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The Second World War in the personal reminiscences of British and Soviet servicewomen

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Introduction

The choice of countries for this comparative study was based on a desire to compare the vision of females from societies with different political systems regarding their participation in the Second World War. The United Kingdom and the Soviet Union – our chosen pair of countries – were members of the anti-Hitler coalition (the Soviet Union joined after Nazi Germany attacked it in 1941), which won the war and significantly influenced the postwar world order. In many ways, the governments of the victorious countries have also influenced the development of gender relations in the world.[1] It was important for us to explore the experiences of women from democratic and non-democratic regimes who served in their armed forces during the war. We chose states with a more or less similar experience during the war, particularly in recruiting women to the armed forces.

We selected the totalitarian Soviet Union, in the territory of which active hostilities took place, as a model of a non-democratic regime. The exhaustion of its human resources led to the government's decision to recruit women into the armed forces on an unprecedented scale due to the army's great losses of men. According to modern estimates, the total number of

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[1] For example, see Catherine Baker, *Gender in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe and the USSR* (London: Macmillan Education UK, 2017); Diane Rothbard Margolis, "Women's Movements around the World: Cross-Cultural Comparisons", *Gender and Society*, 7:3 (1993), 379–399; *The Women's Movements of the United States and Western Europe. Consciousness, Political Opportunity, and Public Policy*, ed. by Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, Carol McClurg Mueller (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Elizabeth Evans, *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms: Neoliberalism, Intersectionality, and the State in Britain and the US* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

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women in the Red Army was about 1 million.[2] Soviet women who served in the armed forces accounted for 0.58% of the total population and more than 1% of the total number of women in the USSR.[3] Soviet authorities did not forbid servicewomen to take part in combat during the war.

We chose the United Kingdom as a democratic state for comparison. It succeeded in thwarting a land invasion of its territory, but its lands were under systematic destructive aerial bombing, which meant that British servicewomen were also under constant threat of hostile attack. This was unlike servicewomen in the United States, in the territory of which there were no hostilities. The experience of France is not suitable for our comparison because in 1940–44, it did not have an independent government located in the country (but only in exile). The British government officially prohibited their servicewomen to perform combat roles. To maintain their non-combatant status, it even classified some of their jobs in air defence as non-combat despite the fact that all members of anti-aircraft battery crews took part in combat.[4] The United Kingdom recruited women to the armed forces on a large scale and used women's services for this purpose – the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). The total number of women who served in the British Armed Forces during the Second World War was approximately 487,000.[5] That is about 1 per cent of the total population and 1.9 per cent of the female population of the country.[6]

A comparison of the experiences of representatives of states with different political regimes will allow us to better understand the essence of democracy and totalitarianism and to determine how different their gender structures were.

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2 Roger Markwick, Euridice Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.

3 *Narodnoe khozyaĭstvo SSSR v 1960 g.* (Moskva: Gosstatizdat CHSU SSSR, 1961), 8.

4 D'Ann Campbell, "Women in Combat: The World War II Experience in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union", *The Journal of Military History*, 57:2 (1993), 313.

5 Jeremy A. Crang, ""Come into the Army, Maud": Women, Military Conscription, and the Markham Inquiry", *Defence Studies*, 8 (2008), 383, 391.

6 Peter Howlett, *Fighting with figures: A Statistical digest of the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1995), 4.

The "double helix" concept

One can conclude from analysis of the memories of British and Soviet female veterans of World War II that the concept of "double helix" proposed by the researchers Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L. R. Higonnet is suitable for a general description of their experience and place in the military hierarchy. These researchers argue that

> "the image of a double helix, with its structure of two intertwined strands […] permits us to look at woman not in isolation but within a persistent system of gender relationships. The female strand on the helix is opposed to the male strand, and position on the female strand is subordinate to position on the male strand […] although the roles of men and women vary greatly from culture to culture, their relationship is in some sense constant. If men gather and women fish, gathering will be thought more important than fishing; in another society where men fish and women gather, fishing will be more prestigious".[7]

Regardless of whether women had the opportunity to perform the full range of duties in the ranks of the army, including combat, their position remained subordinate to men. Servicemen retained their dominant status in the military. They formed the majority and their opinion concerning the skills of servicewomen affected women's status in the armed forces. Since the British and Soviet governments strongly emphasised the inferiority of women's forces, this clearly did not contribute to the perception of them as equals by male comrades-in-arms. In both states, public discourse focused on the auxiliary role of women in the military campaign. In the Soviet Union, public discourse often avoided mentioning their presence in the army as combatants. Both governments followed purely utilitarian approaches to the use of female resources. They were not about to revise the main principles of current gender roles. Partial "amnesia" characterised the societies of both countries, manifested in the postwar period in the understatement of the contribution of servicewomen to victory. In addition to the researchers, both British[8] and Soviet[9] female veterans have

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[7] Margaret R. Higonnet, Patrice L. R. Higonnet, "The Double Helix", *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet et al. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 31–47.

[8] See Dorothy Sheridan, "Ambivalent Memories: Women and the 1939–45 War in Britain", *Oral History*, 18:1 (1990), 35.

[9] Although there are several English translations of Svetlana Alexievich's book *The Unwomanly Face of War* (for example, Svetlana Alexievich, *War's Unwomanly Face* (Progress Publishers, 1988); Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War* (New York: Random House, 2017)), none of them include the whole range of quotes I used in

pointed out this fact. A former member of the ATS noted: "You could say that the forgotten army was not the one in Burma, but the one in skirts".[10]

Despite this, it should be understood that women in the ranks of the armed forces played not only the role of passive executors of orders, but also tried to defend their rights and personal boundaries, and showcased their agency, as evidenced by their memories. During the war, servicewomen had to face not only all of its horrors, which were well known to the servicemen, but also prejudices regarding their presence in the military and on the battlefield as representatives of a sex that should not be involved in combat. In addition, they had to accept the consequences of such an attitude, implemented in their rejection as war veterans, and to oppose accusations of various kinds. According to Joan Savage Cowey, who served in Anti-aircraft Defence, "Women were doing everything in England during the war. Churchill asked us to, remember. But I don't think the army girls were ever popular. I think most people thought we were loose women, just there to entertain the troops."[11] Even abroad, people viewed British women in military uniform with caution.[12] Soviet society was characterised by a contemptuous attitude towards female front-line soldiers and stigmatisation of the "war wife" phenomenon.

Historiography and sources

In both the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, the memories of women who served in the armed forces during the war have attracted little attention in the latter half of the twentieth century. These memories have periodically been used as sources in academic research. Scholars and employees of state memory institutions have sometimes asked female veterans to share details of their service.[13] However, the rest of society rarely showed

my study. That is why I included my translations of the quotes from the Russian and Ukrainian editions of the book (Svetlana Alexievich, *U voĭnȳ ne zhenskoe litso* (Moskva: "Pravda", 1988) and Svitlana Aleksiievych, *U viiny ne zhinoche oblychchia* (Kharkiv: Vivat, 2016)). It is worth noting, that there are differences even between the editions published in Russian and Ukrainian. It is not the aim of my research to investigate the reasons for this, but, in my opinion, this issue indeed deserves a separate thorough study.

10 Shelley Saywell, *Women in War* (Toronto: Penguin Books Canada, 1986), 2.

11 *Ibid*., 1.

12 *Ibid*., 28.

13 For example, see: Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv vyshchykh orhaniv vlady ta upravlinnia Ukrainy (henceforth: TsDAVO Ukrainy).4620.2.128: Dokumenty veteraniv 8-yi povitrianoi armii (avtobiohrafii, osobysti lystky z opysanniam boiovoho shliakhu, fotohrafii). Rukopys, mashynopys, oryhinaly, kopii.

any particular interest in them as defenders of the homeland. In addition, female veterans were hesitant to share their experiences. An approach had to be found to get them to talk. For example, attempts to obtain detailed answers from former servicewomen of the 8th Air Army when they filled out reference cards developed by the employees of the Ukrainian State Museum of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 were unsuccessful. Male and female veterans were asked to share information on their education, service in the armed forces during the war, awards, activities in the post-war period, etc. Most of the space in the cards was dedicated to descriptions of participation and feats in hostilities on various fronts. Veterans themselves mostly filled them out in the late 1970s. In some cases, this was done by their relatives.

The cards contain information on the service of Lidia Alisova, Sofia Glekel', Polina Boĭchenko, Anna Varich-Khryapina, Ol'ga Kalyuzhskaya (Korshunova), Inna Pasportnikova, Valentina Rȳbak, and others.[14] Unfortunately, women's reference cards contain very sparse information on their service. On this basis, one can only state the obvious contrast between cards filled out by male and female veterans. The number of reference cards is too small to draw conclusions regarding the entire Soviet army based on their analysis. Nevertheless, this fact seems to be indicative to us. Women who served in the 8th Air Army and filled out reference cards seldom attached appendices, such as letters, characterisations, extended answers to questions, and other documents that covered the specifics of their activities during the war in greater detail. Only one woman attached a characterisation of her service prepared by her commander. In the card field "Participation on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War and description of the feat", some women considered it necessary to clarify that they did not perform feats (for example, see the cards of L. Alisova, V. Rȳbak, etc.). Other scholars have pointed to similar phenomena in women's narratives.[15] Conversely, men's cards are much more comprehensive, filled with small details. They often did not limit themselves to the space provided on the card to record one or another milestone in their lives. They attached detailed multipage stories about their experiences in the war, diplomas, characterisations, and

[14] *Ibid*.

[15] For example, see: Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, "Black women's life stories: reclaiming self in narrative texts", *Women's Words: the Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. by Sherna Berger Gluck, Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1991), 48; Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame, "The life history approach to internal migration: how men and women came to Paris between the wars", *Our Common History: the Transformation of Europe*, ed. by Paul Thompson (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1982).

so on. We did not come across any man's card that specified in the field "Participation on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War and description of the feat" that he did not perform any feats. If any of the men felt that they had not accomplished any feats in their service, they simply provided information on the place and time of their service in chronological order.

It is also significant that in her research, Shelley Saywell has noted the reluctance of women who took part in the Second World War to present their activities as having been heroic. She has recorded this trend in interviews not only with Soviet, but also with British, French, Polish, and Italian women.[16] It is also worth noting that Saywell was able to obtain detailed accounts of service from many female veterans. Even so, she has also pointed out that female veterans were extremely reluctant to talk about some topics.

The work of Svetlana Alexievich, which was first published as the book *The Unwomanly Face of War* in 1985, is another example of a successful communication experience with Soviet female veterans.[17] It resonated considerably in society and significantly influenced the study of women's experiences in war. The author managed to find an approach that encouraged respondents to talk openly. However, it should be borne in mind that Soviet censors deleted a great deal of material from the book. In an interview in 2015, Alexievich claimed that several of the most embarrassing memories have never been published. However, the publication of the book did not lead to justice for female veterans or a change in Soviet society's attitude towards them. It irritated many people. The author admitted that she periodically received threats and letters of criticism, often from male war veterans.[18]

It is also noteworthy that Soviet and Russian historiography on this subject is largely committed to an essentialist approach to explain women's experiences in war.[19] Thus, Alexievich interpreted differences in male and female experiences not as a consequence of constructed gender roles, through which representatives of the two sexes could perceive the optics

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16 Saywell, *Women in War*, x.

17 Alexievich, *U voĭnȳ ne zhenskoe litso*; Aleksiievych, *U viiny ne zhinoche oblychchia*.

18 *Ispoved' pobeditelya: Mȳ vdesyaterom nasilovali nemetskuyu 12-letnyuyu devochku*, https://bit.ly/3t47WVC (accessed 12.02.2022).

19 For more information on the essentialist approach, see Natal'ya Pushkareva, "Dva napravleniya, dva diskursa v sovremennȳkh zhenskikh i gendernȳkh issledovaniyakh proshlogo", *Zhenskaya istoriya i sovremennȳe gendernȳe roli. Pereosmȳslivaya proshloe, zadumȳvayas' o budushchem* (Moskva: IÉA RAN, 2010), 10–12.

of the same phenomena differently, but as a result of innate biological differences. For example, she wrote:

> "Women's memory encompasses that continent of human feelings in war which usually escapes men's attention. While a man was gripped by war as an action, a woman felt and endured it differently because of her female psychology: bombing, death, and suffering were not the whole war for her. Due to her psychological and physiological peculiarities, a woman felt more keenly both the physical and moral hardships of the war, and it was difficult to her to get used to the 'male' setting of the wartime. And what she remembered and endured during that hell, today has become a unique spiritual experience, an experience of limitless human possibilities, which we have no right to ignore […]"[20]

In some cases, essentialist explanations in studies of women's participation in the war shifted from Soviet to Russian historiography. In particular, the text of Elena Senyavskaya is based on such explanations. She repeats Alexievich's statement about the existence of a special "women's psychology", which had an impact on the perception of frontline everyday life. According to Senyavskaya, things that women saw on the frontline contradicted their nature. Her explanations resemble those used in the 1940s in both British and Soviet societies. Thus, Senyavskaya writes: "psychologists note a thinner nervous organization in women than in men. By nature, the function of maternity, reproduction of the human race is inherent in women. A woman gives life. That is why the phrases 'woman-soldier', woman who bears death seem unnatural".[21] Some statements contained in Natalia Barsukova's research also did not go beyond this concept.[22] At the same time, Ol'ga Nikonova's works represent a critical approach to the analysis of gender roles in the Soviet army.[23]

In Western historiography, research on women's experiences during the war based on their memories has often focused on undermining biological explanations of women's social roles and rethinking them. An example is the work of Dorothy Sheridan, who analysed the memories of 50 former

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20 Alexievich, *U voĭnȳ ne zhenskoe litso*, 10–11.

21 Elena Senyavskaya, *Psikhologiya voĭnȳ v XX veke: istoricheskiĭ opȳt Rossii* (Moskva: ROSSPÉN, 1999), 146.

22 Natal'ya Barsukova, "Zhenshchinȳ v Vooruzhennȳkh silakh SSSR v godȳ Velikoĭ Otechestvennoĭ voĭnȳ 1941–1945 gg.", *Omskiĭ nauchnȳĭ vestnik*, 5 (112) (2012), 12–13.

23 Ol'ga Nikonova, "Kak iz krest'yanki Gaĭdinoĭ sdelat' Marinu Raskovu, ili O teorii i praktike vospitaniya sovetskikh patriotok", https://bit.ly/3kCt13B (accessed 12.02.2022); Ol'ga Nikonova, "Zhenshchinȳ, voĭna i 'figurȳ umolchaniya'", https://bit.ly/3sIFrMo (accessed 28.03.2022).

members of the ATS.[24] She argues that for many British women, military service was a temporary phenomenon, a time that "fell out" of their lives. She sees this as the first reason for limited changes in gender relations in the postwar United Kingdom. In addition, Sheridan attempted to understand how strongly the current gender regime influenced the choices made by female veterans regarding the paths of their lives in the postwar period.

The research by Penny Summerfield and Nicole Crockett is based on the oral testimonies of 40 British women. They not only analysed such a complex and stereotyped topic as female sexuality during the war, they also attempted to refute the most common views on it in historiography. Specifically, they tried to prove the inaccuracy of allegations of women's total immorality during the war, as well as the beginning of their sexual liberation during this period. In addition, they argue that it is not suitable to exaggerate the scale of control and regulation of the private lives of servicewomen exerted by society and government during the war.[25]

At the societal level, both countries became interested in ordinary people's memories of the war, including women, in the early 2000s. In 2003, the BBC launched the project "WW2 People's War". It aimed to collect ordinary British people's memories of their national service during the war in both civilian and military institutions.[26] Interviews were conducted from June of 2003 to January of 2006. Today it contains 47,000 personal stories and 15,000 photographs. A few years earlier (2000) the "YAPOMNYU" ("IREMEMBER") project was launched in Russia.[27] This is a web portal, which currently contains 2,496 recollections of participants in the Soviet-German war. Many of them are from female veterans.

This article relies on personal reminiscences, which were mostly recorded long after the war. Despite the problems inherent to this approach, such as difficulties in reconstructing particular events in detail, censorship, self-censorship, etc., modern methodological developments make it possible to use them as sources for investigating general and particular trends in servicewomen's perception of the Second World War and their own roles in it.

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24 Sheridan, "Ambivalent Memories", 32–40.

25 Penny Summerfield, Nicole Crockett, ""You weren't taught that with the welding": lessons in sexuality in the Second World War'", *Women's History Review*, 1:3 (1992), 435–454.

26 *WW2 People's War. An archive of World War Two memories – written by the public, gathered by the BBC*, https://bbc.in/332Osq6 (accessed 28.03.2022).

27 YAPOMNYU, https://bit.ly/332OxKq (accessed 28.03.2022).

Methodology

In the context of our study, some of the assumptions that emerged in the development of memory studies aimed at studying various facets of the use of memory as a tool for remembering the past are relevant. In particular, it is important to understand the relationship between individual and collective memory. The memories analysed in this article are individual but come from representatives of particular social groups – British and Soviet female veterans of the Second World War. By sharing reminiscences that reflect their experiences and visions of war, they simultaneously reproduce and constitute certain patterns, narratives, and visions inherent to them as a group of individuals and participate in the formation of collective memory[28] of the Second World War. Despite the fact that there are scholarly researchers who deny the existence of collective memory, we agree with the point of view presented by Aleida Assmann. She emphasises:

> "To acknowledge the concept of "collective memory," […] is to acknowledge the concept of some "collective identity." There is no question that this concept has been abused in the past and is still conducive to exclusionary and destructive politics. In order to overcome the malignant aspects that this construct is able to generate, it is of little help to deny its reality and efficiency. To contain its problematic potential, it is more efficient to emphasize and maintain the plurality of identities and "memory-systems" within the individual person. They can function as a salutary system of checks and balances to guard against the imperial dominance of one exclusive "collective memory.""[29]

Since many of the primary sources created using the oral history method are involved in our research, it is necessary to pay more attention to their features. Oral history is a method of conducting historical research that makes it possible to listen to the voices of ordinary people. Often, other types of sources are more likely to present a view of events from the perspective of those with power and authority, while

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[28] According to Henry L. Roediger and Magdalena Abel: "Collective memory is an umbrella term that reflects how people remember their past as members of the group. It can be studied as a body of knowledge, as an attribute or schema of a people, and as a process of contestation and change. Such collective memories probably boost group identity and shape social and political discourse." Henry L. Roediger, Magdalena Abel, "Collective memory: a new arena of cognitive study", *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 19:7 (2015), 361.

[29] Aleida Assmann, "Memory, Individual and Collective", *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin, Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 223.

> "Oral history is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but from the unknown majority of the people […] Equally, oral history offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history, to the authoritarian judgement inherent in its tradition. It provides a means for radical transformation of the social meaning of history."[30]

Despite the fact that interviews often include exaggerations, omissions, mistakes in certain details, etc., Luisa Passerini indicates that "…all autobiographical memory is true; it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose".[31] Joan Sangster, who has demonstrated the valuable impact of oral history on feminist studies, emphasises the importance of taking into account a number of factors for the correct contextualisation of women's memories, in particular, the influence of ideologies that were crucial in shaping the lives of the respondents: "[...] listening to women's words, in turn, will help us to see how women understood, negotiated and sometimes challenged these dominant ideals".[32]

In this study, we will focus on those thematic blocks that, in our opinion, have been most influenced by patriarchal ideology and culture, and are shrouded in several stereotypes related to the perception of women as the "weaker sex" and to the need to nurture such an image in society. We have paid special attention to the following issues: 1) the attitude of female veterans towards the war as a phenomenon, since it is often possible to come across the statement that any hostilities should be considered the prerogative of the male sex; 2) attitudes regarding murder, because ordinary citizens and researchers of the history of war often emphasise the division of gender roles, in which the female role is to give life, and the male role is to take it away; 3) feelings of fear and self-control, because women are often considered to be more prone to panic and sometimes unable to control emotions; 4) fear of losing "femininity", because in both societies (especially in the United Kingdom) the presence of women in the army was associated with fears of their masculinisation, which, incidentally, contradicted the concept of femininity and masculinity as innate characteristics of men and

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30 Paul Thompson, "The voice of the past: oral history", *The oral history reader*, ed. by Robert Perks, Alistair Thomson (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003), 25–28.

31 Luisa Passerini, "Women's personal narratives: myths, experiences, and emotions", *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, ed. by Joy Webster Barbre, Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 197.

32 Joan Sangster, "Telling our stories. Feminist debates and the use of oral history" *The oral history reader*, ed. by Robert Perks, Alistair Thomson (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003), 91.

women; 5) relations between male and female comrades-in-arms, as well as romances and intimate relations between them as subtopics, because this problem is perhaps the most controversial and periodically causes a significant number of discussions regarding morality, the liability for which the societies of both countries tended to impose primarily on women.

Female attitudes to war and their role in it

Undoubtedly, servicewomen assessed their participation in the military campaign of 1939–45 differently. There were those who considered their service an unfortunate exception to the rule, dictated by the conditions of the war and a shortage of males; and those who considered it their duty. In general, it is necessary to understand that, despite the many features common to women's military service, the peculiarities of the perception of war and responses to certain events were accompanied by unique sets of emotions for each woman. Memory studies can only reveal their diversity and find some common trends, but any attempt to unify them is doomed to failure.

In trying to define their attitude toward the war, women in both countries often emphasised the fact that it was a negative and horrific phenomenon. For example, Ruth Mary Parker, a member of the WAAF, claimed: "It was a dreadful war, as are all wars, and so many of my generation gave their lives. I pray to God that nothing of the kind happens to your generation."[33] Nevertheless, it is obvious that state propaganda regarding the total nature of the current armed conflict, addressing it as a people's war involving the entire population, had a significant impact on the minds of women in both countries. Therefore, many of them did not consider military service as a purely male duty. Consequently, the British spy Nancy Wake noted the following: "I hate wars and violence but if they come then I don't see why we women should just wave our men a proud goodbye and then knit them balaclavas."[34] A radar operator who took part in Dorothy Sheridan's study shared this opinion: "I think they [wars] are a wicked waste of good human lives caused by greed and envy. I was proud to be in the ATS and

[33] "Recollections of a WAAF Ruth Mary Parker", *WW2 People's War. An archive of World War Two memories – written by the public, gathered by the BBC*, https://bbc.in/3EG5Yox (accessed 21.04.2022).

[34] Juliette Pattinson, ""Turning a Pretty Girl into a Killer": Women, Violence and Clandestine Operations during the Second World War", *Gender and Interpersonal Violence Language, Action and Representation*, ed. by Karen Throsby, Flora Alexander (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 11.

proud to have served my country during a terrible and futile war."[35] When trying to explain the deviation from accepted social norms according to which women should not fight and to justify her own choice to go to the front, the Soviet pilot Galina Brok-Bel'tsova used the statement about the "people's war", often used in propaganda at the time. She noted that, on the one hand, she believes that war is not a woman's business. However, on the other hand,

> " […] when the enemy attacked, when they bombed, we were watching a film in the cinema when we heard an air siren, and then we were driven to the "Stalinskaya" metro station, there were elderly people, children, and we were strong, beautiful. And so the whole school went to defend Moscow. Nobody asked whether it was a woman's business or not. It was a people's war. And everyone who could do something went to the front."[36]

There were female veterans who openly believed that women should be on an equal footing with men during the war. Among them was the sniper Mariya Galȳshkina (Kleĭmenova), who claimed that women sometimes "have more strength than men".[37] In her opinion, women also have a positive influence on male soldiers, who in the presence of women "try to be neat, well-cultured".[38] Despite her military service, the anti-aircraft gunner Tamara Borisova (Kozȳreva) had the opposite point of view. She believed that war was "not a woman's business. A woman is called, by her essence and character, to be at home. A woman must be a woman. She must give birth to sons, build a house, plant a garden."[39]

Perhaps the most controversial issue during the war was the use of weapons by women and their direct participation in combat. Traditional beliefs characterising women as representatives of the "weaker sex", who should be in the rear during the war, were widespread in the societies of both countries. This was despite the fact that the Soviet Union was quite active in involving women in paramilitary organisations in the interwar period, and during the war allowed them to perform combat roles in the army. Soviet authorities often emphasised that women were sent to the front in exceptional cases, and avoided mentioning their mass presence in the

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35 Sheridan, "Ambivalent Memories", 38–39.

36 "Brok-Bel'tsova Galina Pavlovna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3J5EqEE (accessed 21.04.2022).

37 "Galȳshkina (Kleĭmenova) Mariya Aleksandrovna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3Jj4I73 (accessed 21.04.2022).

38 *Ibid*.

39 "Borisova (Kozȳreva) Tamara Il'inichna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3CvnB3r (accessed 21.04.2022).

armed forces as combatants, which is evident in the analysis of the public discourse of this period.[40] In the United Kingdom, attempts to maintain the status quo in gender roles have often been accompanied by absurd decisions. Servicewomen were not given weapons during their shifts at military facilities. In the event of an enemy attack, they had to fight back with their bare hands, or with axe handles or other improvised means.[41] The authorities initiated such measures, not the women themselves. Sometimes servicewomen criticised such measures. For example, members of the 93rd Searchlight Regiment expressed regret at their taboo on the use of weapons. When their brothers-in-arms were on duty, they were given Lewis guns. However, when women were on duty, all weapons were removed from their locations,[42] even though in their opinion, they should have been left with at least one machine-gun for self-defence in case of enemy attack.

Vera Laughton Mathews, the head of the WRNS, did not share the taboo on women using weapons. She noted that some members of her organisation had undergone appropriate training to be able to protect their units in the event of an attack. At the same time, Laughton Mathews supported an opinion that was very widespread during the First World War,[43] namely that women are not made to kill because their involvement in the birth of life is too great. Therefore, any murder would be violence against their nature.[44] The head of the ATS Jean Knox shared the same opinion and was convinced that women cannot be taught to kill and cannot do it on an equal footing with men because they give life, and therefore are not intended to take it.[45] The latter statement was fully in line with the beliefs of Special Operations Executive (SOE) agent Pearl Witherington. Therefore, during

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40 For example, see "Doch' partizana", *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 01.08.1941, No. 180, 2; G. Orlova, Shlifovshchitsa Matyukhina, *Vechernyaya Moskva,* 10.09.1941, No. 214, 2; "Sovetskaya devushka! Ovladevaĭ voennymi spetsial'nostyami", *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 25.03.1942, No. 70 (5165), 1; "Lozungi TSK VKP (b) k XXIV godovshchine Velikoĭ Oktyabr'skoĭ Sotsialisticheskoĭ revolyutsii", *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 31.10.1941, No. 258 (5389), 1; "Lozungi TSK BKP(b) k 25-ĭ godovshchine Velikoĭ oktyabr'skoĭ Sotsialisticheskoĭ revolyutsii, *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 28.10.1942, No. 254 (5695), 1; "Lozungi TSK BKP(b) k 25 godovshchine Krasnoĭ armii", *Stalinskiĭ sokol, gazeta Voenno-vozdushnykh sil Krasnoĭ Armii*, 23.02.1943, No. 9 (137), 2; "Prizyvy TSK BKP(b) k 26-ĭ godovshchine Krasnoĭ armii", *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 21.02.1944, No. 43 (6100), 1; "Prizyvy TSK BKP (b) k 27-ĭ godovshchine Krasnoĭ armii", *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 21.02.1946, No. 43 (6408), 1.

41 Vee Robinson, *On Target* (Wakefield: Verity Press, 1991), 78.

42 Gerard J. DeGroot, "Whose Finger on the Trigger? Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries and the Female Combat Taboo", *War in History*, 4:4 (1997), 445.

43 For example, see: Joanna Bourke, *Women and the Military during World War One*, BBC History, http://goo.gl/eBvVsp (accessed 21.04.2022).

44 Vera Laughton Mathews, *Blue Tapestry* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1948), 226–227.

45 "Women are not killers – ATS Chief", *Courier and Advertiser*, 01.10.1942, 2.

her service, she refused to take part in combat and kill. At the same time, her position differed from those mentioned above in one key aspect – Witherington did not try to spread her beliefs to all women. She assumed that some representatives of her sex might feel the need to take part in the fighting. However, Witherington still made subjective generalisations, talking about the reasons for this. According to her, they stem from the desire of women to protect their children.[46] However, it is obvious that this was a misguided attempt to fit combat experience to traditional gender roles, according to which caring for children was primarily the responsibility of the mother. After all, British authorities called up predominantly single childless women for service in the armed forces, and this did not prevent them from expressing their readiness to defend the country with weapons in their hands.

Regarding women committing murder during the war, in the United Kingdom, on the one hand, it was argued that such an experience would be too traumatic for them. On the other hand, they were allowed to perform all kinds of anti-aircraft defence duties, except for loading and firing guns. Thus, British women in anti-aircraft defence were still directly involved in killing the enemy and were aware of it, as was the British government, which was actually trying to protect not women, but their image in society as non-combatants. The attitude of British women toward the killing of enemies during the war was different. Gerard J. DeGroot has quoted several memoirs by women who served in anti-aircraft defence regarding whether they felt remorse after the destruction of enemy forces. Joyce Carr said she felt no pity but joy because she was killing enemies who intended to bomb her country. Mollie Ritson also said she did not care that her unit's activities were aimed at killing the pilot of an enemy aircraft. However, she doubted whether she could have killed the enemy if she had come face to face with him.[47] Some British female pilots of Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) reported anger and a desire to take revenge for their desecrated homeland. Despite their civilian status, they periodically had to transport planes with explosives. Flying over destroyed native lands, some of them had a fervent desire to personally drop bombs on the enemies.[48]

Many British women who served in anti-aircraft defence pointed out that they enjoyed training before the battles and the battles themselves.

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46 Elizabeth Kate Vigurs, *The women agents of the Special Operations Executive F section: wartime realities and post war representations* (PhD Thesis: University of Leeds, 2011), 46.

47 DeGroot, "Whose finger on the trigger?", 446.

48 Saywell, *Women in War*, 19–20.

One of them mentioned that the training in shooting down enemy planes, which usually took place from 15:00 to 17:00, was the most interesting part of the training. Joan Quibell, who served in the 1st Air Corps in Uxbridge near London, recalled that during one of her night shifts there was an air attack, which was successfully repulsed by British forces: "[…] the anti-aircraft barrage was terrific. Seven enemy bombers were shot down and I found it fascinating to be actually 'in' on a raid, with the various A.A. Batteries being controlled from our H.Q.."[49] Joan Savage Cowey stated that they "[…] still feel great every time we shot something down. We never thought about the pilot – did he have a family or anything. The army trains to kill. Our instruments and those guns were practically obsolete anyway, and we didn't have many hits. When we did, the whole group would be ecstatic."[50]

It is also interesting that almost half of the members of the ATS, when asked about the motives for their service in the armed forces, said they joined the army for patriotic reasons. Researchers nevertheless doubt the veracity of such answers because the questionnaire was designed so that this answer seemed the most acceptable and correct.[51]

It should be noted that according to their memories, the combat experience of Soviet servicewomen was far more diverse. When speaking about their feelings during battle, they admitted that they reacted very painfully to the first killed enemy. This is found especially often in the memoirs of those servicewomen who clearly saw the death of their human targets. They often found motivation for continuing in military service, in revenge for their homeland and their dead compatriots. For example, Senior Sergeant Klavdiya Krokhina explained her attitude as a sniper towards war and murder as follows:

> "We lay in wait, and I was observing the area. And then I saw that one German lifted himself. I shot and he fell. And, you know, I was shaking all over, I was pounding all over after that. I started to cry. I never felt anything when I shot at the targets but that time, I had a nagging thought: how come I'd killed a human being? [...] Then this feeling disappeared. Here is how it happened. We were walking near some small village in East Prussia. And there was a barrack or a house by the road, I don't know, it was burning, burnt down, only cinders remained. And in these cinders, there were human bones, and among them burnt stars, these were our wounded or captured soldiers had been burned up there

[49] "Joan Quibell's Diary. Part Six. 1943", https://bbc.in/3FA9nPI (accessed 14.05.2022).
[50] Saywell, *Women in War*, 23–24.
[51] Jennifer Margaret Gould, *The women's corps: the establishment of women's military services in Britain* (PhD Thesis: University College London, 1988), 379.

> [...] After that, I didn't feel sorry while killing the enemy. When I saw those burning bones, I couldn't come to my senses, there was anger and desire for revenge."[52]

When the sniper Aleksandra Medvedeva-Nazarkina returned to her unit after killing her first enemy soldier, her colleagues began to greet her, but the woman could not hold back tears caused by understanding that she had killed a man. She noted that at first it was very difficult "[…] to get settled at the front and shoot at people, although I understood that I was shooting at enemies. Soon a fracture occurred in my mind. Seeing human grief, tears, and the blood of my native land, I realised that there can be no pity for the fierce invader."[53] The machine gunner Nina Onilova,[54] the sniper Mariya Bondarenko,[55] and others reported similar reactions and motivations in continuing their service.

It is interesting that according to some servicewomen, the profession of sniper was easier for women than for men. Thus, Antonina Borodkina (Makhlyagina) pointed out that "any woman is more organised, more resilient than a man. We shoot well; we shoot perfectly. When we were in training, we had shooting competitions. We were on Silikatnaya, the men were in Veshnyaki, and we took first place when we competed with them. We were more resilient. When you shoot, you need to be calmer. A man walks, picks up a target and goes with it; you have to shoot at it. And we shoot at those who run too […]"[56]

British female veterans also pointed out women's greater restraint. For example, one mentioned that during their service in Belgium, they did not panic during V-2 attacks on their camp, unlike men who ran and shouted.[57]

Female soldiers were characterised by their devotion and passion to duty in other branches of the military as well. According to the pilot and Hero of the Soviet Union Marina Chechneva's memoirs, she and her sisters-in-arms took great accountability in performing their duties: "Combat sorties are really our job, with a sense of healthy rivalry. The plane has just

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52 Alexievich, *U voĭnȳ ne zhenskoe litso*, 17.

53 "Medvedeva-Nazarkina Aleksandra Petrovna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3eAFXop (accessed 14.05.2022).

54 "Pis'mo komandira pulemëtnovo raschëta N. A. Onilovoĭ", *Govoryat bogibshie geroi* (M.: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoĭ literaturȳ, 1986) (accessed 14.05.2022).

55 "Bondarenko (Kataeva) Mariya Dmitrievna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/32CQPjo (accessed 14.05.2022).

56 "Borodkina (Makhlyagina) Antonina Vasil'evna. Vospominaniya", *YAPOMNYU*, https://iremember.ru/memoirs/snayperi/borodkina-makhlyagina-antonina-vasilevna/ (accessed 14.05.2022).

57 Saywell, *Women in War*, 26–27.

landed, and the crew prods the gunmen: "Bombs, faster!". When we make 5–6 flights a night, you return from the last one at dawn."[58]

Female veterans of both countries spoke differently about fear and war. Some felt fear during battle, others experienced it after combat had ended, and some claimed that they did not feel any fear at all. However, in the majority of the analysed recollections, female soldiers were most afraid of the possibility of serious injuries and disability. Thus, the Soviet telephone operator Mariya Rist (Fedorko) argued that it was impossible not to feel fear at the front. She felt it under artillery fire as well as during bombing raids, when it was difficult to find shelter and she had to hide in craters formed by exploding shells.[59] The signals troops' officer Antonina Kabanikhina stated that she did not think about death at the front: "I was most afraid of injury. I was afraid for my legs and arms. Once there was a heavy bombing. It is said that a bomb does not fall in the same place [twice]. Therefore, I jumped into a shell crater, many barrels were scattered there, and I shouted to our petty officer: "Put the barrels on my legs!" I thought those barrels would save my legs."[60]

According to the sniper Mariya Bondarenko (Kataeva), the most terrible moments at the front were when the troops went on the offensive. After all, under crossfire, it is difficult to get rid of the thought that you may die soon.[61] The pilot Nadezhda Popova recalled that she felt fear not during the battle, but after it ended. For a long time even after the war, she had dreams of sisters-in-arms who died while performing tasks. Popova was most afraid of injuries and captivity, which meant torture and rape for women. Because of this, she and her sisters-in-arms always tried to save one bullet in their weapon for themselves.[62] One woman who did not feel fear during the war was the sniper Roza Shanina, who wrote the following in her diary on 12 October 1944: "[…] how I want to be at the forefront, how interesting and dangerous at the same time, but I'm not scared for some reason".[63] Vee Robinson (Thomson), who served in the British anti-aircraft defence, said that she was very surprised by how she and her sisters-in-arms, representatives of the "weaker sex", could show examples

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58 Valentina Galagan, *Ratnŷĭ podvig zhenshchin v godŷ Velikoĭ otechestvennoĭ voĭnŷ* (Kiev: Golovnoe izdatel'stvo izdatel'skogo ob''edineniya "Vishcha shkola", 1986), 194.

59 "Rist (Fedorko) Mariya Kuz'minichna", https://bit.ly/3ej2MO8 (accessed: 14.05.2022).

60 75-letiyu osvobozhdeniya Belarusi ot nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov i prazdnovaniyu Dnya pobedŷ posvyashchaetsya…, https://bit.ly/3tKJ2tw (accessed 14.05.2022).

61 "Bondarenko (Kataeva) Mariya Dmitrievna".

62 Saywell, *Women in War*, 144.

63 "Frontovoĭ dnevnik Rozŷ Shaninoĭ "Ona zaveshchala nam pesni i rosŷ»", *YAPOMNYU* https://bit.ly/3CvFKOu (accessed 14.05.2022).

of great courage during the war. After all, "[…] none of us showed any fear whatsoever while a raid was in progress when on duty on the Command Post. Guns could be thundering beside us, the enemy threatening in the skies above us, but so totally immersed in our individual tasks were we, that the only emotion felt by us was desire to destroy that which we had been trained to destroy as quickly as possible."[64]

The ATA pilot Diana Barnato Walker, like many of her Soviet sisters-in-arms, was most afraid not of death but of grievous bodily harm, because "a damaged woman has nothing. Men can function without a leg or arm, or burnt, and they are considered heroes."[65] Barnato Walker believed society accepted men with disabilities, but not women.

Maintaining "femininity" and building interpersonal relationships in service

When studying women's experience in army service, one must consider the fact that due to cultural norms, servicewomen had to overcome not only the fear of murder, being killed or maimed, but also the fear of becoming a "wrong" woman or ceasing to be a woman. Lucy Noakes explains this by the existence of a "binary distinction between the female life-giver and the male life-taker". According to the scholar, it is so common that "when women do kill, they are often seen as more ferocious and more dangerous than men".[66] That is why so many memories of female veterans contain comparisons of their experiences with those of men, where they often try to present their brothers-in-arms as stronger and find an excuse for their own military service. The former sniper Tamara Stepanova said:

> "Men could go through it all. They were men after all. But how a woman could do the same, I don't know. As soon as I remember all that, I'm terrified, but at that time I could do everything: I could sleep next to a killed person, and shoot guns, and look at the blood; I remember that the smell of blood is especially strong in the snow […] Now I feel sick even while recalling this to you [....] But at that time, I could go through anything".[67]

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64 Robinson, *On Target*, 198.
65 Saywell, *Women in War*, 19.
66 Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907–1948* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 10.
67 Alexievich, *U voiny ne zhenskoe litso*, 7.

Even the very desire to serve in the military was often perceived as a distancing from the concept of "femininity". For example, when discussing the motives that prompted her to go to the front, the rangefinder of the anti-aircraft artillery Tamara Borisova (Kozȳreva) claimed that she had a "boyish character". Furthermore, in her opinion, this was why before the war she was interested in shooting, earned the "Voroshilov shooter" badge, and studied at the Society for the Assistance of Defence, Aircraft and Chemical Construction (OSOAVIAKHIM).[68] In her mind, these things were not suitable for women.

Merely being in the army was cause for women to doubt their "femininity". This is evidenced by their claims that they "are still women" or that they managed to remain women at the front. Thus, they believed that it had to be proved that they "are still women", and that by serving in the army it was possible to stop being a woman. For example, to prove her "femininity", which was manifested in the maternal instinct and the ability to empathise, Al'bina Gantimurova told the following story. In Poland, when Germans, including civilians, were evicted, a Polish officer snatched a doll from a German girl and threw it overboard. This outraged Gantimurova. She felt sorry for the child, so she hit the officer who offended her, and he fell into the water.[69]

British women's fears of losing their "femininity" were primarily related to increasing independence and gaining power. Sheridan noted that the vast majority of British women in civilian life held positions that did not receive respect in society (domestic servants, factory workers, office clerks, etc.). In private life, they were subordinate to the authority of men and community, and this was clearly articulated in society. Military service meant an increase in social status and greater freedom – women were out of their house, did not have to run a household or retain control of families and communities, lived with their sisters, performed "male" jobs, and sometimes even took patronage of male subordinates. At that time, this could all become a basis for doubts about servicewomen's "femininity" and even for fears of losing it.[70] In addition, society, and therefore women themselves, were particularly concerned about their military uniform. For British society at the time, the objectification of women, particularly in the military, was normal. A women's magazine gave them advice on how to avoid masculinisation: "Don't go all out for hair cropped like an escaped convict, nails clipped to nothing, and a ploughman's stride, all in

68 "Borisova (Kozȳreva) Tamara Il'inichna".

69 "Gantimurova Al'bina Aleksandrovna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3vWHe31 (accessed 14.05.2022).

70 Sheridan, "Ambivalent Memories", 33.

the name of service. Remember that your duty as a woman, uniform or no uniform, is to be feminine come what may."[71] All this was often nourished by servicemen. A former member of the ATS mentioned that their instructor emphasised that they did not look like women due to their pitiful shape and excessive rigidity, because "a real woman wore a picture hat and chiffon".[72] Some British women in military service hated their uniforms and attempted to decorate them in every possible way because of excessive attention to their appearance and its ridicule in society. WAAF members tried to change into civilian clothes at the first opportunity and attempted to improve their military uniform to make it look better.[73] Members of the ATS and WRNS also tried to make their uniforms more "feminine".[74]

There were also opposite fears – that women in military service would look too attractive, which would indicate, in particular, their loose morals and would not reflect the realities of service. The British Parliament discussed the inexpediency of glamorising some materials for the recruitment of women to the ATS.[75] There was criticism in society of the use of cosmetics by servicewomen. Summerfield and Crockett quote a male officer regarding what in his opinion was the "improper" use of cosmetics by members of women's services. At the same time, servicewomen were still expected to use cosmetics, but "properly".[76] Since everyone has their own interpretation of what constitutes "proper" or "improper" use, we must conclude that such criticism stemmed from the general attempt in society to control the behaviour of women in the public sphere.

In the Soviet Union during the war, we could not find outright criticism of the appearance of women in military uniform. On the contrary, we came across critical remarks by Soviet female soldiers regarding the attitude of their foreign sisters-in-arms towards appearance. Thus, during her visit to the United States, the sniper Lyudmila Pavlichenko noted: "I wear my uniform with honour. It has been covered with blood in battle. It is plain to see that what is important for American women is whether they wear silk underwear under their uniforms. They have yet to learn what the

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71 Summerfield, Crockett, ""You weren't taught that with the welding"", 437.

72 Saywell, *Women in War*, 15.

73 Tessa Stone, "Creating a (gendered?) military identity: The Women's auxiliary air force in Great Britain in the Second World War", *Women's History Review*, 8:4 (1999), 618–619.

74 Summerfield, Crockett, ""You weren't taught that with the welding"", 447.

75 "King's speech (25 November 1941)", *Hansard, the Official Report of debates in Parliament. House of Commons Debates*, 376 (1941), cols. 623–720.

76 Summerfield, Crockett, ""You weren't taught that with the welding"", 438.

uniform stands for."[77] In general, that observation also applies to British servicewomen, who, like their American sisters-in-arms, were forced to worry too much about their appearance in uniform and questioned their femininity, regardless of the numerous restrictions on them in the military and the fact that officially, only non-combat roles were available to them. However, entirely within the patriarchal framework, Pavlichenko blamed women in such situations, not the government and society, which demanded "appropriate" behaviour from them. In addition, we should not forget that Soviet female soldiers also tried to decorate themselves and their uniforms. According to the memoirs of the pilot Nadezhda Popova, at the beginning of preparations for going to the front, female pilots were given a man's uniform and ordered to cut their hair short. Many of them were very upset by the latter because they were proud of their long hair and considered it part of their "femininity". The latter belief was nurtured by servicemen. One day, an air force general came to inspect female pilots. He found that one female pilot had managed to save her long hair and hide it under her cap. Instead of punishing her, he said: "Now that is what a woman should look like. Why do all of you want to look like boys?"[78] This led to a situation where after arriving at the front, most of the female pilots grew long hair again. In addition, despite the ban on makeup, they still tried to use it as much as possible, because "You only have your youth once. Ours came during the war, but still, we were not going to miss it."[79] Sometimes they decorated items of clothing, often not for the public, but for themselves. For example, the pilot Natalia Meklin mentioned that her sisters decorated their rags with embroidered flowers.[80]

According to the memories of female veterans from both countries, relations between sisters-in-arms in military units were mostly positive. Even so, there were some interest groups, quarrels, and hierarchies. In the United Kingdom, there was confrontation between representatives of different strata of society. This is evident from female veterans who participated in Saywell's study.[81]

Tessa Stone points out the existence of friction between members of the WAAF who held operational and non-operational positions. The former

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77 "Soviet girl sniper in Britain", *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 06.11.1942, 3.
78 Saywell, *Women in War*, 138.
79 *Ibid*., 145.
80 Irina Rakobol'skaya, Natal'ya Kravtsova, *Nas nazyvali nochnymi ved'mami. Tak voeval zhenskiĭ 46-ĭ gvardeĭskiĭ polk nochnykh bombardirovshchikov* (Moskva: Izd-vo MGU, 2005), 111.
81 Saywell, *Women in War*, 15.

believed that their work was more important and dangerous, while the latter considered them arrogant snobs and played minor dirty tricks on them. For example, kitchen workers might feed them worse or unexpectedly put chili peppers in dishes. Some members of the WAAF who held operational positions during the war tried to hide that fact after the war, so as not to be ostracised by female colleagues who performed general duties and made up the majority.[82] In the Soviet Union, after the war, female soldiers also tried to conceal the fact of service, not because of their sisters-in-arms, but rather due to public prejudices regarding their service and accusations of sexual promiscuity.[83]

As for relations between sisters-in-arms in Soviet military units, they had their own peculiarities. For example, the pilot Galina Brok-Bel'tsova claimed that there were practically no quarrels in her regiment. However, women were grouped according to interests, which often depended on specialisation. For example, pilots had their own group, along with navigators. At the same time, the whole crew was quite friendly with each other.[84] Female veterans from both countries often pointed out that during their military service, they built life-long friendships.[85]

The simplest forms of interaction between brothers-in-arms and their sisters-in-arms in the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union was the exchange of food and other products. For example, the British servicewoman Joyce Stott, who served in anti-aircraft defence, mentioned that the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) provided them with cosmetics, chocolate, and cigarettes. Because few women in their unit smoked, they sold the excess tobacco products to their male counterparts.[86] A former WRNS member, who wished to remain anonymous, said she served on a minesweeping ship in Lowestoft. There were only two women on this ship. So as not to embarrass the men with their skirts, they wore the same uniforms. The former servicewoman said that during the war, she managed to get rum for sailors in exchange for an additional day off. Describing her service in Lowestoft, she stressed that there was an atmosphere

82 Stone, "Creating a (gendered?) military identity", 614–615.

83 For example, see *A Revolution of their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, ed. by Barbara Alpern Engel, Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 215; Viktor Zalgaller, *Bȳt voiĭnȳ*, https://bit.ly/3fhlwoi (accessed 14.05.2022).

84 "Brok-Bel'tsova Galina Pavlovna", *YAPOMNYU*, (access 21.04.2022).

85 For example, see Carol Harris, *Women at war in uniform 1939–1945* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003); Saywell, *Women in War,* 146.

86 Joyce Stott, "Life on the anti-aircraft gun-sites WW2", *WW2 People's War. An archive of World War Two memories – written by the public, gathered by the BBC*, https://bbc.in/33hLqLu (accessed 14.05.2022).

of friendship and mutual support in the crew. On the other hand, when a woman was sent to serve in Northern Ireland, she was less fortunate, as her colleagues were much less friendly and close-knit.[87] The Soviet anti-aircraft gunner Raisa Ponomareva (Shinkarenko) said that when all the soldiers at the front were given a hundred grams of strong alcohol and chocolate, women gave men their alcohol in exchange for chocolate.[88] Soviet female veterans also pointed out the existence of mutual support between them and their male comrades during the war. For example, when possible, the latter helped women to carry difficult things. And the former, in turn, washed and repaired men's clothes.[89] Based on the information that we have analysed, it is difficult to say whether this mutual assistance was equally reciprocated.

In servicewomen's recollections regarding the attitudes toward them of their male counterparts, it is rare to find instances of equal treatment. Female veterans from both countries often pointed out paternalistic attitudes towards themselves. However, it is also obvious to us that in their memoirs, women avoided direct complaints regarding the abusive behaviour of male colleagues, presented their complaints "between the lines", and often even considered such behaviour justified. According to British female members of the anti-aircraft defence units, who had to serve with much older men, their colleagues treated them with respect and parental care – they were friendly, brought them water (which was in short supply), and took on the responsibilities of women who had fallen ill. However, in case of an enemy attack, team members had to perform their duties well, regardless of gender.[90] At the same time, it should not be forgotten that the British military leadership mostly sent men who had no service experience at all to serve with women in anti-aircraft defence. This is because men with experience considered it humiliating to serve with women.[91]

The engine mechanic in the WAAF Frances Snell pointed out that men serving in the Royal Air Force (RAF) often demonstrated a biased approach to her, her sisters-in-arms, and the results of their work. Servicewomen constantly had to prove something to male comrades and try harder than

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87 [Anon.], "Cigarettes and alcohol", *WW2 People's War. An archive of World War Two memories – written by the public, gathered by the BBC*, https://bbc.in/3HfFN2q (accessed 14.06.2022).

88 "Ponomareva (Shinkarenko) Raisa Fedorovna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3ewoo68 (accessed 14.05.2022).

89 Saywell, *Women in War*, 146.

90 *Ibid*., 28–29.

91 Degroot, "Whose Finger on the Trigger?", 438.

men in similar positions to gain recognition.[92] Misunderstandings based on gender hierarchies arose from time to time, even with men who entered the service without previous military experience. A striking example is the situation in the RAF where a 19-year-old WAAF officer was appointed as the superior officer of a 40-year-old man who had just entered the service. The latter considered this situation outrageous and was supported by many members of the House of Commons.[93]

Analysing the experience of Soviet servicewomen in this context, according to the former platoon commander Serafima Petukhova, men in her unit generally treated her well, but believed that it was not "a woman's business to be a commander".[94] The sniper Antonina Kotlyarova (Zakharova) assessed the attitude of men towards women in her unit as caring: "They did not insult us. They gave us chocolate and other things."[95] At the same time, Al'bina Gantimurova related the mockery that they sometimes received from brothers-in-arms, and even outright insults from servicemen from other units. For example, a young lieutenant from an infantry platoon called her an "ersatz soldier" because of her sex.[96]According to the memories of female veterans in the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, women were frequently not taken seriously at first. Servicemen were sometimes hostile to them, and they had to prove their ability to serve on an equal basis with men. The pilot Nadezhda Popova mentioned that her 588th Night Bomber Regiment shared an airfield with male pilots. At first, they were very hostile to the women – they considered their training insufficient, and the women themselves were viewed as an obstacle. The men even played a brutal prank on them, simulating an attack by Nazi aircraft, which the female pilots were unable to repel. However, over time, the women managed to earn credibility and prove themselves as successful military pilots.[97] Similar situations arose in other military branches. Katyusha Mikhailova, who served in the Navy, said that men were hostile to her when she arrived at her place of service. Their commander described her as "insane" and ordered the crew to treat her "properly". So one of the sailors gave her a pacifier with the following words: "This is for you. When we go into battle we won't have time

92 Summerfield, Crockett, ""You weren't taught that with the welding"", 448.

93 "Women in national service (03 August 1943)", *Hansard, the Official Report of debates in Parliament. House of Commons Debates*, 391 (1943), col. 2131.

94 Barsukova, "Zhenshchinȳ v Vooruzhennȳkh silakh SSSR", 12.

95 "Kotlyarova (Zakharova) Antonina Aleksandrovna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3mCCpq6 (accessed 14.05.2022).

96 "Gantimurova Al'bina Aleksandrovna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3vWHe31 (accessed 14.05.2022).

97 Saywell, *Women in War*, 144–145.

to baby you, so take this." In response, she said: "We'll see who is going to take care of whom."[98] Eventually, she managed to build relationships with her brothers-in-arms and earn recognition by withstanding the gruelling training, which was the same for men and women, and proving to be an effective member of the crew in battle.

Sometimes servicemen engaged in posturing to impress their sisters-in-arms. The pilot Galina Brok-Bel'tsova gave the following example: "attack aircraft pilots once said, "Girls, we'll show you how attack aircraft fly". I got into the attack aircraft, sat near the shooter, and here he is skimming the surface, then showing a "candle". Then he turns around and asks, "Do you fly like that? Do you have such aces, Galochka?" I say, "We don't have such fools". I didn't even want to talk to him. You get used to disciplining; try to take care of the equipment. Then you see such bravado… It's just insulting when a person brags like that."[99]

Harassment, sexual and romantic relationships

Undoubtedly, topics related to harassment, and sexual and romantic relationships are the most difficult to study in the relationship between servicemen and servicewomen. Summerfield and Crockett tried to rethink female sexuality during the war. They stated that the problematisation of women's sexuality at that time was a tool used by men and society to maintain control over women.[100] It is hard to disagree with that. After all, sexual emancipation during the war was inherent in both sexes due to several factors, including fear of death, difficult living conditions, separation from legal spouses, and so on. However, only women's behaviour caused concern and brought condemnation in both the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom.

According to Oleg Budnitskiĭ, relations between men and women changed radically in the Soviet Union during the war. In his opinion, it could not be otherwise. After all, society found itself in a situation where 34 million men went to serve in the army and as a result, there was a shortage of women at the front, and of men in the rear. However, society's attitude was not the same for men and women in matters of sexuality. According to the researcher, this stemmed primarily from the lack of gender equality in Soviet society, and it is difficult to disagree with him: "[…] what was

98 *Ibid*., 147.

99 "Brok-Bel'tsova Galina Pavlovna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3J5EqEE (accessed 21.04.2022).

100 Summerfield, Crockett, ""You weren't taught that with the welding"", 436.

considered permissible for men was considered inappropriate for women […]".[101] This maxim is also applicable to British society of that time.

Foremost, it was obviously important for many servicewomen to search for a husband. Female residents of both countries willingly mentioned romantic relationships with men, which eventually resulted in marriage. For example, according to WAAF member Nina Masel, she and her sisters-in-arms mostly talked about finding a groom, discussing their boyfriends, and happily meeting with fellows. However, such relationships often did not involve intimacy: "The average Ops girl admittedly likes a man who can kiss well", but, "definitely abstains from actual immorality".[102] Joan Quibell described in detail her acquaintance and wedding with a man named Leslie. They met in 1943 when they were on leave. The man served in the Light Coastal Forces. According to the woman, they fell in love with each other almost at first sight. That same year, they decided to get married, but they wanted to wait until the end of the war.[103] They were married in early 1945.[104] Esther Greene, a WRNS member since 1943, served in Brussels. She met her future husband, Harry Greene, there in early 1945. They saw each other until March of that year, but he soon disappeared, leaving behind a note claiming he had to go. Later she learned that he participated in the Battle of the Rhine and was not sure that he would survive. After the battle, they met again until in September of 1945, they were engaged in London and married in the following year.[105]

In the memoirs of British female veterans, one can occasionally find information on sexual intercourse and extramarital pregnancies. For example, they mentioned that at the beginning of the war, some of their sisters-in-arms used pregnancy as a means to leave the army. Women who did not want to continue in military service passed by the men's barracks and shouted, "Paragraph 11" (in the Service Regulation, it provides compassionate discharge for pregnant women).[106] It is also worth noting that

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101 Oleg Budnitskiĭ, "Muzhchinȳ i zhenshchinȳ v Krasnoĭ Armii (1941–1945)", *L'URSS et la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, 52/2–3 (2011), 405–422, https://bit.ly/3JrjDev (accessed 14.05.2022).

102 Gail Braybon, Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2013), 205.

103 "Joan Quibell's Diary. Part Six. 1943".

104 "Joan Quibell's Diary. Part Eight. 1945. A Wartime Wedding", *WW2 People's War. An archive of World War Two memories – written by the public, gathered by the BBC*, https://bbc.in/3syvcez (accessed 14.06.2022).

105 Esther Greene, "A Wartime Romance", *WW2 People's War. An archive of World War Two memories – written by the public, gathered by the BBC*, https://bbc.in/3JgloNP (accessed 14.06.2022).

106 Saywell, *Women in War*, 16.

British authorities tried to prevent romantic relationships during military service. According to the memories of female veterans, even at the dance hall it was problematic to dance with the same partner because it usually led to suspicion of romantic relations and to the transfer of the servicewoman to another military unit.[107] Of course, the government failed to completely eradicate intimate relations between servicemen and servicewomen, but it was able to achieve good results in reducing the scale of this phenomenon. A member of the ATS in anti-aircraft defence stated the following in this context:

> "We proved that men and women can be stationed together with no problems. We were comforting to them in a way; they'd enjoy our company. I don't really know where people get this idea that men and women should not be stationed together. It's just fear of sex. I'm sure it was going on, but so what. Anyway, most of the time we were filthy, hadn't taken off our clothes for days and were exhausted. When we were off duty, we were too tired to go anywhere or do anything or even think. We just went to bed. Sometimes we'd invite the men into our hut at night, we'd have a fire going and be in our nightclothes, and make some hot chocolate. Nothing ever happened. We talked about things like a letter from home. If one of us had a pack of cigarettes, we'd share it."[108]

The stories of Paulina Dorothea Nichol, a meteorologist at the WRNS, were perhaps the most candid among the memories we processed. She emphasised that she was amused by the fact that some of her sisters-in-arms said that there were no sexual contacts between men and women in military service. Nichol said that was not true and claimed that short love affairs were widespread, and in her unit in particular. Contraception (condoms) was available. Pregnant members of the WRNS were simply sent home without necessarily arranging a public condemnation of their behaviour. Abortions were strictly prohibited, so almost nobody had them. Women who did not want to continue their military service sometimes got married just for that purpose, because married women could leave the service.[109] A member of the WAAF, the barrier balloon operator Elizabeth Mahan also stated that love affairs were a common phenomenon; there was even a case of pregnancy at one of the stations of her service.[110] ATS member Maisie

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107 *Ibid.*, 29.

108 *Ibid.*

109 The Imperial War Museum, catalogue number: 23180: Nichol, Paulina Dorothea (Oral history), reel 2.

110 The Imperial War Museum, catalogue number: 28356: Mahan, Elizabeth (Oral history), reels 2–3.

Waggott said that some romances between brothers- and sisters-in-arms soon ended in marriage.[111] Dorothy Margaret Williams also told about the widespread prevalence of marriages between servicemen and servicewomen. Her sisters-in-arms married during service and could live in the same station with their husbands if they wished.[112]

Petty officer Dorrit Epstein, who served in the WRNS, emphasised the strict rules for servicewomen who became pregnant. They were expelled from the service. Epstein recalled an incident that happened to one of her sisters-in-arms. The woman's fiancé served on a submarine. She became pregnant by him and soon learned that her lover had died in battle. The woman's father, who was a bishop, was angered by the news of her pregnancy and said that he no longer had a daughter. In those days, there was a strong social stigma in British society regarding pregnancy out of wedlock. At the same time, women were not provided with information on contraception at the WRNS; the organisation ignored the need for sexual education.[113] Cases of parents not accepting their daughters who became pregnant out of wedlock were not isolated. ATS member Mary Irvine Crofton also mentioned that in her unit, women avoided sexual contact with men because they knew that if a woman became pregnant, she would be kicked out of the service, and there was a high probability that her own parents would disown her.[114]

Soviet female veterans spoke differently about romantic relationships. Some considered them a negative phenomenon and argued that in their unit it never happened. Others, conversely, saw nothing wrong in romantic relationships and recall their details with nostalgia, especially when they resulted in marriage. The anti-aircraft gunner Raisa Zayanchukovskaya said there were romances between men and women in her battery, and that she met her future husband there. He was the commander of their unit.[115] The Po-2 aircraft pilot Klavdiya Deryabina (Rȳzhkova) mentioned that romances were also widespread in her unit. For example, her

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111 The Imperial War Museum, catalogue number: 28414: Waggott, Maisie (Oral history), reel 6.

112 The Imperial War Museum, catalogue number: 9440: Williams, Dorothy Margaret (Oral history), reel 9.

113 The Imperial War Museum, catalogue number: 30491: Epstein, Dorrit (Oral history), reels 3–4.

114 The Imperial War Museum, catalogue number: 27085: Crofton, Mary Irvine (Oral history), reel 3.

115 "Zayanchukovskaya Raisa Mikhaĭlovna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3vXG4Ez (accessed 14.06.2022).

sister-in-arms Evgenia Rudneva met a tank man before her death near Kerch.[116] The anti-aircraft gunner Zinaida Sotnikova (Kleimenova) noted that her sister-in-arms had a romantic relationship with a colleague and eventually married him.[117]

On the other hand, the anti-aircraft gunner Anna Alexandrova (Starikova) claimed that there were no "non-regulation relations" between women and men in her unit: "This was strictly monitored. There were so many officers and young men at the division headquarters, but none of them even touched me or said a bad word."[118] The pilot Galina Brok-Bel'tsova also stated that the girls in her unit had no dates with men during their service. They argued that they would adjust their personal lives after the end of the war – "[…] it will end, and then our second youth will begin […]".[119] However, according to her, there were some feelings. She herself met her future husband in the reserve air regiment. They corresponded during the war and after its end, they married.[120]

Female veterans shared more or less frank conversations about romances and sexual intercourse on condition of anonymity. In particular, the respondents who participated in Saywell's study noted that there were romances in their units, and that this was a kind of outlet for them during the war. They noted that it was quite problematic to have sexual intercourse because often there was no suitable place to spend time alone. However, sometimes it happened. Moreover, the constant risk being killed caused many to fear that they might not gain sexual experience at all. A female veteran said that she decided to give up her virginity just before a massive battle. It happened with a brother-in-arms, who was also a virgin at the time and had the same motive for losing his virginity.[121]

A particular problem in the context of romantic relationships was pregnancy. It is obvious that the societies of both countries condemned such cases. This fact influenced how female veterans evaluated this phenomenon. The anti-aircraft gunner Zinaida Sotnikova (Kleĭmenova) noted that women had periodically been removed due to pregnancy in her battalion,

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116 "Deryabina (Rȳzhkova) Klavdiya Andreevna, letchitsa Po–2", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3pTfZCU (accessed 14.06.2022).

117 "Sotnikova (Kleĭmenova) Zinaida Gavrilovna, zenitchitsa", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3MwnjoZ (accessed 14.06.2022).

118 "Aleksandrova (Starikova) Anna Stepanovna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/3qrbyyF (accessed 14.06.2022).

119 "Brok-Bel'tsova Galina Pavlovna".

120 *Ibid*.

121 Saywell, *Women in War*, 145.

but there were no such cases in her battery.[122] The Po-2 aircraft pilot Klavdiya Deryabina (Rȳzhkova) stressed that there were no cases of pregnancy in her unit.[123] Regarding discharge from military service due to pregnancy, the telephone operator Mariya Rist (Fedorko) also noted that there were no such cases in her unit because "[…] people were normal. The regimental commander was also good. He would never allow such a thing to happen to someone."[124] However, there were such incidents in medical units where the women's battalion was stationed, since male pilots from large nearby airfields visited them. As has been observed regarding the preceding respondents, the anti-aircraft gunner Valentina Yanpol'skaya (Sineva) talked without prejudice about the departure of women due to pregnancy, noting that in the unit where she served, this sometimes happened: "It became widespread when we went to Ukraine. Not for nothing, Stalin said: "I sent the girls to the front to maintain the number of our population"".[125]

At the same time, society severely condemned sexual intercourse during the war. Such condemnation became even more extensive in the postwar period. Society saw women as being primarily responsible for immorality. Even in the memories of female veterans, it is quite common to find the sentiment that the servicemen's attitude towards women depended on their behaviour. For example, the sniper Maria Galishkina (Kleimenova) was convinced of this. She noted that if a woman "[…] behaves severely, if she treats everyone equally, does not allow herself to be groped, she will be treated with respect".[126] If not, she would be discharged. It is worth noting that similar beliefs were also inherent to British female military personnel. For example, the teleprinter operator Gwendoline Saunders believed that the presence or absence of sexual harassment depends on the women's behaviour.[127]

In addition, women could often hear insults from the servicemen of other units, such as "war wife", "bitch", and so on. For example, Mariya Galȳshkina (Kleĭmenova) said that when her unit was proceeding to Sivash in 1944, a petty officer tried to hug her: "I say, "I'll punch your face in". "What do you think of yourself, 'war wife', prude?" And behind me was a platoon commander, who had known me for a long time: "Where did you

122 "Sotnikova (Kleĭmenova) Zinaida Gavrilovna, zenitchitsa".
123 "Deryabina (Rȳzhkova) Klavdiya Andreevna, letchitsa Po–2".
124 "Rist (Fedorko) Mariya Kuz'minichna".
125 "Yanpol'skaya (Sineva) Valentina Porfir'evna", *YAPOMNYU*, https://bit.ly/35OQTOu (accessed 14.06.2022).
126 "Galȳshkina (Kleĭmenova) Mariya Aleksandrovna".
127 The Imperial War Museum, catalogue number: 9106: Saunders, Gwendoline (Oral history), reel 5.

come from?" "From the hospital". "Do you know her? I'll kill you now and say that the Germans killed you!" This is how our men defended us."[128]

However, if the woman herself did not properly rebuff advances, then according to the memoirs of female veterans, she was treated with contempt.[129]

The sniper Mariya Bondarenko (Kataeva) spoke with disgust about the phenomenon of the "war wife". She noted that the regimental commander himself tried to get her to become his mistress, but she refused: "Senior Sergeant Kataeva did not come to the front for this purpose. I have one goal: to shoot and kill the Fritzes, otherwise why did the state spend money on me?! That's why they taught me to fight for the Motherland, and you want me to sleep with you. You're fifty and I'm eighteen. It's inconceivable! I must return home a virgin."[130]

When she told her sisters-in-arms about this proposal, one of them, Catherine, called her a fool, and eventually married that commander. After the war, Bondarenko (Kataeva) also married. But even before the wedding, her neighbours in the village discouraged her fiancé from marrying her and accused the woman of loose morals at the front. It reached the point that the newly-wed husband "on the second day after the wedding showed lingerie with blood all over the village",[131] to refute these rumours.

Al'bina Gantimurova also believed that harassment often depended on the women's behaviour. In her statements, however, there is no condemnation of those who engaged in romances during the war, as in the above-mentioned memoirs of female veterans. Gantimurova noted that her male colleagues treated her like a child – they gave her delicacies and took care of her. She never tasted alcohol, although her brothers-in-arms tried to persuade her to do so, and she did not swear or smoke. She also believed that she was lucky that she did not have lovers at the front. She recalls that her commander had a romantic relationship with a subordinate woman, even though he was married. Their story ended tragically – after quarrelling with her lover, that woman actually committed suicide – she fully exposed herself in no man's land and an enemy sniper killed her almost immediately.[132] In addition, according to Gantimurova's recollections, when the conscription of women began, a number of those who joined the army went back to their homes six months later after becoming pregnant: "I do

128 "Galȳshkina (Kleĭmenova) Mariya Aleksandrovna".
129 *Ibid*.
130 "Bondarenko (Kataeva) Mariya Dmitrievna".
131 *Ibid*.
132 "Gantimurova Al'bina Aleksandrovna".

not condemn anyone; of course many of them were in love, because they were young, as were male soldiers and officers."[133]

However, such relationships were not always voluntary. Female veterans were extremely reluctant to share their experience with harassment and violence. Available testimonies are mostly anonymous. For example, a health instructor named Sofia, one of the women interviewed by Svetlana Alexievich, openly admitted that she had to become her battalion commander's "war wife". She noted that even though she did not love him, she "[…] moved into his dugout in a few months. What else was I supposed to do?"[134] According to the woman, her brothers-in-arms, with whom she had to live in the same dugout, often tried to persuade her to have sexual intercourse: "I woke up at night because I waved my hands – I hit them on their cheeks and hands."[135] In fact, that very hierarchical system in the Red Army in 1941–45 often led women to consent to sexual intercourse out of despair. According to the military translator Irina Dunaevskaya, "For peace of mind, a woman on the front must live in a unit whose commander does not have separate living quarters."[136] This is because the latter provided ample opportunities for abuse and to persuade their female subordinates to cohabitate.

Some former WAAF members mentioned that they occasionally faced sexual harassment as well. The photographer's assistant Pamela Brisley-Wilson recalled that an elder serviceman gathered young WAAF members and told them obscene jokes. Morfydd Brooks, a waitress in a canteen for servicemen, pointed out that while serving food, she had to endure verbal attacks from men with obvious hints: "How about a date Darling?", "How is your Sex life?", "I dreamt about you last night", "Would you like to sleep with me?", "Please serve us in the nude", etc.[137] Sometimes servicemen went from words to deeds. According to former members of the ATS and WRNS, quoted by Jeremy Crang, they found themselves in situations where they had to literally fight servicemen off and escape. The researcher reports at least one case of the successful satisfaction of a complaint from an ATS member regarding harassment from Major General. Mary Thomson (Dixon) had quite influential family ties (she was the Archdeacon's daughter and the god-daughter of the Field Marshal). She wrote a complaint against

133 *Ibid*.
134 Aleksiievych, *U viiny ne zhinoche oblychchia*, 293–294.
135 *Ibid*.
136 Irina Dunaevskaya, *Ot Leningrada do Kënigsberga: Dnevnik voennoĭ perevodchitsy̆ (1942–1945)* (Moskva: Rossiĭskaya politicheskaya éntsiklopediya, 2010), 26.
137 Jeremy A. Crang, *Sisters in Arms: Women in the British Armed Forces during the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 79.

her commander, who persecuted and almost raped her in his office. As a result, the Major General was removed from office.[138] However, we were unable to find information on how often women officially complained in such cases and whether all complaints were satisfied. Information on the complaints of Soviet servicewomen regarding harassment and rape, as well as the response to such cases by the leadership, is currently unavailable, as the archives in which they could potentially be held are still inaccessible.[139]

Female veterans of both countries reported that they felt unnecessary and abandoned at the end of the war. The authorities did not take proper care of their resocialisation, and their contribution to the war effort was not adequately addressed. Vee Robinson (Thomson), who served in the Anti-Aircraft Defence, wrote the following before the end of the war: "Mixed batteries were no longer required, so we were disbanded. The blow came after they lived together in a variety of conditions as a cohesive whole for three and a half years, and it was all over. No farewell speeches, no graduation party. The army had its own traditions, but there was no room for sentimentality; in any case, the war in the Far East was not over. We were still in the army and served where ordered, and the girls felt as if they were being thrown into a landfill. The day we had to turn in the Ack Ack kit to the shops, it was like losing our battle honours. No job choice, talk of retraining was just empty talk. An inglorious end for the 536(m) Heavy Ack Battery Royal Artillery, so the artillery girls thought."[140]

Among the memories of Soviet female veterans, the confession of Sergeant Valentina Chudaeva, commander of an anti-aircraft gun, is full of pain: "We were as mute as a fish. We did not tell to anyone that we were fighting at the front. We only kept in touch with each other, corresponded. It was later when we began to be honoured, thirty years later [...] When we began to be invited to the meetings [...] But at first, we were hiding, we didn't even wear awards. Men wore them, but women did not. Men were the victors, heroes, grooms, they had a war, and we were looked at completely differently. Completely differently... I'll tell you that the victory was taken away from us. It was quietly exchanged for ordinary women's happiness. The victory was not shared with us. And it was annoying […]".[141]

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138 *Ibid*., 80.

139 Beate Fieseler, Michaela Hampf, Jutta Schwarzkopf, "Gendering combat: Military women's status in Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union during the Second World War", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 47 (2014), 122.

140 Robinson, *On Target*, 206.

141 Aleksiievych, *U viiny ne zhinoche oblychchia*, 156.

Conclusions

Despite the belief in the societies of both countries that war is not a woman's business, it is obvious that many women who served in the army during the Second World War thought otherwise. As for the attitude regarding murder in the war, some British servicewomen expressed their willingness to use weapons against the enemy in one form or another and expressed surprise at the official taboo for them to do so. Some of the women who served in the Anti-Aircraft Defence and participated in shooting down enemy planes stated that they did not feel pity or remorse after destroying the target. Soviet female veterans often reported that the killing of the first enemy was difficult for them and was accompanied by emotional reactions. However, later they found a foothold to continue military service. It is worth noting that female veterans of both countries often stated that revenge for their desecrated homeland and killed compatriots was the main reason for their desire to fight against enemies. Speaking about fear during the war, some female veterans said that they did not feel any during battle, others, on the contrary, reported that they felt it during every shelling and bombing. It is significant that many British and Soviet servicewomen were most afraid of serious injuries and disabilities, and not of death. In addition, some representatives of both countries pointed out that in their units, despite established stereotypes, women were more restrained than men were and less prone to panic.

In the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, women's entry into the armed forces was accompanied by fears of losing their "femininity". Much attention was paid to their appearance. British women were constantly under social pressure, which criticised their appearance in uniform, gave instructions on how to "remain a woman" in the service, and so on. In Soviet society, there were also cases where servicewomen were told to be "feminine", but that was all on a smaller scale than in the United Kingdom. British and Soviet servicewomen tried to decorate their uniforms and use cosmetics to look more attractive.

Women in both countries were forced to prove their suitability for the positions that they held. They faced numerous prejudices from their brothers-in-arms concerning women's ability to perform their military duties well. Men's paternalism was also widespread. Men and women in military service exchanged products, and supported each other mutually in household matters. It is obvious that in the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, the norms of morality changed during the war, the sexual behaviour of both sexes became more relaxed, but society in both countries considered women responsible for that. Stigmatisation of women with an

active sex life during service was widespread. Whereas men who did the same did not face any condemnation from society. Accusations of immorality were extended to all servicewomen, regardless of whether they had romances during service or not. This resulted not only in prejudice against female veterans and women's military service in society, it also led to the strengthening of internal misogyny. After all, decades later, many female veterans spoke with contempt about their sisters-in-arms who had sexual intercourse with men during service and were discharged due to pregnancy, and tried to distance themselves from them.

Despite the significant differences between the democratic and totalitarian regimes of the 1940s, the patriarchal nature of their societies came to the fore in these countries in the construction of gender hierarchies, particularly in the military. Therefore, women who served in the British and Soviet armed forces during the Second World War faced very similar phenomena related to prejudice against them.

Keywords: servicewomen; personal reminiscences; United Kingdom; Soviet Union; Second World War.

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Kokkuvõte: *Teine maailmasõda Briti ja Nõukogude naiste isiklikes mälestustes*

Artikli eesmärk on võrrelda kahe erineva poliitilise korraga ühiskonnas elanud naiste nägemust nende osalemisest Teises maailmasõjas. Valisin riigid, kellel oli enam-vähem sarnane kogemus naiste värbamisel relvajõududesse. Uurimuse fookuses on teemad, mis minu hinnangul olid kõige enam mõjutatud patriarhaalsest ideoloogiast ja kultuurist ning milles on näha mitmeid stereotüüpe, mis kujutavad naisi kui nõrgemat sugupoolt, ning vajadust võimendada sellist kuvandit ühiskonnas. Olen pööranud erilist

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tähelepanu järgmistele teemadele: 1) naisveteranide suhtumine sõtta kui nähtusesse; 2) suhtumine inimese tapmisesse; 3) hirmu ja enesekontrolli tunded, sest väidetakse, et naised satuvad lihtsamini paanikasse ja ei suuda sageli oma tundeid vaos hoida; 4) hirm kaotada naiselikkus; 5) mees- ja naissoost võitluskaaslaste suhted, sh ka romantilised ja intiimsed suhted.

Autor järeldab, et kuigi mõlemas riigis valitses üldine arvamus, et sõjas osalemine ei ole naistele kohane, jäid mitmed Teise maailmasõja ajal sõjaväes teeninud naised eriarvamusele. Mis puudutab inimeste tapmist sõjas, siis mitmed Briti naised olid üllatunud, et naiste aktiivses lahingutegevuses osalemist peeti tabuks, kuigi nad oleksid olnud valmis vaenlase vastu ka relvaga astuma. Mitmed naised, kes osalesid õhutõrjes ja lasksid alla vaenlase lennukeid, ei tundnud pärast sihtmärgi tabamist kahetsust. Nõukogude naisveteranid tunnistasid tihti, et esimese vaenlase tapmine oli raske kogemus ning sellele järgnes emotsionaalseid reaktsioone. Hiljem pidasid nad sellegipoolest sõjateenistuses jätkamist võimalikuks. On märkimisväärne, et mõlema riigi veteranid väitsid, et kättemaks kodumaa purustuste ja surnud kaasmaalaste eest oli nende põhiline motivatsioon vaenlase vastu võitlemiseks. Mõned naised tõdesid, et ei tundnud lahingu ajal üldse hirmu; teised tunnistasid, et olid hirmul iga pommitamise ajal. On oluline märkida, et ei Briti ega Nõukogude Liidu veteranid ei kartnud surma, vaid enim kardeti tõsiseid vigastusi, millega võis kaasneda invaliidistumine. Mõned mõlema riigi veteranid märkisid, et vaatamata stereotüüpidele, võisid naised jääda isegi vaoshoitumaks kui mehed ja nad ei sattusid harvem paanikasse.

Nii Suurbritannias kui Nõukogude Liidus kaasnes naiste värbamisega armeesse hirm kaotada oma naiselikkuse. Naiste välimusele pöörati palju tähelepanu. Briti naised olid pidevalt sotsiaalse surve all, sest nende välimust kritiseeriti ning anti juhiseid, kuidas vormirõivastuses naiseks jääda. Nõukogude naised kirjeldasid samuti juhtumeid, mil neile anti käsk olla naiselik, kuid see oli väiksema kaaluga kui Suurbritannias. Nii Briti kui Nõukogude naised püüdsid oma vormiriietust kaunistada ning kasutasid kosmeetikat, et näha välja veetlevamad.

Naised pidid mõlemas riigis tõestama, et sobisid oma ametikohtadele. Nad pidid võitlema meessoost kaassõdurite eelarvamusega, et nad ei suuda täita oma sõjaväekohustusi hästi. Mehed ja naised vahetasid toidupakkides olevaid tooteid ja abistasid üksteist majapidamistegevustes. On selge, et Teise maailmasõja ajal muutusid moraalinormid nii Nõukogude Liidus kui Suurbritannias, seksuaalkäitumine muutus vabamaks, kuid ühiskond pidas selle eest vastutavaks naisi. Laialt levinud oli aktiivset seksuaalelu elavate naiste häbistamine, samas sarnaselt käituvad mehed ei saanud

hukkamõistu osaliseks. Teenistuses olevaid naisi süüdistati moraalituses olenemata sellest, kas neil oli romantilisi suhteid teenistuse ajal või mitte. Sellest tulenevalt suhtuti ka naisveteranidesse ning naiste teenistusse sõjaväes eelarvamustega, mis tugevdas sisemist misogüüniat. Kümnendeid hiljem rääkisid mitmed naisveteranid põlgusega relvaõdedest, kes olid seksuaalsuhetes meestega ning vabastati teenistusest, kui nad jäid rasedaks, püüdes neist distantseeruda.

Vaatamata olulistele erinevustele demokraatliku ja totalitaarse võimu vahel 1940. aastatel tuli tänu soolise hierarhia ülesehitamisele (eriti armees) esile mõlema ühiskonna üldine patriarhaalne olemus. Seetõttu puutusid nii Briti kui Nõukogude armees teenivad naised kokku sarnaste eelarvamustega.

Märksõnad: naised väeteenistuses; mälestused; Suurbritannia; Nõukogude Liit; Teine maailmasõda

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