

# Summer's blockbuster tales

I once heard a speaker say: "You know what you know. You know what you don't know. But you don't know what you don't know."

Allow me to share two stories that I didn't know that I didn't know. I found them in a book titled: "The Book of Unusual Knowledge." I found the book at Ollie's. I didn't know they even had books.

First, back in 1931, the New York Yankees were heading home from spring training. Along the way they played a number of exhibition games. Facing the Chattanooga Lookouts, the Yankees were amazed to see a 17-year-old girl on the mound, named Jackie Mitchell. She wanted to play professional baseball.

She had a wicked curveball, and struck out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig consecutively on only seven pitches.

A few days later Major League Baseball Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis voided her contract; he said that baseball was too strenuous for a woman.

I wonder how many male pitchers struck out Ruth and Gehrig back-to-back on seven pitches?

An even more amazing story of the feats of women being largely forgotten by history is the story of a Russian pilot, Marina Raskova.

With the Nazis nearly defeating Russia during World War II, Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin gave Marina permission to form three squadrons for the defense of the homeland. These squadrons - the 586th Fighter Aviation Regiment, the 588th Night Bomber Regiment, and the 125th Guards Bomber Aviation Regiment - were composed entirely of women, from the pilots to the mechanics.

Although all the squadrons performed amazing feats, the 588th became famous as the Nachthexen - German for "night witches" - for their daring and tireless night raids on German command posts and tactical targets.

As you may have guessed, there was a lot of prejudice against the women. For

example the 588th was provided only antiquated open-cockpit Polikarpov Po-2 biplanes which had a top speed of only 94 miles an hour, slower than most planes used in World War I. They could carry only two bombs.

Yet the women used their disadvantages as advantages. They flew close to the ground, and would cut their engines until they had dropped their bombs. Ironically, the faster German planes would stall when they tried to shoot them down. The German pilots were promised an Iron Cross if they could shoot them down. They couldn't.

Allow me to quote a closing paragraph about them: "The Night Witches endured countless hardships during the war. In some cases, the women flew as many as 18 missions a night. During the brutal winters of 1942-1943, the women would often have to lie on the wings of their planes to keep the gale force winds and ice from blowing their light craft right off the airfield. All told, the 588th completed more than 24,000 combat missions by the end of the war. Marina Raskova was killed in January 1943 while attempting to make an emergency landing. But the squadrons she formed went on to fight in the skies above Berlin, bringing victory for the Soviet Union."

Twenty-three of the pilots in the 588th were decorated as Heroines of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union's equivalent of the Medal of Honor.

I tell these stories because I like stories. But I tell them also because I think they would make great movies.

Share these stories with others. After they prove to be box-office hits, maybe the producers could send some large checks to the Archdiocese of Baltimore, or the Little Sisters of the Poor or Catholic Relief Services.

Don't send a check to me.

I'd probably forget to cash it.