

ABOUT TYPHOON

The story of *Typhoon* begins in the pod of an ordinary flight simulator that turns into a real Eurofighter Typhoon.

I had the idea for this book after I'd been in a Typhoon flight simulator with my daughter at an Agricultural Show. First we looked at some prize chickens and then we experienced what it might feel like to fly a Typhoon. Our experience didn't turn into anything more 'real-life', of course. But at many times and places, women have flown aircraft into war.

In the Soviet Air Force in the Second World War, there was a whole regiment of female fighter pilots called the 588th Night Bombers.

The situation was very different in the UK.

Between 1918 and 1920, women could join the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF). The plan was to train women as mechanics to help with Air Force work.

In 1939, at the start of the Second World War, the WRAF started up again as the WAAF – the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

The women of the WAAF could not fly into “the theatre of war”, but their role was to deliver planes where they were needed, including the front line. Women flew 300,000 planes into war zones between 1939 and 1945. And they flew them in skies full of enemy aircraft.

One in every ten of those women died. Just like their male counterparts, they were brave, skilful and determined to do what was needed to win the war.

It took until 1991 for a woman pilot in the RAF to fly into a war zone with a direct part to

play in war. That pilot was Flight Lieutenant Julie Ann Gibson.

Then, in 1994, Flight Lieutenant Jo Salter broke new ground by becoming the first female fast jet pilot. She was a “combat ready” pilot who flew Tornados similar to the jet in this book and carried out bombing missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

All this nearly 80 years after warfare in the air began.

I read about dozens of female pilots when I was writing *Typhoon*.

One woman’s bravery really stood out for me. She was Flight Lieutenant Michelle Goodman, a helicopter pilot.

In Iraq, in the early hours of 1st June 2007, Goodman was woken by an urgent call-out – a British soldier had been badly injured in a major attack in Basra City. The soldier had to

be rescued and brought back to the base within 15 minutes. If the rescue took any longer than that, the soldier would die.

Goodman took off from her base and flew her helicopter into the war zone. She landed her helicopter under fire and in a dust storm. As she landed she let off flares to confuse the enemy missile tracking systems, to prevent them from hitting her. Even so, the helicopter was hit, but Goodman took off with the injured soldier on board, and returned to the British Field Hospital.

Goodman carried out the whole mission at high speed – it took her just 14 minutes. The soldier lived – because Flight Lieutenant Goodman put her own life at risk to save his. She was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for her actions. She was the first – and so far the only – woman to be awarded this medal.

Men and women are still not fully equal in the Royal Air Force. Women can serve in combat roles in the air but they can't fight with the RAF Regiment on the ground. What do you think about that?

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