



Exploration of Violence and Valiance in Elizabeth Wein's *Rose Under Fire*

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ABSTRACT

The article "Exploration of Violence and Valiance in Elizabeth Wein's *Rose Under Fire*" revolves around the Ravensbruck camp. It focuses on the life of women prisoners. Elizabeth Wein brings out the horrors of the Ravensbruck camp in her words perfectly. The beauty of the novel is that the women prisoners are not only Jews, but also from different countries. For example, a pilot from Paris, a pharmacist from Berlin, and a student from Pennsylvania. Each of the women has a story, a family, and a life. The one thing which brings them together is the Second World War. The article focuses on how they save each other from the gassing and firing orders, how they live together inside the four walls, and among the violence of Germans. It centers around the character Rose. Though there are other prisoners Elizabeth Wein moves the plot through Rose. The past life and the post war days reflects the impacts of war. This article finds out how they break the violence through their valiance and attain victory against the Germans.

Key Words: Second World War, Ravensbruck Camp, Violence, Valiance and Victory

The Second World War began on 1st September 1939 when the Germans invaded Poland. It ended in the year of 2nd September 1945. There are fifty countries involved in the Second World War. The United States, the United Kingdom, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China, and France were Allied countries during the Second World War. Germany, Italy, and Japan were Axis countries during the Second World War. The war had a huge impact on the lives of Jews. It took nearly seventy million people's lives. It made a huge impact on the history of humans. History recorded ten thousand six hundred and twenty-four wars. But the world still has the impact of the Second World War. The writers are spinning their stories with the history. Contemporary writers like Kristin Hannah, Kristin Harmel, and Elizabeth Wein set their plots with a background of the Second World War.

Elizabeth Wein was born on 2nd October 1964 in New York, United States. Her father worked in a metropolitan university. She has a love for books and writings from her father. She moved to Jamaica at the age of six when her father shifted to the University of West Indies. She shifted to the United States with her mother Carol Flaocken, younger brother, and sister. She wrote her first book *The Hidden Treasure* at the age of eleven. After their father's separation, Elizabeth Wein lived with her mother and siblings. She graduated from Yale University and completed her Ph.D. in folk literature in the University of Pennsylvania. She has American and British citizenship. The interest in flying comes from her husband Tim. She got a private pilot license from Scottish Aero Club. After she learned to fly, her interest and research shifted to warfare. She wrote *Code Name Verity*, and *Rose Under Fire*. Both the novel brought fame to her in the literary society. This article explores the novel, *Rose Under Fire* which deals with the Second World War.

The novel *Rose Under Fire* opens with Celia's death. Rose finds that Celia dies because she tries to control a flying bomb. Rose submits an accident report of Celia to the ATA. She goes to Scotland for Maddie's marriage. She joins in duty and stays in LA camp. When she takes a damaged Lysander to the port, she finds a flying bomb. She successfully diverted the flying bomb from its destination, but struck in the German border. She becomes a prisoner in the Ravensbruck concentration camp. She meets Roza, Irina, Karolina, Anna, and Lisette. She escapes from the camp with Irina and Roza. After the war, she becomes a poet and studies medicine. The novel focuses on women's life as pilots, prisoners, and witness.

Rose Justice is the protagonist and the narrator of the novel. The plot revolves around her days as a pilot, political prisoner, poet, and witness. Along with Rose, there are other pilots namely Maddie, Felicyta, Celia, and Irina bring out the contribution of women in ATA and WAAF during the Second World War. Roza and Karolina are witnesses of medical experiments in concentration camps. They are known as rabbits. All the characters in the novel portray the role of women in the war front.

Celia is one of the best pilots of her team. She dies in an accident. One of the mechanics states that Celia's flight has no damages. According to him, Celia dies because she has used the wing tip method. The wing tip is a method to control the flying bombs. The flying bomb looks like a flight without a pilot. They are very dangerous. They have a destination to destroy. If the pilots have the guts to divert the flying bombs, they can use the wing tip method. The pilots must connect their wings to the wings of flying bombs. After they connect their wings, they must fly with the speed of flying bombs and balance the speed. Finally, they take the flying bomb to an empty place and disconnect the wing. But if the pilots lose their control they will blast out with the flying bomb. In the case of Celia, she may lose her control while trying the wing tip method. Though she dies, her attempt to control the flying bomb shows her valiance.

Rose Justice is an American who works in the British Air Force. She stays with her uncle's family. She belongs to a wealthy family and lives a cozy life even in the period of war. She does not simply stay in her home. She has completed her flight training and has her license. So, she joined the Women's Auxiliary Airforce and served for her nation. Though she works in the air force she works in the technical field, not in the combat field. She wishes to work in the combat field as a spy or combat pilot. Her father and uncle Roger are also pilots who serve their countries in the war.

Rose Justice has efficient skills and more flying hours than the boys in her team. Rose wants to ride the Tempest and control the flying bomb like Celia. But she does not want to die like her she wants to live after defeating the flying bomb. Rose has her duties with her uncle Roger. Roger realizes that the sound that comes in the air is machine gun fire. Rose does not know about it. Uncle Roger does not say anything about it. It crosses in the distance of a hundred feet. They land their flight safely. He says, "You're are a damned fine pilot, Rosie." (20) Rose looks at him. He reveals that they have come across a flying bomb during their flying. Rose says that she thought it was a flight. Roger says whether it is a flight, flashlight, heavy wind, or a flying bomb he does not find fear in her eyes. This shows how brave Rose Justice is.

Rose takes a damaged Tempest to England. On her way she finds a flying bomb. It goes in the direction of Paris. Rose thinks that the flying bomb is set to destroy one of the places in Paris. She decides to use the wing tip method like Celia. She joins her flight's wing with the flying bomb's wing successfully. She gives her full strength to fly with the speed of the flying bomb. After she diverts the bomb towards an empty land she shouts in joy. This shows her valiance. But Rose forgets about the fuel and the engine pressure. The compass in her flight does not show the route. She does not know in which direction she is flying and where she is now.

Suddenly there are four planes surrounding her. She realizes that they are German flights. The pilot behind her flight fires one time. It is a sound of warning. The pilot on her front waves his flight's wings. It means she must follow him. Rose waves her wings to give her a reply that she will follow him. She flies in the center of four flights. Though she does not know where they take her, she does not hesitate in her mind. After they reach the runway, they keep on flying above thirty meters from the land. Rose feels tired. So, she lands the flight and rests her head on the control panel. A few soldiers pull the flight and one of the soldiers asks her to come out of the cockpit. When she comes out everybody stands stunned.

In the million years, I bet, those German airmen would not have guessed a girl was Going to climb out of that plane. They must have thought all along that they'd captured an RAF reconnaissance pilot taking pictures or on his way to suss out German airfields full of jet-powered swallows so we could bomb them. Someone doing something secret and interesting. And here I turned out to be a boring old transport pilot – and a girl.

I stood on the wing with my hands up. They all backed away respectfully, With their mouths open. (86) Here nobody expects that the pilot is a woman. They all step back from their defend position and give her a salute. This scene states the how the women pilots are treated with respect even by the Germans during the Second World War. They give her a way to go to the big building. This sequence also portrays the bravery of Rose, and how she handles the situation even though she is captivated by Germans in the middle of the sky.

Now Rose is a prisoner in the Ravensbruck concentration camp. She is a civilian prisoner. After the inquiry, she is taken in a truck that fills with dirt and a nasty smell. The container is full of dark and without ventilation.

Oh, God, that smelled so horrible. If there is a smell that goes with fear and despair, it is like that – sweat and dirty underpants and pee. I was already retching as they slammed the doors shut on me, and for a long time I just stood in the middle of the truck, hugging myself and gagging. There was no light. I braced myself in the dark because I thought they were going to take me somewhere any time, and the truck would lurch into action and I'd fall over and have to touch whatever was on the evil floor. (96)

Here it picturizes how Rose manages the darkness and nasty smell with a chocolate cover from her pocket and smells it. It also states how the Germans keep the transport vehicles to take the Jews. When the truck stops, she is dragged by a German guard. She finds several women in German uniform and with a gun in their hands. There are bulldogs near to them. The women who are standing in the line wear different

uniforms. It seems that they come from different countries. She stands with the other prisoners in the line holding her small bag.

The other women who are in the prisoner's uniform look dirt and pathetic. The prisoners who are standing in the line should not move or sit. They should not look around and talk to anyone. If the guards find them breaking the rules, they beat them or shoot them immediately. They do not have food, water or they are not allowed to go to restrooms. They stand like a statue in the empty ground until their turn comes. Even in this situation Rose never thinks that she has committed a mistake by chasing the flying bomb. Still, now she feels elite that she made her day by defeating the flying bomb. She never thought about her future days in the concentration camp. This is the Valiance of Rose.

The Germans built a concentration camp for women in the Ravensbruck village in 1938. It is fifty miles away from Berlin. It is in Northern Germany. When the Jews get arrested, they will separate as men, women, and children. Ravensbruck is a big camp only for women. There are several girls and women in the Ravensbruck camp. The girls who are in their teens age have been used for medical experiments. The women who are old, sick, and handicapped are shot dead by the Germans. When Germans stepped back in the war, they started to kill many women by gassing in a room to destroy the witness from the world.

The basic needs of human beings are food, shelter, and clothing. In Ravensbruck camp the prisoners cannot get the basic things. They offer a uniform dress for prisoners. If the prisoners have luck, they will get a proper suitable dress. Or else they will get an unsuitable uniform. They must wear it whether it is short or tall. They cannot replace it. The Germans will give them a bowl. If they lose the bowl then there is no soup for them. "No bowl, no soup". (104) They bring the soup in two big oil drums. The vegetables are raw and the soup is tasteless. It is merely mild hot water. They give one slice of bread. If somebody throws the bread on the ground and steps on it. The prisoners rush to get that dirty slice of bread too. They are longing for good nutritious food.

They must work from morning till night. A few types of work are the following: knitting socks and hand gloves for Germans, cleaning the block, painting the newly constructed block, and removing the clothes from the dead bodies. They should complete the target of the work. If they fail to complete the work, the entire block will not be allowed to have food and sleep. The prisoners stay in blocks. They eat and work in a big hall. They can talk while eating. While working, they should maintain silence. Some block leaders allow their team to speak while working. They are allowed to go for a walk on the ground only at the weekends.

If any one of the prisoners breaks the rules, the entire block will get punishment. They sleep under a sheet roof without blankets and sweaters in winter and rainy seasons. If they get admitted to the camp hospital, they must recover within two days or else they will be shot by the Germans. The restrooms will not be cleaned. The ditches are overflowed. The unhygienic restrooms cause fever to the prisoners. The prisoners do not have nutritious food. The soup and one slice of bread will not be enough for their hunger either. The women face irregular periods and some of them have no periods.

Elodie is a pilot from France. She is also a civilian prisoner. She speaks with Rose while standing in line. They introduce themselves and become friends. When the German guards collect her ID papers, they discuss about Rose because she is an American pilot who works in a British airfield. The guards collect their properties and give them a prisoner uniform which has the first letter of their nation. Rose has the first letter of France which denotes that she is a French prisoner. Rose tries to explain that she is an American but the German guards bark like dogs. They ask them to sit in the naked state. Rose crosses everything with patience. They teach them their prisoner number in German. Rose learns her number in German.

Effi saw me and Elodie about to swap our dresses, and she came marching over to us and grabbed them away from us. Then she grabbed Elodie by her hair, close to her scalp, and dragged her over to sit down on the floor right next to the desk. Effi jerked one arm fiercely in my direction to tell me to follow Elodie – She wanted to keep an eye on us both as we sewed on our patches.

Elodie suddenly seemed totally coward. Stark naked, she hunched over the dress, covering lap with it; her shoulders shook a little as if she were sobbing. She didn't make a sound, though. I sat next to her biting my lip, helpless with feeling so humiliated and so mad. (111)

How violent the Germans minds are. In the airfield and in their family, people treat the pilots with love and respect. But, being a woman, the German guards go to the extreme level in punishing the prisoners for clarifying about her nationality. It is one of the portrayals of dehumanization in the Ravensbruck camp

Now the new prisoners are divided into groups and the Germans allot blocks for them. Rose and Elodie stay in Block no.32. Rose works in the technical department where they make fuses for flying bombs. After a few days, Rose stops her work to protest the Germans. They beat her and punish her to stand for the whole day without food and water. She works by standing until she completes her target. The next day the Germans conduct an assembly and punish Rose in front of other prisoners. They give twenty-five whip lashes. When Rose collapses the Germans shift her to block eight.

In the eighth block, Rose is under the care of Lisette. She is known as camp mother in the block. Though Rose has undergone standing punishment and whip lashes she does not beg the Germans. She protests them and accepts the punishments without excuses. In the eighth block, Rose meets Roza, Karolina, and Irina. The new friends and the eighth block are a new change in Rose's life. In the eighth block, Rose is an available not a technical worker. The name available is used to denotes the prisoners who are working among the dead bodies. They remove the dresses from the dead body and take it to the funeral ground. If she does not have

her available work she can knit along with the other women in the block. Rose learns the stories of Roza, Lisette, Irina, and Karolina.

Roza is a scout girl in her school. The Germans arrested her when she was just fourteen years old. She says that she transports the small explosives which were placed in front of her house in a basket. She says that she does not know who the leader of the network group is. They leave a note along with the explosives to where the explosives had to be taken. After the Germans find out, they did not do anything with Roza. They beat her mother to die in front of Roza. They shot the scout leader and arrested Roza. In the Ravensbruck camp, they conducted a medical experiment on her leg. It is that they replace a wounded skin or bone in Roza's leg and put a plaster on it. They cannot walk properly. Their wounds are terrible to see because they are not properly treated.

Rose learns that Lisette is the mother of three sons. She has a happy family. After the Second World War began Lisette's husband and her three children were killed by Jews. Because Lisette's husband is a Jew. Lisette was arrested by the Germans when she planned to leave Pennsylvania. Karolina is a good animator. She gets arrested for sowing an animation film that has the content of Germans and Jews. But Rose finds one common thing among all the prisoners in block no. 8. It is though they have undergone several tortures and have lost their family they want to tell the world about the violence of the Germans in the camps during the war. This shows their valiance among the violence of Germans.

The girls who have undergone the operation on their legs are known as Rabbits. While knitting Roza says that the Germans have stopped the medical experiments. But she says that they will not leave them out. They know very well, if they leave them out, they will tell the world the truth about Ravensbruck camp. Roza tells the names of the rabbits who are alive and dead. She says that she believes in Rose. She says that she must tell the world about it after she gets released. Rose prepares a poem on their names.

The next day Rose goes to work with the available team. There she meets Anna. She is the block leader and a German prisoner. Mostly in the camp, the block leaders are German prisoners. Anna loves Rose and befriended her. Anna shares about her with Rose. She says that she was a pharmacist in the medical camp. She was there when the operations happened to the rabbits. She gives morphine to the prisoners who are in the medical camp and they call her the "Angel of sleep." Her higher officer falsely filed a case against her that she humiliated him in front of others. So, she gets arrested. On hearing this Rose thinks that the war makes the Germans not only hate the Jews but also the humans. They do not have kindness even with their country's people. This shows how treacherous the Germans are.

Anna gives her a list of names. She finds all the rabbit's names on the list. Rose shares the news with her team. They plan to hide the rabbits behind the restroom. If they try to save the rabbits the entire block will get punishment. But they do not mind about the punishments. They hide the rabbits and come to the assembly. The guards call out the name lists. But there is no response. So, the guards give them stand-up punishment. The whole block stands on the ground in the snow for day and night. They have not gone to restrooms. They stop the food for block no.8., the other block prisoners share their food. The prisoners in block no 8 sacrifice their food for the rabbits.

Though the prisoners are from different countries, they have unity with them. They live as a family. Though they are physically weak, they are mentally strong. They are brave enough to fight against the Germans. But the braveness is not enough to win. They must be patient for the right time. The only motto of them is that the world must know the hidden stories of Ravensbruck. The survivors are precious gems. Through them, only the world knows about the tales of victory.

After two days guards call out Rose's number. Everyone stands frozen. Irina comes forward along with Rose knowing that they are going to shoot Rose. She pulls Rose behind a wall when the guards do not look. She hides her with the rabbits. The bravery of Irina and her presence of mind save the life of Rose. Irina, Rose, and Roza plan to escape from the camp in the truck with the other prisoners in the truck. They escape as per their plan. A man finds them while they are walking towards the nearby village. He takes them to a big building. Irina and Rose find a German Lysander. Both decide to escape from the place through the flight. Successfully they take off the flight and they cross Ravensbruck. They reach the Swiss Red Cross unit. Irina and Roza move to Paris. Rose goes to Scotland.

After the war gets over Rose joins to study medicine. She writes a collection of poems namely *Ravensbruck poems*. She goes to the Nuremberg trial as a witness. There she meets Roza. Roza works as a translator for the witness. Roza says that she is unable to complete her studies. She says that she cannot tell what happened to her in the camp on the trail. Here not only Roza but also several women suffer from trauma. Though they are unable to get back their life they fight every day to overcome the trauma. Rose and Roza join to write a book based on the Ravensbruck camp.

Willa Brown, Hazel Ying Lee, Cornelia Fort, and Nancy Love are the remarkable pilots in history. Katharina Jacob (Teacher and Resistance Leader), Violette Lecoq (French Artist), Edith Kiss, Lise London, Germaine Tambour (French Resistance fighter), Madeleine Tambour (French Resistance fighter), Krystyna Zaorska (Polish artist), Violette Szabo (British-French spy), Rose Van Thyn, and Sylvia Salvesen are the notable survivors of the Ravensbruck concentration camp. Some prisoners are dead. Some of them die every day in their life because of trauma. Even if they have trauma some of them attain a successful life in society after the war.

Svetlana Alexievich in her work *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II* says, “Women’s war has its own colours, its own smells, its own lighting, and its own range of feelings. Its own words. There are no heroes and incredible feats, there are simply people who are busy doing inhumanly human things.”

Here this article states Women are the nuclear of family and society. The war is not by women or for women. The war is not the history of women. It is the history of humans. During the Second World War, they played an important role in the home and war. They came forward and flew with their wings in the sky. They did not fight for their freedom. They fought for their nation. Even women from other countries contributed their lives to the Second World War. The women are like Phoenix who rise from the ashes to break the violence with their valiance to attain victory.

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