**Tanya von Degurechaff - The Devil of the Rhine - Extra History #2**

The ground is a torn and blasted hellscape, inhabited by the screams of dying men and the pounding of artillery. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers spend days huddling in wet stinking trenches, taking turns charging out into the barb-wire infested expanse of no man's land, only to be torn apart by machine-gun fire. Above it all flies the single deadliest thing on this battlefield - a nine year old girl.

[Extra History intro plays.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtSqZ7VbZQ0)

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Extra History! Last time we saw Second Lieutenant Tanya Degurechaff assigned to the Rhine Front as a platoon leader.

Now, personal correspondence and diary entries show that her superiors were actually reluctant to send a nine year old to the bloodiest battlefield in human history. Unfortunately, she was the only one who could safely use the [Type 95 computational jewel](https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/youjo-senki/images/5/5d/EliniumType95Anime.png/revision/latest/top-crop/width/300/height/300?cb=20170203083526), and it was just too powerful a weapon to be left on the shelf. In fact, perhaps the only one who didn't have any misgivings about the whole affair was Tanya herself. A patriot and a believer in the Empire's inevitable victory, she openly declared her willingness to fight for the fatherland.

Her faith in her own abilities was quickly justified. Within six months of being assigned to the front, she racked up [92 confirmed victories](https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/omniversal-battlefield/images/5/5b/Thumb-1920-815521-lanczos3.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/340?cb=20190415042054) against enemy mages. No one knows how many regular soldiers died to her overpowered spells in those six months, but it may have been as high as a thousand.

Funny thing is, most of her victories took place almost entirely in her first three months on the front. This is because by the end of those three months, the Francois army had learned sending mages into her section of the line was pretty much the same as losing them, and so they just stopped trying. It was here that the nickname "The Devil of the Rhine" first emerged, among the Francois mages whispering about the unknown terror who would introduce herself by [praying on open channels](https://i.pinimg.com/474x/93/e9/18/93e91879f57f56224f0966981485c4be.jpg)for the souls of her enemies before sending them to meet their maker.

However, Tanya's success wasn't just down to the power of the Type 95. She had a talent. Today she is considered one of the true pioneers of magic-assisted flight. Her innovation was simple, even obvious. See, mages in those days flew like characters in comic books like The Golden Man, head first, bodies straight, poses streamlined. But Tanya [asked herself, 'Why'](https://randomc.net/image/Youjo%20Senki/Youjo%20Senki%20-%2004%20-%20Large%2034.jpg)? Magic didn't care about aerodynamics. You could fly in literally any direction, at any position. This obvious observation led her to developing her own style of flying, one which left veteran mages scratching their heads asking 'How the heck did she do that?', and one which would earn her the permanent call sign Pixie as a reference to her insane agility in the air. She would also be the first to combine illusion and combat spells, making her a nightmare to pin down.

It was also on the Rhine front that she showed herself [a capable leader](https://i.pinimg.com/236x/23/6f/fd/236ffd1554ccb745a8ff517087615db4--blonde-beauty.jpg). On that brutal battlefield, the average monthly casualty rate for a mage platoon stood at 50%. Yet, in over six months of fighting, Tanya's own platoon suffered a grand total of two losses. That's something no amount of brute power could have achieved. It was also during this time she would meet someone who would go on to become one of the most important people in her life.

[Viktoriya Ivanovna Serebryakov](https://rei.animecharactersdatabase.com/uploads/chars/5688-1936366815.png). A second child of minor Russy nobility who had fled to Prussia to escape the Communist Revolution, she was drafted into the mage corps at the age of 13, and was assigned to Tanya's platoon at the age of 14 with the rank of Corporal. It was a match made in heaven... or hell depending on which side you were on. She quickly became Tanya's wingman, watching her back as they flew and fought over the front lines.

[It was a partnership that would last a lifetime.](https://c.wallhere.com/photos/a5/1b/1920x1200_px_Anime_Girls_Tanya_Degurechaff_Viktoriya_Ivanovna_Serebryakov_Youjo_Senki-1184070.jpg%21d)

By the time Tanya's first stint on the Rhine front came to an end, Viktoriya was an ace with eight confirmed victories of her own. When Tanya was offered a place in War College in recognition of her abilities, she recommended Viktoriya for officer training.

It was in [War College](https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/youjo-senki/images/5/53/War_College_in_manga.png/revision/latest/top-crop/width/220/height/220?cb=20180115170143) that Tanya Degurechaff would become Tanya ***von*** Degurechaff. Back then, the old Imperial War College had this tradition where the top twelve graduates would be awarded knighthoods - assuming they weren't already nobility - as a declaration of the great things the Empire expected of them. In spite of her young age, Tanya ranked 11th.

It was also in War College that Tanya would submit several papers that would go on to define both the war and many years of her life. One such paper was a proposal to create a reinforced rapid-response aerial mage battalion.

See, until that point mages had rarely been deployed in formations larger than a company. They were simply too useful and needed in too many places. But by creating a single formation of 48 mages, they could concentrate their firepower in a single devastating punch, and be fast enough to reach wherever they might be needed.

The proposal was accepted. The order was given. When Tanya von Degurechaff graduated War College, she was put in charge of forming and training the new battalion. Imperial High Command even approved this battalion to be the first - and for this war, the only - formation to use the Elenium Type 97, a watered down but more user friendly version of the Type 95. They say Tanya herself wrote the advertisement - ["Mages wanted. Extremely difficult battle, little pay. Spend your days in combat and unfathomable danger. Honor and glory for survivors."](http://public.media.smithsonianmag.com/legacy_blog/09_10_2013_shackleton-e1378828023512.jpg)

The selection process was brutal, with over 300 applicants rejected. But in the end, [Tanya had her battalion](https://occ-0-1068-1723.1.nflxso.net/art/9f3c3/1cf2d3ff1fcea60018be420de92de5865e69f3c3.jpg). The best mages in the Empire, trained to combine acrobatics and illusions with combat spells like Tanya herself. She was also a major, having been promoted three times in as many months. And Viktoriya was back as well, having been her assistant during the recruitment process, and now her adjutant.

The 203rd Imperial Mage Battalion saw combat almost immediately. Assigned to the south-eastern border, they were dead center of the path taken by the Dacian army when they declared war, encouraged and supplied by the Francois. An army of 600,000 men poured across the border.

[It was a slaughter](https://randomc.net/image/Youjo%20Senki/Youjo%20Senki%20-%2005%20-%20Large%2024.jpg). The Dacian army had no mages, and few fighter craft. Tanya herself referred to it as a live-fire exercise. After scattering the vanguard, they went on to slaughter the army's HQ and capture the commanding officer.

Most people would have called it a day at that point, but not Tanya, oh no. She decided to launch a retaliatory strike at the Dacian capital of Bucurest. Her battalion flew all day, and when evening fell, they bombarded the Republican arms factory that had set up shop in the city. [The explosion was massive](https://d.wattpad.com/story_parts/718793123/images/1594eb79570b66e4864817206407.jpg). A third of the capital would be consumed by the ensuing fire. Dacia would surrender within a week.

This brief conflict underlined the strategic power of mages in large numbers, and the importance of aerial superiority. Other nations would take note, and battalion and even regiment-sized mage formations would start becoming commonplace as the war progressed. This would also be the action that would bring Tanya von Degurechaff international attention.

In the meantime, Tanya's battalion went from strength to strength. After Dacia, they were sent north to reinforce the invasion of Legadonia. There Tanya introduced another innovation, the stealth raid. In Osfjord, needing to take the enemy by surprise, Tanya had her battalion [transported by plane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messerschmitt_Me_323#/media/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_101I-596-0367-05A,_Flugzeug_Me_323_Gigant.jpg) and then glide in by parachute to avoid magic scanners.

Surprise was total. The [guns guarding the fjord](http://www.imfdb.org/images/thumb/d/d5/Youjo-Senki_kruppco2.jpg/600px-Youjo-Senki_kruppco2.jpg) were destroyed, and their defenders routed. The Imperial Navy was free to land, outflanking the Legadonian positions and turning the entire front. Over the course of six months, the 203rd had been key in the conquest of two countries. The rapid-response aerial battalion had proven worth their weight in gold.

It was also during this battle that Tanya would rack up several more aerial victories, including one Colonel Anson Sioux. Remember that name, it's gonna be important later.

After the fall of Legadonia, the 203rd was assigned to the last big battlefield, the Rhine front. It was this second tour of the Rhine that would cement Tanya's infamy.

It started with an uprising in the Imperial occupied town of Arene. Reinforced by Republican mages, partisans quickly overran the Imperial garrison, destroyed bridges, and started threatening Imperial supply lines. The 203rd was called in, along with an artillery division. Within 72 hours, Arene would be a burning ruin, [a tomb for over 10,000 men, women and children](https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/youjo-senki/images/7/78/Arene_in_artbook.png/revision/latest?cb=20180503163800). The commander of the 203rd had ordered the town's evacuation, and when the citizens failed to comply, had declared them all enemy combatants. It was a technical loophole in the rules of war, and Tanya exploited it ruthlessly to end the resistance.

Yet even though this incident would see the name 'The Devil of the Rhine' spread throughout the world, would see Tanya be named 'The Butcher of Arene' by a furious Francois, in hindsight her responsibility for the incident is... debatable. The order to use the loophole to destroy the town came directly from Berun, the artillery that obliterated the town wasn't even under Tanya's command, and the 203rd mostly just fought the Republican mages, with the artillery inflicting most of the civilian casualties.

So why, even today, is Tanya's name linked to this one incident, in a war filled with so much tragedy? Well, perhaps because, even though she did publicly regret the necessity of the destruction of Arene, never once has Tanya ever admitted the action as wrong. Comments made both during and after the war showed that Tanya was fully on board with the legal interpretation that allowed the Empire to ignore civilian casualties and flatten the town. There are even reports that she was the one who [pointed the loophole out](https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn%3AANd9GcRYrMjPyLYC0mKx14462zAaeiZbDqcgHIGit4AyHeKyQoo-Qojd) to Imperial High Command in the first place.

This completely unapologetic attitude, combined with heavy Francois propaganda at a time when they were doing everything they could to drum up anti-Imperial sentiment, meant that for decades, sole blame for this incident would be placed on the head of Tanya von Degurechaff. Personally, I think what really pissed people off is that everything she did was technically legal... [and she kinda rubbed their faces into it](https://spikeybits.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/165422_469483166456411_1375501436_n.png).

And that's the story of how an eleven year old girl became one of the most reviled people in Europe. Join us next time as we see the first manned supersonic flying machines, the Empire achieve its greatest victory in the war, and how the armies of the world start waking up to the threat of the Empire, and to Tanya von Degurechaff and her 203rd Imperial Mage Battalion. Join us for **A World At War**.