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Linda Grant De Pauw. *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998. xvii + 395 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8061-3100-9.

Reviewed by Dennis Showalter (Colorado College)
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Women and War: Memory, Mythology, and Methodology

This book reflects two increasingly common approaches to writing history. One involves a search for "lost" or "repressed" history as a vehicle for constructing identity. The second seeks to diversify history-making by incorporating voices other than those of scholars. Pieces of history are found in artifacts and images as well as archives. Stories become as important as documents. The subject of women in war is particularly favorable to a synergy of these two ways of "doing history." Particularly in the twentieth-century West, war is considered the province of males. Masculine identity, whether it be presented as inherent or constructed, is considered central to war-making. The women warriors of popular culture are either completely degendered, like Demi Moore's *GI Jane*, or are presented as an offense to reason and natural order, like the female sniper in *Full Metal Jacket*, whose murder restores whatever harmony is possible in the upside-down universe of the Vietnam War.

Yet in this context even traditional military historians increasingly recognize the contrast between mythic images and historic realities. War may be a gendered activity, but it is an experience common to both genders. The MINERVA Center at George Washington University has played a central role in developing the systematic study of women's experiences in war. De Pauw, founder and director of the center, offers here a comprehensive and well written synthesis of a generation's writing.

Battle Cries and Lullabies is intended for non-academic readers, and as a text for courses in war and society as well as for women's studies programs. The author begins by defining "woman" as "any human who self-identifies as a female." This is a legitimate standard, one that reflects as well the principal subtext of the work: gender roles in warmaking are socially constructed. From that premise De Pauw constructs a story of women and war from prehistory to the present. Her female protagonists are strongly proactive. While the text acknowledges the victimization of women by war in ways ranging from rape and murder to unsought roles as single parents, De Pauw takes a stand different in essence from, for example, Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will*. The women of *Battle Cries and Lullabies* are affirmative participants in war's experience, even if often from lack of an alternative.

Most basic–and most familiar–are the women often described in conventional accounts as "camp followers." De Pauw demonstrates that far from being a mere rabble of de facto prostitutes, these women performed essential "logistical" functions as cooks, laundresses, and quartermasters before the development of modern administrative systems. They were central as well to the psychological dimension of military life, providing both actual and surrogate family relationships vital for men as a rule permanently isolated from the wider society. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these women were supplemented, then replaced, by professionals and technicians: the nurses of the Crimean and Civil Wars, the typists, telephone operators, and ferry pilots of 1914-18 and 1939-45.

De Pauw also establishes a spectrum of women's direct participation in combat. The most obvious–and most common–involved specific emergencies: lost battles, raids, and ambushes that put women in situations of "fight or die." Sieges offered particular opportunities for women's direct participation. Fortifications compensated for the infamous "limited upper body strength," while the usual consequences of defeat were sufficiently dire to overcome inhibitions, genetic or social, against taking life. At the high end of the social and political system, women rulers like India's Rani of Jhansi during the Sepoy Rebellion regularly commanded their armies in person. Revolutions as well offered opportunities for women to assume leadership positions, with Vietnam's Trung sisters a familiar example. In the middle, De Pauw presents both woman soldiers who passed successfully as men and women soldiers who never concealed their sex.

She demonstrates in the process that there were more than a few of the latter in nineteenth- and twentieth-century armies.

Thus far, however, women's direct participation reflected either exceptional people or exceptional circumstances. In discussing the twentieth century De Pauw focuses on the growing normalization–the democratization, if you will–of women in front lines. She particularly concentrates on the Russian experience in the World Wars, on Vietnam, and on Israel. In each case she stresses the dialectic between sex-role expectations and the combinations of practical and ideological factors that led to their transgressing by women and the acceptance of that transgressing by men. By the time De Pauw reaches the contemporary American experience, incorporation of women in all roles performed by armed forces seems the culmination of an almost-natural process, as opposed to being a social construction responding to particular stimuli.

Unfortunately, De Pauw consistently trips herself up by her methodology. While the book has an extensive scholarly apparatus and a comprehensive bibliography, its particular use of sources is often highly dubious. This criticism does not refer to "transgressive" interpretations or unconventional documentation. John Laffin, for example, is reliable enough as a battlefield archaeologist. His other historical works are so poorly executed that they are generally regarded as unsuitable sources even for undergraduate term papers. Yet De Pauw cites Laffin as the sole authority on several significant aspects of women's participation in the Vietnam War. She repeats at second hand, again through Laffin, an alleged incident in which twins joined the French Foreign Legion: the male took the physical examination twice, and his sister served for six months until the unit had a compulsory shower parade! The sheer implausibility of this scenario scarcely requires demonstration. It is the kind of war story" a yarn-spinning veteran tells a recruit–or a journalist: "You think the Legion is fouled up now? Let me tell you how it was in the old days." Yet it is included in De Pauw's text without so much as a raised eyebrow.

Credulity shapes wider arguments as well. De Pauw, firmly committed to the existence of Amazon cultures in the ancient world, uses a limited and questionable body of evidence to depict not merely bands, but entire armies of women warriors. The combat memories of modern female soldiers are accepted as they are presented, without even the limited critical framework employed by battle narrators like Gerald Astor or Stephen Ambrose. De Pauw is similarly willing to take at face value accounts of women's participation in combat without questioning the agendas of the systems sponsoring those accounts. The Soviet Union and the DRV each had good reasons to assert that they were fighting people's wars in which gender was irrelevant. Neither system was characterized by respect for inconvenient facts. Yet the war stories are once again repeated without critical comment.

These lapses are particularly disconcerting when juxtaposed to the intellectual rigor with which De Pauw disassembles the legend of Molly Pitcher. Working in her primary area of scholarly research, De Pauw shows how the myth was constructed from scraps of debatable evidence, publicized, sanitized, and enshrined in America's textbooks to become part of the country's identity. In the rest of the work, however, De Pauw's privileging of story-telling results in an anecdotal approach to questions that are still in a stage where analysis is essential. I began this book with the hope that it would provide the general overview of women in war that is so lacking, and so sorely needed. It is a useful first step. Nevertheless, *Battle Cries and Lullabies* depends excessively on nuggets of insight and information drawn from a literature that is as yet strongly self-referencing and correspondingly uncritical.

This review was commissioned by Reina Pennington for H-Minerva.

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