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A Dance with Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II

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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

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recognition of their skill and bravery. The 46th Taman alone produced twenty-three Heroes of the Soviet Union, their nation's highest combat award, and the 586th produced three "aces."

The author, herself a Woman Air Force Service Pilot during World War II, conducted more than seventy interviews. The stories are compelling and are supported by photographs of the women, as young combat pilots in the 1940s and as grandmothers in the 1990s.

To see the photographs of these women flyers as they look today, wearing their wings, decorations, and medals on dresses very much like my grandmother would wear, may conjure up uneasy feelings for some. Yet, however uncomfortable it may be, they proved that women can perform courageously and still maintain their femininity. In her interview, Major Mariya Smirnova, Hero of the Soviet Union, says, "There is an opinion about women in combat that a woman stops being a woman after bombing, destroying, and killing; that she becomes crude and tough. This is not true; we all remained kind, compassionate, and loving. We became even more womanly, more caring of our children, our parents, and the land that has nourished us."

A Dance with Death is not the complete story of all Soviet women in combat, but it relays firsthand knowledge of combat pilots flying daring missions during a pivotal point in their country's history. It is not unlike other oral histories of aviators flying into combat. These pilots with the "right stuff" just happen to be women.

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Willmott, H.P. *Grave of a Dozen Schemes: British Naval Planning and the War against Japan, 1943-1945*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1996. 342pp. \$36.92

In *Grave of a Dozen Schemes*, H.P. Willmott, author of many excellent books on war, and especially on the Second World War, has assumed the difficult task of making clear what the British political and military chieftains wished to do when they were able (or so they imagined) to assume a substantial part in the war against Japan; what their options really were; what they found themselves actually doing; and in the end, how much it mattered.

The principal actors in Willmott's account are the prime minister, Winston Churchill, and the professional heads of Britain's armed forces: Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal. Others, such as Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia (whose title suggests more than reality allowed), play bit parts. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff do not appear, but offstage they rumble ominously. The Japanese army and navy, nominally the objects of everyone's attention, are merely the subjects of occasional allusion.

The central difficulty, Willmott makes plain, was that while the places where the British could fight the Japanese were far away from home, the more pressing war against Germany was being fought right at hand, and even when, at long last, victory over the Germans seemed nigh, the Germans refused to be defeated on the schedule the Allies had set for them.