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Abstract: This paper examines the development and significance of the Soviet 588th Night Bomber Regiment in World War II, a group commonly known as the “Night Witches.” These women were an effective combat force but their achievements were obscured after the conclusion of the war, resulting in a widespread lack of recognition for the role they played. This research focuses on renewing the investigation into their little-acknowledged but unique involvement and contributions to the Soviet war effort.

The research first focuses on how unique the regiment was among all Allied forces by tracing its development to the persistence of a single female pilot, Marina Raskova. From the volunteer-based recruitment process, which filled every position from pilots to mechanics and navigators exclusively with women, to their initial difficulties associating with unreceptive male regiments, the female Soviet pilots were exceptional in many ways.

The paper also focuses on the regiment’s experience serving on the frontlines for three years, pulled largely from collections of the Night Witches’ first-hand accounts. The women flew perilous night bombing sabotage missions in outdated and hazardously limited Po-2 aircraft alongside numerous similar male regiments. However, through these assignments, the Night witches distinguished themselves by striving to maintain standards of accuracy and exceeding expectations with incredibly high sortie rates. By the end of the war, they had become the most decorated of all female aviation units, been awarded for their commitment and persistence above many of their male counterparts. Despite their achievements, the Soviet government instated policies at the end of the war that effaced the roles of most female combatants. After the war, veterans of the regiment were largely forced to obscure their participation in combat or face public derision.

The wartime achievements of the Night Witch regiment are a proud legacy of both Soviet patriotism, and women’s capability in combat situations. The impact of female combatants in World War II calls for more thorough investigation, and the exploits of these women are especially relevant today as tacticians continue to question the possibility of women’s participation in combat.

Christian Worldview Integration: My worldview has largely affected my motivation for pursuing this research, despite the initial difficulty of locating usable material. I believe that all humans are bearers of God’s image, and naturally imbued with dignity and significance in God’s plan. Upon first investigating the topic, I realized there is a historiographical imbalance between the focus on the roles of male and female Soviet combatants in World War II. This imbalance

tends to centralize focus on male's contributions as snipers, pilots and mechanics, suggesting that these were more significant than corresponding female achievements in the same field. I therefore chose to focus on one of the better-known, although still rather obscure branches of female Soviet service to give proper weight to these women and their achievements. Although research was difficult at times and locating sources in English became a trial, I worked persistently towards this goal in hopes that historians could benefit from the wisdom and insight of multiple perspectives in the conflict.

In addition, this research topic overlaps with several hot-button issues today, such as the place female combatants may or may not have serving on the frontlines. It is important to approach such research with Christian values like integrity and a commitment to veracity, which includes the application of historic context. By understanding the complex historical period in which the 588th Regiment acted, historians can draw fitting connections between their era and our modern understanding of corresponding issues, avoiding the pitfall of historic "tunnel vision." My Christian worldview has encouraged me to remain aware of bias to provide the most accurate account of the facts I have discovered.