



Weird World War II, Part 2: When Witches Worked Wonders

The Night Witches of the USSR

In June 1942, Adolf Hitler violated his treaty with Joseph Stalin, launching Operation Barbarossa, a full-scale invasion of the Soviet Union. Caught by surprise, the initial months of the invasion went well for Germany. By the middle of September, German forces were drawing uncomfortably close to Moscow, while the Red Army found itself stretched thin and in need of reinforcement. Until this time, while there were individual exceptions, women were largely discouraged from taking part in the Soviet military. This attitude changed due to the encroachment of German forces and the impetus of one female pilot, famed Soviet aviator Marina Raskova. Considered by some the Russian Amelia Earhart, Raskova, in 1933, became the first woman navigator in the Soviet Air Force. Later, she was the first woman to be an instructor at the Zhukovsky Air Academy. She went on to train at the Central Flying Club, graduating in 1935, after which she became an instrument flying instructor specializing in advanced navigation. In 1937 and 1938, she made a number of record-breaking long distance flights, cementing her celebrity status and providing encouragement for a wave of Soviet women to train as pilots and navigators.

The onset of World War II led many of these women to apply for military service, but they were ignored in the first stages of the conflict. In Sept. 1941, with the German army driving deep into Soviet territory, Raskova used her influence to Stalin to let her create and train three regiments of female aviators, making the Soviet Union the first nation in World War II to allow women to participate in combat missions. Raskova received 2,000 applications and accepted 1,200 of them. These women received a few months of intensive training before receiving assignments as pilots, navigators, engineers, and ground crew members in what would become the 586th Fighter Aviation Regiment, the 587th Bomber Aviation Regiment and the 588th Night Bomber Aviation Regiment. These regiments mostly received outdated equipment, including 1920s era plywood biplanes provided to the 588th. Due to weight restrictions, these planes were only able to carry one bomb under each wing. Traveling in clusters, they would draw out German anti-aircraft fire to help illuminate their targets, while the rear plane cut engines for stealth and glided in to bomb the target. Soldiers on the ground likened the whooshing sound of the gliding aircraft to witches' brooms, leading Germans to call these regiments *Nachthexen*, or Night Witches. The 586th was the first to enter service in April 1942. It flew 4,419 missions, participating in 125 air battles and downing 38 German aircraft. The 587th flew 1,134 missions, dropping 980 tons of bombs and producing five Heroes of the Soviet Union. The 588th's famous Night Witches flew more than 24,000 missions, dropping 23,000 tons of bombs on the Germans, while producing 24 Heroes of the Soviet Union. Raskova died during a crash landing on Jan. 4, 1943, after which she was honored with the USSR's first state funeral of the war.



Marina Raskova - Moscow, 1938

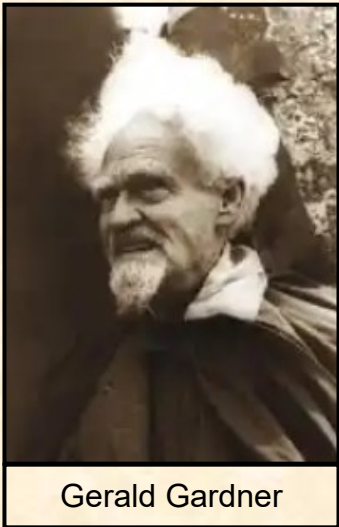


Members of the 588th Night Bomber Regiment

The Cone of Power: Witches vs the World

In 1940, a coven of British witches attempted to cast a spell on Hitler to prevent a German invasion. In fact, it was not the first time witches in England united in an effort to thwart their enemies. The method involved conjuring a Cone of Power, a form of energy visualized by a circle of witches for use in ritual magic. Practitioners believe they can raise energy within themselves and direct it outward to achieve their goals. American witches have attempted to use Cones of Power for military and political goals in the modern era. In 1971, a California coven performed the ritual to stop the war in Vietnam. More recently, American witches have attempted to cast spells to sway elections.

The first known use of the Cone of Power as a weapon of war in England reportedly took place in 1588, when a coven of witches raised a cone to prevent an invasion by the Spanish Armada. That invasion never materialized, as Spain lost 44 ships and up to 20,000 men in what became a disastrous effort. According to legend, English witches again stepped up in 1805 to prevent Napoleon’s planned invasion. The French Emperor assembled 180,000 troops at Boulogne, but lost his entire fleet to the British at the Battle of Trafalgar (Oct. 1805). However, the most famous and well documented case dates from 1940, when English witches turned their sights on Hitler. This effort came through the New Forest coven, centered near the town of Highcliffe on the southern coast. The leader was Gerald Gardner, a British civil servant who spent decades abroad working in the rubber industry while occupying his free time as an amateur archeologist and anthropologist. Returning to England in 1936, he joined nudist circles in London, where he started exploring goddess-based spiritualism. After briefly flirting with Rosicrucianism, he founded the New Forest coven in 1939. This group, in Aug. 1940, conducted the Cone of Power ritual to stop a German from invading England.



Gerald Gardner

According to researchers, the coven met in a portion of New Forest - most likely near the Rufus Stone, where King William II “Rufus” died. Here, they formed a circle in the nude. In place of the traditional bonfire, they used hooded lanterns, to adhere to wartime blackout conditions. They then began raising the Cone of Power by dancing in a circle and chanting, directing discouraging thoughts at Hitler, placing a hex on him, making him think an invasion would be impossible, or at least too dangerous to attempt. Whether it worked or not is anyone’s guess. But, like the instances of the Spanish Armada and the Napoleonic Wars, the goal of the spell came to fruition. None of these invasions happened. Gardner continued his interest in nudism, founding a colony of his own. He also developed his interest in traditional pagan religious beliefs, aligning himself with several druidic groups in England. By 1950, he had developed his views and established witchcraft practices that would first be called Gardnerism. He published his views in the 1954 work *Witchcraft Today*, which popularized the idea that witchcraft was part of ancient religious belief systems. After Gardner’s death in 1960, his views became developed into a new religion, making him the Father of Modern Wicca.

JMC Historical Document Collection

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This Month in Military History

- Oct. 2, 1263:** At the Battle of Largs on the Firth of Clyde, a victorious Scottish army removes the last Norwegians from the British Isles, ending 500 years of Viking attacks.
- Oct. 5, 1274:** One thousand Mongol soldiers start Kublai Khan’s invasion of Japan by landing on the island of Tsushima, between Korea and the Japanese mainland. This event later provides the storyline for the samurai video game *Ghost of Tsushima*.
- Oct. 8, 1856:** Chinese marines in Canton seize the *Arrow*, a British flagged ship, under suspicion of piracy, sparking the Second Opium War (1856-1860).
- Oct. 11, 1776:** In the first major naval engagement of the American Revolution, a fleet of 33 British ships under Gen. Guy Carleton destroys or captures all but three of Brig. Gen. Benedict Arnold’s 15 colonial vessels.
- Oct. 14, 1066:** William, Duke of Normandy, defeats Harold II at the Battle of Hastings, initiating what would become 419 years of Norman-Angevin (French) rule in England.
- Oct. 17, 1448:** At the Second Battle of Kosovo, Sultan Murad II’s Ottoman forces defeat John Hunyadi’s Hungarian army. Among the allies of the Ottoman forces is usurper and eventual three-time Voivode (military ruler) of Wallachia, Vlad III “the Impaler,” the historical inspiration for the character Dracula.
- Oct. 20, 1827:** At the Battle of Navarino, a combined English, French and Russian fleet defeats the forces of Turkey and Egypt, setting the stage for Greece to gain its independence. It is the last significant naval engagement using only wooden ships.
- Oct. 23, 42 BCE:** The forces of Mark Antony and Octavian defeat the army of Brutus and other conspirators in the assassination of Julius Caesar at the Battle of Philippi, ending the Roman Civil War. Fifteen years later, Octavian become Augustus Caesar, the first Roman emperor.
- Oct. 26, 1774:** In response to British military buildup in the colony, the Massachusetts Provincial Legislature resolves to reorganize the colonial militia to face future threats, creating the Minutemen.
- Oct. 29, 539 BCE:** Three weeks after routing the Persian army at the Battle of Opis, King Cyrus the Great (550-530 BCE) of Persia enters the city of Babylon, ending the Babylonian Captivity by freeing Jewish captives and allowing them to return home for the first time in 60 years.