

Donna M. Dean. *Warriors Without Weapons: The Victimization of Military Women*. Pasadena, Md.: Minerva Center, 1997. xxii + 144 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-9634895-3-1.



Reviewed by Lance Janda (University of Oklahoma)

Published on H-Minerva (May, 1998)

Passion vs. Analysis: A Delicate Balance

Of the many recurring debates within Minerva, few have provoked more lively discussion than the question of mission. Should Minerva be a haven for victims of military abuse? Should it be a forum for advocates of political or social action related to women in uniform? Or should it be a scholarly community dedicated to careful research and writing aimed at understanding the dynamics of broadening opportunities for women in the military? Many subscribers have argued there is no need to choose between these goals, that Minerva can be a source of strength, information, and inspiration to people with a variety of backgrounds and agendas. They suggest it can serve a multitude of ends simultaneously, and in an open e-mail forum or within the confines of the journal itself there seems little doubt they are right. There is room within for all of us.

No such room exists within books, however. They require a more narrow focus and a greater consistency in theme and methodology than debates or conversations. Such focus is essential to successfully hold reader attention and vigorously advance an argument. Trying to prove too many points at once or without substantiation is a recipe for disaster, for even sympathetic readers are unable to interact with the text in the way we interact

in conversation. Readers cannot make the text answer their questions, and therefore need clarity and direction. This is especially true in monographs, and the lack of these vital characteristics is the most frustrating element of Donna Dean's often compelling book, *Warriors Without Weapons: The Victimization of Military Women*.

Dean's goal in writing *Warriors* is to attempt to interweave her own personal experiences in the Navy with an analytical assessment of the status of women in the military in both the past and present. She hopes to encourage other women veterans by letting them know they do not suffer alone, and to use her training as a clinical psychologist to offer insights into the predominantly male forces which govern the military. Her work also makes recommendations for changes within the armed forces in the ways women are treated, particularly by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Dean thus takes on the daunting task of writing a work that is part history, part memoir, part policy analysis, and part psychology all at once, and this diversity of goals prevents her work from having any consistent theme. The one thread which binds it together is a conviction the military is misogynistic and needs reform. That argument is undoubtedly true on many levels, but is not one Dean proves beyond the context of her own

experiences.

Warriors is divided into four parts, each barely connected to the others. The first focuses on the “fabric of the experience of women in the military in the United States (p. xix),” which is to say it is an overview of the experiences of American women in the military based on secondary sources. No new information is presented, and the attempt at synthesis is more effectively handled in other works. Part two deals with the “thread of misogyny (p. xix)” which Dean argues dominates the military, but which she never conclusively illustrates. Very little new research is presented, and even the available secondary material is largely mentioned in passing. Part three focuses on Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, and is a section rooted in Dean’s personal experience dealing with PTSD. It is eminently useful for those who also suffer from PTSD, but Dean’s personal agonies hardly prove her contention a larger pattern exists where the needs of abused or emotionally damaged women are ignored by the military. No doubt there is such a pattern; the problem is *Warriors* does not prove it. Part four deals with the assorted weaknesses of the the Department of Veterans Affairs in treating women veterans. Again, it is eminently useful for veterans, but would have been far more compelling had it been placed within a national context that made the pattern of sexism within DVA clear in a variety of cases.

The loose connections between these topics are magnified by the brevity of the work and the paucity of research upon which it is based. One hundred twenty five pages of text are hardly sufficient to thoroughly deal with such vast issues, and there is virtually no primary research behind any of Dean’s conclusions. With the exception of three interviews cited in chapter four and a large amount of anecdotal personal experience, they rest instead on secondary sources and are seldom fully explained.

Dean’s book also seethes with anger, which is completely understandable given the horrible harassment she experienced during an eighteen year career in the Navy. That anger is a passionate, driving force behind much of the narrative, and gives her personal recollections enormous evocative power. The same is true of the accounts of rape and harassment given by women Dean interviewed, and would have been well-suited to a memoir. Yet *Warriors* is not presented exclusively as a memoir,

and the anger clouds the sense of professional objectivity indispensable to a work seeking broad conclusions. Dean sensed this tension, and to her credit explained that her topic was “too painful on a personal level not to have a powerful impact on subjectivity (p. xxi).” No doubt the anger did color her judgements, and it makes *Warriors* a work of advocacy mislabelled as scholarship.

Such confusion between ends and means allows provocative, heart-rending passages to distort the analysis they are meant to support. Even more damaging, those passages are too often scattered amidst broad generalizations unsupported by the evidence presented. We are told that “not all women veterans want to face reality (p. xiv),” that the All Volunteer Force “was, of course, another instance of congressional and social pressure butting up against military determination to protect the status quo (p. 24),” and that “the thread of misogyny and sexist sentiment running through the history of women in the American military is plain” (p. 27). These statements each contain an element of truth, especially to veterans and scholars who study women in the military. Yet they are never fully explored or proven in Dean’s work. Worse, there is very little balance in *Warriors*. Many women have enjoyed positive, fulfilling careers in the military, and many men have been supporters rather than opponents of women in uniform. The voices of those men and women are neither heard nor mentioned in any detail.

Dean’s work contributes very little to our understanding of how and why sexism permeates the armed forces. It does, however, put a very human face on the suffering many women have endured at the hands of misogynists, and offers interesting insights into PTSD and the inadequacies of the Department of Veterans Affairs. While poorly suited for those who desire an analytical overview of the problems faced by military women, it is recommended to veterans who have suffered sexual abuse or harassment and to those who wish to understand some of the severe problems faced by too many women in the armed services.

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Citation: Lance Janda. Review of Dean, Donna M., *Warriors Without Weapons: The Victimization of Military Women*. H-Minerva, H-Net Reviews. May, 1998.

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