Soviet Women in Combat

A History of Violence on the Eastern Front

Soviet Women in Combat explores the unprecedented historical phenomenon of Soviet young women's *en masse* volunteering for World War II combat in 1941 and writes it into the twentieth-century history of women, war, and violence. The book narrates a story about a cohort of Soviet young women who came to think about themselves as women soldiers in Stalinist Russia in the 1930s and who shared modern combat, its machines, and commanding positions with men on the Eastern front between 1941 and 1945. The author asks how a largely patriarchal society with traditional gender values such as Stalinist Russia in the 1930s managed to merge notions of violence and womanhood into a first conceivable and then realizable agenda for the cohort of young female volunteers and for its armed forces. In pursuing this question, Anna Krylova's approach and research reveals a more complex conception of gender identities.

Anna Krylova is Hunt Assistant Professor of Modern Russian History at Duke University. Her research focuses on twentieth-century Russian gender and cultural history, World War II and mechanization of warfare, and problematics of historical interpretation. She has published articles and critical historiographical essays in the *Journal of Modern History*, *Slavic Review*, and *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. Professor Krylova has been a Fellow at Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University, and visiting scholar at Tuebingen University (Germany).

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To my mother,

Tamara Krylova

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Acknowledgments

My interest in modern Russian history was formed at a particular time and place: in the middle of a heated public debate over the meaning of the Soviet past that preoccupied the Soviet society in the late 1980s. Having announced a free discussion about Soviet history to be a crucial part of his perestroika policy, Communist Party chief Mikhail Gorbachev unleashed a public reexamination of the official historical narrative. It would be misleading to say that, as a student in a Moscow high school at the time, I "studied" history. Rather, I watched history being debated, investigated, invalidated, and denounced in an endless flow of newspaper articles, historical novels, documentaries, and talk shows. My high school education concluded with the cancellation of the graduation exam in history, which made the public loss of a coherent historical story about the Soviet past into a memorable personal event. My cohort became a generation without history and was about to become the last Soviet generation. For me, the perestroika struggles over the Soviet legacy underscored the centrality of history to individual and national identity and its susceptibility to multiple and contradictory accounts, long before I made the study of history my professional career.

The intellectual journey that turned a bewildered witness to the destruction of the Soviet historical monolith into the author of this book began at Johns Hopkins. The graduate years spent in the intellectually intense and supportive atmosphere of the History Department there were among the most exciting and transformative years of my life. I would like to thank Jeffrey Brooks, who supervised my dissertation, for his intellectual generosity, passion for Russian history, and unfailing support throughout the years. I owe the inspiration to study women's and gender history and discourse analysis to Judith Walkowitz, whose critical insight into conceptual, interpretive, and writing challenges of the historical profession has informed my intellectual agenda to the present day. I also want to thank Vernon Lidtke for helping me build an intellectual bridge into European and German history and learn to never disengage my study of Russia from larger European and global contexts. His graduate seminars,

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