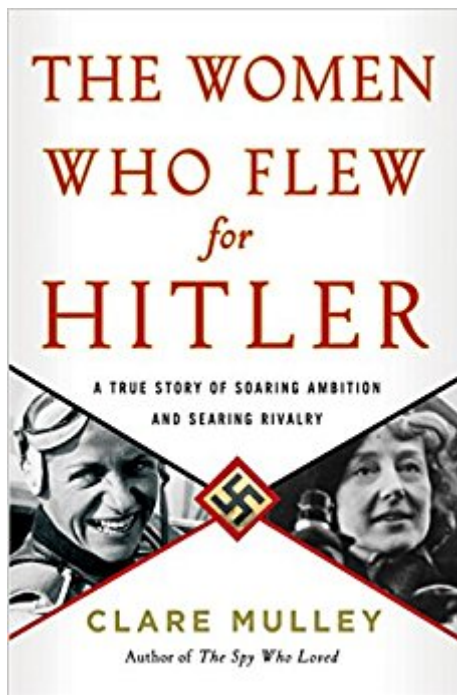




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The Women Who Flew For Hitler: A True Story Of Soaring Ambition And Searing Rivalry



Synopsis

Biographers' Club Prize-winner Clare Mulley's *The Women Who Flew for Hitler* is a dual biography of Nazi Germany's most highly decorated women pilots. Hanna Reitsch and Melitta von Stauffenberg were talented, courageous, and strikingly attractive women who fought convention to make their names in the male-dominated field of flight in 1930s Germany. With the war, both became pioneering test pilots and were awarded the Iron Cross for service to the Third Reich. But they could not have been more different and neither woman had a good word to say for the other. Hanna was middle-class, vivacious, and distinctly Aryan, while the darker, more self-effacing Melitta came from an aristocratic Prussian family. Both were driven by deeply held convictions about honor and patriotism; but ultimately, while Hanna tried to save Hitler's life, begging him to let her fly him to safety in April 1945, Melitta covertly supported the most famous attempt to assassinate the Führer. Their interwoven lives provide vivid insight into Nazi Germany and its attitudes toward women, class, and race. Acclaimed biographer Clare Mulley gets under the skin of these two distinctive and unconventional women, giving a full and as yet largely unknown account of their contrasting yet strangely parallel lives, against a changing backdrop of the 1936 Olympics, the Eastern Front, the Berlin Air Club, and Hitler's bunker. Told with brio and great narrative flair, *The Women Who Flew for Hitler* is an extraordinary true story, with all the excitement and color of the best fiction.

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Customer Reviews

"Biographer Mulley comes through in a major way with this deep dive into the lives of WW2-era German aviatrixes...Absolutely gripping, Mulley's double portrait is a reminder that there are many more stories to tell from this oft-examined time." [Booklist](#) (starred review)"This compelling work has the drama and suspense of the best movie scripts. It is the perfect choice for lovers of narrative non-fiction, especially those interested in strong females." [Library Journal](#) (starred review)

Clare Mulley is the author of *The Woman Who Saved the Children: A Biography of Eglantyne Jebb*, which won the Daily Mail Biographers' Club Prize in the UK. She is also the author of *The Spy Who Loved*. She lives in London.

The name of Hanna Reitsch is well known to those interested in World War II history and especially aviation history. Reitsch was Hitler's favorite aviator, a gifted pilot and an almost criminally naive supporter of Hitler up to the bitter end- and perhaps beyond. Petite and blonde, she was the picture of Hitler's Aryan ideal. Less well known is another skilled German pilot of the era, Melitta Schiller, later to become Melitta Stauffenburg. Schiller was from a aristocratic Prussian family that looked down on Hitler, and thought him a perversion of German history. Schiller also had Jewish ancestry- a dangerous thing in Nazi Germany. The Stauffenburg name will no doubt trigger recognition in the minds of those well read in WWII history, as it was Melitta's brother in law, Claus von Stauffenburg, who was the prime mover behind the plot to kill Hitler, for which he, and one of his - also a plotter- were executed. (Melitta's husband, Alexander, was kept in the dark about the plot and managed to survive). Reitsch always looked down on, and criticized Schiller and belittled her skill, in part perhaps out of jealousy, in part from her resentment of Schiller's aristocratic family, and certainly because of Schiller's Jewish heritage, which was not entirely secret. To the end of her life, Reitsch voiced doubts about the Holocaust and her admiration for national socialism. (Those who harbor some suspicions about Werner von Braun's claims of being apolitical and working under duress might be interested to know that Reitsch and von Braun remained friends throughout their lives). Author Clare Mulley traces the lives of both women from childhood to the end of their lives. For Reitsch, that was in 1979, when she died of a heart attack (some suspected suicide) that followed a particularly shameful episode. Schiller did not live as long as Reitsch, but she did live long enough to see the imminent collapse of the Third Reich. There's a lot of detail on the wartime activities of both women in aircraft development that should interest readers with a specific interest there- Reitsch's well known work test flying helicopters and the "Gigant" glider-turned-transport is covered in some detail.

Mulley has done an excellent job in crafting a detailed and meticulous documented narrative of the two sometimes intersecting lives of these two famous aviators. It's also extremely readable. Strongly recommended for those interested in WWII history and aviation history.

I prefer reading non fiction books, and in particular about history. My ex mother and father in-law were born and raised in Germany, and my mother in-law was there all during the second world war as a teacher in Austria. She only left because she and most of the residents of her town were captured near the end of the war and she spent two years in a Siberian prison camp. Having heard many stories of life in Germany during that time, this book caught my attention very quickly. These two women had a passion for flying that could have arguably been described as an addiction. Interestingly, and slightly ironic to me at least, it was partially Hitler's dictates that a women's place was in the home, which drove them out of the home and into flying. The obvious adrenaline thrill of flying, first with gliders and then engine aircraft, lured them, but it was also the sense of freedom which flying offered, which took them far away from the strictures and deprivations of Weimer Germany. These two women were both awarded the Iron Cross during the Second World War. Their love of flying, their interest in aligning themselves with the historic restoration of their country's honor, and the fact they were both very attractive women were pretty much the only few things they had in common. Yes they both flew for Hitler, however one flew in support of Hitler, and the other, eventually, in opposition to him. I found myself understanding my ex mother and father in-law much better as I was reading this book. The author effectively, and effortlessly takes you into the world of these two women, and you see their world through their eyes. You find they were much more than just women pilots. Melitta, who had Jewish ancestry, for example was an Aeronautical Engineer and worked on the improvement of the targeting dive sights for the two-man Junkers Ju 87 Stuka. She did much more than this. This is the very detailed story of each and how, although their lives more or less intertwined due to their work, they didn't want anything to do with each other. They obviously knew of each other because of their uniqueness as women test pilots, but probably only thought of the other as a competitor. The book is easy to read, but hard to put down. I kept getting drawn into more and more adventures each was involved in during the war, and they are simply fascinating. This book helped me to see the war from the side of the Germans, in particular a woman's view, and seeing it this way is much different than the way we in America saw it. You also may learn, as I did, considerable things about Hitler I had never heard before. As I was reading it, I felt as though the author was presenting their exploits similar to the way movies do, through exciting scenes of glamorous and dangerous events, and she was sending me along with them.

An incredible story, deftly told. I have read many, many books, hundreds in fact, on various aspects of World War Two. This book stands apart from most of those other books. The research the author undertook into the lives of these two women, and those around them, is impressive. This book is not just something thrown together but is the result of a thorough investigation into the multi-faceted lives of these aviators (or aviatrices, if that is your preference). The author then interweaves the story of their lives in a compelling way, starting with individual chapters on the background and early years of each of them. Fascinating reading for anyone interested in aviation or World War II, especially life on the home front during the war, and most especially for background on the July 20 plot to assassinate Hitler and Hitler's last days in the bunker. Hanna Reitch, the much better known in the West of the two pilots, comes out of the story with her reputation somewhat besmirched, at least as to her ability to truthfully portray herself and her history after the war, while the overall reputation of Melitta von Stauffenberg is enhanced, in my view.

The Women Who Flew for Hitler brings to life the presence of these two women pilots, their minds and spirits including into, for one, the post war years. The book can be haunting for those who know German history and Germany. It brings you into the time and the approach and outlook. The wartime activities remain with anyone with ties or interests to that period. It is a well-researched book and one that can leave you with lingering thoughts of the WWII era.

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