

Title: Fighter Pilot to Folk Hero: Representations in the Memoirs of Soviet Women Warriors
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My paper “Fighter Pilot to Folk Hero: Representations in the Memoirs of Soviet Women Warriors” addresses the body of memoirs composed by women pilots who participated in World War II. Unlike historians (Cottam, Pennington) who have examined these memoirs as historical documents, the paper approaches the memoirs as literary works, asking questions related to authorship and objectives: Why did these women compose a deluge of memoirs after a decade and a half of virtual silence? How did they portray themselves? What literary devices did these women use in the creation of their documentary narratives? Who was their intended audience? How do memoirs written by female veterans differ from those written by male veterans?

The paper shows that the women pilots began publishing memoirs in a collective attempt to claim a more central place in Soviet cultural memory of World War II. By the 1960s, the most famous women who participated in the war were either the martyred partisan, who was significant in her sacrifice for the motherland, or the feminine nurse or radio-operator, who did not typically bear arms, but was attentive to male soldiers’ needs. Mass culture was neglecting the memory of the armed woman. In response, the women pilots began to represent themselves as epic heroes in their narratives in an attempt to gain recognition and correct misconceptions of women soldiers. Although they address their memoirs to the younger generation as a whole, some authors specifically targeted female readers. Unlike memoirs penned by male veterans, these memoirs give evidence that female veterans frequently felt the need to prove that they were as capable as men at waging war, yet they remained feminine women, that femininity and combat are not incompatible. Memoirs analyzed include Chechneva’s «Боевые подруги мои», Kravtsova’s «От заката до рассвета», Aronova’s «Ночные ведьмы», and Pozdniakova’s «В ночном небе».