

Yu.Smolnikov, Ph.D, Assoc. Prof.
(National Aviation University, Ukraine, Kyiv)
O.Yurchenko, Ph.D, Assoc. Prof.
(National Aviation University, Ukraine, Kyiv)

WOMEN PILOTS IN THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR OF THE SOVIET UNION

Annotation: the article deals with the role of Soviet women pilots in the victory over Nazi Germany in the years of the Great Patriotic War.

About 600,000 women fought together with men in the Red Army in the years of the Great Patriotic War. Over 90 of them were awarded the titles of "Hero of the Soviet Union," the highest Soviet reward, and over 100,000 were decorated with orders and medals [2]. Not all women, of course, directly participated in warfare. Many served in the rear occupying economic, medical, managerial, and other positions; but many, nevertheless, took direct part in war operations. The specter of their activity was rather wide; they participated in reconnaissance raids and fought in partisan units, served as nurses, machine-gunners, snipers, and tank drivers. Many women served in aviation: pilots, navigators, mechanics, and radio operators. Even before the war, in the 1930s, such slogans as "Girls to Aviation!" became popular among the young. With the outbreak of the war, hundreds of thousands of women rushed into the army, not wanting to lag behind men, and feeling capable of bearing a heavy load of military service. During the war years women ensured their rights to fight on par with men for their motherland.

Preparation of aviation personnel was an important task in the war years, and women pilots distinguished themselves in that activity. In the war years the centre for aviation personnel training moved to Siberia and Central Asia. There were 15 training squadrons in the Civil Aviation Fleet's west-Siberian management [2]. By October the Civil Aviation Fleet's training schools had prepared 9910 pilots for the U-2 plane, 7756 of them were sent to military aviation schools [2]. Study programs were revised in accordance with the front requirements; the periods of study were significantly shortened. The system of draft to aviation schools was changed: aircraft mechanics were enrolled in the first place. On graduation the school they were able not only to fly an airplane but also to do the necessary repairs.

The training program focused attention on flying at night, in bad weather conditions, over forest areas, at low altitude, and landing in forest clearings designated by fires. Among the instructors who devoted their lives to aviation as early as the 1930s there were many women pilots: M. Yaremchuk, N. Sliusarenko, K. Krasnokutskaya, D. Rubanenko and others. In all, the pilots-instructors and teaching staff in the Civil Aviation Fleet had prepared in the war years over 40,000 aviators; 20,900 of whom were sent to the Air Force [2]

Women aviators had fought in air regiments together with men and also in exclusive 'women's units.' A call to enroll girls into the army was sent to all Soviet youth organizations on October 8, 1941. The news spread at a moment. Many responded to the call and were selected to the air force. Hero of the Soviet Union V. Grizadubova selected people for long-haul aircraft. Her unit became known as the 31st regiment of the bomber forces. At the time another Hero of the Soviet Union, M. Raskova, formed an aviation unit consisted entirely of women. Thousands of girls dreamed to serve in it. As a result, three women's aviation regiments were formed. They were: the 46th Guards regiment of night light bombers, the 25th Guards regiment of dive bombers, and the 586th aviation regiment specializing in destruction of anti-aircraft forces units.

All the staff was divided into groups according to specialties: navigators, pilots, and mechanics. Women's aviation regiments were staffed with pilots from the Civil Air Force and *Osoaviakhim*. Many of them were skilled pilots. University and college students, factory and office workers became navigators and technicians. Girls with technical education were appointed to the positions of aircraft mechanics. The 586th regiment was ready to be sent to the front in the spring of 1942. Its commander was T. Kazarinova. Soon after that the 46th light bombers regiment under the command of O. Bershanska was also ready for the front. At the very beginning of 1943 a new women's regiment of dive bombers arrived in Stalingrad. The regiment's commander was Maryna Raskova.

Originally many pilots and navigators of the 46th regiment were disappointed with flying PE-2 planes which were small and not furnished with radio. They dreamt of heavy bombers or fighters. In time, however, they understood the qualities of PE-2, which became a serious threat to the enemy. During the war women pilots courageously fought for the motherland. Many of them made over 1 000 operation flights.

Major Nadia Fedutenko, air squadron commander, became a bright star among Ukrainian women pilots. She proved to be a courageous and resolute pilot, made hundreds flights and rescued from encirclement more than 150 wounded [4, c. 58]. Fedutenko performed various important and risky tasks: she delivered ammunition, food, and medicine to the encircled troops or the units located in the enemy rear; brought intelligence data to the Ground Forces Command.

N. Fedutenko revealed high professional and organizational skills. She was one of the first who mastered the PE-2 dive bomber. Hence she was appointed commander of the 1st air squadron of the 125th women's guard air regiment. Her unit consisted of experienced women pilots who arrived to the front from the Civil Air Force. The 125th air regiment went a glorious way from the Volga to the Baltic in the war years. Using the PE-2 dive bombers the women pilots destroyed the enemy's fortification lines and troops on the banks of the Volga River; they helped the ground forces to break the enemy's defense in the North Caucasus; provided air support for a tank group's attack in the Orel-Kursk direction; destroyed the enemy's resistance pockets on the Bogushevsk-Orsha defense line. The regiment took part in the fight for Yelnya, Smolensk, Vitebsk, Borysiv; it participated in liberation of Belarus and the Baltic republics; assisted the Red Army's ground forces in destruction of the Nazi troops in Northern Prussia. During the Great Patriotic War the regiment made 1134 operational fights and dropped 980 tons of bombs on the enemy [1, c.356].

For the revealed heroism the regiment was decorated with the Order of Suvorov and the Order of Kutuzov. Nadia Fedutenko demonstrated high mastery and professionalism in flying the PE-2. During the war she made 69 operation flights [3, c. 147]. In May 1943 in Kuban she was heavily wounded in action but managed to fulfill the task and returned to the aerodrome. Dozens of times N. Fedutenko led her air squadron into battle providing a powerful air support to our ground forces.

On August 18, 1945, Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR conferred the title of "Hero of the Soviet Union" on Nadia Nikiforivna Fedutenko for courage and heroism revealed in action, successful command of the squadron, and exemplary fulfillment of military tasks. She was also decorated with two orders of the Red Banner, the Order of the Great Patriotic War type 1, and many medals [4, c. 54].

The 588th regiment of night light bombers that first attacked the enemy in the Donbass region on June 8, 1942 achieved great fame. Such outstanding women pilots as E. Nikulina, S. Burzayeva, S. Amosova, R. Rozanova, E. Nosal, A. Popova courageously fought under the command of E. Bershanskaya. The regiment's pilots made 23, 672 operation flights and dropped 2, 902, 980 kg of bombs and 26, 000 ampoules with incendiary substance on the enemy. According to incomplete data, the regiment destroyed or seriously damaged 17 ferries, 9 trains, 2 railway stations, 46 ammunition dumps, 12 fuel tanks, 1 airplane, 2 barges, 76 motor vehicles, 86 weapons sites, 11 searchlights. The regiment caused 811 conflagrations, 1,092 powerful explosions. The women pilots delivered 155 sacks of ammunition and food to our encircled troops. The regiment's pilots spent 28, 676 hours in operation flights [2]. Brave women pilots took part in liberation of the Northern Caucasus, the Crimean peninsula, Sevastopol, Mogilev, Bialystok, Warsaw, Gdynia, and Gdansk. The regiment especially distinguished itself in destroying the powerful "Blue Defensive Line" on the Taman peninsula. As a result, it received an honorable name "Tamansky." For exemplary fulfillment of combat missions in liberation of Crimea and Poland the regiment was awarded Guards status and decorated with the Order of Red Banner and the Order of Suvorov type 3 [2].

Thus, women pilots, who fought in practically all types of aviation (bombers, fighters, attack planes, transport planes) made a great contribution to the victory over the enemy.

Notes

1. Героини. Вып.2. (Очерки о женщинах – Героях Советского Союза). – М.: Политиздат. – 1969. – 464 с.
2. Женщины - авиаторы в Великой Отечественной войне [Электронный ресурс]. – Режим доступа: <http://airaces.narod.ru/woman/womans.htm>. - Назва з екрану.
3. Історія української авіації в особах. К.: НАУ, 2013. – 328 с.
4. Киевский институт инженеров гражданской авиации (1933 – 1993): Очерк истории. – К.: Издательство КМУГА, 1994. – 578 с.