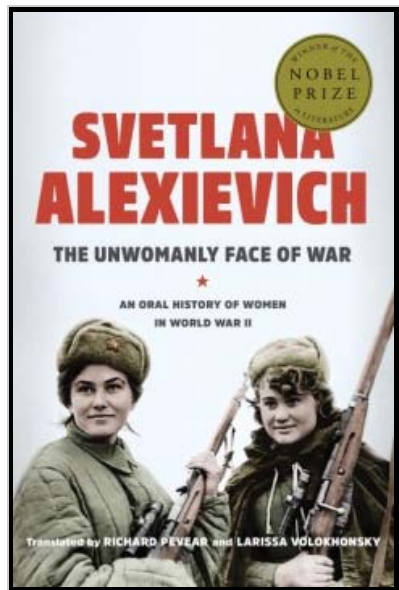


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The Unwomanly Face of War

by Svetlana Alexievich, Richard Pevear, Larissa Volokhonsky

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From the Publisher: A long-awaited English translation of the classic oral history of women in World War II across Europe and Russia—from Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich Bringing together dozens of voices in her distinctive style, Svetlana Alexievich shares stories of women's experiences in World War II—on the front lines, on the home front, and in occupied territories. *The Unwomanly Face of War* is a powerful history of the central conflict of the twentieth century, a kaleidoscopic portrait of the human side of war.

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Svetlana Alexievich, Richard Pevear, Larissa Volokhonsky

Svetlana Alexievich was born in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, in 1948 and has spent most of her life in the Soviet Union and present-day Belarus, with prolonged periods of exile in Western Europe. Starting out as a journalist, she developed her own nonfiction genre, which gathers a chorus of voices...

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What We Say

When Russian historian Svetlana Alexievich became the first journalist to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, my reaction was probably the same as most casual (or even avid) readers. "Who is that?" I wondered. Read this book and you'll understand who she is and why she won. Alexievich is a pioneering combination of oral historian a la Studs Terkel, journalist and literary writer. We've seen a steady stream of her recent works come out in English and now her breakthrough book has been translated with care by the superstar team of Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. It tells the story of WW II almost entirely from the point of view of the Soviet women who served. They served as nurses and snipers, foot soldiers and

cooks, doctors and gunners, anti-mine sweepers and pilots. They fought alongside tank units and in the cavalry, on foot and in the air. Alexievich has no interest in grand strategy or who took which hill with what flanking maneuver. She documents everyday reality, the telling minor detail, the smell and taste of war. The fact that the women who were so vital in fighting were willfully silenced almost the second the war ended makes their desire to be heard all the more palpable. This book is indeed literature and history and journalism of the highest order. It's also compulsively readable and gripping. One girl mentions she was so young when she headed to the front that she actually grew during the war. (Four inches!) Others describe the absurdity of wearing size ten boots because no one ever thought to make them small enough for women. One girl didn't know from saluting and when two officers walked by she dropped what she was carrying and saluted with both hands, one for each officer. Again and again, women describe begging and pleading and demanding to serve at the front. These tales arrive early on as Alexievich arranges a symphony of voices, pausing for extended tales and then bringing in the chorus again, moving from the amusing to the serious, taking in war with all its horror, not to mention the Stalinist purges, the ardent belief in communism, the whispered prayers of people who maintained their faith and so much more. The stories are so heartbreaking, so funny, so sad and striking that no novelist would dare imagine the events that tumble out here. You will smile or cry or shudder or be deeply moved on virtually every page. That's not even a slight exaggeration. This is a masterpiece of reportage akin to the documentary film "Shoah" and I can offer no higher praise. By adding on witness after witness and story after story and fact after fact, Alexievich has created a work of enduring importance. -- Michael Giltz

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