“And that there are frontline women who have remained single, have not arranged their lives, and have nowhere to live”

On September 5th, the Bibliophiles met to review THE UNWOMANLY FACE OF WAR, by Svetlana Alexievich. Recommended by David Clements, this book explores the daunting role of thousands of Soviet women who volunteered for frontline combat duty during the Nazi invasion of Russia during World War II. It relates hundreds of personal testimonials of women who sacrificed all on behalf of their commitment to “Mother Russia.” They were engaged in total war in which there were no moral or other conventional boundaries to what they might be called upon to do. One woman, hiding in a swamp with her baby and a group of authors, was led to drown the baby to avoid possible screams that might alert Nazi invaders to their location. The book is replete with tragic stories of women’s hardships; sometimes bearing the indignity of wearing men’s undergarments because of scarce and rudimentary military supplies. The utter sadness of this account of women mobilized in army units was told with gripping power for all. It was nevertheless considered a wise choice and an engrossing reading experience.

Some interesting revelations and ruminations were expressed about whether war is inhuman. Most people would say it is so. But David contended that the stories reflect true aspects of humanity at its worse. It may be more accurate to say war is inhumane rather than inhuman (since such barbarism has inflicted by humans on humans since the beginning of time). There was some wide-ranging speculation regarding the inclusion of women in combat units alongside men. Kathleen asserted that women should have the right to serve in any military role if they can meet the physical and formal job requirements. It with such challenging opportunities that the true limits of women in war may be tested and expressed.

http://bibliophiles.unomaha.edu/

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