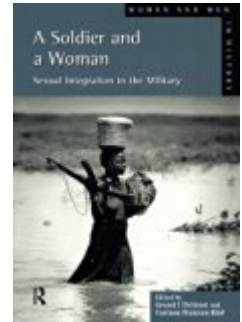


Gerard J. DeGroot, and Corinna Peniston-Bird, eds.. *A Soldier And A Woman: Sexual Integration in the Military*. London and New York: Longman, 2000. xiii + 384 pp. \$69.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-582-41438-9.



Reviewed by Donna M. Dean

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Combatant Women In World History

The Preface of this book is a densely written compendium of issues, educated opinions, historical facts, and major questions about the presence and participation of women in war around the world and throughout history. Simply by reading it, one may gain a grasp of the enormous complexities and difficulties of treating the topic of women and their roles in armed conflict in any one volume.

Because of powerful shifts in political and social forces on a historical basis, the editors have chosen to divide the articles into two sections -- those addressing the time period prior to 1945, and those after. DeGroot and Peniston-Bird attribute their decision to so divide the contents of their book because of what they term "female military participation being grafted onto a powerful feminist ethic." After making this statement, they then proceed to disavow any "feminist" intent and to explain their motivations in other terms. The defense is oddly dissonant because they never define what they mean by "feminist" in the first place, nor do they clarify what their reasoning is

for describing the dividing line as separating what one might term "pre-feminist" and "feminist" influences. However, in fairness, 1945 seems as good a dividing line as any for any number of reasons, including the very nature of wide-scale war itself, weapons development, and communications development, as well as major societal changes in world power and domination on a global scale.

One of the strengths of this particular book in what has become a significant flowering of scholarly writings and works being produced on various aspects of women and war is the sheer diversity of its articles. The contributions cover Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa; the scale of conflicts dealt with ranges from the small but deadly activities of terrorist cells through third-world conflicts, to the near-global wars among the major powers.

It is fascinating to read of the Muslim women's perspectives and motivations, so alien to the average American's comprehension; and the history of China's Long March with the fervid and willing participation of the many Chinese women

who found the promise of Communism so irresistible. Certainly, one cannot read this book without coming away with a better sense not only of the differences of these women in their motivations and conditions, but an appreciation of the cultural contexts within which they fight or the circumstances under which they participate in the various armed forces. We within the cultural and societal milieu of the richest and most powerful nation on earth are often woefully ignorant of other cultures and societies, and are sadly prone to assume they are "all alike" in too many cases.

Because it is an anthology, there are inevitably gaps in the coverage; editors cannot guarantee total inclusion of all important areas. This reviewer would have liked to see an article by Will Roscoe, perhaps; the pre-eminent authority on certain aspects of Native American society prior to European contact which include the common participation of women warriors and their acceptance by the tribal units. Also strangely sparse is coverage of Irish women whose participation in wars has often been an accepted and routine phenomenon. While the topic of female Irish warriors is not wholly ignored, it is so incomplete as to make it seem more of an anomaly than a commonality, which is an inaccurate perception.

In general however, this book fulfills its stated purpose of being accessible and useful to not only the general reader, but scholars as well. The articles are generally well chosen, and most are sufficiently supported through footnotes to be useful in scholarly research. A glaring omission is the lack of an over-all bibliography, requiring the serious researcher to systematically peruse any articles deemed applicable to the desired area of interest in order to look for a given bibliographic reference. Some of the articles are neither supported nor annotated in their statements and perspectives, thus rendering them of questionable value to scholars.

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