

## **A Soldier and a Woman: Sexual Integration in the Military**

**Review Number:**

143

**Publish date:**

Sunday, 1 October, 2000

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**ISBN:**

9780582414385

**Date of Publication:**

2000

**Publisher:**

Longman

**Place of Publication:**

London

**Reviewer:**

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This book is impressively detailed, showing women's experience of demobilisation and the aftermath of armed conflict - an often neglected area of military study relating to women - as well as their feelings about morality, their male counterparts, uniforms, duties and a slew of other subjects. Specifically 'female' subjects; menstruation and pregnancy for example, are not glossed or examined from a single perspective; over the range of the chapters, which is extensive, we can examine the views of women themselves, male soldiers, commanders and the public at large on the most controversial question relating to female militarisation. The effects of military service on women's mental and physical health and the frequently resulting inability of militarised women to become mothers are covered with depth and focus.

The 28 chapters range from Early Modern Europe to current military law in the United States of America, from West Point to terrorist women, and across most areas of the globe. If there is a criticism to be made, it lies in the relative paucity of material from Africa, made even more galling in the paperback version by the cover photograph of a Sudanese woman fighter which implicitly (and wrongly in the case of Sudan) suggested material on women in African militaries could be found inside. But apart from thought provoking and powerful revelations about the role of Muslim women in warfare and particularly about Algeria's complex societal problems, there is little material about women in Africa. This area of study is complex indeed and the lack of substantive material on gender in Africa is indicative of the difficulty of establishing the roles and views of women in African militaries. The material in the book, although more or less limited to Northern Africa, is a valuable contribution to largely unexplored and often inaccessible experience. The editors are to be congratulated on the quality of what has been included.

Across such a range of discourse it is difficult to comment fairly and fully on the many subjects of which the various texts treat. Thematic review is perhaps the only way to attempt to cover some - although not all - of the material. Large and small themes emerge in individual chapters or link them, and the book as a whole

has solid information and discourse of value to students of gender, military history and students of society and culture. From the perspective of this student in the field, military history can be seen as a study of battles, campaigns and strategies, as a study of commanders and decisions, as a study of materials, terrains and utilisation of the available resources, as a study of causes, leaders and propaganda. Until recently there has been a denial, tacit or explicit, of the study of military history as the study of individuals. One great service provided, perhaps unintentionally, by gendered study, has been the increasing acceptance of the investigation of the thoughts and behaviours of individuals involved in the creation of what we later identify as part of "military" history. This book is a cogent contribution to that new corpus.

One strong theme emerging from many chapters and linked to other themes such as harassment, is the paradox of appearance. This subject is impacted by military, social, ideological and religious mores. From Eleanor of Aquitaine in her gold embroidered military apparel to the masculinised Russian Battalion of Death is one continuum of this subject. The other extends from the French Resistance women carrying messages and material on bicycles through to the cultural/religious dilemma of the Algerian women fighters selecting 'European' or 'national' garb depending on the 'disguise' required and on to the Israeli women whose postings rest upon their attractiveness to male officers. Women appear to be trapped by the relationship between their appearance and its effects on the male military machine. They evince a variety of responses from rejection of feminine appearance (Flora Sandes) to the (literally) undercover adoption of most feminine apparel (British Servicewomen in WWII).

This theme in turn, examined across time and across cultures in the various texts, leads inevitably to consideration of harassment in militaries. Harassment is not peculiar to military situations but is peculiarly emblematic of them. This subject in all its manifestations from the unconsciousness of chivalry (as expressed by Major General Phan Trong Tue's eulogies over women volunteer's 'pink brassieres', 'frail heels' and 'sweet songs' on the Ho Chi Minh Trail) to the systematic brutality of the drill sergeant (at the Aberdeen Proving Ground) is explored through many chapters of the text. Perhaps one of the most illuminating, if implicit, examinations of harassment occurs in Corinna Peniston-Bird's chapter on women, the military and Hollywood. While, as she points out, harassment is shown in the films as part of their plot development, in many other chapters of the book the military reveals itself as an intrinsic vehicle for harassment. In effect, the fictional histories of film characters play out many of the recorded experiences of women in militaries. While the films make an unstated claim that it is harassment that allows their heroines - such as Private Benjamin, GI Jane, or Walden - to succeed by finding strategies to survive harassment, real life stories suggest that the harassment of women in militaries is integral to the task of locating military women in 'successful' positions. While this is by no means a problem faced only by women in militaries, it has a very different slant to that faced by men. Men are required by 'hazing' or other initiatory mechanisms to locate themselves at a place on the spectrum defined as 'male' within their given military circumstances. Women however are required to locate either into the male (Russian Battalion of Death) spectrum or the female ('lipstick on her nipples') one. Either location is both inherently unstable and limited. While we recognise Private Benjamin as moving through the female spectrum to become more empowered and more powerful we also see her Captain, Doris Lewis, as the epitome of what it is to extend too far into the male; she is sadistic, incompetent and love starved. Because she is a woman who has become over-masculinised she is a figure of ridicule. Alternatively, in *M\*A\*S\*H\**, Major Houlihan is given the soubriquet 'Hot Lips' and this is consistently used to undermine her role as a nurse; her femininity allows her to be ridiculed - as a sex object - although her professional ability is unquestioned. At the extreme this harassment is lethal, in Algeria women may be killed by fundamentalists for not wearing a veil or by civilian 'militaries' for wearing one. This escalation of the duality of Algerian women's cultural choices extends from their roles against the French during the Algerian War and demonstrates how symbols of femininity can be utilised by patriarchies.

This theme, in its turn, leads to a question that emerges through the reading of women's experiences in such a range of historical and geographical militarised roles. That question lies in the apparent difference between male 'fraternal' experiences in militaries and female 'sororial' ones. From these accounts women seem not to bond and form mutually supportive groups as men do in militaries. The nurses who 'fought' for their patients in the Anglo-Boer War do not appear to have gathered themselves together to produce a united front against

the behaviour of the orderlies or the failure of medical supply systems. The women who took part in the Chinese Long March seem only to have come together in circumstances that were away seen as a part of their essential 'female' role; childbirth, making clothing etc. Unlike the men who bonded together in the trenches during the 1914-18 War or the Israeli military units who move 'lock, stock and barrel' into high tech industries, women do not seem inclined either to act together to protect themselves within militaries or to extend their career opportunities outside them. A striking example is the complete isolation of American Women Veterans after Vietnam. Unlike their male counterparts, whether combatant or no, they seem to have had no opportunity to experience the solidarity of their gender within the military system. Possible answers to the question emerge through the experiences of the women in many chapters of the book. These include such possibilities as the following: women's acceptance of the paradigm and their choice to work within it to gain acceptance from their male peers. Or, women's identification with their unit or peer group regardless of gender and their wish to not move outside it to establish 'sorority'; women's failure to identify either the desire for sororial support or the means by which to effect it; women accepting the paradigm and feeling that subversion could damage identified gains; or indeed women themselves becoming misogynists

Such explorations inevitable lead to examination of power relationships within and outside militaries and here the book serves the reader well, identifying the wide range of justifications used by militaries to preclude women being strategic decision makers. These justifications range from the essentialist: - women are mothers and nurturers, hence unsuited to the command decisions that require orders to kill, to the ideological: - women must give birth to the new generation and hence have no higher role to aspire to than motherhood, to the economic: - men are breadwinners and women must not expect to have positions to which men have 'first rights'. Ultimately there is the military pragmatic: - women are not strong/committed/educated/respected enough to be commanders and/or policy makers because men will not respect or trust their decisions. The grounds on which the 'pragmatic justification' are based must change constantly to keep pace with the changes in society; educational discrimination has long broken down in most Western societies and - as with other justifications like physical strength - also begins to erode under the new high technology nature of modern warfare. Militaries are increasingly forced to accept change or fall back on essentialist/ideological arguments. In this, women in militaries are exposed to a range of barriers made explicit (e.g. physical strength) that women in other circumstances may identify as implicit or indeed, may not be able to recognise at all, due to their subtle and undeclared application. Women in militaries are therefore likely to be a testing ground for gender issues not yet apparent in many other areas of society (West Point's admission of women cadets). The fact that in militaries women may still labour under gender inequalities resolved in other spheres does not invalidate the contention that military women are a frequent and volatile touchstone for wider opinions about women's roles. While women surgeons are no longer newsworthy, women fighter pilots still are. This relates strictly to the controversial power of women to make decisions. When a woman can decide whether bombs should be dropped it seems to challenge many established hierarchies in a way that a masculine decision does not. When a female terrorist can threaten and carry out activities that frighten, hurt or kill men, it seems to be generally regarded as much more shocking that had a man terrorised women. In essence then, the complex and subtle gender distinctions evidenced through history and across geography and culture may be seen to boil down to a very simple question, "Should women have the power of life or death over men?" but such simplicity is misleading for women have always had that power, from the moment of birth (Chinese women had to abandon their babies in uninhabited villages on The Long March) to the final hours of life (in many wars, as in peace, overseen by women attendants) most men have been exposed to the power of women to nurture or destroy. It is in the making explicit that decision to allow or deny life that women's roles become controversial. These dilemmas over women's ability to command extend back to the very first chapter of the book where Christine de Pisan's position as a writer on masculine topics, including war, in the 1400s is examined in the light of the role of women as contributors to the practical necessities of war.

The guide to further reading is a comprehensive and valuable part of the book, containing as it does much to contextualise the fields of gender and militarisation as well as more detailed studies of the fields included in each chapter. Within the work as a whole it is encouraging to see so many younger contributors and such a wide range of disciplinary activities applied to this complex field. Particularly noteworthy, from an

anthropological perspective, is the sensitivity of several contributors to their effect on their interviewees and the likelihood of alternative contextual interpretation of material. This recognition of contextual interpretation allows the reader to appreciate the multi-layered nature of material used and to begin to unpick the various approaches taken by the writers. While the book is an invaluable aid to the student of gender in militaries, it has wider applications simply than the militarist/historian/gender studies disciplines and the two introductory sections, one covering the period before 1945 and the other the period from 1945 to the present day, serve to harmonise the chapters but also provide a commentary and gloss on the various disciplines inherent in the two sections of the book. The introductory sections make relevant and coherent the subsequent detail of the chapters and provide 'markers' for the further exploration of many of the themes in those chapters. Some of these essays are likely to become standard texts for the undergraduate, to which they are admirably suited, but this view should not invalidate the scope and quality of original scholarship involved. The editors are to be congratulated on making a seamless whole of sometimes widely disparate subjects and the contributors on the depth and lucidity of their work.

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