

# The White Rose of Stalingrad: The Real-Life Adventure of Lidiya Vladimirovna Litvyak, the Highest Scoring Female Air Ace of All Time (General Military)

Bill Yenne



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Of all the major air forces that were engaged in the war, only the Red Air Force had units comprised specifically of women. Initially the Red Air Force maintained an all-male policy among its combat pilots. However, as the apparently invincible German juggernaut sliced through Soviet defenses, the Red Air Force began to rethink its ban on women. By October 1941, authorization was forthcoming for three ground attack regiments of women pilots. Among these women, Lidiya Vladimirovna "Lilya†? Litvyak soon emerged as a rising star. She shot down five German aircraft over the Stalingrad Front, and thus become history's first female ace. She scored 12 documented victories over German aircraft between September 1942 and July 1943. She also had many victories shared with other pilots, bringing her possible total to around 20. The fact that she was a 21-year-old woman ace was not lost on the hero-hungry Soviet media, and soon this colourful character, whom the Germans dubbed "The White Rose of Stalingrad,†? became both folk heroine and martyr.

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