

**CAMOUFLAGE ISN'T ONLY FOR COMBAT: GENDER,
SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN IN THE MILITARY¹**

**BATTLE CRIES AND LULLABIES: WOMEN IN WAR
FROM PREHISTORY TO THE PRESENT²**

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Over the last ten years, sexual harassment, fraternization, and other gender-related issues have emerged as the biggest single challenge for Army leaders. As the percentage of female soldiers in the Army is likely to increase in the future, and since the Army is committed to a gender integrated force, it follows that commanders—and the judge advocates advising them—must understand what it means to be a woman in the military. This is because the men and women leading the Army, and those male and female lawyers counseling them, will arrive at better solutions for male-female problems if they understand the gender issues faced by women soldiers.

Two recent books about women in uniform, while very different in their subject-matter, are worth reading. Judge advocates looking to enhance their ability to deal with the thorny male-female issues that face today's Army will want to look at both. Not only will they be more effective in assisting commanders, but they may find that both books help them in managing and leading their own legal operations.

One cannot really understand the present, or begin to think about the future, without looking at the past. In looking for a broad survey of women in war, Linda DePauw's *Battle Cries and Lullabies* is a good place to start, particularly as it tries to compile just about everything known about females in armed conflict. DePauw, a professor of history at George Washington University, writes about women as warriors. She also examines

1. MELISSA S. HERBERT, *CAMOUFLAGE ISN'T ONLY FOR COMBAT: GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN IN THE MILITARY* (1998). New York Univervisty Press, hardcover, 205 pages; \$35.00.

2. LINDA G. DEPAUW, *BATTLE CRIES AND LULLABIES: WOMEN IN WAR FROM PREHISTORY TO THE PRESENT* (1998). University of Oklahoma Press, hardcover, 395 pages; \$24.95.

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women as casualties of war, and as “camp followers” (wives, cooks, nurses, and prostitutes). Her narrative begins in prehistory with the Mesolithic epic (12,000 to 4500 BC), runs through Greek and Roman warfare (5th Century BC to AD 476), and conflict in medieval and early modern Europe and America (AD 1000 to 1900). The last 100 pages of *Battle Cries and Lullabies* focuses on Twentieth Century wars.

The greatest strength of DePauw’s book is that she shows conclusively that women have been a part of military life—as soldiers and as non-combatants—throughout recorded history. This is an important point, as modern readers are often under the mistaken impression that, with a few exceptions, women combatants are a part of recent history only. Linda DePauw proves otherwise. She shows that in the Netherlands in the early 1600s, women fought alongside men in defending their walled towns. They helped to pour boiling tar from city walls, and two Dutch sisters put on swords and organized a battalion of 300 women who fought outside the walls. Similarly, hundreds of Russian women served in all-female “Battalions of Death” in World War I. Women fought in national Resistance movements in World War II. During the war in Southeast Asia, North Vietnamese women trained in hand-to-hand combat and were the core of village self-defense teams. *Battle Cries and Lullabies* thoroughly documents these and other instances of female soldiering, and the author should be praised for proving that women have always been an integral part of combat.

Additionally, the wide focus of DePauw’s book means that she also looks at the many non-combat roles played by women. DePauw writes about women as nurses during the Crimean War, as telephone operators in World War I, and as humanitarian workers during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Again, the author should be commended for demonstrating the multi-faceted roles played by woman in military history.

The principal weakness of *Battle Cries and Lullabies* is that it is more a collection of anecdotes rather than history; it is definitely not a comprehensive look at women in war. As surprising as it may be, DePauw devotes only one paragraph to the Gulf War, even though thousands and thousands of female soldiers deployed to Saudi Arabia and one, Army Major Rhonda Cornum, was decorated for “heroism and bravery beyond the call of duty.” Additionally, DePauw’s book is not balanced. She devotes some ten pages to women in prehistory (necessarily speculative, as no written record sur-

vives), five pages to discussing the “image” of Molly Pitcher (probably not a real person), but only seven pages to the Vietnam conflict.

Finally, the author’s ideological perspective diminishes the overall value of the narrative. In her introduction, Professor DePauw asks: “What is a woman?” She answers the question by explaining that a woman “is any human who self-identifies as female, whatever her race, class, behavior, or physical appearance.” Gender identity is a “social construct”—we should not link it to biological features. For those familiar with Rene Descartes’s famous maxim, DePauw’s assertion seems to be similar: “I think I am a woman, therefore I am one.” Some readers will find this to be psycho-babble and, because DePauw’s discussion of what it is to be a woman is not necessary to the telling of the story of women at war, it has a negative effect. Judge advocates who are interested in her views on lesbians, cross-dressing, transsexuals, and transvestites will find it in her book, but these are not positive features.

In her concluding pages, DePauw talks about the future of women in war. She hopes that “warriors for a new millennium” will be men and women who can “go into combat zones to implement nondestructive methods of conflict resolution.”⁴ In her opinion, soldiers of the future should focus their efforts on peace-making and peace-keeping; they should not train “to kill people and break things.” While DePauw’s views on the future of conflict are interesting, one wishes that she had devoted more pages to topics that will directly affect women in the near future. The author evidently believes that women should be on equal footing with men in the profession of arms. Consequently, she should have answered the following: Should all military occupations be open to women? Should the “combat exclusion” policy be discarded? Should the U.S. armed forces set a single gender-neutral standard for each job, and then ignore gender in filling those jobs? Should we open the infantry to women recruits who meet the same physical and mental standards required of males? To what extent should religious or cultural beliefs affect who gets to be a combat soldier? *Battle Cries and Lullabies* would be better if the author had addressed these and similar questions, particularly as they remain controversial both in and outside European and American military establishments.

Melissa Herbert’s *Camouflage isn’t Only for Combat* is a much more interesting book, if only because of its controversial conclusion: that

4. DEPAUW, *supra* note 2, at 300.

women will forever be “marginalized” in the American Army as long as the institution retains its inherently masculine character. As she explains in the introduction to the book, female soldiers seeking full acceptance in the Army face two barriers. Herbert identifies the first obstacle as the “institutional” barrier of combat exclusion, that is, no women in ground combat roles. The second hurdle she identifies as “interpersonal,” with sexual harassment and individual discrimination falling into this category. According to Melissa Herbert, however, a third barrier is the greatest obstacle: “a gender ideology that views military service as the domain of men, and that affirms masculinity as one mechanism by which men become soldiers.”⁵ As long as the Army remains wedded to masculinity—as long as soldiering is about not only war, but being a man—women will not be fully integrated.

In exploring this theory, Dr. Herbert looks at “how women in the male-dominated world of the military manage sexuality and gender.”⁶ Do women in uniform, Herbert asks, “feel pressured to be more masculine” to prove that they are not incompetent or “weak?” Do they act “more feminine” to show that they are not a threat to male soldiers, or to demonstrate that they are not lesbians? In short, what camouflage do female soldiers use—consciously or unconsciously—to blend into the Army’s male-dominated environment?

Dr. Herbert, a professor of sociology at Hamline University with prior service as a soldier, surveyed almost 300 women (active duty and veteran) in writing her book. Her analysis of their responses led her to conclude that the successful female soldier must be “feminine” enough to be accepted as heterosexual, yet “masculine” enough to be accepted as a soldier. She concludes that women who are perceived as “too feminine” were often seen as being unable to perform “masculine” tasks, and consequently incompetent. But being “too masculine” is no better, as it means running the danger of being perceived as something other than heterosexual, and male soldiers who viewed a women colleague as a lesbian did not respect her or treat her as an equal. Dr. Herbert concludes that this need for women soldiers to have an identity that balances maleness and femaleness—a need that results from the military’s “masculine ideology”—ultimately penalizes women because it forces them to camouflage their behavior to “fit” into a male dominated military. Consequently, until the Army stops viewing itself as a mechanism by which men achieve manhood and define their sta-

5. HERBERT, *supra* note 1, at 6.

6. *Id.* at 13.

tus as males in America, Herbert believes that women soldiers will continue to face obstacles to full acceptance as soldiers.

The major problem with Dr. Herbert's view is that she sees the armed forces as one monolithic institution, when it is not. Everyone who has spent even a short time in uniform recognizes that there are considerable "cultural" differences between the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, and each approaches gender-related issues differently. Herbert takes a similar view of each service, and this is also an error. The Army's many branches, for example, are not unified in their opinions on women-related issues. Consequently, while her views on gender and sexuality might be valid when applied to the infantry or armor branches, they have virtually no applicability to the Army Medical Department, personnel service organizations like the Finance or the Adjutant General's Corps, or combat support branches like the Signal Corps or Transportation Corps.

Women now serve routinely as senior NCOs and as company, battalion, and brigade commanders. The number of female general officers continues to increase. Herbert's view of the Army as a hostile, testosterone-laden institution certainly has no applicability to The Judge Advocate General's Corps, where the prevailing view at all levels is that female and male judge advocates are basically interchangeable when it comes to duty assignments. In short, Dr. Herbert's views may not be applicable to some Army institutions. But, to the extent that female soldiers are not yet permitted to serve in direct ground combat roles, and consequently are disadvantaged in competing for higher rank and responsibility, Dr. Herbert's perspective is worth examining.

A second criticism is her view that there is something wrong with the Army being a place where young men define their masculinity—or, as she calls it, a "finishing school" for men. Just as women struggle to find their identity, so too do young men. Some sociologists argue that the rite of passage for men in America was always military service and, that when the draft was abolished, the unintended effect was to deprive young men of a way to "grow up" from boys to men. There is nothing wrong with the Army providing young men a way to learn how to be men—to discover what it means to be a man, and thus to be more productive citizens. Allowing male soldiers to grow and mature as men, however, should not mean that female soldiers are deprived of self-esteem or made to feel they are second-class soldiers. There seems to be no reason that the Army as an

institution cannot accommodate both needs—and that the Army can also be a place for “girls” to grow into “women.”

Women have always been a part of war, and always will be. As “knowing the client” is part of the judge advocate creed, it follows that every Army lawyer should seek to better understand the varied roles played by women in the past, and better appreciate how a male-dominated military affects women soldiers. Read *Battle Cries and Lullabies* and *Camouflage isn't Only for Combat*. Both thought-provoking books are a beginning to such an understanding.