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Cheryl Lynn Ruff. *Ruff's War: A Navy Nurse on the Frontline in Iraq.* Washington DC: Naval Institute Press, 2005. 209 pp.p Photographs. $25.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-59114-739-8.

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Published on H-Minerva (October, 2008)

Commissioned by Kara Dixon Vuic

A Review of Ruff's War: A Navy Nurse on the Frontline in Iraq

Commander Cheryl Lynn Ruff of the United States Navy spent her twilight tour (her last tour prior to her retirement from active duty) as part of Bravo Surgical Company on deployment in Iraq. Although not scholarly in nature, Ruff's book, entitled *Ruff's War: A Navy Nurse on the Frontline in Iraq*, documents her unique perspective as a nurse anesthetist, caring for wounded Marines and other casualties amidst the harsh conditions of war.

To bridge the gap that may exist between herself and a non-nurse, non-military popular audience, Ruff provides a very thorough list of abbreviations and acronyms common in the military and in field of nursing. This list is crucial in assisting the layperson navigate through the language of the navy nurse.

The first few chapters of *Ruff's War* help set the stage for Ruff's story and put her wartime experience in context. In great detail, Ruff describes her rural upbringing in Pennsylvania and her close relationships with her family and friends. Her poignant representations of love and loss help to make this story real for her readers, and this theme carries all the way through the challenges of her wartime deployment.

Typical of nurses across time, Ruff describes an acceptance of, even an excitement about the prospect of going to war. Paradoxically, but again typical of those in the caring profession of nursing in the military, Ruff articulates her profound struggle with her identity as a nurse, whose job it is to care for others, in the midst of fighting an enemy. She struggles with the conflict of self-preservation while caring for all of her patients, whether U.S. Marine or enemy, friend or foe.

Many of the experiences and challenges faced by nurses during their service in war are timeless. Many of these themes resonate throughout and pervade *Ruff's War*, including dealing with the unforgiving elements of extreme heat, extreme cold, and sand storms, fearing for one's life while caring for patients above all else, the scarcity or lack of equipment, the harsh realities of gas mask drills and enemy attack, feeling dirty, and hungrily looking forward to communication from home. Also, like many chronicles of wartime nursing, Ruff emphasizes the need to adapt quickly to her environment while trying to do the best under untoward conditions, another pervasive and timeless theme.[1]

One cannot read this book without recognizing how, in her role as the only female nurse anesthetist at the front, Ruff crosses the traditional gender boundaries that existed in previous wars. Many historians would argue that gender is no longer the barrier it once was and that it has now become almost commonplace for women to work in traditionally male positions. This is not to say that being a female on active duty in a war zone does not present unique challenges. Ruff describes how the fundamental human act of needing to empty one's bladder can pose a challenge, especially for women, and how having supplies for menstruation was a priority over carrying many other essentials.

Ruff also speaks about her transition back home from the war zone. Like many veterans, Ruff speaks of coming home changed. Her strong sense of family and her close friendships helped her reconnect with daily life at home. The photographs Ruff includes in this memoir paint a vivid illustration of how shampooing one's hair, at cer-

tain times, is a luxury. The lessons learned from Ruff and her experience of taking nothing for granted should not be lost on the readers of this book, which provides a testimonial to the challenges and hardships of caring for the sick and wounded during war, and makes a contribution to women's history, Iraq War history, and to Navy Nurse Corps history.

Note

[1]. Many authors writing about wartime nursing remark on these same themes. See Mary Sarnecky, "Field Expediency: How Army Nurses in Vietnam 'Made Do:' An Ability to Improvise is a Valuable Nursing Skill, On and Off the Battlefield," *American Journal of Nursing* 107, no. 5 (May 2007): 52-59. For exposure to other wartime nursing stories, refer to Elizabeth Norman, *We Band of Angels: The Untold Story of American Nurses Trapped on Bataan by the Japanese* (New York: Random House, 1999); Evelyn M. Monahan and Rosemary L. Neidel, *And If I Perish: Frontline U. S. Army Nurses in World War II* (New York: Knopf, 2003); and Margaret Higonnet, ed., *Nurses at the Front: Writing the Wounds of the Great War* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), which includes Ellen LaMotte's *The Backwash of War* and Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone.*

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Citation: Jennifer Telford. Review of Ruff, Cheryl Lynn, *Ruff's War: A Navy Nurse on the Frontline in Iraq.* H-Minerva, H-Net Reviews. October, 2008.

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