

# WOMEN'S SERVICE IN THE ARMED FORCES DURING WORLD WAR II IN BRITISH AND SOVIET PUBLICATIONS OF THE 1940S

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The twentieth century witnessed not only two world wars, but also confrontation between democratic and totalitarian regimes. Pernicious ideology and the repression of dissidents led to the collapse of most totalitarian systems in Europe, while democracy proved to be a progressive path of development. At the same time, differences between totalitarianism and democracy, and features that they share in common remain a promising area for research. Scholars usually focus on the many differences between these regimes in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres, and try to emphasise the parallelism of their development. However, were the differences in the gender policies of totalitarian and democratic systems in the twentieth century so striking? We have not found a conclusive answer to this question in the academic literature. At the same time, whatever it may be, this answer will significantly improve our understanding of the essence of the two political regimes from a historical perspective.

Our comparative study focuses on analysis of gender policies of totalitarian and democratic systems during World War II, since some of the countries that represented these two systems converged temporarily during this armed conflict. Norman Davies claims that victory was achieved in this war due to the difficult decision for democratic countries to enter into an alliance with one undemocratic regime (the totalitarian USSR) to defeat another (Nazi Germany).<sup>1</sup>

The countries of the anti-Hitler coalition were chosen for our study not by chance, but because they won. For a long time after the end of the war, these countries significantly impacted world politics and largely laid the foundations for the current state of affairs in the gender sphere in many

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Davies, *Europe at War, 1939–1945: No Simple Victory* (London: Macmillan, 2006), 63–67.

countries.<sup>2</sup> Irreconcilable differences between the Allies over a number of issues became apparent during the war, leading to a confrontation after its end, which has become known in historiography as the Cold War (from latter half of the 1940s to 1991). At the same time, the governments of the anti-Hitler coalition had to deal with similar problems related to hostilities in 1939–45. The Allies were not on an equal footing since they differed in terms of territorial location, resources, culture, political regime, and many other features. The Axis powers had different plans for each of those countries, and this should be taken into account in our comparison. However, a shortage in the male population for military service was a common feature that the Allied countries shared. This necessitated the involvement of women to some extent. In our opinion, comparison of the policies of different states on this issue in 1939–45 should shed light on the commonalities and differences in their approaches to gender issues and will contribute to a significantly improved modern idea of totalitarianism and democracy in the mid-twentieth century.

This paper examines the Soviet Union, one of the leading members of the anti-Hitler coalition since 1941, as a model of a totalitarian regime. After World War II, the USSR extended its influence to a significant number of countries in the world. Consequently, the USSR was directly involved in shaping gender policy and social order in those countries. As is known, large-scale hostilities were conducted directly in its territory. This, of course, significantly impacted the USSR's policy on regulating women's service in the army. We chose to compare the USSR's experience in this regard to that of Great Britain – the 'cradle of parliamentary democracy', a classic representative of the Westminster model of democracy (according to Arend Lijphart).<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that no ground operations were conducted in its territory, this country was significantly affected by enemy air bombing. Its population, like that of the Soviet Union, faced the threat of attacks on their homes by the enemy, the economy suffered significant losses, and the authorities constantly needed to maintain a high level of fighting spirit in

<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 10.

society. Citizens of another leading member of the coalition, the United States, did not feel this way, as no hostilities took place directly in its territory. As for France, it did not have an independent government and was under the control of Nazi Germany from 1940 to 1944, so it would not serve as an illustrative example in the context of our study. At the same time, the British people managed to retain power and maintain their independence in very difficult circumstances at the beginning of the war. They created special women's services in the armed forces and attracted women to serve in air defence, the Special Operations Executive, etc.

The total number of women who served in the armed forces<sup>4</sup> in 1939–45 was significant in both countries. According to Jeremy Crang, there was a total of approximately 487,000 members in the three women's services during the war, of which: 222,000 – in the ATS, 185,000 – in the WAAF, and 80,000 – in the WRNS.<sup>5</sup> In 1945, the total British population was 49,182,000 people, of whom 23,723,000 were men and 25,459,000 were women.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the total number of women who served in the armed forces amounted to about 1% of the total population and 1.9% of the female population. At the same time, a total of 5,068,800 people served in the British Armed Forces (army, navy, air force, and three women's services) in 1945 – a little more than 10% of the total population of Great Britain. The percentage of servicewomen in the total number of military personnel was 8.2% (415,800 people) in 1945.

At the same time, various statistics in academic circulation indicate the number of Soviet women in the armed forces during the war. Official Soviet statistics indicate a figure of 800,000 women in the ranks of the Soviet armed forces. Some modern Russian scholars actively use this figure.<sup>7</sup> Instead, we trust the more recent and objective data provided by Roger Markwick and Euridice Cardona. They estimate the total number of women

<sup>4</sup> British authorities established the three women's organisations to serve in the different branches of the armed forces: in the Royal Navy – the Women's Royal Naval Service (W.R.N.S., WRNS, Wrens); in the Army – the Auxiliary Territorial Service (A.T.S., ATS); in the Royal Air Force – the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (W.A.A.F., WAAF).

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

<sup>6</sup> Peter Howlett, *Fighting with Figures: A Statistical Digest of the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1995), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Vera Murmanceva, "Sovetskie zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojne", *Zashhita Otechestva*, 5 (1987), 3; Valentina Van'shina, *Ratnyj podvig sovetskih zhenshhin v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny* (Minsk, 1989), 5; Sergej Poltorak, *Zhenshhiny na frontah Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny* (Sankt-Peterburg, 2002), 21, etc.

in the Red Army at 1 million.<sup>8</sup> The population of the USSR, according to the census of 17 January 1939, was 170.6 million people, including 81.7 million men and 88.9 million women.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, 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. A total of about 34.5 million people served in the Soviet army, and therefore the proportion of women in the army was about 2.9%. In general, the Soviet army included more than 20% of the total population.

Thus, the number of Soviet servicewomen (about 1 million women according to modern estimates) was greater than the British total (about 487 thousand women). However, when comparing the British and Soviet ratios of the number of women in the armed forces to the total population, to the female population, and to the total number of military personnel in the armed forces (1% to 0.58%; 1.9% to 1%; 8.5% to 2.9% respectively), it is obvious that these figures are higher for Great Britain than for the USSR. That is why we consider Great Britain and the Soviet Union to be the most suitable members of the anti-Hitler coalition for this comparative study.

This paper is part of a series of papers aimed at comparing numerous aspects related to the service of British and Soviet women in the armed forces in 1939–45.<sup>10</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to analyse and compare the peculiarities of coverage of women's service in the armed forces during World War II in British and Soviet publications of the 1940s.

<sup>8</sup> Roger Markwick, Euridice Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Narodnoe hozjajstvo SSSR v 1960 godu* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat CSU USSR, 1961), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Nataliia Zaliotok, "British and Soviet Women in the Military Campaign of 1939–45: A Comparative review", *Marine Corps University Journal*, Special Issue: Gender Integration (2018), 9–40; Nataliia Zaliotok, "Normatyvno-pravove rehuliuвання sluzhby brytanskykh ta radianskykh zhinok v zbroinykh sylakh v roky Druhoi svitovoi viiny", *Viiskovo-naukovy visnyk*, 36 (2021), 161–181; Nataliia Zaliotok, "Sluzhba brytanskykh ta radianskykh zhinok u rozvidtsi v roky Druhoi svitovoi viiny", *Yevropeiski istorychni studii*, 19 (2021), 50–60; Nataliia Zaliotok, "Sluzhba ta pobut brytanskykh ta radianskykh zhinok u viiskovo-morskykh sylakh u roky Druhoi svitovoi viiny", *Problemy vsesvitnoi istorii*, 14 (2021), 107–118; Nataliia Zaliotok, "Sluzhba brytanskykh ta radianskykh zhinok u viiskakh zviazku v roky Druhoi svitovoi viiny", *Naukovi zapysky Natsionalnoho universytetu "Ostrozka akademiia". Serii "Istorychni nauky"*, 32 (2021), 140–144.

## Historiography

Modern historians often address the problem of women's participation in World War II. The most controversial of all aspects of the problem is the entry of women into such a masculine structure as the armed forces. Even today, there are certain circles of people in society in different countries who strongly oppose the presence of women in the army, even when they are already in military service. Criticism of women's service in the army during World War II (and in general) can even be found in works by feminist historians. Francine D'Amico has divided the latter into three categories: 1) radical feminists, who consider women in army service as another empowerment and a means of protection against patriarchy; 2) liberal feminists, who also evaluate it positively, seeing women's right to serve in the military as another step towards full equality in men's and women's rights; 3) critical feminists, who consider women's military service as another step towards strengthening the promotion of masculine values that interferes with rethinking existing hierarchical power structures.<sup>11</sup>

Lucy Noakes is one of the scholars who are convinced that women's military service undermines existing gender stereotypes and is a necessary step towards gender equality.<sup>12</sup> Whereas Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L. R. Higonnet believe that women's entry into the military had little effect on gender roles. They have tried to explain this phenomenon with the "double helix" conception.<sup>13</sup> According to this conception, the double helix consists of two intertwined threads: one – male, and the other – female. The female thread is not only the antagonist of the male but is also subordinate to it. Each movement of the female thread leads to movement of the male thread, which retains its dominant position. In the case of World War II, when women filled a certain range of 'male roles', they were still lower in the hierarchy because men held higher positions and retained their dominant status.

Gerard J. DeGroot sharply criticises the proposed conception, noting that 'the great problem with much of the feminist and postmodernist studies of women and war is their tendency to impose complex deconstructionist analysis upon essentially simple issues, in the process obscuring their

<sup>11</sup> Francine D'Amico, "Feminist Perspectives on Women Warriors", *Peace Review* 8:3 (2007), 380, 384.

<sup>12</sup> Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907–1948* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret R. Higonnet, Patrice L. R. Higonnet, "The Double Helix", *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 34.

essential simplicity and forcing the past into a theoretical cloak which does not fit'.<sup>14</sup> He is rather an advocate of 'traditional' gender roles, according to which women should not fight and kill at all, and demonstrates this view in his paper on the problem of British women's service in air defence. The Russian scholar Natalia Barsukova also sharply criticises the phenomenon of women soldiers. She believes that it would be suitable for women in the army to mostly hold service staff positions.<sup>15</sup>

The development of the historiography on the service of Soviet and British women in the army has also been a focal point of research. However, these studies have not been comparative. They are separate for each country. For example, Soviet historiography is reflected in the works of Tetiana Orlova,<sup>16</sup> Valentyna Galagan,<sup>17</sup> etc. However, both authors do not pay sufficient attention to works from the 1940s. They focus instead on analysing later periods. The same is true of Penny Summerfield's study on the British historiography,<sup>18</sup> in which the earliest works under review were published in the 1950s.

Among the available comparative studies, we could not find works that study only the USSR and Great Britain. These two countries are included in a broader list of countries for comparing certain aspects of women's service. For example, Beate Fieseler, Michaela Hampf, and Jutta Schwarzkopf<sup>19</sup> have studied and compared features of the militarisation of women in the United States, Great Britain, and the USSR during World War II, along with its impact on current gender practices in these countries. D'Ann Campbell<sup>20</sup> focuses on comparing the experiences of women in military service in Germany, the United States, Great Britain, and the USSR. Ann

<sup>14</sup> Gerard J. DeGroot, "Whose Finger on the Trigger? Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries and the Female Combat Taboo", *War in History*, 4:4 (1997), 434–453.

<sup>15</sup> Natalia Barsukova, "Zhenshhiny v Vooruzhennyh silah SSSR v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny 1941–1945 gg.", *Omskij nauchnyj vestnik*, 5 (2012), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Tetiana Orlova, "Vijni XX Stolittja u Dzerkali Istorigrafii", *Storinki Istorii*, 27 (2008), 136–144.

<sup>17</sup> Valentyna Galagan, "Radjans'ka Istorichna Literatura Pro Podvig Zhinok u Roki Velikoi Vitchiznjanoi Vijni", *Ukrains'kij Istorichnij Zhurnal*, 12 (1988), 52–61.

<sup>18</sup> Penny Summerfield, "Research on Women in Britain in the Second World War: A Historiographical Essay", *Cahiers d'Histoire Du Temps Présent*, 4 (1998), 207–226.

<sup>19</sup> 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:PA (2014), 115–126.

<sup>20</sup> 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), 301–323.

Taylor Allen<sup>21</sup> compares an even broader range of countries. At the same time, not one of these works contains even a brief comparative analysis of publications in these countries from the 1940s (as well as later periods) in the context of how they cover the service of women. In addition, the authors do not pay enough attention to the commonalities and differences between the organisation of women's service in countries with different political regimes. For example, A. T. Allen only compares countries with similar political regimes and singles out the USSR in a separate group as a unique example. Nevertheless, the USSR had a lot in common with democratic regimes in policy concerning women who served in the armed forces during the war.

Thus, despite the substantial number of works devoted to the analysis of certain aspects of the problem at different historical stages, Soviet and British publications of the 1940s on women's military service in World War II have not yet been the subject of comparative analysis. At the same time, such a study would make it possible to compare propaganda on the issue and to investigate attitudes towards women in military service in these two countries.

Some scholars, for example Gulnara Duzhenko,<sup>22</sup> include books published in the 1940s in the first historiographical period of the study of women's military service during World War II. Indeed, at that time, classical academic works on the problem that were based on the critical processing of information, the employment of a wide range of primary sources, and the use of appropriate methodology, simply did not appear for a number of reasons. It is almost impossible to write objectively about a war while it is still being waged – the opposing parties in the conflict can influence the author, most documents that could be used as sources are classified, numerous false rumours circulate in society, etc. That is why books published in the 1940s in both countries serve as an intermediate link between the first academic works on the issue and printed primary sources, for example periodicals. The term 'historiography' can be applied to these books only in its primary sense – 'the various interpretations of historical events'.<sup>23</sup> One should bear in mind that these books were not written with

<sup>21</sup> Ann Taylor Allen, *Women in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Gulnara Duzhenko, "K Istoriografii Voprosa Sluzhby Zhenshhin v Rjadah Sovetskoy Armii v Gody Velikoy Otechestvennoy Vojny", *V Mire Nauchnyh Otkrytij*, 3–6 (63) (2015), 2529–46.

<sup>23</sup> Writing.ku.edu. 2021. *Historiography*. Available at: <https://writing.ku.edu/historiography> [viewed on 19 October 2021].

a critical approach and their objectivity sometimes causes concerns. At the same time, they contain valuable factual material and can be a source for studying state propaganda of that time. These works formed the basis for further academic research on the problem and for a long time, the assessments expressed in them found repetition in academic works as well since historians are the ‘products’ of the era in which they live. Along with the rest of society, historians are influenced by state propaganda, and sometimes they cannot shake off its postulates.

### *Methodology*

Propaganda is one of the most effective tools for achieving political goals. It acquires special significance in wartime because it is almost the only way to mobilise the population to fight against a common enemy. Since propaganda was the main goal of publishing the literature, which this paper analyses, we used the methodology proposed in the work by Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell<sup>24</sup> to conduct the analysis. It includes the following 10 steps:

1. The ideology and purpose of the propaganda campaign.
2. The context in which the propaganda occurs.
3. Identification of the propagandist.
4. The structure of the propaganda organisations.
5. The target audience.
6. Media utilisation techniques.
7. Special techniques to maximise effect.
8. Audience reaction to various techniques.
9. Counterpropaganda, if present.
10. Effects and evaluation.<sup>25</sup>

Since the focus of our comparative analysis is the policy of the governments of Great Britain and the USSR, step 9 of the proposed methodology is beyond the scope of this study. The issue of audience reaction to the propaganda campaign (step 8) is also not analysed in detail because this would require a separate study. However, it should be noted that the authorities of both countries achieved their goals through propaganda and other methods, such as conscription, and managed to mobilise an unprecedented number of women, who in one way or another defended their countries by serving in the armed forces.

<sup>24</sup> Garth Jowett, Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (London: Sage, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Jowett, O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 270.



We also used a gender approach to analyse the content of publications in order to shed light on the process, as it was carried out by both governments, of constructing the images of women who served in the armed forces. According to Joan Scott, '...gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated'.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the gender approach will help to study the particularities of the approaches of the two countries regarding gender issues in the 1940s.

### *Publishing policy as a means of state propaganda*

Printed publications played a significant role in mobilising the population of both countries during the Second World War. This section covers the context in which propaganda was created, the structure of the corresponding propaganda organisations, its main actors, and media utilisation techniques.

First of all, it should be pointed out that publishing in the USSR and Great Britain was set up in different ways in the 1940s. Long before the war, the Soviet government tried to take control of the publication of all printed works, both periodicals and non-periodicals, and to directly influence their content. As early as 1922, the government established the Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets in the Press (Glavlit), which was responsible for censoring all printed materials in the country. During the Soviet-German war, while informing the public about hostilities, the authorities actively manipulated statistics and even published outright lies. For example, in the first months of the war, Stalin tried to hide the true extent of the Soviet army's losses, and to present everything as if German troops were suffering much greater losses.<sup>27</sup> As will be shown below, the peculiarities of highlighting women's participation in this armed conflict also included various exaggerations.

When choosing Soviet books for our analysis, we tried to find those published in different cities and in different years. In addition, the availability of such literature also had a significant impact. During World War II, all publishing houses in the USSR were state-owned and controlled by the Communist Party through censorship establishments. The ruling regime did not allow the publication of texts that contradicted its current political course. Encouraging women to join the army was one of the Soviet

<sup>26</sup> Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review*, 91:5 (1986), 1069.

<sup>27</sup> Gennadij Kostyrchenko, "Sovetskaja cenzura v 1941–1952 godah", *Voprosy istorii*, 11–12 (1996), 87–94.

government's tasks in the first years of the war due to the catastrophic losses in the armed forces. Because of this, the government actively encouraged publishers throughout the USSR to produce literature on the exploits of women at the front. The beginning of the Soviet-German war forced publishing houses to restructure their policies and concentrate their efforts mainly on producing patriotic and propagandistic literature. The publication of other works, including fiction books, was postponed.<sup>28</sup> Publications related to the service of women in the armed forces were issued by various publishing houses, including 'Ivanovskoe oblastnoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo' (the Ivanovo Regional State Publishing House),<sup>29</sup> 'Voennoe izdatel'stvo narodnogo komissariata oborony' (the Military Publishing House of the People's Commissariat of Defence),<sup>30</sup> 'Kazogiz' (the Association of State Publishing Houses of Kazakhstan, founded in 1941),<sup>31</sup> 'Gospolitizdat' (the State Publishing House of Political Literature),<sup>32</sup> 'Profizdat' (the Publishing House of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions),<sup>33</sup> 'Oblgiz' (the Regional State Publishing House),<sup>34</sup> 'Gazetno-knizhnoe izdatel'stvo Oblastnogo komiteta VKP(b)' (the Newspaper and Book Publishing House of the Regional Committee of the CPSU(b)),<sup>35</sup> the Publishing House 'Iskra revolutsii',<sup>36</sup> and others.

Female party activists who were nominated for leadership positions were often among the authors of patriotic propaganda literature. Thus, the book *Sovetskie Zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojne* (Soviet women in the Great Patriotic War)<sup>37</sup> was written by Ol'ga Mishakova, a party activist who headed the propaganda and agitation department of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) starting from 1938, was the

<sup>28</sup> Lidija Ivanova, *Izdanie hudozhestvennoj literatury v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny (1941–1945 gg.)*, Avtoreferat kandidatskoj dissertatsii (Moskva, 1992), 12–13.

<sup>29</sup> *Sovetskaja zhenshhina – zashhitnica Rodiny* (Ivanovo: Ivanovskoe oblastnoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1942).

<sup>30</sup> Ol'ga Mishakova, *Sovetskie zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojne* (Moskva: Voennoe izdatel'stvo narodnogo komissariata oborony, 1944).

<sup>31</sup> Elena Remizova, *Sovetskaja zhenshhina v Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojne* (Alma-Ata: Kazogiz, 1942).

<sup>32</sup> *Sovetskie patriotki* (Sverdlovsk: Gospolitizdat, 1941); Lidija Karaseva, *Slavnye docheri nashej Rodiny* (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1946); Lidija Karaseva, *Zhenshhiny v kolhozah – bol'shaja sila* (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1949).

<sup>33</sup> Mishakova, *Sovetskie zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojne*.

<sup>34</sup> *Boevye podругi* (Kujbyshev: Oblgiz, 1941).

<sup>35</sup> *Sovetskaja zhenshhina – moguchaja sila* (Saratov: Gazetno-knizhnoe izdvo Obkoma VKP(b), 1942).

<sup>36</sup> *My pobedim! Sovetskaja zhenshhina v Otechestvennoj vojne: al'bom* (Moskva: Tipografija 'Iskra revolutsii', 1943).

<sup>37</sup> Mishakova, *Sovetskie zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojne*.

editor of the Young Communist magazine in 1938–41, and was a member of the Central Audit Commission of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks in 1939–52. She is also known for her active participation in the repressions of the 1930s, for which Stalin personally called her ‘the best female Komsomol member of the USSR’.<sup>38</sup>

The brochure *Sovetskaja Zhenshhina v Otechestvennoj Vojne* (Soviet Woman in the Patriotic War)<sup>39</sup> was written by Klavdija Sverdlova, a Bolshevik revolutionary who during 1931–44 worked in Glavlit, which, as was noted above, ensured the censorship of printed works. She had been imprisoned repeatedly for revolutionary activities in the early twentieth century. According to some sources, she was directly engaged in falsifying the history of the USSR and of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup>

During the war, Soviet publishing houses often issued thematic collections of articles on women's contributions to the war effort. These collections often included materials that had previously been published in Soviet newspapers. In particular, the collection *Boevye Podrugy* (Fighting female friends)<sup>41</sup> included thematic articles that had previously been published in the newspapers *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, and in the magazines *Krestyanka* and *Rabotnitsa* in August–September of 1941.

It was common practice to involve famous writers, poets, and journalists in writing propagandistic and patriotic works. For example, a collection of works entitled ‘*Sovetskaja Zhenshhina – Moguchaja Sila*’ (Soviet woman – a mighty force)<sup>42</sup> brought together in its pages a number of such persons. It contained journalistic articles, essays, and poems on women during the war. The collection consisted of two main sections – ‘Heroines of the Front’ and ‘Heroines of the Rear Area’. The first section included articles by the Soviet poet, translator, literary critic, and military correspondent Lev Ozerov; the writer, playwright, screenwriter, and journalist Oskar Kurganov; the Soviet writer, playwright, screenwriter, and publicist Evgeniy Gabilovich, known for his articles on industrialisation and collectivisation that were published in the 1930s; the Soviet journalist and

<sup>38</sup> Oleg Suvenirov, *Tragedija RKKA 1937–1938. Chast' I*, <https://bit.ly/3BADyoi> (viewed on 29 July 2021).

<sup>39</sup> Klavdija Sverdlova, *Sovetskaja zhenshhina v Otechestvennoj vojne* (Sverdlovsk: Profizdat, 1942).

<sup>40</sup> Konstantin Zalesskij, *Imperija Stalina. Biograficheskij jenciklopedicheskij slovar'* (Moskva: Veche, 2000), <https://bit.ly/3kE8oaO> (viewed on 29 July 2021).

<sup>41</sup> *Boevye podrugy*.

<sup>42</sup> *Sovetskaja zhenshhina – moguchaja sila*.

*Pravda* military correspondent Petr Lidov, who actively covered the course of hostilities in his *Pravda* columns, conducted a journalistic investigation of the death of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, and became a favourite of readers; and other authors.<sup>43</sup> The poems were written by the Soviet poet and military correspondent Evgeniy Dolmatovsky; the poetess, prose writer, translator, and journalist Vera Inber; the poet, screenwriter, editor, and military correspondent Alexandr Bezymensky; the Soviet poet, literary critic, public figure, and military journalist Alexey Surkov, and others.

Monographs<sup>44</sup> based on dissertation research on women's work in the rear area and women's service at the front during the war started appearing in the USSR in the first post-war years. By gaining access to a limited number of sources, their authors were able to present a little bit more verified factual material in contrast to wartime authors. However, these works in their essence can hardly be distinguished from wartime publications because they were not based on thorough research methodology. They were rather a celebration of the Soviet government's victory in the war and served to amplify that celebration. This last issue was in line with the Soviet political agenda at that time, given the escalating confrontation between the members of the former allied forces. The Soviet government no longer needed women soldiers. Therefore, these works attempt to rethink the role of women in war. They propagate a trend to return to the pre-war system, where a woman is a mother and homemaker, but not a fighter or even a defender. In addition, there were also publications at that time aimed at glorifying the feats of women during the war, which mentioned their military experience.<sup>45</sup> However, they were gradually supplanted by works glorifying those forms of women's work and behaviour that were beneficial to the government at that moment.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, during the war, the authorities completely controlled Soviet publishing houses and the content of their publications. At the same time, although in contrast to the USSR Great Britain had not experienced continuous censorship of print media, and its population did not witness several waves of repression, the British government's influence on publishing was similarly significant during the war. The Ministry of Information,

<sup>43</sup> Boris Sokolov, *Zhurnalists na vojne: mifotvorec ili letopisec?*, <https://bit.ly/2V3c75K> (viewed on 29 July 2021).

<sup>44</sup> Faima Davletova, *Zhenshhiny-turkmenki v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny* (Ashhabad, 1949); Alexandra Shmeleva, *Sovetskie zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojne* (Moskva: Politizdat, 1947).

<sup>45</sup> Karaseva, *Slavnye docheri nashej Rodiny*.

<sup>46</sup> For example, see: Karaseva, *Zhenshhiny v kolhozah – bol'shaja sila*.

which had existed during the First World War, was revived in 1939. It was responsible for censorship, propaganda, and publishing official news.<sup>47</sup> The heads of this ministry, and its policy often changed. In addition, society often criticised the ministry.<sup>48</sup> The ministry tried to hide its links to publishers and its impact on the nature and content of printed materials, but it was not easy. There was a significant shortage of paper in the country since 1940. Its rationing was introduced on 3 March and lasted until 1946. Old-established publishers were given 60% of the total amount of the paper they had consumed in the previous year, and newcomers received only 40%. In addition, no paper at all was allocated to publishers that had been established after 3 March 1940.<sup>49</sup> Publishing houses tried to acquire additional paper and the government took advantage of that. The Ministry of Information promised to provide publishers with up to 50% of the paper (but no more than 250 tons) required for publishing books of propaganda value. The Ministry paid considerable attention to the publication of books and pamphlets covering the activities of the British Armed Forces, helping to fortify the nation's fighting spirit and supporting the Allies. In May of 1940, it even wrote a letter to the Ministry of Supply with a request for distributing paper in a way that would encourage the issuing of books rather than other publications.<sup>50</sup> Books on the service of women in the armed forces were of propaganda value. The number of such books grew every year because there was a significant shortage of members in the three women's military services in 1939–43. In 1941, the government was forced to announce the conscription of women because the number of women volunteering for national service was far from enough to cover its needs.

The selection of British books for our study was based on the principle of covering different years of publication and different publishers to reflect their diversity. Of course, the choice was also influenced by the availability of certain publications. There is no academic research on the subject among the British works published in 1939–45 because there was a lack of such research at that time. Even the text of a lecture given by the physician and academic Winifred Cullis at Vassar College (U.S.) in 1942 was not an exception.<sup>51</sup> It was educational and propaganda material filled with facts,

<sup>47</sup> The Ministry at a Glance, <https://bit.ly/3hLNLGF> (viewed on 29 July 2021).

<sup>48</sup> Valerie Holman, "Carefully Concealed Connections: The Ministry of Information and British Publishing, 1939–1946", *Book History*, 8 (2005), 204.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 206–207.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 207–208.

<sup>51</sup> Winifred Cullis, *What British women are doing in the war. The third lecture on the Helen Kenyon lectureship at Vassar college, delivered in two parts, April 30 and May 1,*

but devoid of any critical approach to women's service in Great Britain. Hence it is not an academic study.

The government often used loyal publishers to publish propaganda literature. Hutchinson was one of the publishers that were loyal to the government. It published various books on the British Armed Forces, policies of the Allied countries, etc. including an abbreviated version of the *French Yellow Book*.<sup>52</sup> Hutchinson's *British Women in War* and *They Made Invasion Possible* by Peggy Scott were devoted to the issue of British women's service during the war.<sup>53</sup> The preface to the first book was written by Margaret Bondfield, a well-known Labour MP and women's rights activist. Odhams Press was another publishing house that cooperated actively with the Ministry of Information. Its former employees held several positions in the Ministry's leadership.<sup>54</sup> Along with other educational and propaganda works published during the war, Odhams Press issued the book *The British People at War* in 1944.<sup>55</sup>

Books on women's service were often published as part of a series on Great Britain in the war. In particular, Mary Cox's book<sup>56</sup> is part of the *Britain at War* series, published by J. Murray & the Pilot Press to strengthen the authority of the British Armed Forces and the national service. The other books in this series had the following titles: *The RAAF at War*, *The Royal Navy at War*, *The British Army at War*, *The Merchant Navy at War*, *Civil Defence at War*. *The Book of the WAAF: A Practical Guide to the Women's Branch of the RAF*<sup>57</sup> was published under the aegis of the military forces in collaboration with another private publisher – Amalgamated Press Ltd. The book is part of a series of publications on the British Air Force. Its editorial note states:

'Although the Women's Auxiliary is an integral part of the R.A.F., it proved impracticable from lack of space to deal adequately with the W.A.A.F. in the "A B C of the R.A.F.," the immense circulation of which exceeded 350,000 copies. Only a minimum of attention to the W.A.A.F.

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1942 (New York: Poughkeepsie, 1942).

<sup>52</sup> Holman, *Carefully Concealed Connections: The Ministry of Information and British Publishing, 1939–1946*, 206–207.

<sup>53</sup> Peggy Scott, *British Women in War* (London: Hutchinson & Company, Limited, 1940); Peggy Scott, *They Made Invasion Possible* (London: Hutchinson, 1944).

<sup>54</sup> Holman, *Carefully Concealed Connections: The Ministry of Information and British Publishing, 1939–1946*, 205, 207, 211.

<sup>55</sup> *The British People at War* (London: Odhams Press, 1944).

<sup>56</sup> Mary Cox, *British Women at War* (London: J. Murray & the Pilot Press, 1941).

<sup>57</sup> *The book of the W.A.A.F: a practical guide to the women's branch of the R.A.F.* (London: Amalgamated Press, 1942).

was given owing to the limitation of paper supplies. At the same time the rapidly increasing importance of the women's work made a separate handbook an urgent necessity. Hence the Book of the W.A.A.F., compiled exclusively for the information and instruction of those already in the service and the many thousands of young women who contemplate joining it.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, as we can see, this book was a compilation and served as an informational source for a specific audience. This publisher also supported charity projects for women and men in the service. For example, the following advertisement is on the last page of the above-mentioned book: 'The sale of every copy of this handbook will benefit, through the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund, both women and men who are so often greatly in need of help and who have themselves so greatly fulfilled their duty to their Country and Empire'.<sup>59</sup>

For the most part, the authors of the British publications of 1939–45 devoted to the service of women, as well as those of the analogous Soviet publications, were not professional historians. This group of authors includes various activists, including women's rights activists such as Elaine Burton,<sup>60</sup> journalists, and those who had served in the armed forces and had access to inside information. Among the latter was Anthony Cotterell, who served in the Public Relations Team attached to the 1st Parachute Brigade Headquarters. The former *Daily Express* correspondent, who was called up in 1940, found it difficult to adjust to service in a combat unit, but he quickly found his niche as a military correspondent. Since 1941, he prepared and published various books and brochures on military service.<sup>61</sup> One of his works is dedicated to the servicewomen of the ATS.<sup>62</sup> Vernon Noble, a soldier of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, positioned his book<sup>63</sup> as a tribute from the R.A.F. to the W.A.A.F. 'for doing a grand job well'.

At the end of the war and in the first years after its end, the quantity of literature on women serving in Great Britain declined significantly. However, several important publications were published at that time, which aimed to honour the service of women in the armed forces during the war. In the early post-war years, books on women's service written by former

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Elaine Burton, *What of the Women: A Study of Women in Wartime* (London: F. Muller, 1941).

<sup>61</sup> Major J. Anthony Cotterell, <https://bit.ly/2TfRtyI> (viewed on 29 July 2021).

<sup>62</sup> Anthony Cotterell, *She Walks in Battledress. The Days Work in the A.T.S.* (London: Christophers, 1942).

<sup>63</sup> Vernon Noble, *Girls, You Amaze Me. On the W.A.A.F.* (London: Hurricane Book, 1943).

servicemen and civic activists were also published. Among them was a work by Dorothea Collett Wadge.<sup>64</sup> She started writing the book in 1944 at the request of the publishers Samson Low, Marston & Co. D. Collett Wadge had worked in the publishing industry before the war, and from 1939 to 1945 she served in the ATS, so the publishers decided that she would be capable of accomplishing the task – to cover various types of women’s service in English-speaking countries. The book *The Daughters of Britain*<sup>65</sup> was written by the women’s rights activist and librarian of the Women’s Library Vera Douie.

Two books dedicated to the ATS<sup>66</sup> and WRNS<sup>67</sup> were published in 1946 by Eileen Bigland, a well-known novelist, travel writer, biographer, and author of numerous fiction and non-fiction books. Bigland travelled extensively before World War II, and actively collaborated during the war with the Ministry of Information, which hired her to cover a number of issues related to the war.<sup>68</sup> In the post-war years, the War Office was also directly involved in publishing books on women’s service in the armed forces. It released the series *The Second World War 1939–1945. Army*, and the book by J. M. Cowper was part of that series.<sup>69</sup>

### *Constructing the image of women in the military in the context of the propaganda campaign*

In this section, we will address the ideology and purpose of the propaganda campaign, its target audience, special techniques to maximise effect, as well as measures for establishing the necessary image of servicewomen in both Soviet and British society.

Publishing literature on the service of women in the armed forces in 1939–45 was characteristic of both Great Britain and the USSR during the war and it had a specific purpose. Works on the activities of women in the services began appearing in Great Britain in the first half of the 1940s as

<sup>64</sup> Dorothea Collett Wadge, *Women in Uniform* (London: Dampson Low, 1946).

<sup>65</sup> Vera Douie, *Daughters of Britain: an account of the work of British women during the Second World War* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1949).

<sup>66</sup> Eileen Bigland, *Britain’s Other Army: The Story of the A.T.S.* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1946).

<sup>67</sup> Eileen Bigland, *The Story of the W. R. N. S.* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1946).

<sup>68</sup> Eileen Bigland, Australian War Memorial, <https://bit.ly/2UgU3Ff> (viewed on 29 July 2021).

<sup>69</sup> J. M. Cowper, *The Auxiliary Territorial Service* (London: War Office, 1949).



the need for personnel in female services increased.<sup>70</sup> Some of these works briefly described the features of service in all existing British women's organisations. The rest covered in detail the life and responsibilities of members of a particular service in order to familiarise future recruits with those particulars.<sup>71</sup> For example, the book by M. Cox contains a description of the activities of a number of British women's organisations (W.R.N.S.; A.T.S.; W.A.A.F. and others) in the first years of the war and gives a general idea of each of them.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, A. Cotterell's work, which includes an additional chapter by A.T.S. member E. Courtney, contains a detailed description of service in the A.T.S. only. The authors described in detail the life, training, and responsibilities of servicewomen. The publication was aimed primarily at potential members of the A.T.S. and their families.<sup>73</sup> V. Noble covered the particularities of service in the W.A.A.F.<sup>74</sup>

A narrative, yet rather understated style is a distinctive feature of such works, in contrast to the emotionality and pathos of Soviet brochures on women's service. The main purpose of British publications was to raise the prestige of female services in order to boost recruitment. Such works were often written according to a standard scheme and contained a great deal of similar information. Their authors often tried to emphasise the temporality of women's service and resorted to objectification, describing members of such organisations primarily as attractive women, not as professionals. For example, the book on women's service by V. Noble, a Royal Air Force officer, is full of sexist and paternal notions. For example, he states that he was '...involuntarily watching girls doing men's jobs, and doing it well – girls in tunics and skirts, in blue battle dress, in overalls. Dainty girls, clumsy girls, big ones and little ones, blondes and brunettes; young enough to look like schoolgirls, or in the attractive twenties, or in the even more glamorous thirty-to-forty stage.'<sup>75</sup> Then he describes the current unglamorous daily routine of servicewomen and concludes that there is no place for the word 'glamorous' in W.A.A.F. vocabulary. P. Scott's works stated

<sup>70</sup> The British government, in contrast to the Soviet political powers, officially forbid women to perform combatant roles, but a number of women's organisations were founded in 1938–41, and later they became parts of the armed forces.

<sup>71</sup> Cox, *British Women at War*; Scott, *British Women in War*; Burton, *What of the Women: A Study of Women in Wartime*; Noble, *Girls, You Amaze Me. On the W.A.A.F.*; Cotterell, *She Walks in Battledress. The Days Work in the A.T.S.*; *The Book of the W.A.A.F. A Practical Guide to the Women's Branch of the R.A.F.*

<sup>72</sup> Cox, *British Women at War*; Scott, *British Women in War*.

<sup>73</sup> Cotterell, *She Walks in Battledress. The Days Work in the A.T.S.*

<sup>74</sup> Noble, *Girls, You Amaze Me. On the W.A.A.F.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

that ‘the girls in uniform were aware of the advantages of a pretty frock’;<sup>76</sup> a group of W.A.A.F. members was described as ‘a picturesque group in their dungarees and knitted caps or cloth berets on fair, blonde, auburn or dark hair, and with their rosy cheeks and dark eyes’, etc.<sup>77</sup> We could not find any analogous descriptions in Soviet publications, yet they also imposed a very specific image of a woman – a man’s comrade who is ready at any moment to respond to the call of the Party and the homeland.

During the Soviet-German war, the Soviet government wanted to mobilise all available human resources to fight Nazi Germany. That is why public discourse was filled with propaganda calling on women to defend the homeland. From 1941 until the end of the war, many printed works were published describing the heroic deeds of women at the front.<sup>78</sup> They did not speak of women in the Red Army as a large-scale phenomenon, but mostly of the heroism of specific servicewomen. Such an approach was not chosen by chance because the Soviet authorities were not about to emphasise the total character of the presence of women in the armed forces. A partial change in ideology and a shift away from the masculinisation of war were only situational measures to win at any cost. Instead, the active coverage of specific heroic examples, their romanticisation, the emphasis on how much the Soviet government had given women and how it was time for them to pay back their debt, and other similar rhetoric was quite effective in encouraging women to join the armed forces. In British publications, on the other hand, descriptions of specific cases of female courage were used only to strengthen the text on the service of women. There were no such insistent statements concerning their duty to their country and the authorities, as was the case in the USSR. At the same time, it was often emphasised that British servicewomen were doing something very important for their country while their sisters were just messing around: ‘Let me take you on a night tour of Bomber Station X and introduce you to the girls who are working while their sisters sleep. Bomber Town – for Bomber Station X has a population large enough to merit the name of town

<sup>76</sup> Scott, *British Women in War*, 50.

<sup>77</sup> Scott, *They Made Invasion Possible*, 54.

<sup>78</sup> Mishakova, *Sovetskie Zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojne*; Sverdlova, *Sovetskaja Zhenshhina v Otechestvennoj Vojne*; *Sovetskaja zhenshhina – zashhitnica Rodiny; Boevye Podrugi*; *Sovetskie patriotki*; Remizova, *Sovetskaja Zhenshhina v Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojne*; *Velikaja Otechestvennaja Vojna Sovetskogo Naroda: Annotirovannyj Ukazatel’ Literaturny Za God Vojny* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe bibliotечно-bibliograficheskoe izdatel’stvo NKP RSFSR, 1942); *Sovetskaja Zhenshhina – Moguchaja Sila*.

– has a fascinating night life. It is a town in the front line and its women-folk share in the running of it...'<sup>79</sup>

Brochures and collections devoted to women's participation in the war had medium to large circulations in the USSR. Unfortunately, it is not possible to compare them with the circulation of British publications since such information is mostly not listed in the publications of that country. The circulation of the collection of articles *Soviet woman – a powerful force* was 10,000. This publication included materials on Soviet women at the front and in the rear area. The issue of mothers whose children died in battle was covered separately; in particular, the text version of the radio speech given by the mother of the deceased partisan Z. Kosmodemyanskaya was included in this collection.<sup>80</sup>

The circulation of K. Sverdlova's book was 30,000. In trying to encourage Soviet women to defend the country against the enemy, the author emphasises that the government gave them equality. K. Sverdlova writes: – 'In the USSR, women have political rights equal to those of men; Soviet laws have eliminated women's inequality forever. The Party of Lenin and Stalin has been fighting for the emancipation of women in Russia since the very beginning of its existence. The Soviet government implemented Lenin's idea of 'the establishment of full equality of women's rights with men's rights'.<sup>81</sup> And now, the author states, it's time to thank the state for this and take full advantage of these rights. In order to introduce the presence of women in the army as normal practice and to justify it, K. Sverdlova digresses into the history of women's participation as combatants in military conflicts. She gives examples of Vasilisa Kozhina, the leader of an anti-French guerrilla detachment during the Patriotic War of 1812, of women's participation in the Russian Civil War of 1917–21, etc.<sup>82</sup>

Thereafter, K. Sverdlova tells stories of the heroism of women at the front in 1941–42. The work contains brief descriptions of the feats accomplished by the nurses Katerina Novikova, Tamara Kalinina, Antonina Serova, Vera Masyutina, Elena Zhavoronkova, and the partisan Z. Kosmodemyanskaya. One can often find a statement on the importance of the role that the Soviet government played in the lives of these women. K. Sverdlova writes:

'Soviet women zealously mastered various military professions, so the war did not catch them by surprise. Some of them learned to fly planes,

<sup>79</sup> Noble, *Girls, You Amaze Me. On the W.A.A.F.*, 38.

<sup>80</sup> *Sovetskaja Zhenshhina – Moguchaja Sila.*

<sup>81</sup> Sverdlova, *Sovetskaja Zhenshhina v Otechestvennoj Vojne*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.

others were fond of skydiving. Almost all youngsters went to the shooting range and were proud of their Voroshilov shooter badges... The names of women Heroes of the Soviet Union Osipenko, Gryzodubova, and Raskova are known all over the world. Their feats inspire our women to new heroic deeds. The biography of the pilot Polina Osipenko<sup>83</sup> stirs admiration and ardent desire to follow her example. This poor man's daughter dropped out of school and went to work as a nanny. Before the revolution, Polina would have been destined to live and die as a kulak's<sup>84</sup> hireling. The Soviet government gave her the opportunity to study. Vigorously, boldly overcoming all difficulties, Osipenko became a pilot. Her non-stop flight covering several thousand kilometres made the name of Polina Osipenko and her friends known all over the world. Women deservedly received the high title of Heroes of the Soviet Union from the Soviet government ...<sup>85</sup>

The author uses the same narrative style in covering the life stories of other women.

British scholars and publicists also referred to the previous experience of women from their country during hostilities, in particular World War I, to underscore the link between old and current practices concerning women's service. For example, we find in the work of M. D. Cox: "The war has therefore seen not only an extension of the work which women fulfilled so well in the war of 1914–18, but the gradual assumption by women of more and more work hitherto performed by the men of the fighting Forces, under conditions which may, at any moment, expose them to the fury of a concentrated attack".<sup>86</sup> Or in the book *The British People at War*:

"Tradition is the essence of the Royal Navy, and the Women's Royal Naval Service formed in 1939 had the same name as the organisation of 1917–19. As with the other auxiliaries, the duties of the "Wrens" were numerous. They were clerks, teleprinters, coders, cooks, supply assistants, cinema operators, and wireless mechanics. The cipher staff of each of the home commanders-in-chief was composed of W.R.N.S. officers whose work

<sup>83</sup> In 1938, the pilots V. Gryzodubova, P. Osipenko, and M. Raskova set a record for flight distance among women by completing a non-stop flight from Moscow to Komsomolsk-on-Amur. Due to difficult weather conditions, the women failed to land at the planned location and had to make an emergency landing. However, all three survived and were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. At the same time, only two of them took part in the Soviet-German war because P. Osipenko died in a plane crash in 1939.

<sup>84</sup> Kulak – a term used by the Soviet government to denote a wealthy peasant.

<sup>85</sup> Sverdlova, *Sovetskaja Zhenshhina v Otechestvennoj Vojne*, 14.

<sup>86</sup> Cox, *British Women at War*, 7.

was very responsible, and the members of the service were regarded as an integral part of a ship's company'.<sup>87</sup>

O. Mishakova's work, which was published two years later, was already twice as large as K. Sverdlova's study,<sup>88</sup> and it dedicated a separate section to Soviet women's service at the front. It is significant that materials on females were written according to a scheme similar to that used by K. Sverdlova. Here one can also find the issue of women's emancipation among the dominant motivations for Soviet citizens to go to the front. Again, the reader is offered a historical digression on women's participation in combat in 1812 in particular, and later as well, yet this time in greater detail.<sup>89</sup>

The presentation of the particularities of the everyday life of Soviet women at the front was not original either. O. Mishakova limited herself to describing the cases of several women-combatants, turning their stories into propaganda to attract recruits to the front. At the same time, there are doubts regarding the veracity of her claims. Specifically, there is a statement in the text claiming that the spy Maria Baida allegedly killed five Germans using the butt of her rifle.<sup>90</sup> Some details of Liya Magdogulova's service as a sniper are no less doubtful,<sup>91</sup> specifically the number of enemies she killed in open combat and a description of her behaviour in battle. The author claims that she allegedly killed 32 Germans in a short time after she began her military service, but

‘... it seemed to her that this was not enough, and she waited impatiently for the day when the order to attack would be given. Offensive battles began. Her battalion was given the task: to break the enemy's well-fortified line of defence. The Germans met our soldiers with gunfire, mortars, and machine guns. Liya Magdogulova shouted: “For the Motherland! For Stalin!” and rushed forward. The soldiers rushed after her and broke into the German trenches. Skilfully wielding a rifle and grenades, Liya killed 10 enemy soldiers. The enemy, unable to withstand the quick strike, rolled back and the village was liberated. The next day the battalion fought for the railway line. Again, Liya led the attack. In fierce battles, she killed 12 Nazis. The Germans counterattacked three times, seeking

<sup>87</sup> *The British People at War*, 227.

<sup>88</sup> Mishakova, *Sovetskie Zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojne*.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–36.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>91</sup> The author of this paper uses the name of the famous sniper and Hero of the Soviet Union from O. Myshakova's book – Magdogulova Aliya Kurumgambievna. The same name is used in the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on awarding her the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. However, one can find another name for the same person in the literature – Moldagulova Aliya Nurmukhambetovna (1925–44).

to regain their positions. As they came closer, Liya exchanged her sniper rifle for a machine gun and devastatingly opened fire. She killed 28 German soldiers and officers while repelling the German counterattacks. Despite their losses, the Nazis continued to advance with perseverance as if possessed. A group of soldiers led by an officer managed to break through and reach our trench. Hand-to-hand combat began. Liya shot 8 Germans. Hitler's officer fatally wounded the girl in the back. Liya fell, but her strong hatred for the enemy helped her to continue fighting: with all her might, she raised her machine gun and in a long volley killed the German. The news of the death of everyone's beloved girl spread through the battalion. "Let's take revenge for our Liya, comrades!" – said the commander. With triple force, the soldiers rushed at the enemy. The battalion liberated five settlements that day and moved further to the west, crushing and pursuing the retreating enemy'.<sup>92</sup>

As one can see, the texts on Soviet female combatants that were published during World War II resembled a mixture of propaganda and mythological narrative rather than academic studies. These works did not refer to reliable primary sources, they did not employ fact checking and analysis, methodology, discussion, and other attributes of the academic study. They similarly lacked objectivity, which was practically unattainable in a totalitarian state.

The way the heroism of British servicewomen was described differs significantly. For example, here is a note on the recommendation of Junior Corporal Grace Catherine Golland for the medal of the British Empire of the Junior Corporal Grace Catherine Golland from the book by D. Collett Wage:

'By her courageous behaviour in danger and complete and unsparing devotion to duty she has set an inspiring example to all ranks. On 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1944, when performing her gun-site duties, she was engulfed by smoke and flame from some 50 I.B.s which landed close to her, accompanied by H.E. bombs which killed cattle in the next field. Despite the concussion from bombs and the heat and fumes engendered by the incendiaries, Lance-Corporal Golland remained at her post and by her coolness and leadership enabled her team to maintain their duties, thereby allowing the site to fire in further engagements in a period of 57 minutes.'<sup>93</sup>

This and other descriptions of the courage of British women in 1939–45 are devoid of the tragic pomposity, pathos, and in some places the obvious

<sup>92</sup> Mishakova, *Sovetskie Zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojne*, 43–44.

<sup>93</sup> Collett Wage, *Women in Uniform*, 123.

unreliability of the facts inherent in the Soviet works from the 1940s. At the same time, the lack of analysis, methodology, and discussion was characteristic of the greater part of British printed works from the 1940s as well.

Information on the contribution of Soviet women can be found in works that were not devoted exclusively to them, for example, in the collection *In the fight against the enemy: essays and stories about the Komsomol and the youth of the Leningrad region during the Great Patriotic War* (1945). This work consists of three thematic parts – ‘at the front’, ‘behind enemy lines’, and ‘on duty’. The first part consists of 16 separate small works: memoirs of Soviet youth who served at the front during the war, as well as essays and poems dedicated to them. Four were dedicated to women: 1) ‘How I became a gunner’ – memories of Maria Shishakova on how she retrained from a health instructor to a gunner; 2) ‘The Girl in the Overcoat’ – the story of the sanitary activist Alexandra Fedorova; 3) ‘Heiress’ – a story about the family of the spy Anna Grigorieva; 4) ‘Song of a sanitary activist’ – a poetic work dedicated to Soviet sanitary activists at the front.<sup>94</sup> Thus, during the Soviet-German war, the service of women at the front line was quite widely reflected in printed works, but as we can see, stories on female members of the medical service were predominant in the analysed collection.

Similarly, there was information on British women who served in the armed forces in general publications on the British people at war. Thus, from the very beginning of the book *The British People at War*, it is clear that the entire nation was involved in the war effort. It is also clear that the British people were fighting for democracy, and the forms of their participation in the war differed according to their gender and age:

‘The totalitarian powers of Europe had put the issue before them [to decide whether they want to be slaves or free people – N. Z.], and as free people of a democratic state, they made their choice deliberately. The subsequent adventures of the average representative citizen may be followed in these pages. The boys are in the Army, Navy or Air Force. The girls are on the land, in the munitions factories, in one of the uniformed auxiliary services. The elders are Air Raid Wardens or Home Guards. They are defenders of the Home Front – a phrase which has a literal meaning, for the island of Britain itself is in the front line. Its cities are liable to daily attacks, its coasts are rimmed with danger.’<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> E. Loshkareva, P. Civlina, *V Bor'be s Vragom: Ocherki i Rasskazy o Komsomol'chah i Molodezhi Leningradskoj Oblasti v Dni Otechestvennoj Vojny* (Leningrad: Leningradskoe gaz.-zhurn. i knizh. izd-vo, 1945), 30–32, 35–37, 47–52.

<sup>95</sup> *The British People at War*, 5.

A separate thematic section (24 pages) of this book contains information and illustrations covering all forms of women's participation in the war effort.<sup>96</sup>

However, in the following decades, this trend declined sharply. For example, the six-volume *History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union in 1941–1945* (1960–65) does not contain a detailed description of women's service in the army. Only its sixth volume includes a small amount of material on the topic.<sup>97</sup> This trend also applied to British general works on World War II in the following decades. For example, there is a single mention of only one women's service – the W.A.A.F. – in the book by the famous English military historian Basil Henry Liddell Hart. The honour of being mentioned was awarded to female radar plotters, '...who went on reporting raids until their own station was bombed' during the Luftwaffe attack.<sup>98</sup>

Post-war propaganda in both British and Soviet societies aimed at returning to pre-war gender roles. This was reflected in works on women's service. For example, Soviet authors tried to emphasise the traumatic effects of war on females, to prove the fear and difficulties with which they pulled the trigger in battle. However, the opposite is true in wartime works. They often assert that the physical destruction of the enemy brought women moral satisfaction, and this was often supported by quotes from the servicewomen's reminiscences. For example, the gunner M. Shishakova stated: '...I rushed to the front line where the fighting was going on. I wanted to kill a German by myself, to avenge my mother and father with my own hand... The day I sent the first shell from my gun towards the enemy was a great event, a great joy. When I opened my fighter account, I kept increasing the number that I had killed... I am happy that I achieved the goal of defending my homeland with weapons in my hands'.<sup>99</sup> The same thought permeates the story of L. Magdogulova that was mentioned above. In Great Britain, where there was an official taboo on the use of lethal weapons by women, attempts to refute notions concerning violations of this taboo were often made by emphasising the non-combat role of women in the war. Yet in some studies, it was acknowledged that a certain percentage of women wanted to fill combat roles. For example, the British

<sup>96</sup> *The British People at War*, 218–242.

<sup>97</sup> *Istorija Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojny Sovetskogo Sojuzja 1941–1945*, ed. by V. A. Vasilenko (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1965), 123.

<sup>98</sup> Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *The History of the Second World War* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 99.

<sup>99</sup> Loshkareva and Civlina, *V Bor'be s Vragom*, 31.



physician and academic W. Cullis described the purpose and features of the British service as follows:

'The aim of the women's forces is to replace men by women wherever possible, thus freeing men for offensive combatant duties. In spite of the magnificent example of Russian women and in spite of the fact that a good many British women have begged to take part in the "shooting war", Britain still believes that active offensive fighting is man's work, and for this reason thought women are working on the edge of combatant units, they do not qualify for combatant duties. An AT may locate the target for anti-aircraft gun, but she does not fire the shell that bursts against the enemy bomber; a WAAF unit may have complete charge of a barrage-balloon, but WAAFs do not pilot bombers, though now some are allowed to go up in the bombers to gain experience of the needs of the crew on active service; and though wireless operators of the Wrens may plot the course of an enemy raider, they do it on dry land.'<sup>100</sup>

The same trend was observed in post-war printed works.<sup>101</sup> The use of weapons by British women was more openly discussed in memoirs, for example, in the book by General Frederick Pile,<sup>102</sup> who supported their right to use them.

At the end of the war and in the first post-war years, the tendency to publish works on women's service in 1939–45 declined in Great Britain but did not stop altogether.<sup>103</sup> During this period, several important works were issued that laid the foundation for further rethinking of the role of women in society through the prism of their experience during World War II. Among such works is an extraordinary photo project by Lee Miller dedicated to the W.R.N.S. It contains photographs of the everyday life of members of the organisation at different stages of its existence. Despite the fact that the publications in which the visual material on the topic is represented are beyond the scope of our study, this book was included in the analysis because of its textual component. Its foreword was written by the head of the W.R.N.S., Vera Laughton Mathews. She expressed a progressive opinion for that time that 'the future of this country, and indeed of the world, depends on... the full co-operation of women in public life... women are needed as

<sup>100</sup> Cullis, *What British Women Are Doing in the War*, 12.

<sup>101</sup> Collett Wadge, *Women in Uniform*, 120.

<sup>102</sup> Frederick Pile, *Ack-Ack: Britain's Defence against Air Attack during the Second World War* (London: Harrap, 1949).

<sup>103</sup> Bigland, *The Story of the W. R. N. S.*; Bigland, *Britain's Other Army: The Story of the A.T.S.*; Douie, *Daughters of Britain*; E. C. Cheesman, *Brief Glory: The Story of A.T.A.* (Leicester: Harborough Publishing, 1946); Cowper, *The Auxiliary Territorial Service*.

co-partners of men'.<sup>104</sup> This assertion stood out against the background of the complete curtailment of agitation for women to join female services, the reluctance of the authorities to discuss the possibility of the existence of the latter in peacetime, and the gradual spread of propaganda promoting motherhood at the end of the war and in the first post-war decade.<sup>105</sup>

One of the earliest and most famous works of the post-war period, which reveals the features of service in various women's organisations, was published in 1946 – the book by D. Collett Wage.<sup>106</sup> The author reveals in detail the activities of 20 women's organisations in English-speaking countries during World War II. The author served in the A.T.S. in 1939–45, so her work is based not only on the analysis of sources and literature, but also on her own experience. The book mainly pays attention to British women's auxiliary and nursing organisations. In particular, the activities of the three largest of them – A.T.S., W.R.N.S., W.A.A.F. – are covered in 160 pages out of 386. The author describes in detail the history of their establishment and their development, provides information on the leaders, the main tasks, features of staff training, service abroad, ranks, salary, etc.<sup>107</sup> The information is structured and generally devoid of any emotional component, the narrative style prevails, and the text contains many personal reminiscences of members of women's services. They describe in detail their own daily routine, responsibilities, relationships with sisters-in-arms, etc.

The work traces the author's desire to objectively highlight some aspects of the problem. Thus, in describing one of the most controversial issues for Great Britain – the service of women in anti-aircraft defence – she says that 'The formation of the first mixed battery, which was made possible by the decision in the spring of 1941 to bring the A.T.S. under military law, caused, perhaps, more discussion and speculation than the inauguration of any other A.T.S. activity... In 1941 experiments were carried out in secret to test the possibilities of employing A.T.S. personnel on searchlights.'<sup>108</sup> The experiments were successful and British women who served in anti-aircraft defence successfully defended the country side-by-side with men. At the same time, the author does not pay enough attention to the problem of some of these women using guns. Such cases, along with efforts of the authorities to hide such facts, were discussed in the society of that time and were covered by researchers of later periods. The book contains only one

<sup>104</sup> Lee Miller, *Wrens in Camera* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1945), IX.

<sup>105</sup> Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex*, 129–30, 135.

<sup>106</sup> Collett Wage, *Women in Uniform*.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 59–219.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 119–120.

comment concerning the issue from a member of the mixed battery who claimed from her own experience that such cases had not occurred. In general, D. Collett Wage's book is an important source of factual information on the issue, but the author does not offer conceptually new approaches to rethinking the role of women in society and, in particular, in the service.

In the first post-war years in the USSR, the trend to publish works on Soviet women at the front similarly declined sharply. However, several studies were issued at this time.<sup>109</sup> These works were based on somewhat more reliable primary sources than the bulk of the studies from the previous period. Of course, one should bear in mind that the Soviet totalitarian state tried to keep the majority of controversial information secret, so the majority of sources was not available to researchers, and censorship precluded any attempts to cover historical events objectively. That is why in their essence and content, these books were very similar to those of the war years, as we already stated in the previous section. They covered the activities of Soviet women in various spheres during the war but for the most part, the text was dedicated to the glorification of the Soviet authorities. In addition to the significant ideological component, which still played a dominant role, most of these works focused on specific republics and did not shed light on the all-Union picture in the study area. The exception is the study by Alexandra Shmeleva. It covers the particularities of the work and service of women both at the front and in the rear area. It pays some attention to specific cases of women from different republics who served at the front line. However, instead of the rhetoric of the war years about gender equality and the strong desire of some Soviet women to serve as combatants, she refers to notions about how desperate those times were and shows women's service as a forced step. For example, regarding the problem of the establishment of women's air regiments, she states that the latter 'were formed because of forced need, since the sudden blow of enormous destructive force dealt by Hitler's troops in the first days of the war caused significant damage to the Soviet Air Force'.<sup>110</sup>

In general, despite the significant increase in the first post-war years in the number and quality of studies on the history of the Soviet-German war, the number of works on women's participation in the war, especially on their service in the Red Army, was small.

<sup>109</sup> Davletova, *Zhenshhiny-Turkmenki v Gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojny* (Ashhabad, 1949); A. F. Shmeleva, *Sovetskie Zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojne* (Moskva: Politizdat, 1947); Karaseva, *Slavnye Dochery Nashej Rodiny*.

<sup>110</sup> Shmeleva, *Sovetskie Zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojne*, 42, 66, 69.

## *Conclusions*

The USSR and Great Britain were in difficult circumstances during World War II. Both countries experienced an acute shortage of personnel in the armed forces, and therefore practiced involvement of women in military service. They launched large-scale propaganda campaigns to recruit as many women as possible to the armed forces, using publishing houses that were under their control. The USSR had a longer tradition of censoring printed works, which was conducted by Glavlit. During the existence of the USSR, the government was able to completely subjugate all publishing houses in the country and fully control the content of their products. In Great Britain, strict control over publishing was relaunched with the outbreak of war when the Ministry of Information was restored. This Ministry did not have the same kinds of means for applying social pressure as did the Soviet Glavlit, but it exerted significant impact on the format and content of British publications by rationing the amount of paper available for them because paper was in short supply. The governments of both the USSR and Great Britain encouraged publishers to publish books on the country's participation in the war instead of fiction literature.

In both countries, journalists, writers, political activists, and former servicemen and servicewomen, who were more willing to abandon objectivity in favour of ideology and did not cover the problem critically due to weak knowledge of methodology, were primarily involved in writing information and propaganda works.

The target audience for such works was the population of each respective country, but primarily women. Among the main messages that governments tried to convey to this audience was active participation in the war effort to maintain the current regime. The difference was that in Great Britain, women were called on to defend democracy (which, incidentally, did not provide gender equality, as in many other democratic regimes of that time). In the USSR – they were urged to defend the ‘good’ government led by Stalin, which allegedly liberated women and had already introduced equality between the sexes (of course, reality was more complicated and even equal rights stated by law did not mean equality in real life, and the Soviet government’s policy can hardly be called pro-feminist).

At the end of the war in both countries, the number of works published on the subject tended to decline significantly. At the same time, British publications issued during the war and in the post-war years reflected the picture of women’s service more objectively. Their texts contained far fewer emotional and ideological components, while in Soviet publications

the latter were slightly diluted by factual material, sometimes obviously unreliable.

During the war, both countries were literally flooded with very similar printed works on the issue. However, in the USSR, their structure was primarily based on ideology and was closely intertwined with the history of the ruling party. In Great Britain, in addition to the classic digression into the history of an organisation, their structure depended on the directions and features of the organisation's activities. British and Soviet works are characterised by a narrative style of information presentation. For the most part, these works were rather journalistic in nature, almost devoid of analysis and discussion. This is especially true concerning works that were published during the war. In the post-war period, the situation improved slightly since there was greater access to sources, especially in Great Britain, and there was no longer any need to include propaganda in the text for women to join the armed forces. At the same time, the Soviet books of the 1940s were characterised by a very high level of ideological, propagandistic text aimed at glorifying the ruling regime.

Another distinctive feature was the general style in which women's service during World War II was covered. In the USSR, which was the only state in the world where women could openly fill combatant roles, publications were replete with concrete examples of their heroism at the front. They mostly mention the names of several dozen women-combatants who distinguished themselves during hostilities, but the authors deliberately avoid mentioning the proportion of women in the army. However, printed works from the war years write only about 'thousands' of women who went to the front to defend the homeland,<sup>111</sup> although they should actually speak of at least hundreds of thousands. At the same time, in British publications meant to cover the general picture of women's service, most of the text of the works that have been considered did not include specific cases, in contrast to the corresponding Soviet texts.

In the context of gender attitude, it should be noted that the objectification of servicewomen and their sexualisation can often be found in British printed works. We could not find such sexualised descriptions in Soviet publications. Soviet women were depicted as comrades. In addition, the argumentation system used to explain the need to recruit women is important for our comparison. Thus, this was explained by the alleged gender equality in the USSR, as well as the duty of women to the 'fair' Soviet

<sup>111</sup> Sverdlova, *Sovetskaja Zhenshhina v Otechestvennoj Vojne*, 9; Mishakova, *Sovetskie Zhenshhiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojne*, 17.

government and the homeland, which were under threat. Restrained statements on the so-called 'new role' of women in society caused by war characterised British publications.<sup>112</sup> Such rhetoric was used during the war more to justify temporary and situational changes than to reflect the real intention of the authorities to actively promote such changes in the social order on a permanent basis. In the post-war years in Great Britain, there was a setback regarding the expansion of opportunities for women in various fields. Instead, the cult of motherhood was promoted. The same trend emerged in the USSR as well, with certain variations.

Both countries have succeeded in their propaganda and in mobilisation and recruiting an unprecedented number of women into the armed forces.

KEYWORDS: women; World War II; USSR; Great Britain; Soviet-German war; historiography

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### KOKKUVÕTE: *Naised Teise maailmasõja aegses sõjateenistuses 1940. aastate Briti ja Nõukogude väljaannetes*

Artikli eesmärk on uurida ja võrrelda, kuidas Briti ja Nõukogude ajalookirjanduses on kajastatud ja iseloomustatud naiste osalemist Teises maailmasõjas. Autor jõuab järeldusele, et üks ühine joon Nõukogude ja Briti ajalookirjanduses on asjaolu, et mõlemad riigid asusid naiste osalust aktiivselt kajastama juba enne sõja lõppu, eesmärgiga värvata sõjateenistusse nii palju naisi kui võimalik. Sõja järel vähenes naiste tegevust sõjas kajastavate trükiste arv märgatavalt. Nõukogude ja Briti tekstides oli teisigi sarnaseid

<sup>112</sup> Cox, *British Women at War*, 7.

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elemente, näiteks nende jutustav stiil ning tekstide sügav ideologiseeritus. Samas leidis ka erinevusi, näiteks kirjeldati sõjategevuses osalevaid naisi märgatavalt erinevalt.

MÄRKSONAD: naised; Teine maailmasõda; Nõukogude Liit; Suurbritannia; Nõukogude-Saksamaa sõda; ajalookirjutus

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