Women in Combat: Russian Women in WWII

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WOMEN IN COMBAT: RUSSIAN WOMEN IN WWII
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Purpose of research: To inform current debate, supporting the integration of women into combat roles, while educating the public.

Soviet Union mobilized 800,000-1,000,000 women as:
• Snipers
• Medics, Doctors, Nurses
• Machinegunners
• Anti-aircraft gunners
• Drivers
• Riflemen
• Telephone & Radio Operators
• Pilots
• Clerks
• Engineers
• Scouts

This research is part of a larger project which includes an exhibit that will be on public display. The goal of the exhibit is that the viewer will leave knowing more than they did before viewing, devoid of any doubt that females can serve in combat roles, convinced that women can do any job that men can.

In this case, my research involved reading diaries, letters, memoirs, and oral histories from Russian women written during and after the war, supplemented by numerous secondary sources and translations. These accounts provide glimpses of life on the front and civilian life after service.

Defense Secretary Carter’s 2015 announcement of the full integration of women into combat roles within the U.S. military prompted discussions regarding female capabilities in mechanized warfare. The decision was criticized by many citing lower achievement from women related to training standards, performance results, and combat effectiveness. Studies are continuously conducted to gauge these results, rather than examining real-world examples. By analyzing the experiences of Russian women on the Eastern front in World War II, these women proved they could perform comparable to the men they served next to.

These facts are important because to this day, people continue to question any achievement by women in the military, as seen with the Army’s Ranger School graduations. Many articles were published alluding to lowered standards in order for women to pass, which has since been debunked. Regardless, the same conversations are had whenever a new job within the military is opened to women. This research demonstrates that the repetitive argument against women going into combat is unfounded.

"Altogether I carried 481 wounded soldiers from under fire. One of the journalists counted them up: a whole infantry battalion. We hauled men two or three times our weight. When they’re wounded they’re still heavier. You carry him, his weapon, plus there’s his overcoat, boots. So you hoist some 180 pounds on your back and carry it. Unload it. Go for the next one." Maria Petrovna Smirnova – Medic

Fascism, the Most Evil Enemy of Women – Propaganda poster by Nina Vatolina

This research further influences the conversations surrounding:
• Gender equality
• Deeply entrenched cultural norms
• Governmental policies
• The future of the U.S. military