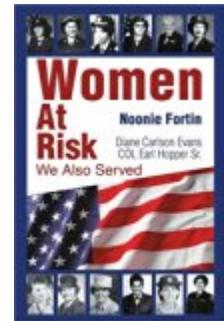


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Noonie Fortin. *Women at Risk*. Lincoln: Writers Club Press, 2002. xxii + 467 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-595-21494-5.

Reviewed by Donna M. Dean (Independent Scholar)
Published on H-Minerva (September, 2004)



Women Who Served

The title of this book, *Women at Risk* is something of a mystery, since it implies the stories gathered within are somehow connected to clear and eminent danger or risk as a class or group. This is not the case, and the author never explains the odd choice of title.

In actuality, the book is a collection of individual stories apparently garnered from various women whom the author has met or contacted through various means. The stories vary in voice from the author's to the individuals', with frequent "editorializing" remarks concerning the author's opinions, thoughts, or experiences interspersed throughout. Occasionally a completely disparate story is dropped into the text, seemingly on a whim, with no apparent connection in either context or subject.

The women vary from World War II veterans through the present, and include some civilian women who went to Vietnam as part of various organizations, wives of veterans, and women who have lost their children to war. Some stories are little more than a resume-like recitation of enlistment, duty station and discharge; others are more fully developed and informative.

Fortin repeatedly says she finds little literature about women and the military or various aspects of war, and states those she does find tend to be academic, written by those she describes as "people who've made a name for themselves," or officers. Apparently, Fortin finds little of value in books falling within those categories, although she never clarifies her reasoning. She does include a list of references in the back of her book, but it is woefully incomplete. In any case, it seems she un-

dertook the writing of this book to fill one or more perceived gaps in the canon, as she herself is a former enlisted woman. Oddly, many of the references she does list contain just the sort of material she is trying to document and are extremely well written. Examples include: Josette Dermody Wingo's *Mother Was A Gunner's Mate*, a rollicking, hilarious account of one woman's bumpy trip through World War II; *The Good Soldier*, by Selene Weise, one of only a few women to serve in the South Pacific Theater under combat conditions; and Diane Burke's *No Time For Fear: Voices of American Nurses in World War II*; and several collections of stories from women in Vietnam, among others. While it is certain that not all women who have participated in war—in uniform, as civilians, or as family members—have told their stories or been perpetuated in print, there is no paucity of good material out there, even stories by and about enlisted women.

Fortin's book is published by one of the print-on-demand publishers that have proliferated with the advancements of electronic communications and capabilities. While often an outlet for writers unable to procure traditional publishers in an ever-shrinking market dominated by global mega-conglomerates, the venue does have its problems, and this book illustrates a good many of them.

The grammar, punctuation, and structural errors are legion, and the writing itself is best described as pedestrian. The frequent interspersions of Fortin's opinions and other random insertions are distracting and off-putting. Since Fortin has included herself in the collec-

tion, it would have been far more reader-friendly to confine her personal story snippets there. The entire book suffers enormously from the absence of a good editorial red pen, from the inexplicable title to the un-referred-to reference list.

The stories themselves range from extremely terse non-stories to more fully developed, interesting presentations. If Fortin utilized some form of standardized interview techniques or questions, it is not evident. She fails to draw out many of her subjects. Admittedly, it is sometimes difficult to make a routine, rather mundane stint in the military sound interesting, much less arresting, yet it can be done. Again, Wingo's *Mother Was A Gunner's Mate* is a superlative example of the true writer's art as she regales the reader with humorous tales

of what was, in reality, a stateside tour where nothing of much magnitude happened. Yet, after reading it, one knows what it was like to be young, slightly mischievous, and full of life, serving in the Navy during wartime. One knows what Wingo thought, observed, and experienced. Unfortunately, this is not the case in all too many of the stories, or more properly in the many cases or vignettes put together in *Women At Risk*.

The use of this book in the classroom would be limited, and it is wholly unsuited for utilization as a text at the college level. There are many more suitable books available, in spite of Fortin's lament that there are not. Her own limited reference list is testimony to that; one wonders if she truly has read the books in her list.

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Citation: Donna M. Dean. Review of Fortin, Noonie, *Women at Risk*. H-Minerva, H-Net Reviews. September, 2004.

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