rigid during the 1930s. Since men still harbored chauvinistic attitudes, change came slowly. They still believed that women should not have direct combat roles. They could not see their mothers, sisters, and wives picking up a rifle and fighting and dying like men.

The young Soviet women would not be denied. They chafed at the backbreaking labor of digging anti-tank ditches or helping to bring in the harvest while the enemy advanced on Moscow. They found it hard to sit on the sidelines. Some had flight and paramilitary skills from their involvement with *Osoaviakhim* (The All-Union Voluntary Society for the Support of the Air Force). As high school students, they participated in marksmanship, gliding and parachuting, powered flights, and aircraft mechanics.



The fastest way for women to join the military at the start of the war was to take a certified Red Cross medical training course.

ABOVE OPPOSITE **"Forward, follow me!" Sr/Sgt Zinaida Mareseva** shouted these orders and stopped the retreat of her battalion on August 2, 1943. She rallied her troops during a fierce enemy counterattack along the banks of the Northern Donets River in Belgorod Province. She was wounded the following day, died three days later, and became a Heroine on February 22, 1944.

BELOW OPPOSITE **The "Night Witches" of the 46th Taman Guards Night Bomber Regiment** in a publicity photo. Left to right: Rufina Gasheva, Irina Sebrova, Natalya Meklin, Marina Chechnova, Nadezhda Popova, Serafina Amosova, Yevdokiya Nikulina, regiment leader Maj Yevdokiya Bershanskaya, Mariya Smirnova, and Yevgeniya Zhigulenko. Eight of these women became Heroines.

These clever women used any means at their disposal to worm their way into the fighting. The easiest path to the frontlines was to take a medical training course and then volunteer as a field medic. On the battlefield, medics searched out the wounded and dragged them into shellholes and trenches to provide first aid. When the enemy counterattacked, the women would not leave the wounded unprotected: they picked up available weapons and fought savagely. These field medics quickly became known as the "Angels of Mercy" and were highly respected.

In the area of aviation, three women regiments were formed by aviatrix Maj Marina Raskova. This charismatic leader, role model, and Heroine of the Soviet Union convinced Stalin that women should be employed as fighter and bomber pilots. Whether this was motivated by politics or public relations is immaterial.

The women in the 46th *Taman* Guards Night Bomber Regiment not only had to fight the enemy, but also male prejudice. At first, they were regarded lightly. However, they were so successful in harassing the Germans at night in their rickety biplanes that the enemy named them the "Night Witches." The women wholeheartedly accepted the new moniker and they were proud to call themselves so. As a testament to their skill and valor, 21 became Heroines of the Soviet Union.

Other women aviators served in all-male units, the most notable being Lydia Litvyak, the most famous female pilot of the Great Patriotic War. She shot down 12 German planes before she was killed in combat.

During the early part of the war, the Soviets suffered horrendous losses. What they could not make up for in military hardware, they made up with masses of fighting men. Stalin's strategy was to try to overwhelm

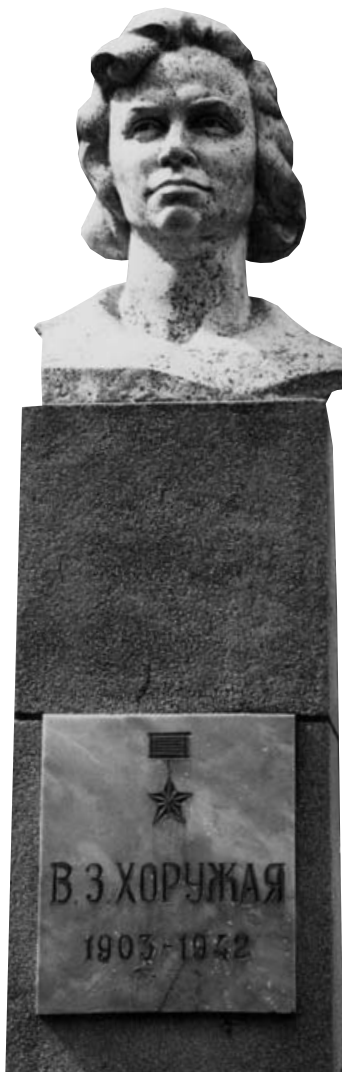


the enemy with wave after wave of infantry. He issued a strict directive that no Soviet soldier was to fall back, and enforced this with NKVD (Internal Security) troops who brought up the rear. Anyone violating this provision was shot on the spot.

The presence of women on the battlefield had an unexpected consequence. There were many instances in which men found themselves pinned down by enemy fire, unable or unwilling to move forward. Suddenly, a woman would get up and charge ahead. "Cowards!" a political officer would yell at his men. "Look at that woman! She is not afraid!" Then entire units would suddenly find the courage to rally around the woman and charge forward. Some skirmishes were won because a woman took the initiative.

In the infantry, about 40 percent of the medical personnel were women, and they often fought fiercely to protect their wounded comrades. Although men were physically stronger, it took no more effort for a woman to pull a trigger or a pin from a grenade, or to pilot a fighter or a bomber, or drive a tank. They could kill just as effectively as men. There is a wide-





A bust in Bobruysk, Belarus (formerly Belorussia), was erected in honor of Vera Khoruzhaya. She ran a vast spy network in Vitebsk, but was caught in November 1942 and executed the following month. (Joe Walker)

spread misconception in the West that these female soldiers endured constant sexual harassment by their male comrades. One male Soviet veteran had this to say: "We were constantly on the go and always exhausted. The only things we thought about were survival, our families, food, and rest!" "The women field medics were angels!" said another veteran. "They were greatly respected for saving so many lives. We thought of them as our sisters and we were very protective of them. No man in my unit ever laid hands on them or said unkind things."

The young women of the Komsomol (Young Communist League) also did their share for the Motherland. The idealistic student leaders organized resistance networks, distributed leaflets, gave aid and comfort to the partisans, and engaged in sabotage.

After the end of the war, many women left service. Many had health problems directly related to the war. For those who stayed and made the military their career, they found the post-war environment very unfriendly. Military academies no longer accepted them. Promotions came slowly and many were weeded out for medical reasons. Men's attitude to women in the military took a giant step backward. Women's voices were seldom heard in a political system that did not encourage their participation.

The role of Soviet women in the Great Patriotic War is now receiving due recognition in the West. They proved themselves beyond expectation. The US military has recently reconsidered the role of women in combat, a lesson they should perhaps have learned from the Soviets more than 60 years ago.

HERO OF THE SOVIET UNION

The title "Hero of the Soviet Union" (HSU) was the highest distinction any Soviet citizen or foreigner could receive. Streets, factories, ships, buildings, and organizations were named in their honor. Their likeness was carved on granite or cast in bronze, and publicly displayed. The Gold Star Medal they wore brought instant respect and admiration, and was recognized in all parts of the Soviet Union by the old and young alike.

The Soviet government awarded a huge quantity of medals to its citizens, a tradition based on history and culture. Commemorative and jubilee medals were practically given away, for having been a veteran, a resident of a certain city during the war, or for something as mundane as working in a factory. Over a million medals were awarded to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Lenin's birth. However, the Gold Star of a Hero of the Soviet Union separated the distinguished few from the masses.

The title "Hero of the Soviet Union"¹ was established by the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars on April 16, 1934. The recipient was recognized with the Order of Lenin, the highest award of the USSR. The Order of Lenin was first established on April 6, 1930, by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and was not purely a military decoration: it could be awarded for achievements in

1 The Soviets did not have a Hero and Heroines category. However, in this book women will be called Heroines to differentiate them from the men.



ABOVE LEFT Pvt Anelia Kzhivon became the only non-Soviet (Polish) Heroine during the Great Patriotic War. She was a machine gunner with the 1st Polish Division. On October 12, 1943, her truck was attacked by German planes. She sacrificed her life to rescue the wounded and saved her headquarters' important documents. She became a Heroine on November 11, 1943.



ABOVE RIGHT Sr/Sgt Valeriya Gnarovskaya killed 28 Germans in one battle while protecting the wounded. On September 23, 1943, she saved the lives of 70 wounded men by throwing herself under a Tiger tank with a satchel of anti-tank grenades, destroying the tank. She became a Heroine on June 3, 1944.

science and industry, agriculture, promoting Communism, etc. To separate the Hero from the non-Hero, the Gold Star Medal was established on August 1, 1939, by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Hence, the Hero received both during their investiture. In addition to the Gold Star Medal and the Order of Lenin, the recipient was also given a large diploma from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and a small passport-sized red leather identification booklet, which had the award document reproduced inside. This booklet was often used to obtain privileges and was treated like a bankbook.

To become a HSU, the individual had to perform a great military feat. Marshals and generals could receive the honor for a successful campaign while the colonels and their subordinates might receive it for their units' successes. Although some believed that the award was reserved mainly for officers, many enlisted personnel from sergeants to privates received it for their role in hand-to-hand fighting.

Many coveted the title because of the special privileges it brought. The major perks included a union-level personal pension, first priority on a housing list, 50 percent rent reduction for housing, 50 percent reduction in taxes, free personal transportation in the city (on public buses), an annual free pass to a rest home or resort, and free medical treatment. The recipient also received a free personal round trip ticket (first class) for travel every year. Merely by waving the red passport-sized HSU booklet, the awardee was able to cut to the front of a line at entertainment, sports, and cultural events. He or she also found it easy to join the privileged



Communist Party, which paved the way for excellent work and educational opportunities.

Stalin was a shrewd manipulator who used every means possible to ensure victory. He issued a decree that the first ones to cross the mighty River Dnieper and hold their positions would become HSUs. The Germans had heavily fortified the opposing bank and any attempt to cross was considered almost suicidal. The Soviets did attack though, and the mad infantry rush pushed the enemy back. Tens of thousands of Soviet soldiers died in the effort and over 4,000 became HSUs on the banks of the Dnieper.

A Hero performing a second feat of great valor was decorated with a second Gold Star Medal and the Order of Lenin. Multiple award recipients were rare, with only 119 double winners, seven triple, and one quadruple. As there are no exact equivalents, it can be stated that the Gold Star Medal was roughly comparable to the British Victoria Cross, the American Medal of Honor, and the German Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.

The Great Patriotic War produced some 11,635 HSU awardees. Only 92 were women and 50 of them received the title posthumously. Although the Soviet Union was an immense country composed of many republics and with at least 90 separate ethnic nationalities, most of the HSU awardees were Russians and Ukrainians.

The title of "Hero of the Soviet Union" and the Gold Star Medal have lost considerable luster with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Many governments and citizens of the former republics, freed from the Soviet yoke, no longer give it the respect it once had. Heroes, once proud to wear the Gold Star Medal and other Soviet decorations in public, now only wear them on special occasions, such as Victory Day. The Russian Government still retains this highest honor, but the title has now been changed to Hero of the Russian Federation.

ABOVE LEFT Corp Aliya Moldagulova scored 91 kills with her sniper rifle. On January 12, 1944, she helped capture a strategic railway station by leading a charge and knocking out a machine gun nest with a grenade. She was killed in action the next day.

LEFT Corp Tatyana Baramzina was a sniper who once eliminated 16 enemy soldiers in a single day. On July 5, 1944, she killed 20 of the enemy and was captured while defending the wounded. She was shot the same day and received the title of HSU on March 24, 1945.

THE HEROINES

AIRCREW

Mariya Ivanovna Dolina

Mariya Dolina could be considered the “Grandmother of Soviet bomber aviation.” She was born on December 18, 1922, in the Omsk region of Siberia. She was the eldest of ten children born into an impoverished farm family, and when her father became totally disabled she dropped out of the eighth grade to work at a factory.

Dolina joined a glider club and became the best student in the class. She could not go to flight school as she was two years younger than the acceptance age so the leader of the flying club solved this problem by adding two years to her age, which to this day remains unchanged in official records. She graduated from Kherson Flying School before the war as a lieutenant in the reserves and was involved in commercial aviation.

When the war suddenly came Dolina’s first task was to help ferry out aircraft and destroy her airfield’s hangars and fuel to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. The following day, she was formally accepted for military service. After training, Dolina was assigned to the 587th Dive-Bomber Regiment, which flew the fast and demanding Petlyakov Pe-2 twin-engined medium bomber, which carried a crew of three. Dolina flew daylight missions as assistant commander of the air squadron, which was later renamed the 125th M.M. Raskova *Borisov* Guards Dive-Bomber Regiment.

On June 2, 1943, Dolina’s plane was damaged during a bombing mission over Kuban. Initially hit by fierce anti-aircraft fire, she completed her run and fled for home. On the way, they were attacked by German fighters and set on fire. Her gunner managed to shoot down one and they belly landed on a grassy field. The entire aircraft went up in flames; the male gunner, who was wounded in the leg, pried open the canopy and pulled the two women out – the other woman was Galina Dzhunkovskaya (see page 10). All three were on fire and rolled on the ground to extinguish the flames. They were picked up by artillerymen and Dolina spent over a month in the hospital with a spinal compression injury, which plagues her to this day.

Ground attacks during daylight operations against the enemy were extremely dangerous. Only five women aviators in Pe-2s lived long enough to become Heroines. Guards Capt Mariya Dolina completed 72 missions and became a Heroine of the Soviet Union on 18 August 1945. She had shot down three enemy planes and dropped 45,000 kg of bombs on the enemy during her war career.

After the war, Dolina served in various political posts. She became a heroine again when she spoke at the Congress of War Veterans in Moscow on Victory Day 1990. She spoke so passionately about the plight of the aging female war veterans, that no one dared

Guards Capt Mariya Dolina in a formal portrait wearing her new Gold Star Medal, August 1945.



interrupt her for 10 minutes despite a strict five minute time limit. Turning to President Mikhail Gorbachev twice, she demanded higher pensions in an unprecedented display of conviction. Gorbachev twice responded by standing up, nodding his approval, and applauding her. The next day, pensions were increased.

President Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine, on the 50th Anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War, promoted her to the rank of major. She now resides with her son in Kiev.

Galina Ivanovna Dzhunkovskaya

Galina Dzhunkovskaya was born in the village of Yurkovka in the Kiev region of Ukraine; her father was a peasant farmer. In 1938, she went to Grozny in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR to study medicine. However, her career goal changed, and she went to Moscow to study aviation engineering.

At the outbreak of the war, Dzhunkovskaya volunteered as a nurse's aid and helped in civil defense along with members of the Moscow Aviation Institute. She tired of digging ditches and wanted a more direct role in the war. When she heard the call of Marina Raskova for women volunteers to join her flying regiment, the young student immediately signed up. She was trained as a navigator at Engels near Stalingrad, and was posted to the newly formed 587th Dive-Bomber Regiment. This unit employed the fast twin-engined Petlyakov Pe-2 medium bomber.

The 587th was originally commanded by Marina Raskova, but she was killed in an aircraft accident in January 1943. Maj Valentin Markov was appointed as her successor, a position he initially considered humiliating. To make matters worse, the women disliked the newcomer. Not wishing to be condescending, Markov began as a strict and demanding commander, which earned him the unflattering nickname of "Bayonet."

As their incredible feats became known, Maj Markov's attitude towards the women softened – and particularly towards Dzhunkovskaya, with whom he fell in love. Likewise, the women gradually accepted him and his new nickname became "Daddy." The major would often lead the bombing missions and he wanted the best navigator to accompany him. The best navigator in the unit happened to be Galina Dzhunkovskaya. Because of his position, Maj Markov could not show any preferential treatment towards any one woman, including his navigator. The disciplined officer continued to do his duty while suffering in silence for love.

During this time, Dzhunkovskaya had a close encounter with death. Her bomber was inter-



Mariya Dolina and the author, Henry Sakaida, at her home in Kiev, October 2002.

Dolina has said of her life: "I was born under a lucky star like my mother always told me,"



cepted by German fighters and a savage gunfight ensued. When the Pe-2 gunner ran out of ammunition, two fighters came in from the rear for the kill. She quick-wittedly grabbed a flare pistol, and from an open hatch fired a desperate shot. The signal flare exploded and the enemy pilots, believing that the Pe-2 was firing an aerial grenade, broke off the attack and fled.

In the spring of 1944, Dzhunkovskaya teamed up with Klavdiya Fomicheva from the 2nd Squadron. On their first mission together in Belorussia, they were hit by anti-aircraft fire and their port engine caught fire. They completed their bombing run, but were forced to bail out at an extremely low altitude of 150m. Their aircraft was seen to crash, and they were reported killed in action.

The two women were both injured and Dzhunkovskaya had suffered burns to her face. The radio operator was killed in the crash. The two survivors were picked up by friendly troops, received first aid treatment and made their way back to base. When Fomicheva and Dzhunkovskaya landed by transport plane at their base five days later, it was Maj Markov who rushed forward and carried the injured navigator off the plane. The commander had been worried and despondent for days. Now, the entire regiment knew of his feelings for his navigator.

By December 1944, Dzhunkovskaya had completed 62 missions, engaged in five aerial combats, and was credited with two enemy fighters shot down. Immediately after the end of hostilities, Galina Dzhunkovskaya married her commander, Valentin Markov, which came as no surprise to the other women in the regiment. On August 18, 1945, she received the HSU title.

Both later served in the Soviet Far East, but she retired in 1950 due to poor health attributed to her wartime service. Dzhunkovskaya-Markova graduated from Kirovgrad Teacher's College and taught English for many years. She passed away on September 12, 1985.

Klavdiya Yakolevna Fomicheva

Klava Fomicheva was the highest scoring female bomber ace of the Great Patriotic War. She was born in Moscow but spent her childhood in the village of Znamenka in the Lipetsk region. Her family struggled with poverty after her father and eldest brother died. She completed secondary education and went to work in Moscow as an apprentice book-keeper in the state bank. At the same time, she enrolled in a glider club sponsored by her work and became hooked on aviation. The young woman became so proficient that she was invited to join a paramilitary flying club.

Fomicheva became a certified pilot in 1937, and a year later became an instructor. As a testament to her skill and teaching abilities, 65 of her pupils were admitted to military flight schools during the three years she taught at the club.

When the all-woman flight regiment was organized by Marina Raskova, Fomicheva volunteered to become a fighter pilot. However, the commander convinced the young woman that her talents would be put to best use with the bomber regiment. The new recruit received training at Engels and was posted to the 587th Dive-Bomber Regiment, which had converted from the old Su-2 single-engined bomber to the new twin-engined Pe-2, a demanding aircraft.

OPPOSITE **Guards Sr/Lt Galina Dzhunkovskaya, c1944. Due to old war wounds she was forced to retire from the military in 1950. She became an English teacher and taught until 1967.**



Guards Capt Klavdiya Fomicheva stands next to her Pe-2 medium bomber after a mission. She remained in service after the war and retired as a lieutenant colonel. (George Mellinger)

Fomicheva flew her first two missions with a male squadron in early 1943 just as the Battle of Stalingrad was in its final phase. She learned her responsibilities very quickly and left her tutors to help run her own squadron. As deputy squadron commander, she trained her subordinates well. During the battle over the Kuban area on the North Caucasus Front, her squadron suffered no casualties.

Most noteworthy was the engagement of June 2, 1943, when Klava Fomicheva's squadron received high praise from the head of the Air Force. Nine Pe-2s sortied on a bombing mission to the Kuban, escorted by fighters. Minutes before they were intercepted, the fighter escorts abandoned the bombers to pursue enemy aircraft. Eight other German fighters tried to take advantage of the situation. The bombers closed formation and put up a ferocious battle, shooting down four of the enemy planes. Five bombers were shot down, but all the crews returned safely. This incident made headlines in the Soviet press.

On September 17, 1943, Fomicheva's plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire while completing a bombing run. With one engine on fire and a

wounded navigator on board, the brave pilot struggled to make an emergency landing on a friendly airfield that had already been bombed. Her aircraft flipped over when it hit a bomb crater and burst into flames. She and her navigator survived but with serious injuries, while their gunner died in the crash. Fomicheva was grounded until early 1944 while she recovered in hospital.

Before the end of the war, Squadron Leader Fomicheva was shot down again, on June 23, 1944, and sustained a leg wound and burns. She and her navigator, Galina Dzhunkovskaya, were forced to bail out at 150m. She was grounded for another two months and returned to duty in late August.

Klavdiya Fomicheva had completed 55 operational sorties by December 1944. At the end of the war, she was credited with 11 aerial victories. On August 18, 1945, this accomplished fighter-leader received the HSU title.

After the war, Fomicheva became an instructor at the Air Force Academy, but retired in 1956 due to poor health as a direct result of her war-time service. She died on October 5, 1958, and is buried in Moscow.

Polina Vladimirovna Gelman

Diminutive, raven-haired Polina Gelman was the only female Jewish HSU. Russian-born Jews were not considered Russians, but were listed as a separate nationality and were often discriminated against. She was born in Berdichev in Ukraine of working-class parents. When she was five months old, her father was killed in the Civil War, and her mother took her to live in Belorussia.

Gelman had her first taste of aviation when she joined a glider school, while in the ninth grade. On her first flight, the instructor told her to

execute a maneuver that he had shown her. Unfortunately, she was so small that she had to slide down from her seat to reach the rudder pedals, disappearing from the sight of her instructor! When they landed, she was reprimanded and told not to come back. She did not go back, but the thrill of flight never left her.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, young Polina was a history major at Moscow State University. She heard the recruitment call of Marina Raskova to join her all-female flight regiment, and at Engels Polina trained as a navigator. She wanted to become a pilot, but was still too short to reach the rudder pedals. However, trained navigators were in just as much demand as pilots.

The desperate fighting called for night bombing to harass the Germans and deprive them of sleep. At times, Gelman and her comrades would fly between six and ten missions a night. They would drop their bombs, return to refuel and rearm, and go straight back out again. The standard attack method involved turning off the engine of their U-2/Po-2 biplane to glide-bomb under the cover of silence, then restart the engine to escape. Gelman was initially paired with Dusya Nosal, but after she was killed Maguba Syrtlanova (a future HSU) became her pilot.

One of the most gratifying moments for this Jewish aviator was the resupplying effort to a group of Soviet marines in the Crimea during the winter of 1943. In bad weather, she flew many missions over the Kerch Strait to drop ammunition and food to the men below.

As a senior lieutenant of communications in the 46th *Taman* Guards Night Bomber Regiment, Gelman flew a total of 860 missions. When the war ended, she had flown more sorties than some of her comrades who were decorated with the Gold Star. The highest honor was finally awarded to her on May 15, 1946.

After the war, Gelman went back to Moscow State University where she graduated with a degree in history. She continued to serve in the military until 1957 and retired with the rank of major. She later obtained a degree of Candidate of Economic Science in 1970 and worked diligently for the Communist Party. She is now retired and lives in Moscow.



Guards Maj Polina Gelman in a postwar formal portrait. She was one of the few female HSUs who made the military her career and retired as a Guards Major in 1957. She then became a teacher, and later worked in Cuba as an economic advisor for the Communist Party.

Lydia Vladimirovna Litvyak

Lydia Litvyak is the most famous Soviet female fighter pilot of all time. She was born in Moscow and completed high school in 1938. As a little girl, she was fascinated by the adventures of the famous women fliers Valentina Grizodubova, Polina Osipenko, and Marina Raskova. The flight of the *Rodina*, where these women set a long-distance record, inspired the young Lydia and pushed her towards an aviation career.

At the start of the war, Litvyak was an instructor at Kherson Flying School, where she earned her wings. Her initial attempts to enter service



were thwarted. However, when she heard that Marina Raskova was recruiting members for her all-woman regiment, she rushed to join. Rigorous training commenced at Engels. After completing this, she was assigned to a fighter regiment. Later, she and three female companions were transferred to the 437th Fighter Regiment, which flew Yak-1 fighters.

On September 13, 1942, Litvyak scored her first two victories and became the first woman to shoot down an enemy plane. As the popular story goes, she shot down a Luftwaffe ace and a Knight's Cross holder who parachuted out of his stricken fighter. The captured enemy pilot was brought before Litvyak and refused to believe that he had been felled by a woman, until she described the dogfight. Research indicates that no Knight's Cross recipient was shot down that day. Most likely, the account was exaggerated.

On the following day, the 14th, Litvyak shot down an Me 109. On the 27th, she added a Ju 88 bomber. She mostly flew bomber escort missions. Although she did not see much action, she impressed her male counterparts through her ability to hold her own. At the end of 1942, her score stood at four victories, mostly gained around Stalingrad. The newspapers publicized her accomplishments, but the publicity-shy woman made great efforts to keep a very low profile.

Litvyak was wounded for the first time on March 22, 1943, in aerial combat, and made a forced landing. An IL-2 landed nearby and rescued



ABOVE LEFT **Lydia Litvyak** became the most famous female fighter ace in history. (Frunze)

ABOVE RIGHT **Jr/Lt Lydia Litvyak** stands on the wing of her Yak-1 fighter. Fighter pilots suffered from cold feet in unheated aircraft and insulated their boots with cowhide leggings.

her. She was hospitalized and did not return to her unit until May. She scored another victory on May 5 against an Me 109 when the Germans intercepted a Pe-2 bomber formation. Two days later, she bagged another 109.

On July 16, she was wounded for the second time. Six Yaks encountered 30 German bombers with six escorts. The Soviet pilots put up a tremendous fight. The woman ace downed one bomber and shared a victory with a comrade, but her fighter was hit and she had to make a belly landing on her airfield. She refused to be sidelined by her wound, which she considered minor.

On August 1, 1943, Litvyak was reported missing in action while attacking a formation of bombers and escorts in the Donetsk area of Ukraine. On this last mission, she was credited with the destruction of an Me 109. In 168 sorties, she achieved 12 personal and four shared victories, plus a reconnaissance balloon.

In 1969, children playing out in a field found the remains of a small pilot in the wreckage of an aircraft, which were buried in a common grave in the village of Dmitriyeva. In nearby Krasny Luch, a group of students under the leadership of schoolteacher Valentina Vaschenko, made a search for her crash site in 1971 but were unsuccessful. However, in 1979 they learned that the remains of a pilot, presumably female, had been found near Dmitriyeva and were buried there. The remains were disinterred and forensic testing identified them as those of Lydia Litvyak.

Through the efforts of schoolteacher Vaschenko, Litvyak received the HSU title on May 5, 1990, by a decree from President Mikhail Gorbachev. Vaschenko established the Museum of War Glory attached to School No.1 to honor the Heroine and others in Krasny Luch.

Marina Raskova wears the collar rank insignia of a major. Her medals include the Type 1 Gold Star with two Orders of Lenin. Medals were part of the uniform and were often worn in training and combat. (Frunze)

Marina Mikhailovna Raskova

The woman who inspired thousands of young Soviet women to fly had no early interest in flying. Rather, her goal was to become an opera singer. Marina Malinina was born in Moscow to middle-class parents. Her mother was a schoolteacher. Her father, who was a singing instructor, was killed in an accident in 1919. Despite this tragedy, she continued with her drama and singing lessons. She was very hard on herself and soon began to suffer from stress. Financial hardship and illness forced her to quit music school and change her career goal. She decided to study chemistry in high school, which would help her secure a job.

After graduation in 1929, young Marina found employment with a dye factory as a chemist. She also married an engineer named Sergey Raskov, thus changing her name to Raskova. Her daughter Tanya was born in 1930 and Marina divorced her husband in 1935.

From the dye factory, Raskova moved in 1931 to the Aero Navigation Laboratory of the Air Force Academy as a draftswoman. Through her work she was gradually drawn into aviation. She studied





physics, mathematics, mechanical engineering, radio theory, and navigation. In 1934, she graduated from the Leningrad Air Force Scientific Research Institute. Raskova was the first Soviet woman to be certified as an aviation navigator.

During September 24–25, 1938, Raskova participated in the world record distance flight as navigator aboard the twin-engine bomber *Rodina*. Piloted by Valentina Grizodubova and Polina Osipenko, the



OPPOSITE **The crew of the *Rodina* set a world distance record in 1938. Left to right: Polina Osipenko (co-pilot), Valentina Grizodubova (pilot), and Marina Raskova (navigator).**

ABOVE **The *Rodina* came down in a swamp. This photo was taken from a rescue plane on October 4, 1938. Grizodubova can be seen on the left wing.**

three women flew from Moscow towards the Soviet Far East. Their fuel supply was inadequate to reach their destination, probably because a mechanic forgot to refill the tanks after engine testing. Raskova was ordered to parachute out from her workstation in the nose section: Grizodubova was fearful that a belly landing would kill or injure her navigator. She bailed out at 2,300m and spent ten days roaming the wilderness before she was reunited with her two comrades. A massive rescue effort located the trio safe and sound. The *Rodina* had come down in a swamp.

The women had set a world distance record of 6,450km. On November 2, 1938, all three women were decorated with the Gold Star Medal and the Order of Lenin. Raskova went on the lecture circuit for the Moscow Communist Party (she became a member in 1940) and studied at the M.V. Frunze Military Academy.

When the war began, Raskova could not obtain an assignment for combat duties. She joined the People's Defense Committee and became aware that thousands of women pilots wanted to participate in battle. Because of her popularity and influence with high government officials, she used her position to lobby for a flight regiment composed of women. The plan was approved and Maj Raskova was appointed as commander.

The call went out for volunteers and 1,000 were selected for intensive training at Engels, located on the River Volga. The regiment was so large, it was split into three and she chose to lead the 587th Dive-Bomber Regiment (later renamed the 125th M.M. Raskova *Borisov* Guards Bomber Regiment). They trained with the Petlyakov Pe-2.



Guards Capt Mariya Smirnova in a formal portrait following the award of the Gold Star Medal. On the right of her chest she wears the Order of the Red Star, the Order of Alexander Nevsky, and a Guards emblem below the rest. On the left is the Gold Star, followed below by an Order of Lenin, and three orders of the Red Banner.

On January 4, 1943, Maj Marina Raskova took off for the front in bad weather. Her aircraft crashed and the entire crew was killed. Her ashes were interred in the Kremlin Wall.

Mariya Vasilevna Smirnova

Looks can deceive: even in uniform, Mariya Smirnova looked like a sweet, harmless teenager. Yet this short, baby-faced woman was a “Night Witch” who struck terror into the hearts of the enemy during the Great Patriotic War.

Mariya was born to a peasant family in the village of Vorobyevo in the Kalinin region. Her love affair with aviation began while teaching kindergarten in Kalinin; there was an airfield nearby and she would watch the planes every day. She joined the Kalinin Flying Club in 1937, the only female in her class amongst hundreds of members. Two years later, she became an instructor.

On November 1, 1941 Smirnova signed up following Marina Raskova’s call for female volunteers. She took a flight course at Engels Aviation School and was posted to the 588th Night Bomber Regiment.

When the women flight regiments were first thrown into combat, there was considerable skepticism and mistrust as to their capabilities among their male comrades. Smirnova was flight

tested by a male pilot and passed with excellent marks. When the commander of her squadron was killed, Smirnova took over and led by example. She piloted the Polikarpov U-2/Po-2 biplane and dropped bombs on German troop concentrations, supply lines, and railroads. In the Taman area, her plane was hit by groundfire on a moonlit night. She crash-landed with a bomb still attached and a wounded navigator in the back seat. She was knocked unconscious, but suffered no major injuries.

The “Night Witches” were often deprived of sleep and rest, and flew in the worst weather imaginable. They were situated very close to the frontlines, sometimes as close as a 15-minute flight. This allowed the women to execute up to ten missions a night: the crew simply stayed in the cockpit while the mechanics serviced the plane and attached bombs.

The famous German fighter-leader Hauptmann Johannes Steinhoff, commander of II./JG52, paid an indirect compliment to the Soviet female aviators in a letter he wrote on September 2, 1942: “We simply couldn’t grasp that the Soviet airmen that caused us the greatest trouble were in fact women. These women feared nothing. They came night after night in their very slow biplanes, and for some periods, they wouldn’t give us any sleep at all.”

By August 1944, Smirnova had survived 805 night missions and was granted leave to attend a women’s conference in Moscow. The foreign journalists noticed the youthful Smirnova with a chest full of medals and thought that she was a propaganda ploy. Skepticism turned to respect later when her flight logbook was produced.



Sr/Lt Anna Yegorova (Timofeyeva) stands by her IL-2 Sturmovik ground attack aircraft in early 1944. Originally bestowed the HSU in 1944 posthumously, she returned alive and her title was revoked.

On October 26, 1944, Guards Capt Mariya Smirnova, the diminutive squadron commander, was awarded the HSU title. A few months before the war ended, the regiment commander sent Smirnova and Guards Sr/Lt Yekaterina Ryabova (HSU, February 23, 1945) to study at the Air Force Academy. The two were not admitted because the institution was now officially closed to women. Smirnova returned to her unit and finished the war with 935 missions flown.

Some of the women aviators had hoped for a post-war aviation career. In the case of Smirnova, four years of continuous fighting had nearly ruined her health, both physically and mentally. She was found unfit to fly and was transferred to the reserves. Undaunted, she worked as an instructor for the Kalinin Regional Communist Party and held the position of personnel director for a wool manufacturing company. Now retired, she lives in Kalinin.

Anna Aleksandrovna Timofeyeva

This remarkable woman was the only female pilot in her bomber regiment. She was born Anna Yegorova in the village of Torzhok in the Kalinin region between Moscow and Leningrad. She was one of 16 children in a poor peasant family. After completing secondary school, she entered a trade

school and then secured work on the construction of the Moscow Metro. At the same time, Yegorova attended a worker's preparatory course for university and also joined a glider club. The ambitious young woman later joined the Kherson Flying School and became an instructor.

At the start of the war, Yegorova flew the U-2/Po-2 biplane to deliver passengers, mail, and conduct reconnaissance. On May 20, 1942, she was nearly shot down by a German fighter while on a mail delivery flight. With her plane on fire, she landed in a forest. The enemy plane strafed her repeatedly, but she hid herself in a large cornfield until the fighter left. She was able to deliver the mail and was treated for burns.

Marina Raskova wanted Yegorova for her all-woman flight regiment and sent numerous requests to her unit, but the staff was reluctant to let her go. She did not learn about this until long after the war.

Yegorova trained with the Ilyushin Sturmovik IL-2. It was an excellent ground attack aircraft, which could carry 600kg of bombs or up to eight rockets. She quickly mastered this plane and flew with the 805th Ground Attack Regiment over the Taman Peninsula and the fortified area known as the "Blue Line." The highly dangerous ground support missions decimated her squadron, but she always returned.

A woman flying the IL-2 was a rarity in those days. On July 7, 1944, Yegorova made a reconnaissance mission over the Belorussian front with two fighter escorts. The male pilots did not know that she was a woman and made fun of her effeminate voice. On the way back, she radioed her report. "Thank you, Anechka!" responded the base radio operator. It



The Polikarpov U-2/Po-2 was called the “Mule” and served as a biplane trainer, transport, and crop duster. The women of 46th Taman Guards Night Bomber Regiment harassed the enemy continuously, often flying this aeroplane. The aircraft shown has fallen into enemy hands and is being examined. (Aerospace Publishing)

was only then that the two escorts realized that the pilot of the *Sturmovik* was a woman. “They began circling around and wagging their wings at me,” she later recalled. “They did not land at their aerodrome but escorted me to my field, wagged their wings again, and flew away.” When she reported to headquarters, the personnel kidded her about having found bridegrooms.

On August 20, 1944, Yegorova flew her 243rd and last mission from an airfield east of Warsaw. She led a group of ten aircraft to attack the Germans preparing for a counterattack against the Soviet 8th Army on the Magnuszew bridgehead. Her plane took a direct hit and her gunner was killed. The *Sturmovik* turned over on fire and she was thrown out of the cockpit. Her parachute opened partially at very low altitude and she was badly burned and injured when she hit the ground. The Germans captured her immediately and provided medical treatment. She was rescued when the Soviets overran the Kustin POW camp on January 31, 1945.

When Sr/Lt Yegorova returned, she was arrested by the NKVD on suspicion of having surrendered to the enemy, a traitorous offense. She was jailed for 11 days and interrogated every night. Several POW camp doctors testified on her behalf, which finally secured her release. Declared an invalid due to serious wounds, her flying career came to an end. She finally married her former division commander, Vyacheslav Timofeyev, and had two sons.

Anna Yegorova Timofeyeva had “posthumously” received the HSU title in late 1944. However, the award was revoked when it was learned that she had survived as a prisoner. Later the political climate changed, and she finally received the Gold Star Medal and the Order of Lenin on May 6, 1965.

FIELD MEDICS

Mariya Karpovna Baida

During the siege of Sevastopol, the Soviets needed heroic role models to inspire their troops. Mariya Baida became one of three heroines to fulfill this purpose (the others were sniper Lyudmila Pavlichenko and machine gunner Nina Onilova.)

Mariya Baida was born in 1922 in the village of Novyi Sivash in the Krasnyi Perekop area in the Crimea. Orphaned at an early age, she was brought up by her grandparents. Life was extremely tough for her as a child and she toiled on a collective farm when she wasn't attending school. When her grandfather died and her grandmother became ill, she was forced to drop out of school and work full time. She looked after children on a collective farm's day-care center, and later served as a nurse's aid at a local hospital.

The war came directly to Baida when the Germans bombed her house in the village of Voinka during Operation Barbarossa. Thousands of refugees made their way toward Simferopol and Sevastopol as the enemy advanced. Baida accompanied the wounded to safety, then joined a home guard unit which was later absorbed into the 514th Rifle Regiment. Because of her nursing background, she became a field medic and was sent with her unit to defend Sevastopol.

It wasn't long before "Marusia" Baida made a name for herself in the severe fighting. She was quick to volunteer for hazardous assignments and joined a reconnaissance unit. On her first mission, she captured a wounded German pilot and brought him back for interrogation. On another mission, the recon patrol was sent to destroy a hidden machine gun nest located in a cave and Baida captured an officer while he was attempting to escape.

On June 6, 1942, Sgt Baida outdid all of her other previous achievements. She crept up to an enemy position and then burst forward with her submachine gun, killing 15 German soldiers and their officer. She knocked out several more with the butt of her PPSH-41. In the process, she rescued her commanding officer and eight comrades who were prisoners, and captured a machine gun and other weapons. News of her valor went straight to the top and she was recommended for the HSU title.

Baida continued to fight, but suffered a serious leg wound and was hospitalized. While laid up in bed, she was awarded the Gold Star Medal and the Order of Lenin on June 20. Military newspapers hailed her as "Masha Sevastopolskaya" and "Fearless Marusia."

During the siege of Sevastopol, the Soviets lost over 100,000 soldiers and 200 tanks. Gen Andrei Vlasov tried to counterattack, but received no support from his headquarters. The enemy encircled the city and Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's 11th Army captured the fortress on July 4. While attempting to escape with her unit, Baida was captured. She was moved between various prisoner of war camps, and escaped from one in



Mariya Baida in a post-war photo. She received the coveted title of Honorary Citizen of Sevastopol and School No.36 was named after her there.

Rovno, Ukraine. She was recaptured and transferred to a death camp in Salzburg, Austria where she joined the camp's resistance organization. This courageous woman was betrayed by an informant and tortured, but she survived until the Americans liberated the camp on May 8, 1945.

Mariya Baida returned to Sevastopol where they named a school after her. She participated each year in the memorial service for the Sevastopol defenders at the Malakhov Burial Mound. She passed away in September 2002.

Mariya Sergeyevna Borovichenko

"Little Mashen from Mousetrap" was born in the small village of Myshelovki (Mousetrap) just outside Kiev, Ukraine. Orphaned at an early age, she was raised by her uncle and completed eight grades of school. She was enrolled in a nursing course when the war started.

When the Germans advanced on Kiev, Mariya and her uncle managed to escape. She collected valuable information along the way and passed it to the 5th Airborne Brigade, commanded by Col Alexandr Rodimtsev. The information enabled the Soviets to destroy part of the enemy artillery. Because of this action and her nursing background, she was immediately accepted into service.

On August 13, 1941, Borovichenko distinguished herself in her baptism of fire south of Kiev. While treating the wounded, she rescued her battalion commander from capture. Three Germans took custody of Capt Simkin. Little Mashen killed two of them with a pistol she had picked up on the battlefield, allowing Simkin to escape.

In the next battle, Pvt Borovichenko captured a high-ranking German officer who was humiliated at having been taken prisoner by a 16-year-old girl. News of this courageous teenager's exploits fascinated Col Rodimtsev, who ordered his subordinates to keep him fully informed of her activities.

During a subsequent battle near the village of Kazatskoye, Borovichenko was captured. However, she managed to escape and brought back valuable information on enemy troop movements. This allowed the staff officers to move their headquarters to safety.

On September 5, 1941, Borovichenko again made headlines. The Germans were encircling Kiev when Col Rodimtsev received orders to move his unit to the southern bank of the River Seym near Konotop. Rodimtsev's troops arrived just in time: the enemy was attempting to rush infantry across a damaged railroad bridge. Realizing the disastrous outcome if the enemy succeeded, Borovichenko convinced a comrade to help her drag a Maxim machine gun to an ideal position. Mariya acted as spotter and loader. They rained accurate fire upon the enemy and stopped them cold. Col Rodimtsev personally

Mariya Borovichenko. The three triangular pins in her collar tab (Red Army 1941 ranking system) indicate that she is a senior sergeant of infantry.



Lt/Gen Alexandr I. Rodimtsev, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, was fascinated by the exploits of "Little Mashen from Mousetrap" and wrote her biography after the war in tribute. (Paul McDaniel)



congratulated the young girl on her bravery.

On September 17, Borovichenko captured ten German soldiers single-handedly while on a scouting mission. Her name was featured prominently in newspapers, but the glory never went to her head. As the great battles raged, she continued to live a charmed life. She participated in the Battle of Stalingrad where her fiancé was felled by a sniper's bullet.

During the Battle of Kursk on July 14, 1943, Sr/Sgt Borovichenko died in combat. Her last act was

to shield a wounded officer with her body after knocking out an advancing tank with an anti-tank grenade. She was killed by shrapnel from an exploding shell. Her death stunned Maj/Gen Rodimtsev, who considered her one of his favorite soldiers. She was buried in the village of Mikhaylovskoye.

On May 6, 1965, Mariya Borovichenko received the HSU title. A year later, Col/Gen Alexandr I. Rodimtsev, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, paid tribute to her by publishing her biography, *Mashenka iz Myshelovki* (Little Mashen from Mousetrap). A feature movie was made about her based on his book.

Yekaterina Mikhaylova-Demina

The lack of fairness in the Soviet award system is clearly illustrated by the case of Yekaterina Mikhaylova-Demina. Had she been a man, there is no doubt that she would have received the Soviet Union's highest honor at the end of the war. She was born in Leningrad and grew up in an orphanage. On the way to visit a brother, her train was bombed near Smolensk. The date was June 22, 1941, the start of the Great Patriotic War.

The patriotic 16-year-old girl volunteered for military service, but the recruitment office rejected her. She then volunteered and was accepted to help at a military hospital. Her stint was short-lived, as the enemy bombed the building. The patients were evacuated and Katya Mikhaylova stayed behind. As there was a desperate need for field medics, she was finally accepted for service in the Army.

The Germans pushed on toward Moscow and Mikhaylova saw much combat. Near Gzhatsk, she received a serious leg wound and was evacuated to the Urals. On her recovery, she was transferred to naval service and served aboard a hospital ship. The routine activities aboard the ship bored her, so she volunteered for the formidable Azov Flotilla. When her request was denied, she filed a complaint with the

government in Moscow: she was admitted in February 1943.

The Marines treated Mikhaylova with contempt at the beginning, but as she accompanied them on first-wave assaults, their attitudes changed. She could handle weapons like her male comrades, joined in scouting enemy-held territory, and treated the wounded. In no time, she was accepted. In the course of combat, she was wounded three times.

Mikhaylova participated in the capture of Belgorod-Dnestrovski in August 1944.

The attackers landed at night from rubber boats along the shores of the Dniester estuary in a commando operation. She was one of the first to climb a ridge, and then lowered a rope to help pull her comrades up. Once on top, they charged and cleared the ridge of the enemy. At the end of the day, she had treated and removed 17 men to safety. In addition, she had single-handedly stormed a fortified position and taken 14 German prisoners.

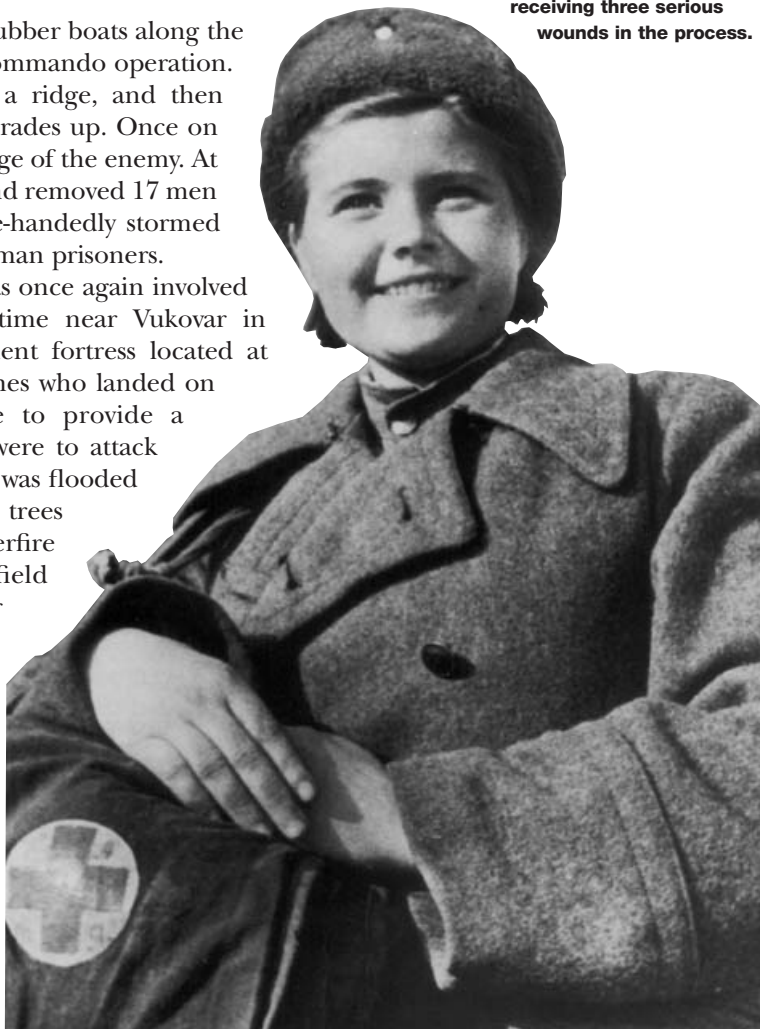
In December 1944, Mikhaylova was once again involved in a commando-style assault, this time near Vukovar in Yugoslavia. The target was the ancient fortress located at Ilok. She was in a group of 50 Marines who landed on a small island nearby. They were to provide a diversion while the main elements were to attack from a different location. The island was flooded and the assault group had to climb trees to fire on the fortress. The counterfire was horrendous and the young field medic received a bullet through her hand. When some of the men were hit and fell into the icy water, she jumped in to save them. Using belts and rifle slings, she secured the wounded to the trees and treated them. In this fashion, she saved the lives of seven men.

Just as the Marines were about to be destroyed completely, Soviet and Yugoslav forces stormed the fortress. Only 13 from Mikhaylova's group survived and all were



Naval CPO Galina Petrova became a Heroine during the amphibious assault at Kerch in the Crimea in November 1943. CPO Mikhaylova-Demina participated in the same operation, but in a different unit. Petrova was severely wounded in December 1943 and was hospitalized. She was killed when the hospital was bombed on December 8, 1943.

Naval Chief Petty Officer Yekaterina Mikhaylova-Demina in 1945. Although she was small, she dragged several hundred men off the battlefields, receiving three serious wounds in the process.



wounded. A short hospitalization followed, but before she had fully recovered, she escaped back to her unit.

Yekaterina Mikhaylovna continued in the medical profession after the war, married, and served in various veterans' posts. She also worked for the Soviet Red Cross and Red Crescent Society. The International Committee of the Red Cross recognized her work during the war with the Florence Nightingale Medal. She had been nominated for the HSU title three times, but the Awards Department denied the requests.

On May 5, 1990, by a decree from President Gorbachev, Yekaterina Mikhaylovna-Demina became a Heroine of the Soviet Union. She was one of the last to be honored before the collapse of the USSR.

Mariya Zakharovna Shcherbachenko

Out of the 15 women medical personnel who became HSUs, only seven survived to wear the Gold Star Medal. Mariya Shcherbachenko was one of those lucky enough to beat the odds. She was born in the village of Yefremovksa in Kharkov Province of Ukraine to a peasant family. Her family lived in abject poverty and both of her parents died before she was ten. She was raised by her older brother and completed seven grades of secondary school.

Before the war, Mariya worked as a bookkeeper's assistant on a collective farm. She remained at her job throughout the German occupation of her village, which ended in March 1943. When the enemy fell back, she was called into service and trained as a field medic. She saw her first action in the small settlement of Grebenki.

On the night of September 24, 1943, Shcherbachenko accompanied an advance group of 13 infantrymen attempting to cross the mighty River Dnieper in the region of Kiev. Such small probing actions were considered suicidal. Two small fishing boats slowly made their way silently to the other side under the cover of darkness.

Shcherbachenko's boat became stranded on a shoal and the occupants were forced to jump into the icy water and swim ashore. At dawn, another boat containing 17 men arrived. The Germans made repeated counterattacks to drive them back into the river, but the lightly armed platoon hung on tenaciously. They would not receive reinforcements for 24 hours due to the firepower of the enemy guns. Sgt Shcherbachenko did her best to dress the wounds of her comrades and dragged them to concealed places. Grabbing a *Papasha* (PPSh-41), she stood her ground.

Reinforcements started to arrive the following day. From the time she landed until October 4, the brave field medic aided 112 wounded men. Her bravery under fire served as an inspiration to all.

On October 23, 1943, all 13 men and Sgt Mariya Shcherbachenko were awarded the HSU

Sgt Mariya Shcherbachenko appears in a publicity photo for the newspapers in November 1943. She holds a 7.62mm PPS-43 submachine gun, a crudely manufactured but very effective weapon.



title. After the war, she finished law school and worked as a lawyer. She lives in retirement in Kiev.

Zinaida Tusnolobova-Marchenko

Zinaida Tusnolobova-Marchenko was a woman who inspired many people. Soldiers on the 1st Baltic Front liberated the town of Polotsk for her; tanks, aircraft, and artillery pieces carried her name; factory workers increased production when they heard her story.

She was born in Polotsk in the Vitebsk region of Belorussia. She came from a peasant family and completed seven grades of school. When the war began, Zinaida was working as a chemical lab technician for a coal-mining operation in Siberia. She wanted to join the fight, but was rejected because she did not possess any qualifying skills. A three-month nursing program remedied the situation. Upon completion in April 1942, she was accepted into the 849th Rifle Regiment and sent to the Voronezh Front. Just before her departure, she married a soldier named Iosif Marchenko.

In July, this field medic participated in her first battles. She treated and removed 40 wounded soldiers from the battlefield, for which she was decorated with the Order of the Red Star. By the time she received the Order of the Red Banner she had treated and moved to safety a total of 128 wounded men.

On February 2, 1943, Pvt Tusnolobova-Marchenko was seriously wounded near Kursk while trying to provide aid to her company commander, who later died. Shot through both legs, she had to crawl through the snow: and when the Germans overran her position, she played dead. However, an enemy soldier smashed her face with his rifle butt just to make certain that she was dead. Two days later, she was found by scouts and rushed to a field hospital. It was a miracle that she had survived the freezing temperatures and loss of blood.

Tusnolobova-Marchenko endured the agony of losing her right arm, right leg, and left hand due to gangrene. The doctors also amputated a portion of her left foot due to severe frostbite. Depression consumed her and she almost gave up hope. However, she was given a book about a young Soviet writer who struggled with blindness and illness, and died at an early age. This book literally changed her life.

After 15 months of hospitalization, a long process of rehabilitation followed. The Institute of Prosthetic Devices took Tusnolobova-Marchenko and taught her how to write and walk again. Rather than wallowing in self-pity, she believed that she could use her tragedy to inspire others. She sent a letter to the soldiers on the 1st Baltic Front, asking them to liberate Polotsk, her birthplace. Eventually, the soldiers delivered on their promise. "Avenge Tusnolobova-Marchenko!" soon became a familiar battle cry. Sacks of letters arrived from the troops to



Sgt Zinaida Tusnolobova-Marchenko, c1942, before she was severely wounded. The city of Polotsk gave her the esteemed title of Honorary Citizen.



"For Zina Tusnolobova!" This popular battle cry was written on the turret of a T-34 tank. Her writings and radio addresses inspired her comrades to retake her hometown from the enemy.

hearten her and thank her for her inspiration. Her writings were widely published in newspapers and her voice was heard on the radio.

When the war ended, the woman who inspired the troops returned to her birthplace. She was reunited with her husband and later had a son and a daughter. In Polotsk, she was involved in the city council and did social work.

On December 6, 1957, Zinaida Tusnolobova-Marchenko was honored with the HSU title. She was also a recipient of the International Committee of the Red Cross Florence Nightingale Medal. She passed away on May 20, 1980.

MACHINE GUNNERS

Manshuk Mametova

This courageous machine gunner was the first Soviet Asian woman to become a Heroine in the Great Patriotic War. She was born in a steppe village in the Ural region of Kazakhstan, the daughter of a shoemaker. When she was five years old, her parents gave her to her aunt and uncle, who were childless.

During the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s, her adoptive father was arrested. He influenced her to become a physician and when the war broke out, Manshuk was a medical student studying in Alma-Ata, the republic's capital city. She also worked in the Secretariat of People's Commissars of the Kazakh SSR.

In August 1942, Mametova enlisted in the Army and initially worked as a clerk. Later, under the tutelage of an experienced gunner, she received machine gun training in the 21st Guards Rifle Division of the 3rd Shock Army. In competition with other gunners in the unit, the young Kazakh girl won top honors. The battalion commander was so



Sgt Manshuk Mametova in a 1943 photograph. She became more famous after her heroic death and was featured in poems, songs, and a movie.

impressed, he promoted her to senior sergeant and made her a leader of a machine gun crew.

In her first battle, Sr/Sgt Mametova showed off her skill. She allowed the enemy to come close, then proceeded to mow them down. Her name was frequently mentioned in the frontline newspapers for extraordinary skill and valor.

As a candidate member of the Communist Party, Mametova distinguished herself on October 15, 1943, in Nevel, an ancient town near the border of Belorussia. The Soviets had pushed the Germans out, but the enemy came back in a series of counterattacks. On a strategic hill, fierce fighting raged. When her machine gun crew was killed, Mametova carried on alone despite a barrage of mortar shells falling on her position. She was knocked out by a blast and badly wounded in the head, but regained consciousness, and moved her gun to another location.

The Germans charged up the hill, trying desperately to silence the deadly machine gun post with small arms fire and grenades, but they took heavy losses. Mametova kept firing, almost at point blank range, but there was no way to stop the assault by wave after wave of infantry. Her

body was discovered later after the Germans were thrown back.

Sr/Sgt Manshuk Mametova was awarded the title of Heroine of the Soviet Union on March 1, 1944. She is buried in Nevel where a monument is dedicated to her. She became the subject of many poems, stories, and songs. Even today, long after the end of the Great Patriotic War, her name is mentioned on the anniversary of Victory Day in her native Kazakhstan.

Nina Andreyevna Onilova

One of the two greatest female machine gunners in the Great Patriotic War was Nina Onilova. She was born in the village of Novonikolayevka in the Odessa region of Ukraine, and was orphaned aged 11. She was brought up in an orphanage and completed the seventh grade. As a teenager, she worked in a knitted goods factory and attended night classes.

Nina's entire focus on life changed when she saw the film *Chapayev*, a movie about the Civil War and a famous woman machine gunner named "Anka." The young girl decided that she would be the next Anka. She undertook machine gun training at the paramilitary club attached to the factory, and soon mastered it.

Onilova joined the Army in late 1941 after she was accepted as a field medic in the 54th Rifle Regiment. Fighting in the area of Odessa, she was able to demonstrate her gunnery skills. While treating the wounded, a nearby machine gun jammed, putting their position in great danger. She ran over, cleared the gun, and proceeded to mow down the enemy as they advanced. The crew had never seen anything



Sr/Sgt Nina Onilova was a young Komsomol member whose death inspired female medics to become machine gunners as she was. This photograph was taken in early 1942.

like this: Pvt Onilova now had her big chance. She was given the position of gunner of this crew and their exploits became legendary.

While fighting near Odessa in September, the young gunner was severely wounded by a mortar blast and she spent nearly two months in hospital. The doctors wanted to declare her an invalid, but Onilova was determined to get back to the battles and argued persistently with the medical board. The doctors grew weary and signed the release papers, allowing her to go back.

On November 21, 1941 near the village of Mekenziya, Onilova came face to face with a German tank. She crawled forward some 20m from her trench and threw two Molotov cocktails, setting the tank ablaze. This earned her the Order of the Red Banner from General I. Ye. Petrov and an instant promotion to sergeant. Despite the celebrity status, Nina remained shy and modest.

On February 28, 1942, during a night action around the village of Mekenziya, Sgt Onilova destroyed two enemy machine gun nests and stayed behind alone to cover the retreat of her comrades. She took a mortar blast in the chest and was mortally wounded. The young gunner, who lived up to her role model's reputation, died on March 8, 1942. Her story was told far and wide.

The death of this courageous woman inspired other female field medics to take up machine gun training. She became the new role model for many young women who wanted to follow in her footsteps. On May 14, 1965, Sr/Sgt Nina Onilova received the HSU title. She was interned at the Communards Cemetery near Sevastopol.

SNIPERS

Natalya Venediktovna Kovshova

Pvt Natalya Kovshova was one of the first two female snipers to earn the HSU title. She was born in Ufa, then the capital of the Bashkirian Autonomous Socialist Republic (now Bashkortostan) in the Urals region. Her family was caught up in the Civil War and was victimized by the White Guards. Her grandfather was killed and her mother, grandmother, and two aunts were imprisoned. After they were freed, they moved to Moscow where she was raised by her grandmother.

Young Natalya was a Komsomol member during high school. She received paramilitary training where she became an accomplished sharpshooter and later an instructor. When she graduated, she had aspirations of becoming an aviation engineer. She worked briefly at an aviation research institute and attended night school.

Kovshova's aviation career came to an end when the war began in June 1941, the same month she passed her entrance examination to the



ABOVE LEFT Pvt Natalya Kovshova in a photo taken in 1941. She started the sniper movement in her regiment and passed on her shooting skills to her comrades. Women made the best snipers because they could withstand more stress and cold weather than men and were more patient.

ABOVE RIGHT Sniper Pvt Mariya Polivanova teamed with her best friend Natalya Kovshova. After running out of ammunition they detonated grenades rather than surrender, taking some of the enemy with them.

Moscow Aviation Institute. She enlisted in the Army and trained in the use of light and heavy automatic weapons. Because of her sharpshooting skills, she was elevated to the position of sniper instructor. With the Communist Battalion of the Comintern District of Moscow, the young woman marched into battle on the North-Western Front.

As a sniper attached to the 528th Rifle Regiment of the 130th Rifle Division, Pvt Kovshova scored her first kill on February 21, 1942, when she shot a German sniper out of a tree. She organized the sniper movement in her regiment, patiently teaching her young pupils the fine points of handling the Moisin-Nagant 1891/30 rifle with a PE 4-power scope.

Kovshova eventually teamed up with Pvt Mariya Polivanova, another accomplished sniper. They had both received training at the Central Women's Sniper Academy and soon became best friends. The duo distinguished themselves between March 1–4, 1942, by picking off a German machine gun crew and killing dozens of infantrymen. Pvt Kovshova was wounded in the fierce fighting of May 20, 1942. Two weeks later, she was wounded again. Luckily, the wounds were not serious and she returned to duty.

On August 14, 1942, Pvt Kovshova was a member of a sniper unit near the village of Sutoky (now Parfinski District, Novgorod region). They tried to rout the Germans, but suffered disastrously during a series of enemy counterattacks. The platoon was cut off from the main group and surrounded. Kovshova and Polivanova fired on the enemy from a

A stamp was issued in July 1944 commemorating the heroic deaths of privates Natalya Kovshova and Mariya Polivanova. (Courtesy of Mahdi Bseiso)



trench until they ran out of ammunition. Death was their only option and they kissed each other farewell. They pulled the pins out of their grenades and waited. When their guns fell silent, the Germans cautiously crept forward. The two women detonated their grenades, taking some of the enemy with them.

The news of the valiant deaths of Kovshova and Polivanova spread far and wide, thanks to the report of a survivor. Both received the HSU title posthumously on February 14, 1943. The women were buried in the village of Korovitchino in Staraya Russa. At the time of their deaths, they had jointly scored over 300 kills.

Lyudmila Mikhailovna Pavlichenko

The greatest female sniper of all time was Lyudmila Pavlichenko. She was born in the village (now a town) of Belaya Tserkov (the name means “white church”) in the Kiev region, into the family of an office worker. Opinionated and independent, the gifted student finished the ninth grade in her hometown school before her family relocated to the capital city of Kiev. After she completed high school, Lyudmila worked as a grinder at an arsenal and joined a shooting club. She later joined a paramilitary organization where she learned to parachute and hang glide.

When war broke out, 24-year-old Pavlichenko, now a Kiev State University history student, volunteered to serve in the Army. At first, the recruiting officer eyed her with suspicion when she claimed that she was an expert markswomen. She proved it with a certificate of shooting proficiency. “I joined the Army at a time when women were not yet accepted,” she later recalled. “I had the option of becoming a nurse, but I refused.”

Pvt Pavlichenko was attached to the 25th Infantry Division “V.I. Chapayev” as a sniper and soon found herself in combat near Odessa in August 1941. She scored her first two kills near the village of Belyayevka when her unit was ordered to defend a hill. She fought for two and a half months in the region with the division and recorded 187 kills. She used the Tokarev SVT-40 semi-automatic rifle with a 3.5 telescopic sight.



Maj Lyudmila Pavlichenko in Naval uniform. Although she served in the Army, she worked for the Navy after the war. (Paul McDaniel)

The art of sniping took tremendous self-control and patience. Working in a two-person team, the frigid cold, biting insects, stress, hunger, and thirst constantly plagued them. However, worst of all, German snipers were also lying in wait for them.

When the Germans gained control of Odessa, the Independent Maritime Army was pulled out and sent to Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula of the Black Sea. In the fierce fighting, Pavlichenko was wounded by mortar shells in June 1942. With a record score of 309 kills, her sniping skills were invaluable. She was ordered to board a submarine and evacuate Sevastopol.

The Soviet High Command saw the propaganda value of Lt Lyudmila Pavlichenko and she was sent on motivational and fund raising tours. In August 1942, she was received by President and Eleanor Roosevelt at the White House in Washington, DC. Afterwards, she toured various American cities and Canada. The

Winchester Firearms Co. presented her with a specially engraved rifle.

The HSU title was bestowed upon Maj Lyudmila Pavlichenko on October 25, 1943. She never returned to the fighting and helped train hundreds of snipers until war's end.

After the hostilities, Pavlichenko returned to Kiev State University to continue where she had left off. She graduated in late 1945 and went straight to work as a research assistant for the Soviet Navy Headquarters. She continued to be a popular role model and speaker for Soviet youth and was also very active in veterans' affairs.

Pavlichenko never showed remorse for the men she killed and stated that it was all in the line of duty. She died on October 10, 1974, aged 58 and is buried at the Novodevichiye Cemetery in Moscow.



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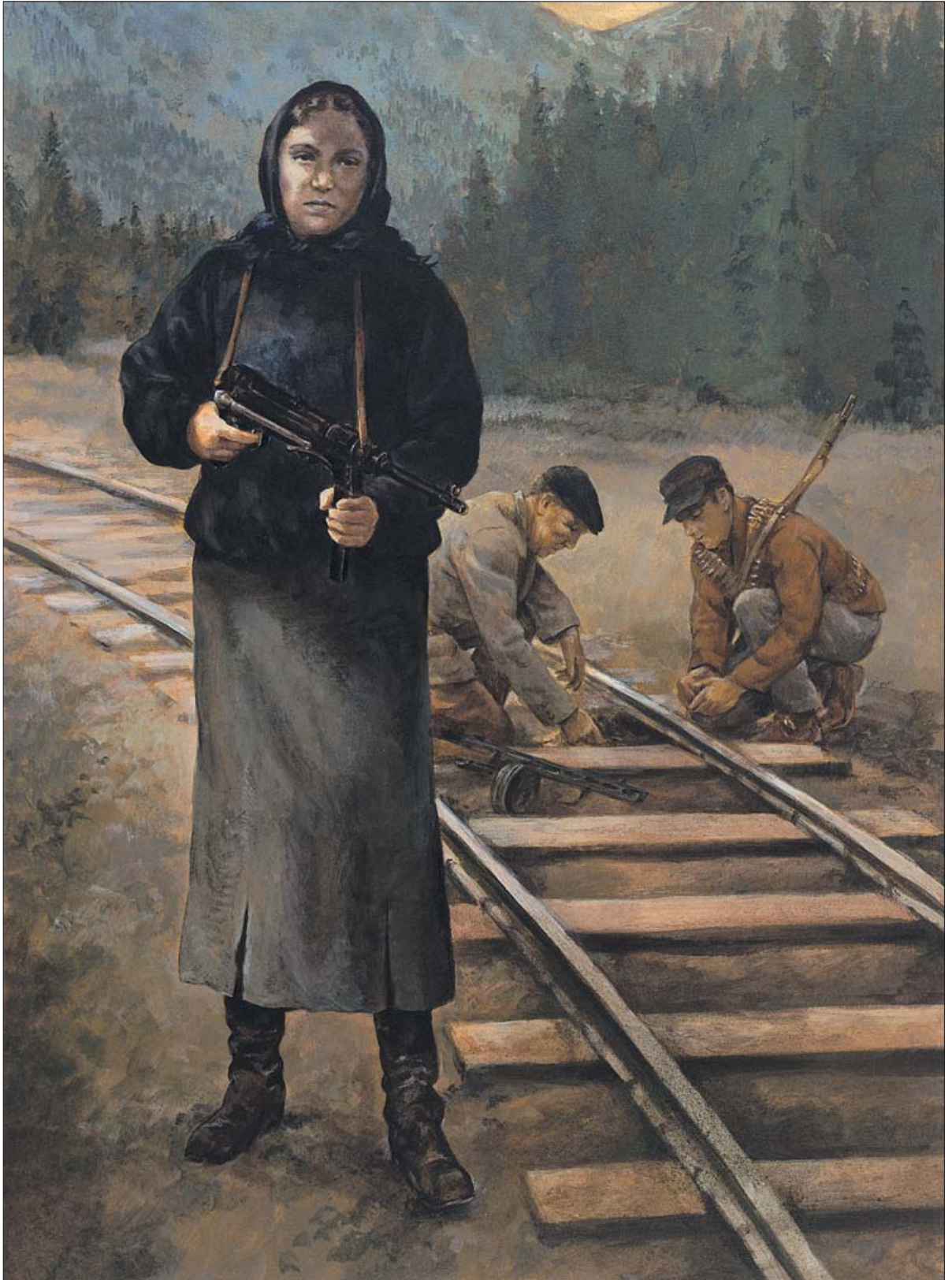
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The Gold Star Medal and the Order of Lenin

A



B Partisan Mariya Melnikaite, Northeast Lithuania, July 1943



"Night Witch" Mariya Smirnova, 46th *Taman* Guards Night Bomber Regiment, May 1944



D

Sniper Lyudmila Pavlichenko, Pskov region, winter 1943



Machine gunner Manshuk Mametova, Nevel area, October 1943



F Tank driver Mariya Oktyabrskaya, Vitebsk region, January 1944



Field medic Mariya Borovichenko, Battle of Kursk, July 1943



H Fighter ace Lydia Litvyak, Kotelnikov, March 1943

RECONNAISSANCE SCOUT

Nina Timofeyevna Gnilitskaya

Nina Timofeyevna Gnilitskaya was born in the Donetsk region of Eastern Ukraine, the daughter of a coalminer. Because of their poverty, she entered the mines aged 16 as a laborer to help support the family.

When the war broke out, young Nina tried to join the Army but was turned away. Gnilitskaya had to prove herself before she could join. When fierce fighting broke out near Knyaginevka, her home village, Soviet forces withdrew from the area and the Germans moved in. A scout became lost and sought refuge in the village: Gnilitskaya took him in, and disguised him as her husband. When the enemy passed through, she guided the scout back to his unit. Because she knew the area so well, she was allowed to join the special reconnaissance company of the 383rd Rifle Division.

Gathering intelligence information was generally a crude and simple procedure. Many times, it consisted of capturing enemy soldiers and torturing them. In November 1941, an order was issued by the divisional command to bring back some prisoners for interrogation. Pvt Gnilitskaya led a party of scouts on the night of November 5 into occupied territory.

They killed about a dozen enemy soldiers with two grenades thrown into a house. They brought back valuable documents, weapons, and a prisoner. At the end of November, she led a scouting party back to her village and quickly dispatched about a dozen enemy soldiers at night.

Knyaginevka became a strategic target because of its proximity to Krasny Luch, a much larger town in the coalfields. A plan was hatched to send a reconnaissance team to attack the enemy headquarters there. Once this was completed, the 383rd Rifle Division would rush in to take the town. Pvt Gnilitskaya was part of the group of 16



Pvt Nina Gnilitskaya appears on a post-war trading card. She had no formal military training and learned partisan skills "on the job."



A bronze bust was erected in honor of Nina Gnilitskaya in the town park located in Krasny Luch, Ukraine. (A. Lebedev)

BELOW LEFT Jr/Lt Mariya Batrakova. Note the five gold horizontal wound stripes, introduced in July 1942, on the left of her chest next to her Order of the Red Star. She was wounded 10 times and the gold stripes indicate serious wounds (red was for less serious). On the left of her chest she wears the Gold Star Medal, the Order of Lenin, and the Medal for Bravery. Her beret is part of the formal female dress uniform.

BELOW RIGHT Sr/Lt Anna Nikandrova. Political officers were always expected to lead by example. On June 23, 1944, when her unit became pinned down by fierce enemy fire, she yelled "Follow me!" and rushed forward. Her men rallied behind her and stormed the enemy trenches. She was killed while attempting to throw a grenade at a machine gun nest, and became a Heroine on March 24, 1945.

scouts that made their way to the objective on the night of December 9, 1941. While hiding in a house, they were detected by German war dogs around 0140 on the morning of the 10th and a skirmish followed. Only one scout managed to survive and he later gave an account of how they died. Gnilitskaya fought to the end and lay mortally wounded. She tried to take her life, but was unsuccessful. The Germans bayoneted the dying woman and then threw her body onto a fire.

On March 31, 1943, Pvt Nina Gnilitskaya received the HSU title. She is buried in the village of Vakhrushevo in a communal grave.

POLITICAL OFFICER

Mariya Stepanovna Batrakova

Mariya Batrakova went through the dress rehearsal of the Great Patriotic War by participating in the Russo–Finnish War of 1939–40. She was born in Leningrad and graduated from high school, where she completed a two-year Red Cross training program. When the war with Finland started, she volunteered and served as a field medic with the 118th Rifle Division in Karelia.

Before the Great Patriotic War broke out, Batrakova was in medical school in Leningrad. Upon news of the German invasion, she went to war again as a field medic, now attached to the 33rd Independent Ski Brigade. She served in the battles at Leningrad and was seriously wounded in February 1942. After discharge from hospital, she became a scout and soon undertook dangerous missions with her male comrades.



Besides being a scout and a field medic, Batrakova was also employed as a spy, thanks to her fluent German. She lived with a German family and passed secret information to the partisans. Eventually, she was arrested and tortured. When Soviet troops entered the village, she was rescued and sent to a hospital.

Batrakova was appointed the Komsomol organizer in her unit. As the political officer and a candidate member of the Communist Party, it was her duty to inspire her comrades, recruit new members, and lead by example. She lived up to expectation. On August 30, 1943, during fierce fighting around Rostov, she volunteered for a tank assault. The commander was wounded and political officer Batrakova took over. The assault became stalled due to fierce resistance and her comrades sought cover. Despite the hail of gunfire, she jumped aboard a tank and ordered a charge. The daredevil display of heroism inspired the 22 surviving members of her company to rally and rout the enemy.

A month later, on September 30, Jr/Lt Batrakova distinguished herself in action again. After crossing the River Molochnaya under murderous enemy fire, her unit landed and scaled the sides of a deep anti-tank ditch. Her commander was shot off the ladder and she took over. With pistol in hand, she ordered her men to charge forward and inspired the battalion to perform heroic deeds. They withstood counterattacks by enemy tanks and dive-bombers. When reinforcements arrived five days later, there were only 23 survivors. Batrakova was wounded twice and was sent to Moscow to recover in hospital.

On March 19, 1944, Jr/Lt Mariya Batrakova received the Gold Star Medal and the Order of Lenin from the hands of President Kalinin. Because of her injuries, she could not return to the front and worked in promoting Komsomol affairs. After the war, she went into the reserves, married, and lectured about her experiences.

TANK DRIVERS

Irina Nikolayevna Levchenko

Irina Levchenko was one of only two tank Heroines from the Great Patriotic War. If this woman were to be described with one word, then that word would be “tenacious.” She forced her way into the tank corps when it was an all-male service and proved herself beyond doubt. She was born in the Voroshilovgrad region of Ukraine. Her father, an electrician who was a deputy minister of Transportation in Stalin’s regime, was executed during the infamous purges in the late 1930s.

As soon as the war started, Levchenko worked with the local Soviet Red Cross helping civilians. She served as a field medic with the 744th Rifle Regiment. By May 1942, she had distinguished herself by treating and removing 168 wounded soldiers from the battlefield.

Irina Levchenko wears the collar tabs of a master sergeant. Her sheer persistence helped break the gender barrier for other women who wanted to join the tank corps. She retired from service as a lieutenant colonel.



Having seen tanks in combat at first hand, Levchenko decided that she wanted to be a tank driver. This was not an easy task for her. Through sheer persistence and by refusing to take “no” for an answer, she convinced a general of a tank regiment to send her to the 39th Tank Brigade. She was wounded in the right arm during a battle in the Crimea and was subsequently discharged as an invalid. However, she rejected the discharge and was determined to carry on fighting.

In Moscow, Levchenko impressed many people with her burning desire to get back to the war. She finally cornered Lt/Gen Y. N. Fedorenko, commander of Armored Troops, and pleaded her case. When the general politely refused, she burst into tears and wouldn’t stop crying until he finally gave in. He told her that she had to pass a medical fitness test. The medical examiner failed the candidate, but he later passed her after a “friendly” discussion with the general. She was at last back in tank school.

In 1943, Levchenko finished the accelerated course of the Stalingrad Tank School and served as a communication officer with the 41st Tank Brigade. Her right arm still gave her trouble, but it did not stop her from participating in tank battles around Smolensk. Her tank was hit and she was wounded, but she recovered after a brief hospital stay. She fought on the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts and nearly reached Berlin when the war ended.

Levchenko became an engineer of tank troops and retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel. She bears the distinction of being the first Soviet woman to receive the prestigious Florence Nightingale Medal for her deeds as a field medic. On May 6, 1965, this extraordinary woman finally received the HSU title. She passed away on January 18, 1973.

A Soviet T-34 Model 41/42 tank prepares for battle. The crew is loading shells through the driver's hatch. (Paul McDaniel)



Mariya Oktyabrskaya

Mariya Oktyabrskaya was the first female tank driver to become a Heroine. She was born in the Crimean region of the Ukraine, one of ten children in a peasant family. After completing secondary school, she worked in a cannery, and later as a telephone operator. When she married in 1925, she and her husband changed their names in honor of the October Revolution, and she became Mariya Oktyabrskaya. Her husband was a military officer and they lived on various bases.

Not content with being an officer's wife, Oktyabrskaya took interest in her husband's trade and learned how to drive and use firearms, and she also took up nursing. All this was in addition to involvement with the military wives' councils.

At the start of the Great Patriotic War, Oktyabrskaya was sent to Tomsk in Siberia far away from the fighting. Two years later, she was notified that her husband had been killed in Kiev back in August 1941. Filled with anger and a desire for revenge, she sold all of her possessions to raise money to donate a tank to the military. The only stipulation was that she would be its driver! The State Committee of Defense realized the publicity that could be derived from this, and the request was granted. She completed five months of tank training and was posted to the 26th Guards Tank Brigade in September 1943 as a mechanic/driver.

When 38-year-old Mariya Oktyabrskaya showed up in her T-34 in the Smolensk area with the words "Fighting Girlfriend" painted on the turret, many of her comrades were skeptical. They viewed her as a joke. However, scorn turned to respect on October 21, 1943, when she participated in her first tank battle. With the deputy of her brigade, a lieutenant colonel, riding as an observer, Oktyabrskaya's tank was the first to breach the enemy positions. She maneuvered the tank like a veteran, destroying several artillery pieces and machine gun nests. Her rampage caused havoc amongst the enemy.

During a night action on November 17–18, the Soviets captured the town of Novoye Selo in the Vitebsk region. Once again, the fearless tank driver distinguished herself. Rushing into the German defenses, a shell exploded in their tracks, stopping them dead. Oktyabrskaya and another crewmen jumped out to repair the tracks while gunners inside the tank kept up steady fire. They returned to their unit two days later.

On January 17, 1944, during another night action, Oktyabrskaya drove her tank into the enemy's fortified positions, plowing over dugouts and machine gun nests, and knocking out a self-propelled gun. An anti-tank gunner scored a hit on the tank's track. Oktyabrskaya was told to stay inside the tank, but she disobeyed orders and jumped out to help the two others repair the broken links. They came under intense fire and



Guards Sr/Sgt Mariya Oktyabrskaya entered the war as a 38-year-old tank driver.



Vera Khoruzhaya in a prewar photo. Civilians in the resistance movement rarely received the HSU because their identities and accomplishments were cloaked in secrecy.

A stamp was issued in 1964 to commemorate the contributions of Vera Khoruzhaya.



she was struck in the head by shrapnel and knocked unconscious.

Guards Sr/Sgt Mariya Oktyabrskaya remained in a coma for almost two months, and died on March 15, 1944. For her many acts of valor, she was awarded the HSU title on August 2, 1944.

RESISTANCE FIGHTERS

Vera Zakharovna Khoruzhaya

Vera Khoruzhaya, a veteran of the Civil War, was the first member of the Communist Party to become a Heroine. She was born in the city of Bobruysk in the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. A teacher by profession, she joined the Communist Party in 1921 and became an organizer and a political activist. With a flair for writing, she became editor of a youth newspaper, and held the position of secretary of the Central Komsomol Committee of West Belorussia.

As a dedicated Communist, Khoruzhaya went to Poland under an assumed name to organize and recruit new members. However, the Polish authorities arrested her on September 15, 1925, and gave her a long prison sentence. In 1932, she was released due to a prisoner exchange between Poland and the Soviet Union. Up until the start of the Great Patriotic War, she was occupied with political work. Starting in 1935, she worked in

Kazakhstan and did social work on behalf of the Communists. Although a dedicated and loyal Party member, she became a victim of Stalin's purges, and was arrested in 1937 and imprisoned for two years.

Khoruzhaya joined the resistance when the war broke out. On July 4, 1941, her husband was killed; she was six months pregnant. After giving birth, she returned to her duties and went to Vitebsk to carry out intelligence gathering on the location of enemy supply and ammunition depots, headquarters, and the disposition of aircraft on the airfields. This allowed the Soviet Air Force to accurately bomb these targets. Khoruzhaya's network also helped free people bound for labor camps in Germany. She established safe houses in the city and ran a vast spy network.

On November 13, 1942, Khoruzhaya was arrested along with a number of individuals and underwent torture. She was believed executed on December 4, 1942.

Vera Khoruzhaya received the Order of the Red Banner posthumously by recommendation from the Communist Party of Belorussia. While the award was not insignificant, it did not measure the enormous value of her resistance work. This was finally recognized on May 17, 1960, when she received the HSU title.

Yelena Fedorovna Kolesova

Although Yelena Kolesova fought for less than a year, she was responsible for massive destruction of enemy property and lives. So efficient was she that the Germans believed her small band of female saboteurs was over 600 strong. She was born in the village of Kolesovo in the Yaroslavl region north of Moscow in a peasant family. She lost her father when she was about two and went to Moscow to live with her aunt.

At the start of the war, Kolesova was a school-teacher in a grammar school in Moscow. Rejected initially for the military, she volunteered to help construct defenses around the city. She did hard manual labor until October, when she was selected for a special partisan detachment, Unit No. 9903. Because of the rapid enemy advance toward Moscow, Kolesova was given a three-day crash course in sabotage and immediately sent on assignment.

Kolesova's first mission almost ended in tragedy. In a group of four men and three women, the men proved a hindrance by bickering amongst themselves. Since the men showed no initiative, she took charge and ordered them back. The women planted mines on the roads around Staraya and Novaya Russa and collected information on enemy troop strength and movements. Disguised as local women, Kolesova and one of her comrades were taken into custody while crossing a bridge. Their regulation Soviet Army boots did not go with peasant dresses. During the prisoner transfer to Novaya Russa, the two managed to escape, and made their way back with valuable information.

Kolesova became the leader of a small group of women saboteurs and carried out diversions in the Borisov and Krupsk regions of Minsk Province. They demolished a bridge, dynamited railroad tracks, derailed 11 trains, and destroyed numerous vehicles, supply depots, and buildings. Team members, disguised as local girls looking for fun, lured lonely officers and soldiers to secluded areas where they were killed. Kolesova



Yelena Kolesova in an October 1941 *Spetsnaz* (Units for Special Missions) graduation photo.

also taught civilians how to use explosives. The Germans were convinced that hundreds of partisans were involved in this clandestine warfare, when in fact, Kolesova's "army" was no more than a small group.

Yelena Kolesova was killed in action on September 11, 1942, while charging a machine gun nest in the village of Vydritsa in the Krupsk region. Her dying wish was that she be buried with the four members of her sabotage team who had been killed previously. After the war, all five women were reburied together with full military honors in the town of Krupki. She received the HSU title on November 21, 1944.

Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya

Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya was to the Soviets during the Great Patriotic War what American spy Nathan Hale was to the colonists during the Revolution. The 18-year-old Komsomol member with the unforgettable name (Zoya means "life" in Greek, and Kosma and Demyan were the names of two saints) also died by a hangman's noose.

Kosmodemyanskaya was born in the village of Osino-Gai of the Tambov region. Both of her parents were teachers. In 1930, her family moved to Moscow where the young teenager finished nine grades at School No.201. In 1938, she became a member of the Komsomol.

In October 1941, Zoya joined a special partisan detachment (*Spetsnaz* No.9903), which operated in the Mozhaisk area on the Western Front. On her first mission behind enemy lines in November, her unit destroyed telephone lines and engaged in reconnaissance.

In her second sabotage mission around the end of November, Zoya and her comrades again cut telephone lines and burned enemy-occupied peasant houses. In the village of Petrishchevo (in the Ruza area of the Moscow region), she was caught by a German sentry in the act of burning down a stable, which she had mistaken for a storehouse.

Kosmodemyanskaya was brutally interrogated. She was beaten and whipped, but still refused to talk. The order was issued to publicly execute her.

She was led to the gallows with a sign around her neck. A large crowd of villagers was forced to watch. As the noose was placed around her neck, she yelled to the citizens to fight the enemy. "You can't hang all 190 million of us!" she shouted at the Germans. With those words, she died, on November 29, 1941. Her body hung on the rope until permission was given to take her down for burial on January 1, 1942.

The HSU title was bestowed upon Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya on February 16, 1942, the first woman to receive the honor in the Great Patriotic War. Her unselfish devotion to the Motherland and her courage became an inspiration to the people. She was later reburied with honors in the Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow.



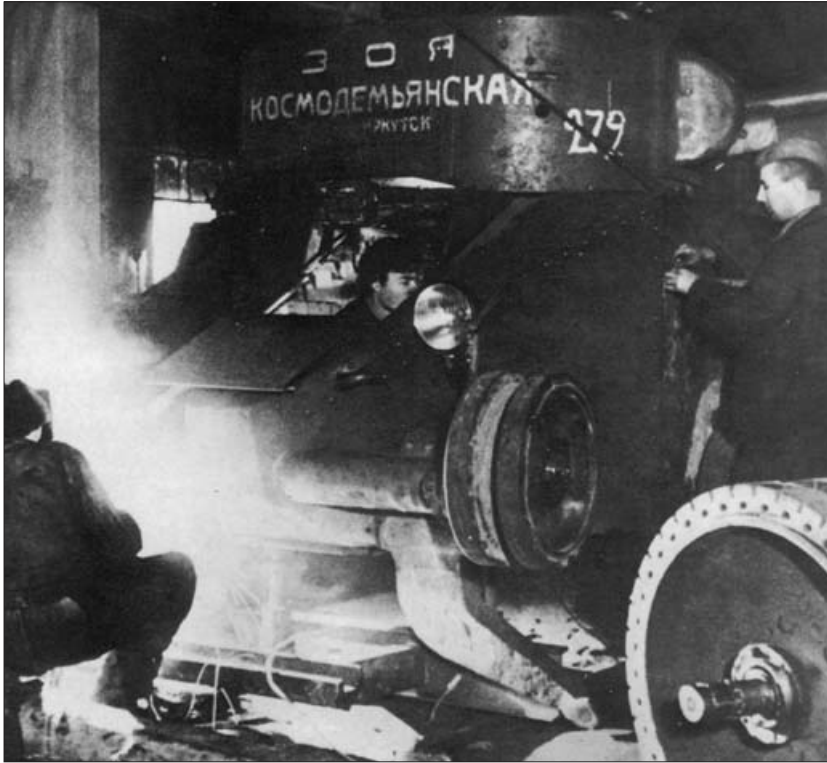
Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya in a prewar high school era photograph. She became the first female HSU of the Great Patriotic War.



The Soviet post office issued this stamp commemorating Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya.



As she was about to be hanged, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya defiantly exhorted the citizens to fight the Germans. She wears a sign around her neck which reads "I burned a stable."



The death of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya galvanized the nation. Workers at a tank factory in Irkutsk have painted her name on the turret.

BELOW LEFT **Nadezhda Troyan** was a partisan saboteur. She brought Yelena Mazanik into the assassination conspiracy.

BELOW RIGHT **Mariya Osipova** was a lawyer and member of the Belorussian Supreme Court. She received orders to kill Wilhelm Kube and supplied Yelena Mazanik with a time bomb.



Yelena Gregoryevna Mazanik

Yelena Mazanik achieved fame for being part of the assassination team that rid Belorussia of one of Hitler's henchmen. Of peasant stock, her father died when she was only four years old, which added to the family's extreme poverty. Her schooling ended with the sixth grade. Aged 14, she moved to Minsk to seek a job as a domestic worker; she became a housekeeper in a holiday rest home. In 1938, she married a man whom she met there.

When the Germans occupied Minsk, Mazanik found employment as a kitchen helper in a German officers' mess. In the summer of 1942, the partisans had singled out Wilhelm Kube, the Nazi Commissar of Belorussia, for assassination. Through hard work and under false pretenses, she gained access to the Kube household as a maid. There had been many unsuccessful attempts on Kube's life, but Mazanik's position as an insider assured the resistance movement of a very good chance at completing their goal. She was ordered to place a time bomb in his bedroom.

On September 22, 1943, Mazanik was given a magnetic high explosive bomb about the size of a cigarette pack. She smuggled the device into the house in a basket of berries and went straight to the toilet. "I was shaking like a leaf!" she later recounted. "I had an open front dress, so I placed the bomb under my breast in my undergarment. The duty officer was in the small corridor, acting as guard. I went up to him and said 'Bet you haven't managed to get a cup of coffee today, dear officer. Go downstairs and someone in the kitchen will give you a cup.'" She had told the cook earlier that the guard was her boyfriend.

When the guard left his post, Mazanik raced into the bedroom. There were two beds in the room. She determined that Kube's bed was the one closest to the door. "I quickly squatted down by the bed and placed the bomb between the mattress and the springs," she explained. Then she sat on the bed and bounced up and down to make sure that it was secure. The bomb was set to explode after midnight. Mazanik continued to do her chores. That night, she, her sister, and another operative were whisked out of town on a truck. The bomb detonated and Wilhelm Kube was killed. His wife, who slept in her own bed, was uninjured. In retaliation, over 1,000 Minsk citizens were executed.

Mazanik and two other conspirators were flown immediately to Moscow. On October 29, 1943, they were each awarded the HSU title, presented personally by a grateful President Kalinin.

In 1948, Mazanik graduated from the High Republican Party School attached to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belorussia. From 1952 until 1960, she was employed as an assistant director of the main library of the Academy of Sciences.

"If I had the strength, I would do it all over again for my country!" she once said. "Nothing could have stopped me. I was present at some of Kube's banquets, held in honor of the bandit leaders who carried out extermination and

Yelena Mazanik in a 1960s official portrait. After receiving her HSU, she was "retired" from further underground activities for her protection.





Mariya Melnikaite in a prewar photograph. Touted as a great Soviet Heroine, her name and deeds have faded into obscurity in Lithuania with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

destroyed entire villages. When they got together and drank, Kube used to say things like ‘I have to admit that Hans has done very well ... No one got away. He burned everyone in the village. But Fritz didn’t do so well this time because a few people slipped through the net.’ So, tell me, what can you feel about people like that? You just want to kill them; kill them like mad dogs. It’s the only country we had, the land where we were born.”

Mariya Melnikaite

Mariya Melnikaite was the only Lithuanian female to become a Heroine. She was born in the town of Zarasai in Eastern Lithuania. Due to extreme poverty, as a girl she worked as a shepherdess for the area farmers and started school late. She later worked at a confectionery factory during the day and took educational courses at night.

Melnikaite was a dedicated Komsomol member who favored the Communist annexation of her home country in 1940. When the war started, she was evacuated to Tyumen in Siberia where she worked in a munitions plant.

In 1943, Melnikaite returned to her hometown after completing a partisan training course. As Secretary of the Zarasai District Komsomol

resistance group, she distributed propaganda leaflets and recruited new members. The underground effort grew and caused the enemy many problems. Trains were derailed, telephone lines were cut, and the army of occupation was attacked. In time, Melnikaite became a local legend who was always one step ahead of the enemy.

On July 7, 1943, Melnikaite and five members of her group derailed an enemy troop train and hid in a birch grove. They were betrayed by a farmer who reported them to the local police. Soon, German troops arrived and laid siege. They were all killed except for Melnikaite, who was badly wounded and taken prisoner.

On July 13, Melnikaite was forced to walk to the local cemetery where she was to be hanged. The enemy’s effort to make her talk had failed despite cruel torture. As she was shoved forward towards the gallows, she turned and threw herself on the German officer in her last act of defiance. He shot and killed her.

On March 22, 1944, Mariya Melnikaite became a Heroine of the Soviet Union. Schools, streets, and Young Pioneer squads were named after her, and songs and poems were written about her many deeds.

Zinaida Martynovna Portnova

Zinaida Portnova was the youngest female Heroine of the Great Patriotic War. She was born in Leningrad in a working-class family. Having completed seven grades of school, she and her sister were visiting an aunt in the Vitebsk region when the Germans invaded. Unable to return home, she had no choice but to stay behind and live under enemy occupation.

The harshness of the enemy filled this 15-year-old Komsomol member with hate. She witnessed their brutality when soldiers came onto her grandmother's property to confiscate her cow; when the old woman protested, a soldier struck her. In 1942, the teenager was persuaded to join the resistance movement called "The Young Avengers" led by Yefrosinya Zenkova. She started her underground career by collecting and hiding weapons left by Soviet troops, distributing leaflets, and reporting on enemy troop movements. The older partisans taught her how to use explosives and weapons. She participated in the destruction of the local power plant and pump house.

Portnova went to Obol in 1943 and found employment as a kitchen aid. This was a major town and an enemy garrison was stationed there. One day in August, many of the soldiers became ill from food poisoning and some died. She had poisoned the food and was immediately suspected. She protested her innocence and sampled a small portion with no immediate ill effects. Released from questioning, she made her way to her grandmother's house but fell violently ill along the way. To neutralize the poison, she was given large amounts of whey to drink. She vomited and eventually rid herself of the toxic substance. When she did not return to work, the Germans and the local police went looking for her.

The young Komsomol member could not go back to Obol so she became a reconnaissance scout because of her familiarity with the area. She joined in attacking the punitive patrols sent out after them, and engaged in many acts of sabotage.

In January 1944, Portnova was ordered to go back to the Obol area to establish contact with another partisan group. As a fugitive with a recognizable face, she was quickly picked up by the local police and turned over to the Germans. Well knowing what her fate would be, she had no other option than to escape at all costs. When an officer led her into a room for questioning, she grabbed a pistol off a table and shot him dead. When another officer and a guard rushed in, she killed them too. She fled the building and ran into the woods.

Portnova was caught on the banks of a river and brought back to the village of Goryany where she was brutally tortured and blinded. Shortly afterwards, she was thrown aboard a truck and driven into the forest where she was shot.

On July 1, 1958, along with partisan leader Yefrosinya Zenkova, Zinaida Portnova received the HSU title. There is a monument dedicated to her in the city of Minsk and many Pioneer detachments were named after her.



Zinaida Portnova was one of the most celebrated "Child Heroes" of the Great Patriotic War. This photograph was taken when she was 14 years old.

COMPLETE LIST OF HEROINES OF THE SOVIET UNION

Aircrew

<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Date awarded the HSU</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Guards Maj Raisa Yermolayevna Aronova (10/1/20–20/12/82)	Russian	15/5/46	Flew 960 night missions as navigator and pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Lt Vera Lukyanovna Belik (5/8/21–25/8/44)	Ukrainian	23/2/45*	Killed on her 813th night mission as navigator in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Maj Marina Pavlovna Chechneva (15/8/22–12/1/84)	Russian	15/8/46	Flew 810 night missions as pilot and squadron leader in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Maj Mariya Ivanovna Dolina (18/12/22–)	Ukrainian	18/8/45	Flew 72 daylight missions as pilot in a Pe-2 medium bomber
Guards Maj Galina Ivanovna Dzhunkovskaya (6/10/22–12/9/85)	Ukrainian	18/8/45	Flew 69 daylight missions as navigator in a Pe-2 medium bomber
Guards Maj Nadezhda Nikiforovna Fedutenko (30/9/15–28/1/78)	Russian	18/8/45	Squadron commander, flew 56 daylight missions as pilot in a Pe-2 by December 1944
Guards L/Col Klavdiya Yakolevna Fomicheva (25/12/17–5/10/58)	Russian	18/8/45	Highest scoring Pe-2 bomber pilot ace with 11 victories
Guards Maj Rufina Sergeyevna Gasheva (14/10/21–)	Russian	23/2/45	Flew 848 night missions as navigator in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Maj Polina Vladimirovna Gelman (24/10/19–)	Jewish	15/5/46	Flew 860 night missions as navigator in a U-2/Po-2
Col Valentina Stepanovna Grizodubova (18/1/10–28/4/93)	Russian	2/11/38	Prewar aviatrix, set world record in the twin-engined plane <i>Rodina</i> with two others. Flew 200 missions in the war as CO of long-range bomber regiment
Sr/Lt Tamara Fedorovna Konstantinova (7/11/19–)	Russian	29/6/45	Flew 66 daylight missions as pilot in an IL-2 Sturmovik dive-bomber by March 1945.
Guards Sr/Lt Antonina Fedorovna Khudyakova (20/6/17–)	Russian	15/5/46	Flew 926 night missions as deputy squadron leader and pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Capt Larissa Nikolayevna Litvinova (6/12/18–5/10/97)	Ukrainian	23/2/45	Flew 816 night missions as navigator and pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Sr/Lt Lydia Litvyak (18/8/21–1/8/43)	Russian	5/5/90*	Most famous female ace and first to shoot down an enemy aircraft. Achieved 12 victories, 4 shared and one observation balloon, flying Yaks
Guards Lt Tatyana Petrovna Makarova (25/11/20–25/8/44)	Russian	23/2/45*	Killed in action on her 628th night mission as pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Maj Natalya Fedorovna Meklin (8/9/22–)	Russian	23/2/45	Flew 982 night missions as pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Maj Yevdokiya Andreyevna Nikulina (8/11/17–?)	Russian	26/10/44	Flew 774 night missions as pilot in a U-2/Po-2. She was murdered for her medals in a burglary
Guards Sr/Lt Yevdokiya Nosal (13/3/18–23/4/43)	Ukrainian	24/5/43*	Killed in action on her 354th night mission as pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Maj Polina Denisovna Osipenko (8/10/07–11/5/39)	Ukrainian	2/11/38	Prewar aviatrix, set world record as co-pilot of the <i>Rodina</i> . Killed while conducting a test flight
Guards Sr/Lt Zoya Ivanovna Parfenova (23/6/20–)	Russian	18/8/45	Flew 739 night missions as pilot and deputy squadron commander in a U-2/Po-2
Sr/Lt Yevdokiya Borisovna Pasko (30/12/19–)	Ukrainian	26/10/44	Flew 780 night missions by September 1944 as navigator in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Capt Nadezhda Anastasiya Popova (17/12/21–)	Russian	23/2/45	Flew 852 night missions as pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Maj Marina Mikhailovna Raskova (28/3/12–4/1/43)	Russian	2/11/38	Prewar aviatrix, navigator aboard the <i>Rodina</i> , and founder of the women's flight regiments. Killed in air crash
Guards Sr/Lt Nina Maksimovna Raspopova (1/12/13–)	Russian	15/5/46	Flew 805 night missions as pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Sr/Lt Yevgeniya Maksimovna Rudneva (24/12/20–9/4/44)	Ukrainian	26/10/44*	Killed on her 645th night mission as navigator in a U-2/Po-2

<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Date awarded the HSU</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Guards Sr/Lt Yekaterina Vasilyevna Ryabova (14/7/21–12/9/74)	Russian	23/2/45	Flew 860 night missions as navigator in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Sr/Lt Irina Fedorovna Sebrova (25/12/14–5/4/00)	Russian	23/2/45	Flew 1,008 night and 92 daylight missions as pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Maj Mariya Vasilevna Smirnova (31/3/20–)	Karelian	26/10/44	Flew 935 night missions as pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Sr/Lt Maguba Guseynovna Syrtlanova (15/7/12–1/10/71)	Tartar	15/5/46	Flew 780 night missions as pilot and deputy squadron leader in a U-2/Po-2
Sr/Lt Anna Aleksandrovna Timofeyeva (23/9/18–)	Russian	6/5/65	Flew 243 daylight missions as pilot of an IL-2 dive-bomber; shot down and captured. Liberated 31/1/45 by Soviet troops
Guards Lt Nina Zakharovna Ulyanenko (17/12/23–)	Russian	18/8/45	Flew 815 night missions as navigator and pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Guards Maj Yevgeniya Andreyevna Zhigulenko (1/12/20–27/2/94)	Russian	23/2/45	Flew 968 night missions as pilot in a U-2/Po-2
Sr/Lt Yekaterina Ivanovna Zelenko (13/2/16–12/9/41)	Russian	5/5/90*	Killed ramming a Me 109 in her Sukhoi Su-2 single-engined bomber, the first and only woman to intentionally ram an enemy aircraft
Guards Capt Antonina Leontyevna Zubkova (12/10/20–13/11/50)	Russian	18/8/45	Flew 68 daylight missions as a navigator in a Pe-2 medium bomber.

Reconnaissance scout

<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Date awarded the HSU</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Pvt Nina Timofeyevna Gnilitskaya (1/8/16–10/12/41)	Russian	31/3/43*	Led many scouting missions. Fought to the end in a firefight with the Germans after her group was discovered hiding in a house by war dogs

Political officers

<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Date awarded the HSU</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Jr/Lt Mariya Stepanovna Batrakova (21/11/22–)	Russian	19/3/44	When a tank assault bogged down, she jumped aboard a tank under a hail of enemy fire and ordered a successful charge into the trenches. Led another charge and successfully maintained a bridgehead
Sr/Lt Anna Alekseyevna Nikandrova (13/10/21–23/6/44)	Russian	24/3/45*	Led many charges against the enemy. In her last battle she was killed while crawling towards an enemy machine gun nest to

Field medics

<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Date awarded the HSU</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Sr/Sgt Mariya Karpovna Baida (1/2/22–9/02)	Russian	20/6/42	throw a grenade Killed 15 Germans and rescued her commanding officer and eight comrades, captured a machine gun nest
Sr/Sgt Mariya Sergeyevna Borovichenko (21/10/25–14/7/43)	Ukrainian	6/5/65*	Rescued battalion commander from capture, took many German prisoners, prevented enemy from crossing a bridge over the River Seym, knocked out an enemy tank with anti-tank grenade and saved a wounded officer
Sr/Sgt Valeriya Osipovna Gnarovskaya (18/10/23–23/9/43)	Russian	3/6/44*	Killed 28 Germans in one battle with a submachine gun, threw herself underneath a Tiger tank and destroyed it with a satchel of anti-tank grenades
Sr/Lt Vera Sergeyevna Kashcheyeva (15/9/22–20/5/75)	Russian	28/2/44	Crossed the Dnieper in an advance assault force, treated the wounded and fought to keep a bridgehead. One of only five survivors
Sr/Sgt Kseniya Semenovna Konstantinova (18/3/25–1/10/43)	Russian	4/6/44*	Defended the wounded against a German assault. She was captured and shot
Sr/Sgt Lyudmila Stepanovna Kravets	Ukrainian	31/5/45	Pulled a wounded crewman from a burning tank, took the place

(7/2/22–)

of her commander who was killed, and rallied her men forward

Heroine	Nationality	Date awarded the HSU	Comments
Sr/Sgt Zinaida Ivanovna Mareseva (20/6/23–6/8/43)	Russian	22/2/44*	First three days in August 1943, treated 64 wounded men, charged the enemy with pistol in hand and rallied the troops. Shielded wounded comrade with her body during mortar attack, was hit and died three days later
CPO Yekaterina Mikhaylova-Demina (1925–)	Russian	5/5/90	Naval Infantry, single-handedly stormed an enemy position and took 14 prisoners. Saved seven wounded men from drowning during battle
CPO Galina Konstantinovna Petrova (1920–8/12/43)	Russian	17/11/43*	Naval Infantry, treated many wounded men and fought to maintain a beachhead on the Kerch Peninsula. Found a clear path in a minefield and led her detachment forward. Hospitalized for wounds, killed in a bombing attack
Lt Fedora Andreyevna Pushina (13/11/23–6/11/43)	Ukrainian	10/1/44*	Sacrificed her life to save over 30 officers and men from a burning hospital after it was hit by German bombers
Sr/Sgt Zinaida Aleksandrovna Samsonova (14/10/23–27/1/44)	Russian	3/6/44*	One of the first to cross the Dnieper and establish a bridgehead; treated and evacuated over 30 men back across the river. Killed by a sniper while attempting to rescue a wounded comrade
Sr/Sgt Mariya Zakharovna Shcherbachenko (14/2/23–)	Ukrainian	23/10/43	With 13 men, crossed the Dnieper and established a bridgehead against overwhelming odds. When reinforcements arrived, treated 112 wounded comrades
Sr/Sgt Mariya Savelyevna Shkarletova (3/2/25–)	Ukrainian	24/3/45	Crossed the River Vistula in an advance party to secure a bridgehead. Under heavy enemy fire, dragged the wounded to cover, and fought back counterattacks. Evacuated over 100 wounded men back across the river under the cover of darkness
M/Sgt Zinaida Tusnolobova-Marchenko (23/11/20–20/5/80)	Russian	6/12/57	Saved many men on the battlefield. Badly wounded, she lost her right arm, right leg, and left hand. While recovering, she inspired an entire nation through her writings
Petty Officer 2/c Mariya Nikitichna Tsukanova (6/24–14/8/45)	Russian	14/9/45*	Naval Infantry, fought the Japanese at Chongjin, Korea. Made her way to a group surrounded by the enemy. Unable to

Machine gunners

Heroine	Nationality	Date awarded the HSU	Comments
Pvt Anelia Tadeushevna Kzhivon (1925–12/10/43)	Polish	11/11/43*	evacuate the wounded, she organized a defensive position and died fighting while waiting for reinforcements
Sr/Sgt Manshuk Zhiyengaleyevna Mametova (23/10/22–15/10/43)	Kazakh	1/3/44*	Only non-Soviet female to become a Heroine. Sacrificed her life to save her wounded comrades and important headquarters documents when their truck was attacked by German planes
			Killed while defending a strategic hill, crawling between three machine gun posts, and single-handedly firing on the enemy

Snipers

Sr/Sgt Nina Andreyevna Onilova (4/21–8/3/42)	Ukrainian	14/4/65*	In her last battle, destroyed two enemy machine gun nests. Sacrificed her life to cover the retreat of her comrades
Heroine	Nationality	Date awarded the HSU	Comments
Corp Tatyana Nikolayevna Baramzina (19/12/19–5/7/44)	Russian	24/3/45*	Killed 16 and 20 enemy soldiers in two separate engagements, stepped in for her commander who was killed and led troops in a successful attack. Captured while defending the wounded, tortured but revealed nothing, and was shot.
Jr/Sgt Tatyana Ignatovna Kostyrina (1924–22/11/43)	Russian	16/5/44*	Killed 120 enemy soldiers, 15 in her last combat. Despite her , wounds took over from the battalion commander who was killed, and led a charge. Died in hand-to-hand fighting
Pvt Natalya Venediktovna Kovshova (26/11/20–14/8/42)	Russian	14/2/43*	Teamed with Pvt Mariya Polivanova and jointly scored over 300 kills. In their last battle, they fought until they ran out of ammunition, then detonated grenades in their hands, killing some of the enemy
Corp Aliya Moldagulova	Kazakh	24/3/45*	Scored 91 kills. Led several assaults and knocked out an enemy

(25/10/25–14/1/44)

<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Date awarded the HSU</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Maj Lyudmila Mikhailovna Pavlichenko (12/7/16–10/10/74)	Ukrainian	25/10/43	machine gun nest with a grenade. Killed in action Highest scoring female sniper with 309 kills
Pvt Mariya Semenovna Polivanova (24/10/22–14/8/42)	Russian	14/2/43*	Teamed with Pvt Natalya Kovshova and jointly scored over 300 kills. In their last battle, fought until they ran out of ammunition,

Communications

<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Date awarded the HSU</i>	<i>Comments</i>
			then detonated grenades in their hands, killing some of the enemy
Sgt Anna Afanasyevna Morozova (23/5/21–31/12/44)	Russian	8/5/65*	Initially a partisan who organized a secret resistance group of Soviet, Polish, and Czech nationals with much success. Joined the Army, became a radio operator, and killed herself with a grenade to avoid capture
Jr/Sgt Yelena Konstantinovna	Russian	15/5/46*	When German tanks broke through to headquarters, she killed

Tank drivers

Stempkovskaya (1921–26/6/42)

<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Date awarded the HSU</i>	<i>Comments</i>
			three enemy soldiers as they rushed her, destroyed her radio set, and covered the retreat of her battalion by drawing fire to herself
L/Col Irina Nikolayevna Levchenko (15/3/24–)	Ukrainian	6/5/65	Initially a field medic, once treated 168 wounded comrades. Participated in many tank battles and was the first Soviet woman to receive the prestigious Florence Nightingale Medal for her deeds as a field medic

Resistance fighters

Guards Sr/Sgt Mariya Vasilyevna Oktyabrskaya (16/8/05–5/3/44)	Ukrainian	2/8/44*	Many acts of valor as a tank driver, destroyed numerous enemy fortified positions. Killed in action
<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Date awarded the HSU</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Anastasiya Aleksandrovna Biseniek (1899–10/43)	Russian	9/5/65*	Oldest woman to receive the title of HSU. Organized a group of saboteurs and gathered intelligence information. Arrested and shot in a death camp
Yelizaveta Ivanovna Chaykina (10/9/18–22/11/41)	Russian	6/3/42*	Organized resistance and spy networks. Betrayed by a collaborator, she was arrested. Just before she was about to be hanged, she was ordered to tell the people to cooperate with the German occupation force. Instead, she exhorted the people to fight them, and was shot on the spot
Darya Grigoryevna Dyachenko (2/4/24–10/4/44)	Ukrainian	1/7/58*	Komsomol member and saboteur, masterminded the escape of over 200 Soviet citizens from a detention camp. Arrested in March 1943 and executed almost a year later
Ulyana Matveyevna Gromova (3/1/24–9/2/43)	Russian	21/9/43*	As a Komsomol member, organized a resistance group. Distributed leaflets, killed collaborators, and engaged in sabotage. Arrested, shot, and thrown down a coal mine shaft
Vera Zakharovna Khoruzhaya (27/9/03–4/12/42)	Belorussian	17/5/60*	Communist activist in Poland and resistance leader in Vitebsk, Belorussia. Arrested and executed
Mariya Timofeyevna Kislyak (6/3/25–18/6/43)	Ukrainian	8/5/65*	Komsomol member, organized a small resistance group. Kidnapped and murdered German officers to obtain names of collaborators. Arrested and publicly hanged with two others
Yelena Fedorovna Kolesova (8/6/20–11/9/42)	Russian	21/11/44*	Led a small group of women saboteurs who destroyed a bridge, railroads, trains, vehicles, and supply depots. Killed while charging a machine gun nest
Zoya Anatoleyva Kosmodemyanskaya (13/9/23–29/11/41)	Russian	16/2/42*	The first female Heroine of the Great Patriotic War. Caught after burning down a horse stable. Before she was hanged she urged villagers to resist the enemy
Yelena Andreyevna Kullman (31/1/20–6/3/43)	Estonian	8/5/65*	Spy for the Soviet Baltic Fleet who returned to her native area and regularly reported on enemy movements. Arrested and

tortured, she was shot by an Estonian guard when she spat in his face while being escorted in prison.

<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Date awarded the HSU</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Anna Mikhaylovna Lisitsyna (1922–3/8/42)	Karelian	25/9/43*	Helped form a resistance group and set up a network of safe houses in the Leningrad region. Drowned while attempting to cross a river at night on her return journey to give a report
Tatyana Savelyevna Marinenko (25/1/20–2/8/42)	Belorussian	8/5/65*	Schoolteacher, acted as courier and liaison between the partisans and the underground. Betrayed and arrested, she was tortured, then shot
Anna Ivanovna Maslovskaya (6/1/20–11/11/80)	Belorussian	15/5/44	Organized a successful revolt by members of the German-conscripted "Russian Liberation Army." Destroyed a machine gun nest and derailed enemy supply and troop trains
Yelena Gregoryevna Mazanik (4/4/14–1995)	Belorussian	29/10/43	Worked as a housemaid for Wilhelm Kube, Nazi Commissar of Belorussia. Placed a time bomb underneath his bed and killed him
Mariya Vladimirovna Melentyeva (1924–1943)	Karelian	25/9/43*	Worked with fellow spy Anna Lisitsyna. While attempting to cross a river at night, Lisitsyna drowned but Melentyeva made it back to report. On her last assignment, caught by Finnish troops and shot
Mariya Melnikaite (8/4/23–13/7/43)	Lithuanian	22/3/44*	Distributed leaflets and engaged in many acts of sabotage. While being escorted to the gallows, threw herself on the German officer in a last act of defiance and was shot
Klavdiya Ivanovna Nazarova (20/10/18–12/12/42)	Russian	20/8/45*	Organized a resistance movement and engaged in sabotage. Arrested and publicly hanged
Mariya Borisovna Osipova (27/12/08–1999)	Belorussian	29/10/43	Lawyer who organized a resistance movement in Minsk. Ordered to assassinate Wilhelm Kube, Nazi Commissar of Belorussia. She delivered a time bomb to co-conspirator Yelena Mazanik
Antonina Vasilyevna Petrova (14/3/15–4/11/41)	Russian	8/3/42*	Gathered intelligence information, engaged in sabotage, and performed nursing duties. Surprised by a German punitive raid, she fought to the end, and then took her own life
Zinaida Martynovna Portnova (20/2/26–1/44)	Belorussian	1/7/58*	Youngest posthumous Heroine, engaged in acts of sabotage. Was arrested, and killed three Germans in an unsuccessful escape attempt. Tortured and shot
Larissa Stepanovna Ratushnaya (9/1/21–18/3/44)	Ukrainian	8/6/65*	Courier, spy, document forger, and resistance organizer. Murdered by an unidentified collaborator
Valentina Ivanovna Safronova (1918–1/5/43)	Russian	8/5/65*	Famous Heroine of the Bryansk partisans. Gathered intelligence, distributed leaflets, and smuggled explosives to various groups. Captured and tortured to death
Lyubov Grigoryevna Shevtsova (8/9/24–9/2/43)	Russian	13/9/43*	Komsomol member, active in the Donetsk region of Ukraine. Courier and scout, helped many Soviet prisoners to escape. Arrested and shot
Nina Ivanovna Sosnina (30/11/23–31/8/43)	Russian	8/5/65*	Komsomol member, recruited friends into her resistance group. Engaged in sabotage and combat against German forces. Liaison between the partisan and anti-fascist Slovak and Hungarian units. Burned to death in a house when the Germans set fire to it, after the occupants refused to surrender and a gunfight ensued
Sr/Lt Nadezhda Viktorovna Troyan (24/10/21–?)	Belorussian	29/10/43	Scout and field medic for a partisan detachment, engaged in sabotage and rescued civilians on their way to death camps. Involved in the successful conspiracy to assassinate Wilhelm Kube, Nazi Commissar of Belorussia
Yelena Konstantinovna Ubiyovok (22/11/18–26/5/42)	Ukrainian	8/5/65*	Komsomol leader and organizer of a resistance group in Ukraine, that helped Soviet prisoners escape, distributed leaflets, and engaged in sabotage. Arrested, tortured, and shot
Nadezhda Terentyevna Volkova (24/6/20–26/11/42)	Ukrainian	8/5/65*	Courier and spy for the Kharkov Komsomol Committee. Ambushed by a punitive German expedition, stayed behind with a wounded comrade and drew fire on herself, allowing the others to escape. She saved the last bullet for herself
Yefrosinya Savelyevna Zenkova (22/12/23–19/4/84)	Belorussian	1/7/58	Leader of the "Young Avengers," an underground Komsomol organization composed of mainly teenagers. Engaged in acts of sabotage and helped the local partisans

*Posthumous awards. The Soviet government received petitions from citizens and veterans' groups, asking to honour certain individuals. The cases were carefully investigated. The announcement of the posthumous award was usually made on Victory Day, May 9. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, posthumous awards are still being made, but under the title of Hero of the Russian Federation, and only to Russian nationals.

THE PLATES

A: The Gold Star Medal and the Order of Lenin

As stated earlier (see pages 6 & 7) the Hero of the Soviet Union received two decorations at his investiture – the Gold Star Medal and the Order of Lenin. The Gold Star Medal (**A1 & A2**) pictured here is the Type 1 (Early Suspension) variety, awarded from August 1, 1939, until June 19, 1943. The Type 2 (Late Suspension) was implemented on 19 June, 1943, and was awarded unchanged until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The Type 1 has a shorter suspension than the Type 2. The star contains 21.5g of 950/1,000 parts gold. On the reverse in Cyrillic are the words “Hero of the USSR” with the serial number stamped above. The star is hung from a small rectangular suspension, which is covered with a piece of red ribbon. The ribbon is retained by a suspension plate on the reverse side. This plate is made of gold-plated sterling silver. The medal screwpost is placed through the uniform and retained by a circular screwback plate. The Gold Star Medals were initially produced by the Leningrad Mint before the Great Patriotic War, and by the Moscow Mint from 1945.

There are six major variations of the Order of Lenin (established on April 6, 1930), and the Type 4 (“Platinum Head Lenin”) depicted here (**A3 & A4**) was awarded between June 11, 1936, and June 19, 1943. The profile of Lenin was made of platinum and placed in a circle of grayish-blue enamel, surrounded by wheat ears, and a banner of red enamel with the words “Lenin” in gold. The medal is made from 950/1,000 parts gold. The mint’s name (either Monetny Dvor or Mondvor) appears under the screwpost in curved raised letters, and the serial number is stamped above it. On the reverse, there is a screw post for the screw back plate. The screw-backed version was replaced by the Type 5 variety, which employed a five-sided suspension ribbon to hang the medal. The Type 5 was issued from June 19, 1943, until the early 1950s.

B: Partisan Mariya Melnikaite, Northeast Lithuania, July 1943

Mariya Melnikaite stands guard on the morning of July 7, 1943, while her two partisan comrades prepare to place explosives to blow up a troop train set to arrive in half an hour. They are 10

This magnificent monument to Mariya Melnikaite is located on the shore of Zarasai Lake in Lithuania.

kilometers from the Dukstas train station in the Utena region of northeast Lithuania. This area was a major railroad transportation hub used by the Germans to transport war supplies to Latvia and Belorussia. Aware of partisan activity in the area, frequent enemy searches were made using observation planes in coordination with ground patrols. This would be the last act of sabotage for Melnikaite and her small group. The next morning, they were hunted down and killed.

Melnikaite is wearing civilian clothing with heavy boots. She is holding a captured German MP-40 machine pistol, a favorite with the Partisans. Because it had a low rate of fire at 500 rounds per minute, it was easy to handle with very little recoil. It used a 32-round stick magazine. The MP-40 was reliable if kept clean. Her male associates are dressed as common workers. The young man on the right is armed with a 7.62x54mm Moisin-Nagant rifle, the standard infantry rifle of the Soviets in the Great Patriotic War. It was a five-shot, bolt-operated weapon with a tremendous kick. The older man on the left prefers the PPSH-41 submachine gun. Partisans were mostly armed civilians who operated locally to disrupt the German war effort through sabotage and guerilla warfare. They were organized and directed by central headquarters in Moscow. There were more than 80,000 of these irregulars during the Great Patriotic War. When caught, they were tortured and executed.





“Night Witch” Lt Natalya Meklin was Mariya Smirnova’s first pilot and the standard bearer of the regiment. She flew 982 night missions and was described by Col/Gen K.A. Vershinin as “a confident, fearless pilot.” She became a writer after the war and now resides in Moscow.

OPPOSITE Pavlichenko’s weapon of choice was the semi-automatic Tokarev SVT-40 sniper rifle. She is shown in autumn camouflage clothing.

C: “Night Witch” Mariya Smirnova, 46th *Taman* Guards Night Bomber Regiment, May 1944

Squadron leader Sr/Lt Mariya Smirnova of the 46th *Taman* Guards Night Bomber Regiment checks the sky while a mechanic inspects the engine of her aircraft. The date is May 4, 1944, and in a few hours she and her comrades will start their first mission of the night. The Germans have been landing large concentrations of troops and supplies at Cape Khersones near Sevastopol in the Crimea. Targets of opportunity are everywhere, but strongly defended by an array of searchlights and anti-aircraft batteries. The wood and fabric-covered Polikarpov U-2/Po-2 biplane trainer first flew in 1928. It was lightweight and could take off and land in a very short distance. It was very maneuverable and slow, with a top speed of only 150km/h. It could carry one 250kg bomb or two 100kg bombs under each wing and was able to attack from a silent glide with the engine turned off.

Smirnova is wearing an M1943 gymnastiorka pullover shirt with stand-up collar. Her shoulder boards show that she is a senior lieutenant. Her brown leather flight helmet is of the type commonly used during the 1930–40s, and has a lightweight satin liner, with rounded earphone covers. The flight goggles have glass lenses and a rubber mask. A brown leather holster on her officer’s belt holds a 7.62mm Tokarev pistol, which was based on the Colt-Browning design. It was the standard sidearm of the Soviets and very dependable. An extra eight-shot magazine was stored in the holster. Women aviators vowed never to be taken prisoner and would save the last bullet for themselves. Her breeches are made of wool gabardine, with front slit pockets and back pockets with flap.

D: Sniper Lyudmila Pavlichenko, Pskov region, winter 1943

Lyudmila Pavlichenko lies in wait for her next victim in the ruins of a building in the Pskov region near Estonia during



the winter of 1943. Snipers on both sides during the Great Patriotic War claimed tremendous numbers of victims. Like her German counterpart, the Soviet sniper employed a spotter and they worked as an independent team along certain sectors. The spotter carried a submachine gun and binoculars: his or her job was to scout the terrain and alert the sniper to a potential victim.

Sgt Pavlichenko is wearing a two-piece camouflaged snowsuit. The pants and smock were made of white cotton and the hood was tied around the head with a string or cord. The suit was issued with separate white mitten covers. The index finger on the mittens was separate so they would not interfere with trigger pulling. The suit was worn over regular service clothing. It had large slits on the side to provide access to ammunition pouches and other equipment. The snowsuit was not waterproof, but did offer wind protection. It was sometimes produced locally. Pavlichenko's weapon is a 7.62x54mm Tokarev SVT-40 self-loading sniper rifle fitted with a PU 3.5 power scope. Veteran snipers preferred the old Moisin-Nagant bolt-action sniper rifle because it was considered more reliable. However, Pavlichenko became the top female sniper with 309 kills using the SVT-40.

E: Machine gunner Manshuk Mametova, Nevel area, October 1943

The date is October 15, 1943. On the strategic hill overlooking the ancient town of Nevel near the border with Belorussia, Sr/Sgt Manshuk Mametova of the 21st Guards Division is locked in mortal combat against overwhelming odds. Having silenced two machine gun posts with effective mortar fire, a massive wave of German infantry is charging up the hill to eliminate her position. Bleeding from a head wound inflicted by a mortar shell, which had knocked her

unconscious, she knows she is doomed and plans to take out as many of the enemy as she can.

Sr/Sgt Mametova is wearing a *telogreika* padded jacket. It was very warm and was issued with matching quilted breeches. The shoulder boards indicate her rank as senior sergeant. Many Soviet military women in the field wore closely cropped hair. She has slung a PPSH-41 submachine gun across her back and wears a drum magazine ammunition pouch on her brown enlisted man's belt.

Manshuk is firing a Soviet-made 1910 Maxim machine gun in 7.62x54mm caliber with a Sokolov mount. The full-fluted water jacket cooled the barrel down. Its rate of fire was between 520 and 580 rounds per minute utilizing a fabric belt, which was fed into the gun from the right. The gun was issued with a steel shield, but it was often discarded in the field due to its weight, minimal protection, and interference with visibility.

F: Tank driver Mariya Oktyabrskaya, Vitebsk region, January 1944

Sr/Sgt Oktyabrskaya confers with her crew over the plan to attack German artillery positions in their T-34 Model 1943 Medium Tank. The enemy is entrenched in the village of Shvedy in the Vitebsk region of Belorussia. Mariya and her crew are looking over a map to determine their position: she is pointing in the direction of the target. The date is January 17, 1944, and the temperature is sub-zero. With the terrain blanketed in snow, it was important to first get their bearings before the final push. They are 12 kilometers from their objective and their unit has stopped to make final preparations. This will be Oktyabrskaya's final battle. Her tank, which weighs 28.5 tons, is capable of speeds up to 55km/h. The four-man crew consists of a driver/mechanic, machine

gun/radio operator, tank commander, and cannon loader. The T-34 was outmatched by the German Panther and Tiger tanks in terms of armor and firepower, but the Soviet tactic was to overwhelm the enemy with sheer numbers.

Oktyabrskaya and her crew wear the M1941 tanker helmet, which is made of canvas with a white felt lining and rectangular earphone covers. For service in cold weather, they have been issued tanker coveralls, made of brown gabardine. They are fleece-lined, and have a pile collar and a zippered front with button flaps. The crewmen carry Tokarev pistols in their holsters, which hang from their belts. The boots are standard black boots. Each crewman has leather gloves for fire protection and for handling hot objects such as shell casings.

G: Field medic Mariya Borovichenko, Battle of Kursk, July 1943

Sr/Sgt Mariya Borovichenko drags a wounded lieutenant to a nearby shell crater for protection during the Battle of Kursk, July 14, 1943. She is caught in a dire situation with enemy tanks advancing towards her position. She has knocked out a tank with an anti-tank grenade, and now her last act of valor will be to shield the wounded officer with her body. Mariya will be killed by shrapnel from an exploding shell, but the officer will survive. The field medic was an important member of a platoon and widely respected for showing bravery. According to the Geneva Convention, medical personnel could only arm themselves for self-protection and for the protection of the wounded and sick. The female medics were never formally trained and armed as combatants. However, they acquired weapons on the battlefield and learned to use them "for the protection of the wounded."

Sr/Sgt Mariya Borovichenko wears a khaki M1943 pullover shirt made from cotton gabardine, and a khaki skirt. Her cotton garrison cap has a small green cloth star. In 1943, the Soviets started to issue skirts to their female personnel. Not all women wore them; it all depended on the local supply situation. On her left arm she wears the Red Cross armband. Her shoulder boards indicate that she

holds the rank of senior sergeant. She wears an enlisted man's web and leather belt. The enlisted man's boots are made of leather with impregnated canvas uppers. Field medical bags were either made of canvas or leather and carried enough supplies to stop bleeding and prevent the wounded from going into shock.

H: Fighter ace Lydia Litvyak, Kotelnikov, March 1943

Jr/Lt Lydia Litvyak waves and greets her well-wishers after landing her Yak-1 at her base at Kotelnikov on March 1, 1943. She has a reason to be happy – she has just shot down an Fw 190 while flying wing with Maj Nikolai Baranov, bringing her score to six kills. The Yak-1 was very easy to fly and fought well at low altitude. The fighter was quickly assembled using semi-skilled labor and minimum materials: the wing was made of wood with plywood surfaces, and most of the aircraft surfaces were covered with fabric. Poor quality materials and workmanship sometimes caused the wing and tail to warp. It had a top speed of 580km/h with a ceiling of 10,000m. It was armed with one 20mm cannon, which fired through the propeller, and two nose-mounted 7.62mm machine guns. It was inferior to the German Me 109, but its lightweight construction made it extremely maneuverable.

Litvyak wears a thick pile-lined canvas flight suit with a pile collar. This standard winter suit was not fire resistant, and it proved comfortably warm in the unheated Soviet fighter. Her regular service clothes are worn underneath. Her brown 1936 pattern leather flight helmet is fur-lined and has earphone flaps. The flight goggles were the standard type issued to air force, armored, and motorcycle personnel. Litvyak wears an officer's leather belt. The cowhide leggings are an improvisation to provide insulation to the fleece-lined leather boots. She carries her Tokarev pistol in one of the two leg pockets. Fighter pilots all wore parachutes of the seat-pack variety. The parachute harness did not have a quick-release mechanism and simply used hooks.



Contents of a field medical kit included bandages, forceps for removing bullets and shrapnel, needles, and painkillers such as opium, codeine, aspirin, and morphine. The triangular bandage is printed with basic instructions. Also included with the kit is a first aid manual. The medic's first task was to prevent the wounded soldier going into shock because of the wounds received. The field microscope (left) was used in mobile labs. The items pictured are mementos of a Soviet medical officer, and also include his officer's hat, shoulder boards, canteen, and Red Cross armband. (Laszlo Bekesi)



ABOVE A post-war memorial dedicated to Lydia Litvyak is located in front of School No.1 in Krasny Luch, in the Donetsk region of Eastern Ukraine. (A. Lebedev)



RIGHT A bust of Mariya Borovichenko stands in the courtyard of School No.122 in Kiev, Ukraine. (Sergy Tumasyan)

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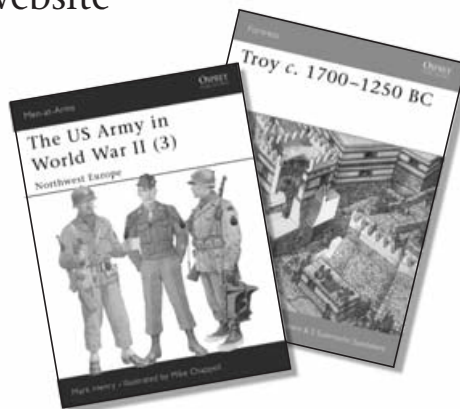
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