

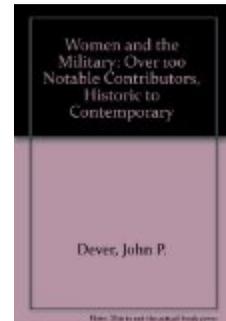
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



John P. Dever, Maria C. Dever. *Women and the Military: Over 100 Notable Contributors, Historic to Contemporary*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1995. 163 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89950-976-1.

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## Military Women: A Story Still Untold

Millions of women throughout history have provided logistical and medical care for armies, served in the military as leaders and administrators, defended their countries against enemies, and have even driven tanks and flown fighter aircraft in combat. Yet one searches in vain to find their collected biographies; there is no scholarly “Who’s Who” of military women. The field so far has been left to popular writers like the authors reviewed here.

John and Maria Dever’s book, *Women and the Military: Over 100 Notable Contributors, Historic to Contemporary*, has an admirable goal but unfortunately falls far short of its mark. This brief book is lightweight, literally and figuratively, and of little use to scholars or serious students of military or women’s history.

John Dever, a veteran Army reservist, was a faculty member at the U.S. Army Area Intelligence School at Fort Bragg, N.C.; his wife Maria is a high school teacher. Their research was conducted at West Point and Fort Bragg. The sources used, as revealed in the brief bibliography, were almost entirely English-language, secondary materials. There are no sources or citations given for individual entries, making it impossible to verify the information provided.

The authors claim to have included “women to represent all ages” and from “diverse origins” (p. 19). They define their scope as “women who defended their homeland or beliefs” in any role—a rather broad definition of military involvement. Their inclusion criteria were women

who had pioneer status; an unusual military experience involving quick-thinking or bravery; an exemplary life; or who had been victims of prejudice. The book is divided into three sections: Major Biographies, Women in Military Service, and Women Who Aided the Military.

The military history of women is far more extensive in Europe and Asia than in the United States, a fact not reflected in this work. Although the book purports to provide worldwide coverage, in fact it emphasizes American women heavily—eighteen of twenty-one major biographies, and almost half the remaining entries—nearly 85 percent of the book overall. The preface and foreword speak only of American women. Even the index fails to contain entries by nation.

Most of the book, nearly one hundred pages, is devoted to twenty-one “major biographies” written in a popular style. There is no common format or required elements of information, such as places and dates of birth and death, dates of service, ranks, etc. Sometimes this information is provided in the text, sometimes not. At times it is difficult to determine the context of a particular entry; for example, the biography of Sherian Grace Cadonia (pp. 38-40) opens by stating that she was the “first black woman general” but does not specify in what country or service she served. (It can be deduced from later information that she was in the Army in the United States.) The entry for Mary Roberts Rinehart (p. 152) never makes clear her nationality. It would have been useful to have such basic facts provided at the top of each

entry.

The entries provide no new information or fresh insight on their subjects. For example, the Devers portray Clara Barton in the traditional manner, as a woman altruistically devoted to medical service. However, Ellen Lawson's entry on Barton in Roger J. Spiller's *Dictionary of American Military Biography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984) is far more perceptive in its discussion of Barton as being "a frustrated would-be soldier" whose "career grew out of efforts to fashion an alternative to a strictly military career." (Unfortunately, the entry on Barton is one of very few devoted to women in Spiller's three-volume work.) Entries on non-Americans simply repeat what's been published in other popular works. The paragraph on Russian fighter pilot Lydia Litvak (the correct spelling is "Litviak") states that she was part of an all-female fighter regiment, but fails to note that she transferred from that unit, which belonged to air defense, during the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942; Litviak achieved all of her twelve kills (which are also not mentioned) in front-line Air Force regiments.

Other shortcomings are more serious. The entry on Rhonda Cornum never mentions the sexual abuse she endured as a prisoner of war—an important issue for those who study military women. The entry on Margaret Corbin mentions that she received a pension for her Revolutionary War service, but fails to note that she was the first woman in American history to do so. It also omits the fact that she is buried at West Point.

*Women and the Military* might be useful as an introductory work for secondary students. It does at least provide a collection of names of some women who played military roles, information that is usually omitted in other reference works. It is a more accurate book than Jessica Amanda Salmonson's *The Encyclopedia of Amazons: Women Warriors from Antiquity to the Modern Era* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), but that is damn-

ing with faint praise. Unfortunately, there are no other transnational biographical collections yet in print.

For American women, the researcher will find the following more useful:

Vicki L. Friedl. *Women in the United States Military, 1901-1995: A Research Guide and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1996).

Kimberly Jensen, ed. *Women, War and the Military from the American Revolution to the Post Cold-War Era*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997).

Charlotte Palmer Seeley, ed. *American Women and the U.S. Armed Forces: A Guide to the Records of Military Agencies in the National Archives Relating to American Women*. (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1992).

Victoria Sherrow. *Women and the Military: An Encyclopedia*. (Denver: ABC-CLIO, 1996).

For the general reader, a more interesting book is David E. Jones, *Women Warriors: A History*, (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1997), though it too has shortcomings; see Barton C. Hacker's recent review for H-Minerva (12/9/97, <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?~path=19488884970319>).

The Devers undertook a much-needed task: to collect information on some of the women who have played military roles throughout history. Popular works like this one have their uses, but only when supported by academically rigorous research. It is time the scholarly community devoted its attention to this important historical topic.

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