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## Mr. Truman's War

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## 140 Naval War College Review

These papers are interesting and readable efforts by scholars of skill and reputation. The range is wide, the level of argument generally cogent, and their passion is often high. Provocative of discussion and argument, they might best be given the Old Scot's verdict, "not proven."

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Moskin, J. Robert. *Mr. Truman's War*.  
New York: Random House, 1995.  
411pp. \$30

The five months following the death of Franklin Roosevelt witnessed the most tumultuous period in the administration of President Harry S. Truman. From April through September 1945, Truman orchestrated the complete destruction of the Nazi war machine, directed the final victory over Japan, launched the atomic age, and laid the foundation for the Cold War. In *Mr. Truman's War*, J. Robert Moskin examines that climactic period in the life of our thirty-third president.

Moskin, author of six previous books, including *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, concentrates his efforts on the spring and summer of 1945 in an effort to understand where we, as a nation, stand in the stream of history. According to the author, the decisions Truman made in 1945 conditioned the final victory in World War II and the birth of the post-war world. The enormity of these decisions constituted "Mr. Truman's war," as the president pursued a course across uncharted waters.

Written more for the general reader than the serious student of history, this

work relies extensively on secondary sources and is best classified as popular history. The author's challenges were to pull together the varied, conflicting strands that made these five months one of the crucial and exciting moments in world history, and to enable the reader to visualize our world being born. Consequently, he concentrated his efforts on both putting into perspective and communicating what happened. As he puts it, Moskin sought "not to uncover but to reveal." As a result, *Mr. Truman's War* offers little new to our understanding of the final months of World War II.

The coverage of the strategic debate concerning the proposed invasion of Japan, for example, is cursory at best. When Truman met with the service secretaries and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 18 June 1945, his advisers presented him with the full range of military and diplomatic options to end the war. Regrettably, the often acrimonious debate concerning the wisdom of the direct approach versus the maintenance of an air and naval blockade to compel Japan to accept the Potsdam ultimatum does not receive the attention it deserves. Graduates of the Naval War College will lament the absence of discussion of the inter-service rivalry governing Truman's strategic options.

On the other hand, Moskin does explore the relationship between strategy and policy. Nowhere is this theme more evident than in Truman's endorsement of Eisenhower's decision not to go to Berlin, or in the president's own decision to drop the atomic bomb. Determined to end the war in the most expeditious manner, and at the least cost in American lives, Truman never wavered

in his contention that the A-bomb was a legitimate weapon that had to be employed. With respect to Truman's rather naive anticolonial sentiments, the author notes that the president eventually yielded to the realities of power politics. Not surprisingly, Truman's opposition to colonialism became muddled as he sought to balance personal views with pragmatic politics.

To his credit, Moskin examines both the international and domestic aspects of Truman's policies. His analysis, however, is highly biased in his subject's behalf. Though Moskin asserts that Truman played a bold and defining role in bringing black and white Americans together, thus plowing the ground for the civil rights movement, he offers little evidence to support such a claim. And aside from acknowledging the great contribution played by women in the war effort, Truman failed to advance the cause of women's rights in a significant fashion.

In summary, *Mr. Truman's War* does not live up to expectations as a serious work of history. In his acknowledgments, Moskin admits that most of what occurred in the spring and summer of 1945 is known and that the sources have been exhausted. This reader regrets the author's reluctance to examine the plethora of primary sources available on the war's final months. The finished product lacks the detailed analysis that might have made Moskin's latest effort a valuable contribution in presidential studies and strategic assessment.

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Noggle, Anne. *A Dance with Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II*. College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1994. 318pp. \$29.95

*A Dance with Death* is a remarkable collection of sixty-nine oral histories of Soviet female combat pilots during World War II. It is an important book for all naval officers, but especially naval aviators, because it will lay to rest any question as to whether or not women can perform in aerial combat.

In early 1942, the Soviet Union organized three female air regiments. The 586th Fighter Regiment, flying Yakovlev fighters, played an important role in the battle of Stalingrad. The 587th Bomber Regiment, flying the twin-engine Pe-2 dive-bomber, was used for both ground-support and offensive bombing. The 588th flew the U-2/Po-2 single-engine utility and training biplane as a night bomber. While other regiments eventually integrated during the war, with both female and male commanding officers, the 588th Regiment remained all-female—from the commander to the ground crew—during the entire war. The 587th and the 588th both earned outstanding war records, earning the coveted title of "Guards" units. They were redesignated the 125th Guards Bomber Regiment and the 46th Taman Guards Bomber Regiment, respectively.

These regiments were not social experiments or a "politically correct" move by Joseph Stalin. They were front-line units in the heart of the fighting (not in some remote corner), flying some of the most rugged and dangerous missions of the war, and they compiled outstanding war records. The regiments earned the Order of the Red Banner, the Suvorov III, and the Kutuzov unit citations in