



Lyudmila Pavlichenko, 'Lady Death'

Lyudmila Pavlichenko (1916 -1974) was a sniper in the Soviet army during World War II. Credited with 309 confirmed kills in less than a year, she became the most successful female sniper in history and one of the greatest snipers of all time.

Pavlichenko was born in Ukraine. As a young woman she was a highly competitive athlete. After hearing a boy boasting about his achievements on the rifle range, she took up the sport to prove that a girl could shoot just as well, and became highly proficient. While studying at Kiev University as a history student, she enrolled in a Red Army military-style sniper school for six months.

In June 1941, as Germany began its invasion of the Soviet Union, she enlisted in the Red Army and was assigned to a rifle division. She was one of about 2000 Soviet female snipers. Only about 500 survived the war.



Pavlichenko served during the Siege of Odessa in the summer of 1941, where she recorded 187 kills in just 2 1/2 months. She wrote in her memoirs about this experience, "You need great self-control, will power and endurance to lie fifteen hours at a stretch without moving. The slightest twitch may mean death."



When the Soviet army withdrew to the Crimean Peninsula, she took part in the Siege of Sevastopol. In addition to her combat duties, she trained other snipers. Her total confirmed kills during World War II included thirty-six Axis snipers



Pavlichenko was so feared by the Germans that she earned the nickname "Lady Death." She later reported that they would try to bribe her over a loudspeaker, "Lyudmila Pavlichenko, come over to us. We will give you lots of chocolate and make you a German officer."

Pavlichenko fought for eight months in Sevastopol and was wounded four times. After receiving facial wounds, she was evacuated by submarine as Soviet leadership felt she was too valuable to lose on the front lines. She spent a month in a hospital recovering and then became a propagandist for the Red Army.

In 1942, Pavlichenko was sent to Great Britain, Canada and the United States as part of Russia's attempt to convince the Allies to open a second front against Nazi Germany. She became the first Soviet citizen to be received by a United States president.



First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt invited Pavlichenko to tour the country with her. She was asked to talk about her experiences as a female soldier on the front lines to help raise support for the war. A friendship developed between the two that continued after the war.



Russian diplomats accompany Pavlichenko to Washington D.C.

(Library of Congress Photo)



She was greeted by large crowds wherever she went but never taken seriously by the American media who called her "the girl sniper". She received many negative comments about her uniform and fielded questions about issues such as wearing make-up on the front lines. She became increasingly frustrated.

Finally, in Chicago, she addressed the gathered media, "Gentlemen, I am 25 years old and I have killed 309 fascist invaders by now. Don't you think, gentlemen, that you've been hiding behind my back for too long?" She received a huge roar of support from the assembled crowd.

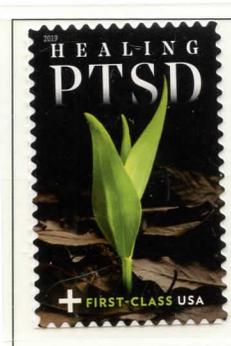


Pavlichenko never returned to active combat but continued training snipers. After the war she worked as an historian in the Soviet Navy. She was awarded the gold star of the Hero of the Soviet Union, her country's highest distinction.



She also received the Order of Lenin twice and two awards for Meritorious Service in Battle.

Lyudmila Pavlichenko died at age 58 from a stroke. After the war, she suffered from depression which she attributed to the loss of her husband, a fellow sniper, during combat. She also struggled with PTSD and alcoholism.



She wrote in her memoirs that she felt no remorse for her kills. "The only feeling I have is the great satisfaction a hunter feels who has killed a beast of prey."

For most soldiers in modern warfare, enemy targets are killed from a distance. For Pavlichenko, all her "kills" were "up close and personal," viewed through the scope of her sniper's rifle.



The story of this amazing woman lives on today in many forms. The first English edition of her memoirs, *Lady Death*, was published in 2018. The 2015 movie, *Battle for Sevastopol*, portrayed a romanticized version of her life.



As a tribute to her war record, American folk singer Woody Guthrie composed the song, "Miss Pavlichenko."

"Miss Pavlichenko's well known to fame,
Russia's your country, fighting is your game,
The whole world will love her for a long time
to come,
For more than three hundred Nazis fell by
your gun."

