

The American Institute of Stress

COMBAT STRESS

BRINGING YOU ALL THE WAY HOME

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Women in the Military Challenges, Changes and Champions

Guest Editor: Christiane O'Hara PhD



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Combat Stress is a quarterly magazine, published in February, May, August, and November. Each issue contains news and advertising designed with Service Members, veterans, and their families in mind. It appeals to all those interested in the myriad and complex interrelationships between combat stress and health because technical jargon is avoided, and it is easy to understand. Combat Stress is archived online at stress.org. Information in this publication is carefully compiled to ensure accuracy.

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GET INSIDE OUR HEAD

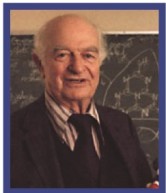


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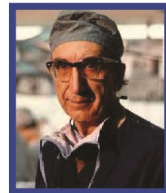
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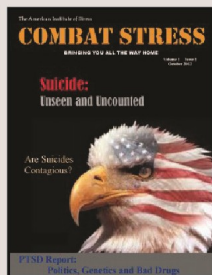
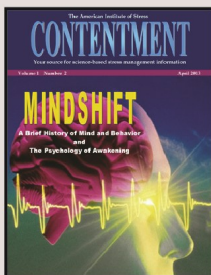
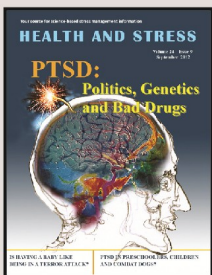
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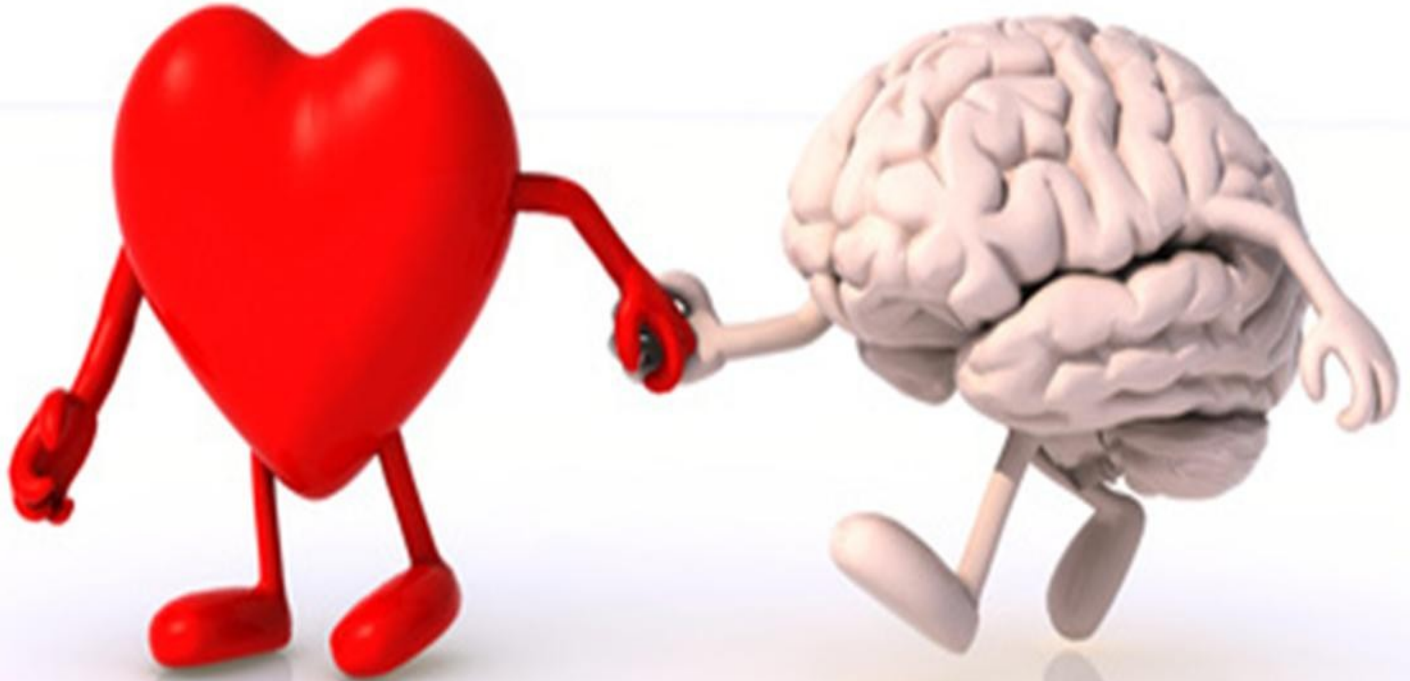


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Thank You!

We at the American Institute of Stress appreciate the women Service Members and Veterans whom have contributed to this issue in continuing service to improve the lives and experiences of their peers. We also appreciate the work of this issue's Guest Editor, Christiane O'Hara, PhD, in bringing these women's voices and calls to action to Combat Stress. A brief biography for Dr. Christiane O'Hara is listed below. If you have questions or comments regarding this issue, please contact her via email at: editor@stress.org.

Christiane O'Hara, PhD has served as a volunteer Advisor to Women Veteran Social Justice, a nonprofit network for women service members and veterans. She has also served as a volunteer Psychologist through the Red Cross at the Functional Recovery Program, TBI Clinic, Dwight David Eisenhower Army Medical Center, Fort Gordon. She is co-author of *Rehabilitation with Brain Injury Survivors: An Empowerment Approach* (1991); "ArtReach Project America and other Innovative Civilian-Military Partnering" chapter in *War Trauma and its Wake: Expanding the Circle of Healing* (2012); and "Veterans and the Arts as Healing Interventions" in *Combat Stress* e-magazine (2014). She received her PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of Georgia and completed postdoctoral training in Neuropsychology and Rehabilitation Medicine at the Atlanta Veterans Administration Medical Center and Emory University Center for Rehabilitation. She is a Life Member of the American Psychological Association. She is the daughter of a veteran and mother of three sons, one of whom is a Soldier.

Introduction to this Special *Combat Stress* Women's Issue

Christiane O'Hara, PhD

This issue is a hallmark in publishing. Every article is written by one of our women who has proudly served in the United States military, and addresses issues that affect not only women who have put on or continue to wear the uniform, but affect all of us. This issue speaks to YOU.

The most important themes in this issue relate to:

- a) a call for change in military culture, which allows both toxic military leadership (specifically, women in leadership) and military sexual assault, both having major consequences for tens of thousands of veterans each year; and
- b) the power of women Service Members and veterans to overcome these issues, take ownership of their service, and move into leadership roles: by identifying themselves as serving/having served, connecting online, in adaptive sports, and in local communities, telling their stories through the expressive arts, and taking leadership in veteran service organizations, business and boardrooms, politics, finance, healthcare, faith and local communities, sports and recreation, and education.

This is an invitation to share this issue with everyone you know. These authors challenge us, military and civilian alike, to address and change longstanding cultural military norms that affect everyone in the service, men and women alike.

While this journal is titled *Combat Stress*, this issue's authors acknowledge some of the *other major stressors* of their military service that drive millions of veterans into the VA and other programs for treatment of military-related traumas. These authors represent service in the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force, both at home and abroad and including combat deployments. Some reflect on managing and overcoming life-altering injuries that include sexual trauma, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and chronic pain. All reflect remarkable resilience and a determination that no injury, no trauma will keep them from moving forward in their life paths, telling their stories, continuing their educations, searching for restoration of body, heart, and soul, assuming leadership as proud women veterans, and challenging other veterans to do the same.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as Guest Editor for this issue. I am grateful not only to all of the authors but to Kathy Platoni and Kathy Shoop who helped with editing. As a civilian clinician with family members who served/serve, I did not fully appreciate the service of women in uniform until the first woman in my family, my only niece, took the oath from her father. I was proud of her! But when she deployed, I was secretly fearful for her safety. I was relieved when she left the service and went on to become a leader in banking, as well as a wonderful spouse and mother.

But it was not until years later, when I

met women veterans through my work as a Red Cross volunteer with Wounded Warriors at Fort Gordon, and as a volunteer with a nonprofit organization serving veterans, that I became aware of the isolation of injured and wounded women Service Members and veterans. Each one, whether they have been raped, have a TBI, combat trauma, or other catastrophic incident while serving, has loved serving in uniform. Each undergoes a lonely exit out of military service that inalterably changes their identity, income, relationships, life direction, trust, and beliefs. Also, each women Service Member searches for meaning and justice while trying to navigate the VA and other agencies in search of physical, mental, financial, employment, and spiritual recovery.

Lesson for all of us: Female troops and veterans are different from male troops and veterans, and they do indeed have special needs. One of the most striking differences: many either do not want to identify themselves as veterans (if they were assaulted or demeaned) , or do not think they are veterans (if they did not serve during war or in combat), or think most veteran programs are meant for men only, or combat veterans only, or post 9/11 only.

Lesson for clinicians and all programs serving veterans: Learn more about what women Service Members and veterans need. Open your programs and clarify in your promotional materials that women, as well as men, of all eras are welcome. Expand your programs to be more inclusive for all eras and for women. Have some women-specific programs to accommodate those who are so trauma-

tized by military rape that they cannot yet trust being in mixed groups. And kudos to those clinicians, programs, VSO's, and businesses already on the cutting edge!

One of the extraordinary outcomes of connecting with women Service Members and veterans is listening to how there is a need for a basic cultural shift within all branches of service. If we do not address the cultural dysfunction that is cyclical both within leadership (men and women) and through the entire chain of command (sexual assaults, again both men and women), our society and researchers remain focused on "fixing the outcomes" of broken veterans. We spend time and huge amounts of tax and donor dollars on developing and implementing "healing interventions" instead of going to the source and focusing on a systemic overhaul of practices and behaviors that breed internal wounds, and that drum its victims from the ranks. It is one thing for our military to examine the enemy and plot strategic strikes; it is another to identify and remove the enemies within, whom are breaking spirits, bodies, and hearts of those over whom they hold power and contempt.

Lesson for military leaders: Take heed of these authors' perspectives. They come from scores of years in service, with best intentions. They sound the alarm to help prevent further destructive behaviors, and offer their recommendations for changing the culture. Read closely. Women veterans are finding one another. It has been through my connections with women Service Members and veterans in Women Veteran Social Justice, a non-profit national electronic network offering

national conferences, meet ups, retreats, and other programs for women, that I have met and volunteered with outstanding women veterans, many of whom are authors in this issue. The First Annual WVSJ Conference in 2014, at which Kathy Platoni and BriGette McCoy (both authors in this issue) gave keynotes, served as the impetus for this issue. What if we could get important messages about, for, and by women Service Members and veterans, to a huge electronic audience?

Lesson for all of us: Electronic networks offer connectivity to Service Members of all branches and to veterans, no matter where they are in the United States and around the world. Read more about that in this issue, and get connected! Finally, *lesson for the more than 2 million*

women whom have served: You are all veterans. Stand up and be counted. Take your bows. Take on leadership positions, wherever you are in your personal journeys, and acknowledge your service and wisdom borne of service. Write, speak or paint or dance or sing your stories, not only for yourself, but as part of your legacy.

Many of us are eager to read or watch or listen, and the rest of us will follow along sooner or later.

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**Kathy Platoni, Psy.D., DAAPM, FAIS
Colonel, Retired, US Army
Colonel, Ohio Military Reserve
(State Defense Forces)**

Kathy Platoni, Psy.D. has been a practicing clinical psychologist for more than 34 years and maintains her private practice in Centerville, Ohio. In service of her country and as an Army Reserve clinical psychologist, she has deployed on four occasions in time of war, to include Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom (both Joint Task Force, Guantanamo Bay Cuba and Afghanistan). As a survivor of the tragic Fort Hood Massacre in November of 2009, she remains an ardent activist for reconsideration of this shooting incident as an act of terrorism to assure that the wounded and the families of the deceased are awarded long overdue benefits.

Dr. Platoni is a graduate of the School of Professional Psychology of Nova University (now Nova Southeastern University) in Davie, Florida. She held the position of Army Reserve Clinical Psychology Consultant to the Chief, Medical Service Corp for six years and is a graduate of the US Army Command and General Staff College. Dr. Platoni retired from the US Army with the rank of Colonel in October of 2013. In March of 2015, she was sworn into the Ohio Military Reserve as Chief Clinical Psychologist; she also holds the rank of Colonel for State Defense Forces. She also serves as the Dayton SWAT psychologist and the Clinical Advisor to the Dayton Hostage Negotiation Team.

Dr. Platoni maintains an appointment as Assistant Clinical Professor with the School of Professional Psychology, Wright State University. Two landmark books, written and edited by Dr. Raymond Scurfield and Dr. Platoni on the subject of war trauma, *Expanding the Circle of Healing~Trauma in Its Wake and Healing War Trauma~A Handbook of Creative Approaches*, were published in 2012. She was awarded Diplomate status by the American Academy of Pain Management and was recently appointed Fellow of the American Institute of Stress and holds membership in the Institute of Traumatic Stress 2013 Board of Scientific and Professional Advisors, and the Clinical Advisory Board of Warrior Salute. She is also Editor of the [Combat Stress E-Magazine](#).

“Eating Our Own or Throwing a Lifeline”: Leadership of Consequence among Women in Uniform and Women Veterans

Kathy Platoni, Psy.D., DAAPM, FAIS
COL (RET), US Army
COL, Ohio Military Reserve

Snarky Women

Misogyny among women is nothing new. Neither is the fact that girls behave with far more malice towards each other than boys do, and are a great deal less kind in their criticism of one another than most members of the male species (Meyers, 2013). The “mean girls” mindset is alive, well, and overflowing with all degrees of vitriol (Meyers, 2013). Few girls escaped junior high or high school without being the target of some degree of torment and social exclusion. The very threat of being left out is more akin to failure than most other forms of perceived persecution. According to Crick and Bigbee (Meyers, 2013), this is a form of relational aggression perpetrated by women against one another and a more covert form of interpersonal victimization.

If one takes a gander at social learning theory, it is clear that many mothers, under the guise of acting in the best interests of their children, conduct child rearing with a notable absence of kindness and lovability. The outcome is generations of women who feel anxious and inade-

quate. These women may readily come to believe that what one does in the world is necessarily flawed and that a cascade of criticism is just around every corner. Of equal concern is the idea that women are judgmental of one another, not because they have lost respect for them, but because they covet what they do not possess within themselves. They feel most threatened when they believe that another female is trying to take something away from them, which typically stems from personal feelings of insecurity. One’s female foes may strike out of fear and gladly leave stab wounds in their backs, despising parts of themselves more than they could ever detest any other woman (Stewart, 2015). It has become dangerous to step too close to those whose unmistakable disdain and disregard for themselves masquerades as envy and all things venomous.

Stated simply, the pressure for women to succeed, be liked, loved, and admired may come at the expense of other women trampled at the bottom rungs of that success ladder. There are women who will eat your soul for breakfast. Women can

be brutal, pitchfork-carrying members of that exclusive club of insecure high schoolers who never grew up or left that turf, carrying hate-mongering well past their youth into adulthood.

This takes passive-aggressiveness to entirely new levels of loathing. Casting one another in the most undesirable light to prevent other women from ascending above them is one of the most deleterious forms of sabotage, in the most mean-spirited manner (Hoogervorst, 2014). Throwing each other under the bus may have its early roots in how mothers parent their daughters. Children learn from what they observe and what they live.

In order to compete for acceptance as adults, some women see the need to scratch their way to the top in order to remain competitive in the approval market. In today's society and in many circles, men still have the upper edge. Women are far from resting on equal footing. Women who truly dislike or even despise themselves project their own self-hatred or self-disgust onto other women. Hence, the trap of despising one another (MacDonald, 2013) fosters something hardly resembling healthy competitiveness. The mission of female "have nots" is to launch search and destroy missions against their rivals. Women sabotage each other in the workplace, the classroom, the faith community, and the neighborhood. Nothing seems to be more offensive to some women than the success of other women, says renowned novelist, Barbara Taylor Bradford (Hopkins, 2013). The workplace is often abundant with a trail of destruction against those women with higher salaries, thinner frames, nicer clothes,

and more appealing faces. This remains one of the more blatant forms of sexism and oppression of women: by other women.

According to leading expert Dr. Paula Caplan (personal communication, 2015), clinical and research psychologist and an ardent women's activist, our entire society may be socialized to blame women for just about everything, set women up, and pit them against each other as enemies. Instead, we should focus our attention on the fact that women are trapped in an imbalance of power, with far fewer resources than men have at their disposal. In an ideal world, women should recognize and use this as a reason to pave the way to fight for and not against one another. What we need to be doing is to come together as allies to battle for a more equal and fair share of power and resources.

"But I think that instead of immediately rushing to blame women in power, we ought to consider: (1) what she had to struggle against to get her power, (2) the fact that quite likely, any support she got from women was not particularly effective, because most women had less power than she did or than the men who had the power to promote her, and (3) the fact that women with power are rarely in the top slots and thus, have to worry about losing what power they have. Some women may genuinely want to help other women, but if they are caught helping other women, they get slammed, accused of being biased, and can lose what power they

have" (Caplan, personal communication, 2015).

Toxic Leadership: Women in Uniform

The military is certainly fertile ground for the incubation and cultivation of toxic leadership among women. This may begin with the premise that the rules for women as military leaders are different from the start, probably from the playground decades earlier, remaining frozen in time among those brazen enough to accept leadership roles.

According to Litwin (2014), "women's friendship rules" and prospects for building connections and trust through relationships often fall short of matching the expectations of both the employer and women in military leadership positions. Masculine norms dictate that aloofness, toughness, and autonomy are the more desirable of leadership traits, but the greater truth may be that effective leadership requires more advanced interpersonal skills and actual likability, both within the military and the civilian sector.

Some women are thrilled to witness the progression of women up the corporate and military ladders, but they prefer not to work for them. **Professional jealousy, whether in military or civilian circles, persists as a problem of enormous proportions, especially when other women get promoted beyond those left behind, or when their accomplishments are more notice-**



able and recognized. This can evolve into to a very public struggle for acceptance within the ranks for professional distinction and acknowledgment (Allen, 2015).

Women in positions of power may be at risk for assuming the intoxicating role of the Queen Bee (Caplan, 1981). With the high addictive potential of superior status, military women who become elevated in their workplace status frequently have little allegiance or loyalty to their

female counterparts and believe that they have absolutely everything to lose if they lend a hand to other women seeking the same opportunities in climbing to the next rung. Many women in positions of authority within military circles struggle to maintain their unique status and labor intensively to keep other women in lower positions, for fear that their positions, rank, and power will be overtaken or surpassed.

And then there are the age old societal and normative beliefs which perceive women as innately flawed. Women are continuously slapped with the implicit order to improve themselves... lose weight, stand up straight, have some "work" done on your face, get a makeover, throw out that old, ugly outfit... it is doubtful that anyone of the male persuasion has heard these directives. Women may very well struggle their entire lives to learn what not to wear. In essence, girls and women hear the same explicit,

misogynistic messages from the time their first pink bow is twisted into tow-head wisps of hair, internalizing sexism at the knees of their mothers and grandmothers. This same indoctrination seeks to protect male superiority, colluding with the male species to perpetrate stereotypes of women as weak, passive, manipulative, cunning, sneaky, untrustworthy, and without the requisite skills and abilities to assume any type of leadership role (Chemaly, 2012). These dynamics, sadly, are an excellent fit for many military women who scale their way to the top on the backs of other women and who will attempt to soar at any cost... no price too high.

Insidious and sinister, there is a subgroup of military women in positions of power who take pleasure in trampling on the souls of their female peers and eat their own for breakfast without so much as an eye blink. As with sexual harassment of male Service Members against female Service Members, consequences may be not only destructive, but deadly. Research has not yet taken into account how the mounting suicide rate among uniformed personnel may correlate with merciless treatment from toxic leaders and repeatedly being pushed over the brink, from which there is no escape. When troops are deployed overseas or in war zones, there is no going home to escape the crossfire. In the military, one cannot just walk away or quit the force without dire conse-

quences under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice; there is no exit strategy or safe haven from these forms of persecution. These tormentors are unrepentant and will stop at nothing to advance their careers.

In the corporate world, ruling by fear and ruthlessness is shameless enough, but in the military, this degree of toxicity is not just demeaning and poisonous; it "gets people killed" (Hatcher, 2014). This becomes particularly egregious when women target and engage in search and destroy missions against their very own, the consequences of which endure long past deployments, homecoming, and departure from military service. The landscape of toxic women in the military offers a rich battleground for women to propel themselves into an attack mode



against other women. It is well-known among Service women and women veterans that there is a subgroup of female peers and superiors who strike out and knock other women out of the way on their way to the top, all for the joy that comes from the power play to scale the summit with little regard for consequences or damaging repercussions on those in the direct line of fire. If the threat to their power exists, it must be eliminated, expelled, and exterminated at any cost (Heppner, 2013).

The other subgroup of toxic women leaders, experientially speaking, are those who are defined by their subservience to male domination, willingly subjected to the whims of toxic male leaders who call the shots for women to fall in line and stand behind them. These female leaders embrace oppression in order to gain male attention, acceptance, and approval. This may very well be a direct reflection of American culture, not just of the past, but very much of the present climate. Many women still remain stuck in the belief that they do not measure up to men. Mothers who teach their daughters to cook and clean would do well to teach them how to make command decisions at the same time. What a concept. Unfortunately when it comes to female military leaders, off the fainting couch we go, into the board room and the command center, often without the requisite (essential) skills to lead from the front. What often emerges is another type of cannibal who eats her own (Dallocchio, personal communication, October, 2015).

The worst kind of undermining and sabotage occurs when women in uniform en-

gage in crimes against the humanity of our own gender. It is incumbent upon us to refuse to become a part of this form of persecution. We cannot sell our souls to the devil to commit cruel, deriding, contemptuous, insolent, divisive, injurious and often despicable forms of inhumane treatment of human beings in our charge. This becomes the very downfall of the movement to become leaders in our own right.

“Mean girls” hamper other women and, not unlike “The Devil Wears Prada”, do not often enough frown on the unapologetic use of power in the workplace, in school, and in the trenches. Some women specialize in brilliant sneakiness, garnering closeness long enough to move in for the kill. Leave this to the scorpions. The percentage of women at the top of chain of commands is scarce, in part because women refuse to help other women move into leadership positions. They step on or shun them instead. This is perceived as a direct threat, a stunning example of professional jealousy, too often forgetting what it was like to be the rookie.

It is high time for military women leaders to get over sexism amnesia and to prevent passing on the legacy of crawling one’s way to the top at the expense of everyone on the rungs below. We can ill afford to make the women’s movement one of equality when we operate on principles of condemnation, name calling, sabotage, shunning, backlash, or pay-back. This will surely guarantee that we will live in fear of one another for all time and that a sexist society of women against women will create an entirely new atmosphere of inequality. Women

who inflict themselves as weapons upon other women is an abhorrent practice.

We must stop women who rise up the ranks through search and destroy missions, and who justify other women's inferiority in a culture that seeks to keep us there. We will fail to transform and rise above poor, abusive, and inhumane leadership on such a fertile battleground when there is such dissent and oppression within our own ranks. If bullying is the only way we know to get to the top, making women prime targets on behalf of our own deep-seated insecurities, we will surely fail to set the standard or raise the bar for women in military leadership positions. And bullying is the most cunning form of emotional manipulation; one that unleashes a degree of pathology from which victims may never recover. Ask most of us who have had the misfortune to serve with them and under them.

If we live in fear of other women getting ahead because we may be replaced, we will surely crash and burn and explode and will have earned that privilege. By the same token, those who seek to smash through the glass ceiling with a claw hammer will certainly face scrutiny and cast tremendous doubt on the ability of women to lead, not only in the workplace and within military culture, but in society at large. For too many, it boils down to temptation to stab every female perceived as a threat without hesitation. This is precisely what fosters such tremendous distrust of female commanders and leaders, by both women and men who serve with them.

What we must embrace, rather, is that hardships, challenges, sorrow, grief,

abuses and losses that are guaranteed occurrences throughout our military service absolutely must be the gorilla glue that forges the bands of sisters, as in the case of Lioness Missions in Iraq, and that leadeth us away from the temptation to conduct the hunt against our very selves. We cannot afford to allow ourselves to forget that we shared our very last sheet of the sandpaper we called toilet paper with the female Soldier in the crapper next to us, in godforsaken 130 degree latrine heat, or the very last shred of privacy by stringing up moldy blankets on 550 cord in our hooches, posting guard over our weapons while we took 3 minute combat showers every 6 weeks or so, or that we never let our sisters down when they could no longer do the duffel bag drag with bag number 4 and with a full combat load of ammo or that we helped them schlep the last of their gear off the shithook (Chinook) before it took off under fire, or that we slammed each other into the ground when we came under indirect fire to protect one another from certain death with the latest symphony of mortar and rocket attacks, or that we endured the true horrors and deprivations of war in proportions that no civilian could relate to, let alone survive, and *that we endured this together.*

Together we prevailed through what few ever could or ever will and that we are members of a club so exclusive, that it sets us far apart from those who remain clueless about the devastating impact of military and wartime service. We rose to it anyway because that is what was asked of us as Servicewomen in all branches of the military. Move over world, because we carry the heaviest of loads and ruck sacks and all our battle

rattle, all 50+ pounds of it, without expecting anyone else to carry our loads for us... and we did it with finesse, true grit, and the determination to overcome any adversity and ascend any obstacle. We can ill afford to forget, overlook, or fail to honor the irrevocable bonds of this uniformed sisterhood that steeled us against the forces of evil in the Global War on Terrorism and in prior wars, and the unforgettable roles we played. We cannot cast aside or lose sight of these gifts and connections and what we, as women Service Members and veterans, carry to the banquet table of military service. It is ours to assure that these messages are passed on to the generations of women that will follow in our boots and that do us proud because we did what was right by our sisters in uniform.

A Call to Leadership of Consequence

Time is long past due for women Service Members and veterans to take the lead as team players, to encourage those women in their charge to reach deeply within themselves to give birth to team spirit and camaraderie, to be compassionate and yes, even empathic and likeable. This should never be at the expense of a single other soul, regardless of gender. Women should be able and willing to take the lead without fear and to be agents of positive cultural change, where tolerance of the abuses inherent in venomous military leadership should be prevented at all costs. Is this little more than a pipe dream?

Herein lies the challenge: be not afraid to live your personal values, to demonstrate and exist and abide by principles that only incorporate integrity and morals,

and values and ethics for the betterment of the masses and not just the self. Refuse to be a part of that conspiracy of silence that tolerates abuse of women against women. Doing nothing makes us accomplices to crimes against humanity. We must devise within each of us a means to develop a call to action to lift up our sisters as agents of change. The onus is upon us to undertake this without expecting anything in return, other than the pure and unadulterated satisfaction and reward of conducting business righteously and honorably. Make these the large and lofty goals with a force that drives and propels. Do not just aspire, but *inspire* (Namin-Hedayati, 2014). It is certainly not a stretch to expect that women Service Members and veterans can be good leaders, good mentors, good parents, and good people all in one. There are many military women that we can identify as role models whom should be fully acknowledged as such. We should seek to emulate them for their fine leadership and moral fortitude. And by the way, one does not need to be bossy to be a boss. Throw that notion out with the trash. The premise that women must step quietly into management or anywhere for that matter is pure horse hockey. Kill off the notion that women were not born to lead. The desire and the initiative to lead are actually not gender-specific. It is quite acceptable, even noble, to pursue dreams and to work tirelessly for them, as long as there are no broken backs along the route.

Mental toughness and guts need to include heart and soul. This is an absolute. Walk in the front door, but do not slam it shut on your sisters in arms... your sisters, period. There is never a time to

squash your female counterparts on the way up the ladder. Ever. Be seen and heard as an effectual and powerful leader by enabling and promoting the advancement of your sisters. This should be the only way to make one's mark on the organization, the military, the culture, and our society as a whole. Your epitaph will not be inscribed with what you did, but who you were. Character still counts. Be not afraid to risk failure, as this means only one thing; that you were courageous enough to step up and to take the risk. Lead lives that are meaningful by doing meaningful work that does not include vitriol and venom as part of your enterprise. The truth is that it is a great thing to level the playing field based upon merit and decency and kindness and plain old human consideration.

A destructive force among women looks like this: support non-qualified women for positions of leadership. This is highly unlikely to advance the cause of women breaching the glass ceiling and the brick wall. If there is a loose brick, maybe getting rid of it really is the right thing. It is high time that women in the ranks of leadership, military or otherwise, develop the sheer and unadulterated courage to battle against the rising tide of being demeaned, discounted, disrespected, dismissed, reviled and shunned, oppressed and suppressed, only to become depressed by a cultural wasteland that seeks to suck the lives out of us and send us back to our ovens and our irons.

It is long past time to throw our sisters a lifeline and not a noose. As women warriors, our country asked us to place our lives on the line and to be geared up to give it up by making the ultimate sacri-

fice, only to find that the real enemy is within the gates: a culture of cruelty, indifference, and devaluation within the military and more specifically, within our own ranks of women leaders. There is every reason not to become fearless of one another. In an ideal world, we should be bound to have the backs and "the six" of our sisters in uniform. This is pure sustenance in the wartime theater of operations and when we march home to a society from which we are completely divorced and detached. We will only become more invisible if we are ridden with conflict and contentiousness.

A Charge to Women Leaders of Consequence

Be Joan of Arc, but quit burning each other at the stake in order to reach past that intangible barrier in the ceiling and the roof. Do not bite the hand offered you, but take it. Mentor; don't annihilate and assassinate. Build, but do not erode trust by spewing mean-spiritedness and derailing your sisters in uniform. Get them back on track. Stop ruthlessness and miscarriages of justice in their tracks. Refuse to tolerate lapses in judgment and character. Do not allow the women's movement to come only from your bowels. And remember that whatever women do, we must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good. Fortunately, this is not hard.

Live a life of consequence, but not at the expense of your sisters in uniform. Memorize the Girl Scout promise. Mean it when you say it silently to yourself. The time is long past due for us to address the critical need for changing the culture that enables and rewards toxic leadership.



I invite women of audacity to come forward to create a blue ribbon commission to confront the military culture of toxic leadership, and to contact the staff of our e-magazine directly. We want researchers, military women in leadership positions including top brass, experts and authors about women's leadership issues, to join forces with us to challenge the problem and to change the culture for women in uniform. It is time for us to be, not women of victimization, but women of valor.

Contact us: info@stress.org

**Subject line: Women of Valor
Blue Ribbon Commission**

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Antecedents and Solutions for Military Sexual Assault

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Introduction: The Problem

The military has a long and well-documented problem with sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape. There have been many attempts to address this problem. Survivors have exposed the problem by sharing accounts of their experiences in hopes of revealing the nature of the problem in films like *The Invisible War*, or by offering testimony in Congressional Hearings. The Department of Defense (DOD) has tweaked training with little measurable success. The testimony given by Nancy Parrish before the Commission on Civil Rights on January 11, 2013, referenced a 1992 LA Times story (<http://tech.mit.edu/V112/N44/tailhook.44w.html>) that quoted post-Tailhook Acting Navy Secretary as saying:

"We get it. We know that the larger issue is a cultural problem,

which has allowed demeaning behavior and attitudes towards women to exist within the Navy Department. Our senior leadership is totally committed to confronting this problem... Those who don't get the message will be driven from our ranks." (Parrish quoting O'Keefe, 2013)

There is no clear indication that attempts to curb violence after Tailhook yielded positive results.

Twenty-one years later, a Senate hearing on Military Sexual Assault the United States Senate Subcommittee on the Armed Services heard testimony from male and female military sexual assault (MST) survivors and Department of Defense officials. The Director of the Department of Defense Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Office (SAPRO), Major

General Gary S. Patton, offered testimony that illuminated how horrible sexual assault was, how the statistics in the 2012 SAPRO report were compiled, and who the stakeholders were in the sexual assault chain of support (Patton 2013).

The 2014 SAPRO report indicated that their data was provisional due to insufficient time to collect data (SAPRO 2014). It further indicated that there were an estimated 26,000 military rapes in 2013, based on an estimated 13% reporting rate. A different set of data collection methods were used to collect and extrapolate data, which indicated that there were 18,900 rapes in the military in 2014. As the SAPRO report indicated an increase in reporting to 25%, this shift in data extrapolation drove down the extrapolated

number of reports from 26,000 to 18,900 (SAPRO 2014, 8). There is no way to estimate an exact number of military sexual assaults and the subsequent health and mental health issues (let alone recriminations against victims who report) that follow such assaults. Nevertheless, these numbers reflect a significant unresolved problem some twenty plus years after the Tailhook scandal made the issue public. Sexual assault numbers in the tens of thousands indicate an inexcusable lapse in meaningful corrective action. A true revision of policies with more serious consequences for perpetrators (including more convictions) should have significantly reduced these crimes by now.

Within the 2014 SAPRO report, a RAND Workplace Study identified that 72% of



the victims who stated that they reported the crime, would report again (SAPRO 2014, 7). However, the data also indicates that 62% of Service Members who reported unwanted sexual contact experienced professional retaliation. In addition, social retaliation was reported by 53% of respondents, and adverse action was reported by 35% (SAPRO 2014, 10-11). One puzzle emerged in the data: how could 72% of participants report satisfaction in reporting, when 62% reported experiencing professional retaliation? Perhaps the 72% of assault survivors who were satisfied in reporting may have had a higher commitment to see justice enforced, despite risking loss of rank, income, and social retaliation within the military system.

Three other statistical under-reporting problems are also cause for concern. First, the SAPRO report discounted and dismissed eight percent of the reports as having occurred before military service. These reports may have included unwanted sexual contact (USC) by recruiters, in boot camp, or by other recruits during delayed entry. Second, data on USC by active duty military and veteran parents, family members, or family friends whom have learned the tools of grooming and disparaging victims remains largely underexplored and uncounted. Such factors can be a critical component in understanding how military sexual abuse may be a repetition of



some recruits' similar abuse prior to enlistment. Third, report/incident rates within each branch cannot be compared over time. Under-reporting and minimal prosecutions have been the norm since at least World War II, when the Judge Advocate General reported 971 rapes, with three services not even reporting (Brownmiller 1975, 75-78). In short, there is a long history of sexual abuse without accurate data collection and with minimal consequences for perpetrators in the military. It will be difficult to determine increasing or decreasing trends over time without a consistent program of data collection conducted by a research team independent of the Armed Forces in order to avoid conflict of interest within the military.

Clearly the Department of Defense has begun training military personnel to resist unwanted sexual contact, but with little measurable success. There are policies in place to combat sexual abuse in the military. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have insisted that they have a handle on this problem, and yet the problem persists. But "when policy conflicts with attitude, the victor will be attitude" (Hunter 2007, 238).

Issues have come to light which are of great concern and raise questions about the credibility and accuracy of the SAPRO report's findings. The SAPRO office itself has come under scrutiny for unwanted sexual contact. Lt. Col. Jeff Krusinski,

chief of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, was arrested in Arlington, Virginia on charges of having allegedly groped a woman in a parking lot (Martinez 2013). Krusinski was acquitted in November 2013 (Harding, 2013) by a civilian jury, despite a female bartender also testifying that she had also been groped by him the same night. He was later assigned to another position by the Air Force (Weiner & Sabatosky, 2013). If the SAPRO office is participating in sexual abuse, it is hard to believe that the SAPRO program is effective. When a SAPRO officer is charged with assault, the training that he received had no impact whatsoever on his attitude and inappropriate sexual behavior toward women.

In another more recent incident, Army SFC Gregory McQueen, who served as a sexual assault victim advocate at Fort Hood, was charged with organizing and running a prostitution ring (Reuters 2013). In 2015, he was convicted by court martial on 15 counts, including recruiting female cash-strapped Soldiers to join the ring. He was sentenced to 24 months confinement, dishonorably discharged, and reduced to E-1 (Associated Press, 2015). While this perpetrator was convicted, the issue remains that these two examples suggest that those selected to serve as victim advocates have not been subject to the highest level of scrutiny prior to appointment or during their tenures. It also raises doubts among victims as to whether to

trust the “advocates” to whom they are to report.

Revising the Questions and Proposing Solutions

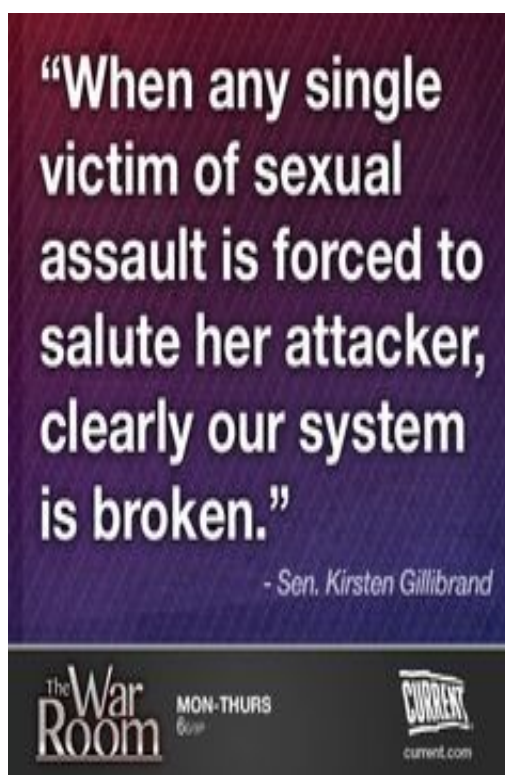
The increased media attention on military sexual assaults and lack of prosecutions led to Congressional proposals (The Military Justice Improvement Act SB 1752 or HR 1593 Sexual Assault Training Oversight and Prevention Act STOP Act) to remove investigation and adjudication from

the military chain of command to civilian courts. There was strong resistance within the military and veteran ranks (citing the history of separating military from civil justice), and the bills were defeated. The Department of Defense seems to be focusing their efforts, then, on two questions:

How many assaults are being reported (i.e., data collection and management), and

How can we appear to address the problem, with minimal internal cultural adjustment?

These questions are unlikely to produce solution-oriented answers and a real shift in culture. This article proposes that identifying better questions will yield better results. If the questions were changed to examine the *contributing factors* to sexual assaults and to *identify and implement systemic proactive inter-*



ventions, then the answers are more likely to change outcomes. Such questions include:

- What are the military cultural problems that make sexual assault permissible, limit victim reporting, and minimize prosecution and consequences of perpetrators?
- When attitude overpowers policy, what are these attitudes and why are they not being challenged by leadership?
- What interventions and outcomes match similar systemic problems in other settings?
- How can the military develop new interventions that reduce sexual assaults, shift attitude and culture, and build a more ethical and responsible fighting force?

Only when these questions are presented can true dialogue, brainstorming, and effective policies be developed and implemented. Only then will productive and consistent results manifest as meaningful change in behavior and outcome within the ranks.

What are the historical and cultural factors that contribute to the high incidents of sexual assault and rape in the military? Rape-supportive antecedents have been identified by writers such as Dr. Mic Hunter, author of *Honor Betrayed: Sexual Abuse in America's Military* (2007). These include traditional military training, hyper-masculinity, victim blaming, and the notion that the presence of a woman

can compel a man to assault. Other writers note that this is not simply a gender problem, however; continuous patterns of sexual assault occur across all military demographics, including male on male rape. Roughly half of the people that are assaulted in the military are men, with such crimes also remaining more likely under-reported, let alone unpunished (SAPRO reports, 2012, 2013, and SAPRO Appendix on male crime in 2014).

These crimes take traditional military training, of which building a warrior mentality of power, dominance, us versus the enemy, and combat skills are required, to an extreme:

A view of masculinity that emphasizes dominance, aggression, self-sufficiency and willingness to take risks, combined with rejection of compassion and empathy, is correlated with the propensity to rape (Morris 1982, 202-203). These are the very values that have been promoted in the military (Hunter 2007, 42).

For those with a history or propensity of physical or sexual assault prior to entering the service, this training may unwittingly trigger acting out with a distorted interpretation or rationalization of using one's training against one's own peers. Signs of violence, verbal and physical abuse towards one's peers that emerge in basic training, OCS, and other training points throughout military service warrant new policies to report, refer, assess, and determine capacity for or evidence of assault and victimization of others. Similarly, recognition of individual male or female troops who take on the role of

“black sheep”, are ostracized and ridiculed by peers, or otherwise isolated from peers due to youth, new assignments, etc., are targets for perpetrators. Programs need to be developed that identify at-risk troops and that train all troops in being on the alert for perpetrators. This kind of “observe and report” training could parallel recent training efforts among all military ranks to watch and report peers exhibiting suicidal ideation (<http://www.realwarriors.net/active/treatment/suicideprevention.php>).

The latter training was developed in response to a crisis in military suicides. A shift into recognition of military rape as a crisis (certainly inflicting wounds on all victims, some provoking suicide) might yield more effective preventive efforts at the individual and systemic levels.

Hyper-masculinity and negative perceptions of women have also been identified as predictors of sexual assault: “One study found that a man's attitude toward feminism was the most consistent predictor of date rape-supportive attitudes” (Hunter, 2007, 42). Cultural rejections of feminism are predicated on appeals to tradition, and lend credence to military rape culture. If feminism is perceived by the culture as evil, it is not much of a leap to declare that all women are “potential feminists” and therefore dangerous. Dr. Paula J. Caplan describes the dilemma this way:

Features of traditional socialization of women, such as passivity, fragility, and dependency, conflict with expectations for Service Members to be active, strong, independent, and emotionally tough.

Yet women in the military need to prove that they deserve as much as men to be in the military, even while the vast majority are told they are either dykes or sluts, and at least one-third are sexually assaulted while in service, for instance, an estimate of 19,000 such assaults last year in the U.S. military (Caplan, 2012).

Women are in danger. They are socially reared against self-efficacy, and if they demand equality, they are labeled as bad women who open themselves up to sexual harassment and assault. Women up the chain of command and women in team leader positions can provoke rage among male Service Members who hold women in low regard. Male peers and subordinates who exhibit perceived feminine traits are also targets. Male Service Members with evidence or history of abuse toward others, particularly sexual abuse, should be considered as “recruiting undesirables.” As recruits who hold gang or hate group membership are considered as recruiting undesirables, a policy review is in order to determine if hyper-masculinity and/or clear animosity toward women, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender, and other targeted individuals should be added to “recruiting undesirables”.

Victim blaming comes from both pressure and attitudes within the military and from civilian sources. Regrettably, some victim blaming comes from women. Appeals to upholding old traditions; rejecting feminism protecting victims are reinforced by civilian “news” discourse such as Liz Trotta’s February 12, 2012, on-air rant asserting that women in the military

should "expect" to be raped.

Trotta cited a new Pentagon report on sexual abuse in the military: "I think they have actually discovered there is a difference between men and women. And the sexual abuse report says that there has been, since 2006, a 64% increase in violent sexual assaults. Now, what did they [women] expect?" (Trotta, 2012). Trotta not only blames women for rape, but appeals to hyper-masculinity and the tradition of the dominant male military in one neat package. A civilian diatribe like Trotta's supports rape culture by reinforcing the cultural prevalence that is still shared among some women of blaming women for rape. By blatantly blaming women, Trotta exposes the traditional cultural myths of rape culture.

Interventions and New Cultural Paradigms

Breaking through cultural norms that allow military sexual assault and shifting to new cultural paradigms may take time, but must be done. Solutions emerge when those with the power to change military traditions are engaged in logical discussion and problem solving "outside the box" with stakeholders, and when more important issues than tradition are at stake (Damer 2009, 109). Curbing sexual assault is more important than appealing to the "good old days" of an all-male service, and the current practice of classmates, peers, and lower ranking men and women testifying for perpetrators to protect themselves and their careers.

Longitudinal and preventive interventions are needed to challenge and change these cultural problems. Successful out-

comes will rely on goal-oriented practices that include constant vigilance. Direct and rapid responses are needed to curb inappropriate language and behaviors that may be indicators of intent to harass or assault others. For example, if a senior enlisted person or an officer learns of one or more service members participating in abusive talk or discussing date rape, etc., those involved would be subject to immediate investigation, and if warranted, notation in their files and/or disciplinary action. Military commands should not tolerate language that includes discussions of assaults on anyone, or that encourages, dares, plans, or celebrates sexualizing of peers or subordinates, let alone rape. Similarly, policies need to be reviewed to eliminate materials available on post that celebrate assault, rape, and men and women as sexualized objects. These include selling pornographic materials, showing sexual and aggravated assaults in social movies, etc. These reinforce perceptions that the military endorses such behaviors. Actions speak louder than words.

Alternative Solutions

When an organization needs a systemic change, a training program should be established that makes a measurable difference to those who are trained and a significant difference in the system. What follows is a discussion on some problems and possible solutions for These include the use of mobile apps, the buddy system, and social problems.

One idea that can be incorporated into training is a mobile app that: a) informs all Service Members of military policy, reporting procedures, and consequences of

sexual assault; b) lists local, regional, and national help available for military assault victims, including 24/7 emergency phone contact; c) identifies emergency and long term interventions available to victims, including legal counsel contact information and options; and d) gives examples of each type of assault for victims to recognize the correct language to use, to validate their own experience, and to recognize that they are not alone.

When every Service Member considers the possibility of needing to help a victim then the concept of sexual assault becomes personal and a reality, and not "another training program we have to do". An additional mobile app could offer certification-based training to help every Service Member to be ready to engage, intervene, and offer support. The more Service Members who live the standard of resisting the antecedents to sexual assault permissive culture, the more likely that this problem can be reduced. Apps have been successfully developed within the Department of Defense through its National Center for Telehealth and Technology (T2) for other pervasive conditions related to military service, including Post Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Insomnia (<http://t2health.dcoe.mil/products/mobile-apps>). The assault statistics support that this would be an appropriate addition to T2 apps.

The documentary film *The Invisible War* (2012) showcased Department of Defense-approved barracks signs that said, "Wait 'til she's sober." The problems with these signs are they only address date rape, they are biased to indicate that



About the Safe Helpline App

The Safe Helpline App (for iOS or Android) allows sexual assault survivors in the military to create a customized self-care plan and connect to resources from anywhere in the world.

You can use the self-care exercises and information in the app whenever you'd like. Your personalized plan will be stored only on your mobile device so it will remain completely confidential. Once you download the app, you don't need an internet connection to use it

Safety

Our top priority is your safety. Because of that, we designed the Safe Helpline Mobile App so that you can remain completely anonymous.

While RAINN operates the Safe Helpline under contract from the Department of Defense (DoD), we will not share any personally identifying information about your download with the Department or your chain of command, unless required by law.

Keep in mind that if you are using a DoD or other work-related device, your employer may be able to track your usage of this app.

only women are raped. They place blame on inebriation. Language influences culture. Such posters narrow the conversation and support faulty thinking, ultimately contributing to the problem rather than the solution. The origin of such messages and the framework of thinking by those who developed them need to be reviewed and corrected.

For example, the Buddy System is in place at every command, but can be used against the victim. A victim might be blamed for his or her assault if they lose track of their "buddy," or the "buddy" may end up being the rapist. The Department of Defense should not abandon the Buddy System; rather, it should explore and correct some of its inherent problems.

Furthermore, standardization of reporting assaults, with consequences for failure to meet the standards, need to be in place. Commands vary in the reporting times after sexual assault incidents. When there is a time lag between incident and report, the command should be investigated for potential hostility toward victims.

The nature of hostility toward victims and perpetrator mentality also need to be examined. Dr. Mic Hunter's 2007 *Honor Betrayed: Sexual Abuse in America's Military* (Hunter, 2007) offers insight into perpetrator mentality. Dr. David Lisak, a psychologist who testified at the 2013 Civil Rights Hearing on Military Sexual Assault, has devoted his career to studying the causes and consequences of interpersonal violence and has written extensively on perpetrator mentality (<http://www.davidlisak.com/biography>).

These and other professionals are valuable as consultants in developing programs to combat the culture that continues to tolerate pervasive unpunished sexual assault.

Military and civilian subject experts, technology, and good social science are parts of a large toolbox of dynamic actions that the Department of Defense can engage in to begin to solve the unresolved military sexual abuse problem.

Borrowing Tools from Psychology

Any person or organization can follow the ABC (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence) problem-solving model used in cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) (Beck, 2011). "During CBT a therapist will actively work with a person to uncover unhealthy patterns of thought and how they may be causing self-destructive behaviors and beliefs" (National Institute on Mental Health 2015). When we examine military services' high frequency of sexual assault, we examine the following: What are the contributing antecedents - cultural and living conditions? Toxic thoughts? Intentions? Plans?

What are the behaviors of the perpetrator and the responding behavior of the victim? In this case, we know that the behaviors are sexual harassment, assault, and rape; but what is the consequence for each act? They are so minimal for most perpetrators that they reinforce the culture of continuing assaultive behaviors within the entire military community.

Reporting may lead to recriminations, ostracization, station transfer, or separation (voluntary or involuntary) from service

by the victim, any of which can lead to longstanding post-traumatic stress, suicidal ideation, and/or suicide.

In discussing interventions, the practice of shifting military tolerance of sexual assault toward zero tolerance will be labeled by this author as Organizational Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (OCBT). The design of a proposed training program incorporating the principles of OCBT should include independent data collection by those outside the system on antecedents and behaviors within the military community that support rape culture. Following implementation of training within each command, every individual should be questioned about antecedents and behaviors using a standardized protocol for data collection every time there is an incident reported. What did everyone, from the E1-07, notice that may have conveyed a message that harassment, assault, and rape would be tolerated? This data can be evaluated to identify where and how the command climate and specific circumstances could have prevented or diverted the assault. Data collection is a vital element of a data-driven model for culture change.

An OCBT-based review of organizational structure will point to places that might benefit from cultural education and intervention curricula. Each command should have a required reading list and compulsory annual internal and external training programs that drive culture change. There is a large body of literature dedicated to culture change in organizations with toxic leadership from which reading materials can be selected. There should be a subdivision of the ad-

ministrative military operation specialties that focus on cultural adaptation. This internal team needs to work in tandem with external subject experts on changing a culture supportive of sexual harassment and assault to one with zero tolerance and clear, rapid, and public consequences for perpetrators. The time for victim separations from service is over; it is time for the military community to identify and convict perpetrators and remove them from service.

This shift may require the development of a rewards based system for uncovering cultural problems and fostering systemic change, especially at the squad and company levels. Such rewards may tap those already available within the ranks: points toward promotion for completing training and certification programs, public honors for personnel who interrupt sexual assaults/offer emergency assistance to victims, etc.

In summary, the Department of Defense already has some of the tools to address its military rape problem. Among these are personnel from the top to the bottom of the chain of command who can implement change when given orders to do so; and adaptability, including the capacity to incorporate new training programs, transfer or "break up" toxic teams that have a history of sexual violence, and development of individual and group rewards for shifting the culture.

Unfortunately, the current military leadership pays it lip service while remaining embedded in the status quo of military justice. This has led to very few reports, fewer convictions, and tens of thousands

of traumatized military victims *every year*.

The system is in need of a major overhaul. It is time for coalitions of veterans and civilians, civil rights groups and veteran service organizations, national subject matter experts and program designers/evaluators, and Congress to lead the way in demanding justice for military rapists. It is time to demand a partnership approach with the Armed Services

to correcting its covert message that allows continued military assaults in record numbers. Sexual assault and rape will never be eradicated, but with a joint moral purpose, we can do a more effective job in eliminating its rampant existence within our ranks and casting a blind eye to the lifetimes of its consequences.



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If You Don't Write It, Who Will?

M. L. Doyle

M. L. Doyle has served in the U.S. Army at home and abroad for more than three decades as both a Soldier and civilian. Her first published book, *I'm Still Standing, From Captured U.S. Soldier to Free Citizen, My Journey Home*, (Touchstone, 2010), was nominated for an NAACP Image award. Her *Master Sergeant Harper* mystery series has been recognized with an Independent Publisher Book Award (IPPY), a Lyra Award, which recognizes the best in independently published e-books, and with the Carrie McCray Memorial Literary Award, the latter from the South Carolina Writer's Workshop. Mary's award winning fiction features women who wear combat boots. Unafraid of genre jumping, her work includes mystery, erotic romance, and co-authoring two memoirs which chronicle the lives of prominent women in uniform. Her latest book, *The Bonding Spell*, is the first book in a new urban fantasy series and was released in November 2015. A native Minnesotan, Mary currently resides in Baltimore where she is furiously penning more adventures. www.mldoyleauthor.com, Twitter, @mldoyleauthor.com.

One of my favorite quotes is from Winston Churchill, who said, "History will be kind to me because I intended to write it." It's a simple idea, but one that women, especially those who have served in uniform, need to hear and appreciate.

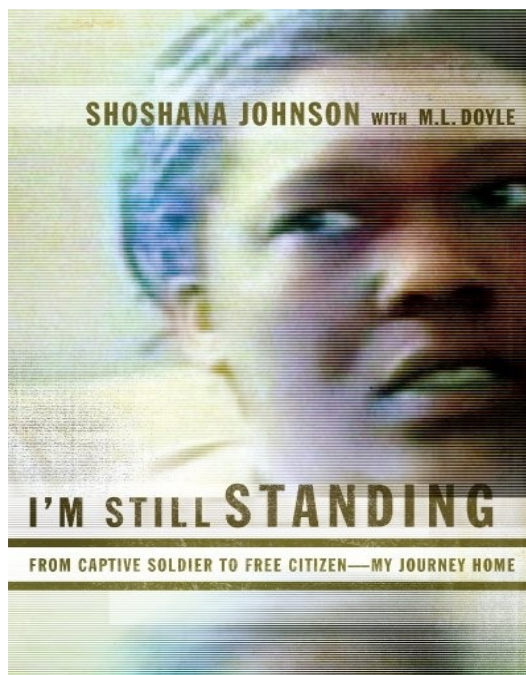
Women have served in times of war just as long as men have. In every war, in every battle, in every civilization, women have played some role, either in caring for the wounded, feeding the troops, sharpening blades or standing shoulder to shoulder alongside the men whom are first to receive any recognition for the service and sacrifice they've provided.

And despite the expanding roles women now assume in modern warfare, the military characters we see of the conflicts in the Middle East, be they in books, film or other genres, remain almost exclusively those of male warriors, and are still told by male warriors, writers, directors and playwrights. We can expect that trend to continue to be the case until women in all branches of service, across all eras and genres, record their stories and those stories are repeated and become mainstream in study, literature and entertainment.

Even as more women become involved in telling our stories of war and service in

uniform, many of us are doing so by continuing the tradition of centering the tale on male characters. Academy Award winning director, Kathryn Bigelow, has made a name for herself depicting intense stories like *The Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty*; stories which needed to be told, but which are centered on a male protagonist. And while I look forward to seeing the books that may document the experiences of the two women who have paved the way for other women by completing the Army Ranger School—Captain Shaye Haver and 1st Lieutenant Kristen Griest—we cannot limit our writing to women who achieve that level of success; we must encourage one another to not only tell each of our own experiences, but to celebrate them.

One of those stories is my co-authored memoir with Spec. Shoshana Johnson, a soldier in the 507th Maintenance Company. We tell the story of how Johnson, along with four members of her unit, were captured during an ambush in the early days of the Iraq War. Wounded and held prisoner for twenty three days, she was the first African American female POW in the modern age. Johnson's story is told in the book, *I'm Still Standing; From Captured US Soldier to Free Citizen—My Journey Home* (Touchstone, 2010). The book was nominated for an NAACP Image Award. That award and the fact that a major New York City publisher pushed for the publi-



I'm Still Standing (Touchstone, 2013) is the story of Specialist Shoshana Johnson, a soldier in the 507th Maintenance Company who was captured by Iraqi insurgents March, 2003 and held a prisoner of war for 23 days.

cation of this book is an important civilian acknowledgement of the importance of stories from a woman service member perspective.

Additionally, Brigadier General (Retired) Julia Cleckley was nominated for her star at a time when she was still mourning the loss of her husband to cancer and caring for her youngest daughter, who would also ultimately succumb to the cancer. BG Cleckley would be the first African American female general officer of the line in the Army National Guard. I worked with Cleckley to pen her story in the book, *A Promise Fulfilled; My Life As A Wife and Mother, Soldier and General Officer* (2013).

Kayla Williams writes about how women are increasingly chronicling their roles in war in her article published in the Los Angeles Review of Books, *Women Writing War; A List of Essential Contemporary War Literature by Women* (March 26, 2014). Williams lists several works, including *I'm Still Standing*, as evidence that women are writing about war. Cara Hoffman, in her New York Times op-ed, *The Things She Carried*, (March 31, 2014) believes that there has not been enough written from the female perspective. I agree.

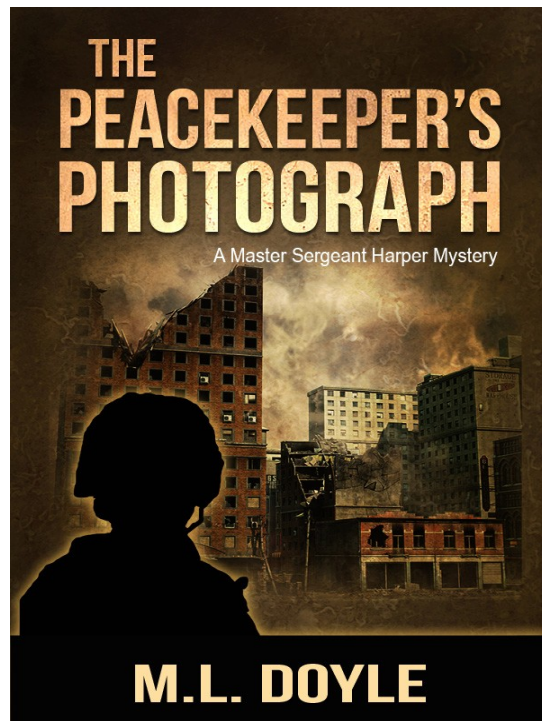
Memoirs have helped to at least begin a conversation about the lives of women in uniform, but this is only a start. To fully understand the roles women play, to depict their roles as equally vital to the mission, and in some circumstances, to protect identities and allow distancing of personally difficult or traumatic experiences, stories of women in uniform also can and should be fictionalized.

Fiction provides a vehicle for an author to accurately depict her military experience without making the story a personal one. In true storyteller fashion, the writer can use dramatic tension, fictionalized characters, alter locations and details of actual events or change outcomes.

My mystery series features a female Soldier in an accidental sleuth role. In *The Peacekeeper's Photograph* (2013), Master Sergeant Lauren Harper is deployed to a remote base in a country recovering from war. In *The Sapper's Plot*, Harper is participating in a humanitarian mission in the jungles of Honduras. In *The General's Ambition*, she is at the Combat Maneuver Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany. To anyone in uniform, these are familiar locations, familiar missions, a part of any Service Member's experience. The first-person female perspective presents a unique opportunity to view everyday life in uniform. A story told by a woman doing a job that doesn't involve Special Forces-like training will help people think of military service a bit differently. And perhaps the stories will simply be entertaining.

The realization that women veterans have stories to tell is growing. Look for opportunities to add your voice to the discussion and become active in veteran writing

workshops like Military Experience and the Arts (www.militaryexperience.org) or take the free weekend seminar offered through The Veteran Writing Workshop (www.veteranswritingworkshop.org). Check out Warrior Writers (www.warriorwriters.org) or Voices from War (www.voicesfromwar.org), to name a few. These are all organizations who understand the importance of telling the veteran story. Use them to start on the road to add your perspective and ensure that veteran stories include the voices of women.



The Peacekeeper's Photograph is the first book in the Master Sergeant Harper mystery series by M.L. Doyle and available at Amazon.com

I look forward to being a part of a panel of women veterans who write about their experiences at the next Association of Writer's and Writing Programs convention taking place at the Los Angeles Convention Center, March 30 to April 2, 2016. The panel discussion *Unsung Epics: Women Veteran's Voices* will feature women who served and write about their service through poetry, memoir and fiction. AWP is the largest literary writing convention in the country. The panel or-

ganizer, Jerri Bell, has worked long and hard to bring attention to the need for women veterans to put their stories on paper and record their experiences in every medium possible.

Poet or essayists, novelist or screenwriter, historian or autobiographer, it's time we ensure history will be kind to women who wear combat boots by writing about it ourselves.



Read the Women Who Have Gone Before You:

An Interview with Jerri Bell

M. L. Doyle

Jerri Bell is the Managing Editor for *O-Dark-Thirty*, the literary journal of the Veterans Writing Project. She retired from the Navy in 2008; her assignments included antisubmarine warfare in the Azores Islands, sea duty on USS *Mount Whitney* and HMS *Sheffield*, and attaché duty at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Russia. She has published both short fiction and nonfiction, and her work has won prizes in the West Virginia Writers annual competition and from Words After War. She and author/editor Tracy Crow (*Red, White, & True: Stories from Veterans and Families, World War II to Present*) have a book of military-themed nonfiction forthcoming from University of Nebraska Press/Potomac Books in 2017.

Jerri Bell, a former Navy pilot, author and advocate for veteran writers, has created an online bibliography of works authored by women veterans. The bibliography is part of a larger website packed with resources writers, especially female veteran authors, will find helpful. Her goal is to include as many works as possible and to remind us of the veteran status of authors we may already know.

The list includes authors of popular books from whom few recognize as veterans, such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1880), who was a nurse during WWI. It also includes Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, a surgeon, spy, prisoner of war and the only woman awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Walker wrote two books, *Hit; Essays on Women's Rights* (1871) and *Unmasked; or, the Science of Immorality* (1878), a book that explores infidelity.

These are only two authors of the scores of books already on library shelves which we may not realize were penned by women veterans.

I spoke to Bell, about her list and why the project deserves our attention.

Q: What made you decide to pull this extensive list together and how long did it take you to complete?

In 2013, I joined the staff of the Veterans Writing Project – a nonprofit organization that offers free writing seminars for veterans and family members, and publishes their work in print and online. Director Ron Capps had noticed that women veterans attending the seminars weren't speaking up or participating as much as the men, and he challenged me to put together a special seminar just for women veterans, to give them a safe space to tell

their stories.

First I looked at our seminar curriculum, *Writing War: A Guide to Telling Your Own Story* (2013). It's a craft-of-writing book, and when Ron wrote it he found examples of craft in books by veterans from Leo Tolstoy to Tobias Wolff. But in the entire book, there was only one example of writing by a woman veteran: Vera Brittain, a British woman who served as a nursing aide in World War I and who wrote a classic memoir, *Testament of Youth*. I thought: surely there must be more, and I started looking for writing by American women who had served in the military. I only found two books: Kayla Williams's memoir *Love My Rifle More Than You* (2005), and the poetry/nonfiction anthology *Powder: Writing by Women in the Ranks, from Vietnam to Iraq* (2008).

About six months later, civilian novelist Cara Hoffman (*Be Safe, I Love You*, 2014) wrote an op-ed for the *New York Times*, "The Things She Carried," in which she lamented that the narratives of women veterans were "nearly absent from our culture" because they simply weren't being told. Kayla Williams responded in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* with a list of books by women veterans. Game on!

Once I started running those books through the search engines, I found others. Eventually I went to the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, where I spent three hours sitting on the

floor taking notes on the books for sale in their gift shop (and getting a lot of funny looks from both the staff and the tourists). That led to an annotated bibliography of writing by and about women veterans, by historian Judith Bellafaire (2010). She cataloged hundreds of books, most self-published or printed in limited runs by small presses, and a sampling of newspaper and magazine articles. She also listed a number of unpublished memoirs in archives and libraries across the country. Friends who knew I was curating a bibliography of women veterans' writing shared their sources, and Susan O'Neill – a writer who'd served as a nurse in Vietnam – walked up to me at a conference and gave me a copy of her excellent short story collection.

Eventually I learned that the one woman (Dr. Mary Edwards Walker) who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor had written two books. Another American veteran (who had to serve in the British Women's Auxiliary Air Force during World War II because she physically didn't qual-

Whatever may come from your days on
this earth, wherever the paths you take may
lead you, know that every defeat, every
loss, every step backward gives you the
strength, courage, and determination to
turn them into successes, wins, and dreams
come true.

-g.j.t. (@midnightxxrider)

ify for service in the American Women's Army Corps) not only won the National Book Award, but also founded the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction. Who knew that women veterans had that literary heritage?

Q: The books are extremely diverse and aside from the fact they're all written by women veterans, is there something consistent you find in them? Something maybe only a female veteran writer can bring to the table?

Civilian author Tanya Biank says in her book *Undaunted* (2014) that the military has a "curious mix of traditional men and unconventional women drawn to its ranks," and I think that "unconventional women" is a perfect description of many of the women veterans who have written their memoirs. Women veteran memoirists often reflect on ways in which their service was something new, something unconventional, even something socially unacceptable to many. Kayla Williams has said quite correctly that "no woman joins the military to prove her manhood," and you also see in the memoirs that most women who wrote about their service claimed to have joined either out of a sense of civic duty or economic necessity. The memoirs of women veterans cannot be understood out of the historical context of the times when the women served. Many women veterans also wrote about the challenges and rewards of gender integration in the armed forces – most men writing military memoirs don't have much to say about that.

I have some theories about what might be unique in contemporary fiction by women

veterans, but since I'm still curating the bibliography and working on a military nonfiction book (with former Marine Tracy Crow; due out in spring 2017), I haven't yet had time to do enough close reading and critical thinking to find out if the books and stories bear the theories out. I've proposed a paper for an academic conference on fictional depictions of women veterans who experienced trauma, and if the proposal isn't accepted I'll eventually do the work anyway and blog about it instead of writing an academic paper. I'm also looking forward to hearing the perspectives of other women veterans who write at our upcoming panel at the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) Conference in Los Angeles in 2016.

But don't ask me about poetry – I don't know enough about poetry to string together a coherent sentence!

Q: Why is it important for women veterans to write their stories?

I think that women veterans who have the desire and ability to write their stories – whether as a memoir, or in fiction or poetry – also have a kind of obligation to write. To tell it like it was, and not to leave it up to the journalists, the historians, and the pundits to tell our stories for us.

Classicist Mary Beard argues in the *London Review of Books* that there's a gendered aspect to public speaking and silence that goes all the way back to ancient Greece: the right to speak in public not only belonged exclusively to men, but was a defining attribute of maleness. That was certainly the case when I was serving – I joined the Navy three years before the Tailhook scandal broke, and women in uniform all saw what happened to Paula

Coughlin when she spoke up and challenged the status quo. If you wanted to stay in, you kept your head down and your mouth shut. We were also conditioned to think that anything we said or did reflected not just on ourselves, but on all women serving. So not only were we silenced; we were made complicit in that silencing. But in modern America women have a right to speak up, and perhaps even an obligation to participate some way in the public discourse about America's military and America's wars.

I didn't always think that way. When I got to grad school, our fiction advisor asked me to revise the chapters of the Navy novel I was working on – to write them from the point of view of a woman. It wasn't that the male character that I was writing was poorly done, he said; it was that he felt the themes I was exploring would be more interesting if the stories were told from a woman's point of view. I flat-out refused. I was still on active duty, and I told him that I couldn't do it. Women in the military just didn't tell our true stories. The costs would be too high. I put my fiction thesis in File Thirteen within a month of graduation, and planned never to write anything about the military again.

Several years later, when I was revising the Veterans Writing Project seminar for a women's class, I realized that I couldn't ask other women veterans to take the risk of telling their stories if I wasn't willing to tell my own. The first personal essay I wrote was picked up for publication immediately. It took longer to get some Navy fiction ready for submission, but the first of those stories has been accepted for publication and is forthcoming in the winter issue of *CONSEQUENCE Magazine*.

Q: Does it frustrate you that some of these books are so unknown? Do you think if they were more action packed or written by men that their appeal would have been or would be wider?

Not at all! I see it as an opportunity to revive interest in some of the earlier work, and to reconsider women veterans' writing in light of the changing roles of women in the US Armed Forces.

If the books that women veterans have written were more action-packed they would certainly attract a different audience, perhaps a wider one. A few more men might be interested in reading them. In the end, I don't think that any female narrative, no matter how action-packed, is going to appeal to traditional men who look to literature to reflect and reveal something to them about masculinity – which could be part of the appeal of war literature for many men. And focusing on action narratives could obscure unique things that women veterans have to say about military service, American society, and war. Channeling women veterans' stories into "she-ro" narratives and "trauma narratives" is just too limiting. We have a wide variety of experiences of service and war. We don't have to write about infantry patrols and firefights. And it's up to us to tell our stories as well as we can – to make them dramatic, interesting, and meaningful.

This is an exciting time for women veterans who want to write for publication. The changes to combat exclusion laws have generated a great deal of public interest in what women have to say about military service and war. We just need to get to work. To write. And to write well.

My Writing Path

M.L. Doyle

My memories of my mother are filled with images of her reading stories to me and my siblings, going to the library with her, and later, having arguments with her over who would get to read which books first from the massive stacks we'd borrowed. As an adult, my conversations with her always included a discussion of what we were reading, what we'd enjoyed most and what we didn't. Our interests tended to ebb and flow together as we'd read several selections in literature, then horror, then mystery or science fiction. The only consistent thing being that we were always reading something, usually several books a week.

It was her encouragement that cemented my decision to join the Army Reserve. She'd served in the Women's Army Corps during WWII and knew firsthand the benefits of service in uniform. Her thoughts on any subject always carried more weight than anyone else's.

So when I took creative writing courses and later, several screenwriting courses, my mother's opinion on the words I'd labor over was the first I sought. She never went easy on me and at one point handed me one of my short stories, shaking her head. "Stick to non-fiction," she'd said.

Those words broke my heart, but as much as I respected her opinion, it was one bit of parental advice I had to ignore. I continued to write short stories and screenplays, becoming involved in two different writing workshop groups and looking forward to evenings spent discussing and critiquing work. When I moved overseas, the long hours and frequent travel of my work life left little time for my writing hobby.

It wasn't until I returned to the States that I decided to take a mystery writing class at a local community college. The short course reinvigorated my love of writing, it got me involved in another writing critique group and eventually, led to the completion of my first novel, *The Peacekeeper's Photograph*, (2013).

Now, people ask me how to do it. How do you write a book? The answer is to begin without fearing how it will end.

If you need an extensive outline or a loose collection of notes or no notes at all, the most important thing is to begin. Don't think about the final product or worry what others will think of the words you are collecting. Just start. Don't worry about the perfection of a sentence until later. Don't over-think the motives or the message until

you know where you're going. Books are a bunch of words that lead to sentences on a bunch of pages. Start by writing the words.

If writing isn't your thing and you've convinced yourself that putting words to paper will be impossible for you, than consider hiring a ghost writer. My first published book, *I'm Still Standing, From Captive Soldier to Free Citizen, My Journey Home* (Touchstone, 2010) – and note, that incredibly long title was one the publisher came up with – was a co-authored story I wrote for Shoshana Johnson, who was taken prisoner during the early days of the Iraq War and is the first African-American female POW. Later, I assisted Brigadier General (Retired) Julia Cleckley writer her incredible story of triumph over adversity in, *A Promise Fulfilled, My Life as a Wife and Mother, Soldier and General Officer*, (2013). Julia's youngest daughter had always wanted to write her mother's story, understanding how vital it was to women's history. Unfortunately, Ellen died before they even began the project. I had the privilege of helping the general put her story to paper and I'm so happy it is now available for the world to read and ponder.

If working with another author isn't for you, use some other medium. Speak into a microphone, record your stories on a home video camera or better yet, tell your children or grandchildren. Tell someone.

My mother passed away while I lived overseas. I spend a great deal of time thinking about the hours we could have spent talking about her life as a WAC, what her basic training had been like, how it felt to serve during that war, stories that are lost to me now. The only thing she ever told me was that she volunteered to go to Berlin after the fighting was over. She'd been deeply disappointed when her request was turned down. Instead she stayed stateside working as a medical technician, treating the wounded who'd been fortunate enough to return.

Aside from the members of my writing critique group, my siblings are the first readers of my work now. It fascinates me to hear what others have taken from my work, good or bad. I try to absorb what they have to say, but have learned to know what suggestions to act on and what to discount.

I wonder what my mother would have thought of the fact that my first published book was a work of non-fiction. I cried for her absence when I opened that box of books and held one in my hand for the first time. Even now, when I see the first printed copy of my seventh published book, *The Bonding Spell* (2015), I can't help but think of her. What would she have thought? Would she still think I should stick to non-fiction?

The [Bonding Spell](#) is dedicated to my mom.

Adaptive Sports for Women Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Military Sexual Trauma

**Tonya Butler Collins NSCA-CPT, LMT
United States Army 1990-1996
United States Army Reserve 1996-1998
PhD Candidate, United States Sports Academy**

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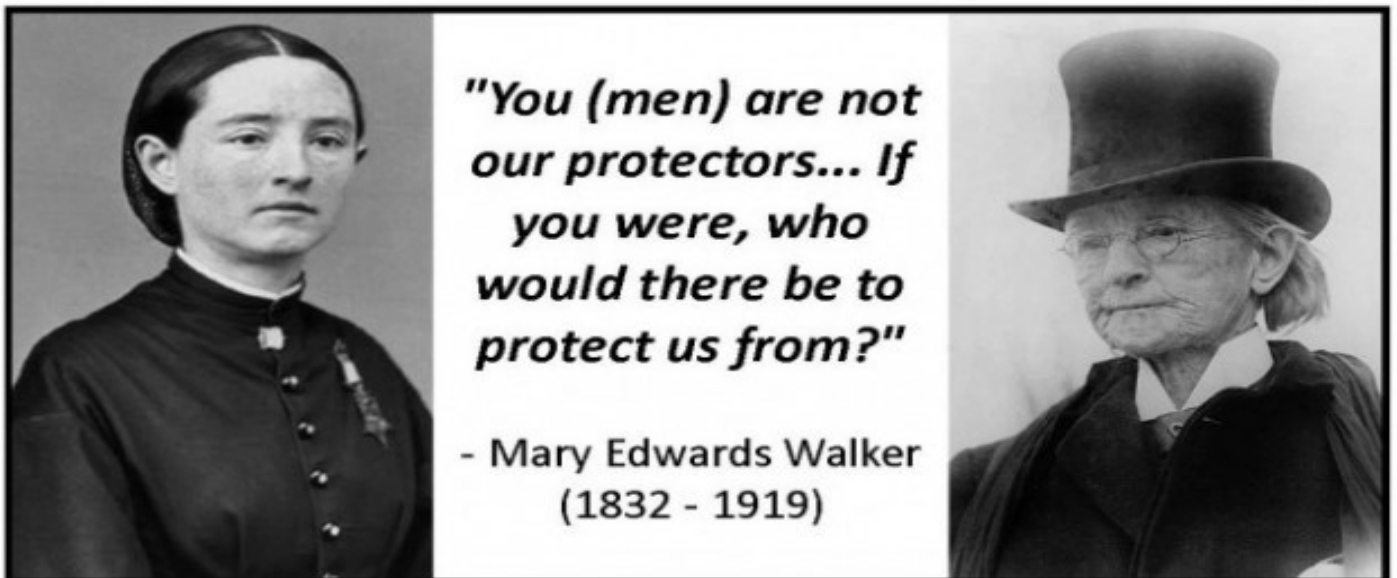
Tonya Butler-Collins, MSED, NSCA-CPT, LMT, is a Gulf War era veteran who served in the US Army Band as a flute/piccolo player. After a traumatic injury in the military, Ms. Butler-Collins was forced to change careers and later became an Assistant Professor of Health, Physical Education and Recreation at the University of North Georgia. Currently, Ms. Butler-Collins is completing her doctoral dissertation in sports sciences at the United States Sports Academy on a full scholarship. Her research emphasis is on adaptive sports for veterans with traumatic brain injuries and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. She is a volunteer with a national organization called Team River Runners, whose mission is simply to help veterans heal by getting "butts in a boat". She has been an advocate and a faculty advisor for student veterans and a community activist for women veterans. Ms. Butler-Collins is a certified strength and conditioning specialist, as well as a licensed medical massage therapist and a master trainer for Trigger Point Technologies. She is a certified kayak instructor through the American Canoe Association, in addition to a specialist in adaptive paddling for people with disabilities. Ms. Butler-Collins travels and speaks on topics of myofascial compression techniques and on adaptive sports for wounded veterans. You may reach her at tonya_bc@yahoo.com or mobile.al@teamriverrunner.org

Johan Huizinga once said, "Play is a uniquely adaptive act, not subordinate to some other adaptive act, but with a special function of its own in human experience" (Huizinga, 1948). Dreams, passions, and purpose are what guide us to finding fulfillment in our lives. Play, sports, and recreation are integral components of this journey. This is how we are able to recreate who we are, and to work on who we want to become. Huizinga describes play as being purposeful and a necessary part of how we learn to be... well, human.

There are many women whom have answered that special call of duty to serve this country, in order to preserve the ability for all to pursue our dreams, be able to experience great adventures, and become whatever and whomever we choose. There is a cost to answering that call of duty. For some, it has been far greater than expected, changing their dreams and aspirations and dampening their ability to pursue them. Every veteran who has served in the Armed Services has his or her own

unique story. There are stories of great achievements and accomplishments as well as epic failures. The most frequent stories are of bonds formed and camaraderie with fellow unit members. The military transforms its forces to be fearless, protect the weak, and preserve freedom at all costs.

There are no reliable military statistics on disabled veterans, and little information beyond personal accounts, to tell us what life might have been like for wounded and disabled veterans during the first hundred years of American history. Most who served were men, but women served as nurses, laundresses, cooks, and in other supportive roles, beginning with the Revolutionary War. The first woman Medal of Honor recipient, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, served during the Civil War as a surgeon in the Union Army (http://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2015/0315_womens-history/). We can infer from death rate records from the Revolutionary War through the Civil War that because of insufficient medical care and the primitive state of



the medical profession, most severely wounded soldiers died, unlike those surviving with disabilities today (Puente-Duany, 2009). The survival rate of wounded combat veterans has continued to rise, beginning with Vietnam War through Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), as Service Members receive treatment while still in the field, are rapidly removed to field hospitals and returned stateside for state-of-the-art medical treatment, and face rehabilitation interventions that continue to evolve.

Despite these medical interventions, the transition back to the life of a veteran among civilians has proven to be difficult for some of our veterans, both men and women. Today, counselors, therapists and researchers are identifying a great increase in transition issues: there are physical disabilities, chronic pain, emotional issues dealing with the aftermath of combat and other life stressors, struggles to create a new identity and "fit in" with family and community, and for those who remain employable, the search for new employment after leaving active duty. The shift toward mind-body medicine and integration of "alternative interventions" into rehabilitation has prompted an expansion of sports and recreational opportunities for veterans. While participation in recreational and athletic opportunities helps maintain physical and emotional balance for many veterans, those veterans with post-traumatic stress, brain injury, and/or military sexual trauma are faced with finding a good fit in selecting a sport that can be adapted to special needs such as variable energy level, pain management, compromised mentation, and safety.

Historical Perspective

Organized sports for persons with physical disabilities existed as early as 1911, when the "Cripples Olympiad" was held in the United States. One of the successful athletes was Walter William Francis, a Welshman, who won both the running and wrestling championships (Thames Star, 1913). Adaptive sports programs were expanded to meet the need to rehabilitate veterans from World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars, primarily served male veterans. Jim Winthers, a WWII veteran who was a member of the U.S. 10th Mountain Division – the Skiing 10th, an elite group specifically trained for alpine warfare, was one of the early pioneers of adaptive sports. In 1953, Winthers was director of the Donner Ski Ranch in Northern California. Reunited with two buddies who lost legs in the war, and using techniques he saw in Europe, he taught them to ski on one leg (Disabled Sports USA, 2010). In 1967, the National Amputee Skiers Association (NASA) was founded with three chapters, and later renamed as the National Handicapped Sports and Recreation Association (NHSRA). In 1994, NHSRA was renamed Disabled Sports USA; it now includes 91 chapters in 36 states (Disabled Sports USA, 2010).

Today, opportunities for adaptive sports are available for both civilians and military personnel who have sustained permanent physically disabling injuries while in Iraq, Afghanistan, and across the globe. The Veteran's Administration (VA) recognizes 30 different sports as a therapeutic addition to treatment. The most recent publication of community based adaptive sports programs is posted at <http://www.va.gov/adaptivesports/docs/>

[CBASP web spreads.pdf](#).

Disability classification for sports exists in four categories: physical, mental, permanent and temporary. Disabled sports, also called adaptive sports or para-sports, are played by persons with a disability, including physical and intellectual disabilities. Many disabled sports are based on existing able bodied sports, modified to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. However, not all disabled sports are adapted; several sports that have been specifically created for persons with a disability have no equivalent in able-bodied sports. Some examples of sports developed for those with disabilities are wheelchair racing and basketball, power soccer (indoor soccer using power wheelchairs), and audio darts, goalball, and beeper ball (designed with sounds embedded in equipment for blind athletes).

Target Populations for Adaptive Sports

The Research and Development (RAND) Center for Military Health Policy Research recently found that 31 percent of returning Service Members from Iraq and Afghanistan meet criteria for a mental health condition such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or report experiencing a traumatic brain injury (TBI) (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). In addition, many service members are returning from combat with a wide variety of physical disabili-



ties, including amputations and visual impairments. Researchers have suggested that service members are twice as likely to experience amputations in OIF and OEF, as a result of the improvised explosive device (IED), than in any other conflict in the past century (Weisskopf, 2007). Incidents of service members returning home with visual impairments have also increased significantly (Zoroya, 2007).

Among Overseas Contingency Operations veterans utilizing health services through a VA hospital or care center between the years of 2001 and 2011, 21 percent were diagnosed with a depressive disorder (Congressional Budget Office, 2013). As of January 2009, the VA estimates approximately 20 percent of OIF and OEF veterans screened positive for traumatic brain injuries (TBI). In 2008, the VA reported that 21 percent of women screened positive for military sexual trauma (MST) during intake and physical assessments (Williamson, 2009).

Taken together, the numbers of TBI, PTSD, and MST diagnoses among women veterans are staggering. Just these three conditions, let alone those including other physical and mental health diagnoses, represent a huge

number of women veterans in need of adaptive sports and recreational opportunities that can accommodate chronic pain, trauma triggers, and/or avoidance reactions to new situations (the latter secondary to perceived threats to one's health and safety). At the same time, these sports opportunities are essential to maintaining women veterans' physical health, optimizing weight, rebuilding self-confidence, and offering supportive connections to others.

The Benefits and Implications of Adaptive Sports for Veterans

The benefits of physical activity and adaptive sports for injured veterans include reduced stress, increased quality of life, lower blood pressure, weight management, and enhancement of the rehabilitative process. Adaptive sports are available for veterans with cognitive, emotional, physical, and/or social impairments. They are meant to engage veterans in community-based activities to help them overcome their injuries. Through sports, wounded veterans have the opportunity to create new friendships, learn new skills, and challenge each other in some friendly competition. However, sports offer more than just an enjoyable activity to veterans. The increase in self-confidence and expanded perception of one's capacity to excel in physical activities, provide much more important motives and outcomes for participation (Cornett & Puymbroek, 2010).

Adaptive sports and therapeutic recreation programs are also uniquely positioned to help alleviate many of the physical and emotional symptoms of PTSD, TBI and MST. They facilitate stress reduction,

the development of social networks, the redevelopment of skills needed to enjoy activities, and the recreation of joyful memories, all of which are particularly challenging for veterans with PTSD, TBI, and MST (Schiraldi, 2000). As the number of women veterans who have served during OIF and OEF conflicts with acquired disabilities such as TBI, PTSD, and MST expands (Ainspan & Penk, 2008), so will the need for therapeutic recreation specialists and adaptive sports programs to meet their needs.

Disabled Sports USA teamed up with the Department of Labor to study the correlation between participation in sports and employment among Americans with disabilities. The study sample of 1,108 Americans with disabilities included 203 veterans who suffered traumatic injuries while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. The results showed that 90 percent of disabled veterans surveyed felt their quality of life had significantly improved through physical activity (Disabled Sports USA, 2009).

In another study, Wise & Matthews (2010) found that one year after injury, more than three-fourths of their subjects with TBI had not returned to pre-injury levels of leisure activities. Their new activities were less social and more sedentary, such as watching television. The study also concluded that those individuals who survived a TBI, experience a substantial decrease in participation in leisure activities after injury, with a resulting negative impact on life satisfaction.

There are numerous programs emerging all over the United States that provide recreational opportunities for men and women veterans recovering or moving

through issues related to PTSD, TBI and/or MST. These programs are organized by individuals who share a common mission to help those who sacrificed for our freedoms. Many of these programs are moving wounded warriors out of hospital beds and putting them in kayaks, out on the trails or on yoga mats.



Engaging Female Veterans

The total veteran population in the United States and its territories as of September 30, 2015, was 21,680,534. The population of women veterans numbered 2,035,213. States with the largest number of women veterans were Texas, California, Florida, Virginia and Georgia (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Refer to populations



All Women's Trip on the San Juan River sponsored by Team River Runner and Adaptive Sports Association

listed by state: <http://www1.va.gov/WOMENVET/docs/WomenVeteransPopulationFactSheet.pdf>. Women now represent 10 percent of all veterans, and almost 18.5 percent of our current Service Members, numbers that will only increase as more women enlist and more career tracks open to women Service Members (<http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2013-Demographics-Report.pdf>). Women are now eligible for 90 percent of all assignments. The increase in the numbers of women serving in combat and the increase in victims reporting MST have led to more women filing claims and seeking treatment for injuries. As these numbers rise, there is an increasing need for adaptive sports for this population.

In May 2015, I was given the opportunity to participate in a program designed for female veterans offered by Team River Runner USA (www.teamriverrunner.org), in collaboration with Adaptive Sports Association out of Durango, Colorado (<http://asadurango.com/>). The staff was made up of an all-female crew of raft guides, as well as all-female veteran participants. We began our journey in Durango, Colorado and traveled down to the San Juan River in Utah. We paddled 59 miles down the San Juan River in 5 days using rafts, inflatable kayaks and hard shell kayaks. This trip gave female veterans an opportunity to bond with each other and to talk through some of the unique issues of our military service, as well as the transitions, injuries and traumas that we have faced.



Team River Runner Southeast Rendezvous in Bryson City, NC

I took the opportunity one evening around the campfire to ask these ladies about other programs in which they have participated. I also wanted to know more about why they had not participated in other adaptive sports and recreation programs so that I may advise program directors in

breaking down barriers that prevent female veterans from participating. There were many interesting points made, but three consistent responses emerged: a) a lack of awareness of adaptive sports programs; b) erroneous impression that programs are exclusive to combat veterans only; and c) the lack of female participation in programs (e.g., no women in promotional photos or program descriptions, no female only sessions, no female guides or instructors, etc.). This single adaptive sports experience was transformative. It encouraged many of us who participated to self-identify as veterans, connect with other female veterans, and take more risks in adaptive sports. We encourage other female veterans to do the same!

Adaptive sports were created for all veterans as an alternative or supplement to clinical treatment. Some of the roadblocks to participation are similar for both men and women: reluctance to take risks or test physical capacities (especially after injuries), difficulty in identifying resources and for those with MST, and fear for one's safety in new situations. Women have some additional roadblocks, including finding resources exclusively for women, single parenting issues, including managing finances, arranging for childcare in order to attend, and fear that getting injured might have catastrophic effects on caretaking of children and maintaining family functions. Programs designed for "women veterans only" may alleviate some of these issues, especially for those with MST who fear and avoid participating in co-ed programs. There are many programs that offer op-

portunities to integrate the family unit in sports and recreation. A number of adaptive sports and recreation programs exclusively for women have been developed to encourage women to “take the plunge” in supervised experiences such as Team River Runner as described above. For example, Challenge Aspen Military Opportunities (CAMO) retreats in Colorado offer co-ed, couple, family and women veteran retreats with seasonal opportunities to ski, snowboard, skate, fly-fish, raft, and hike (<https://challengeaspen.org/military/>). Women Veteran Social Justice (WVSJ), based in Georgia, offers half-day programs for women veterans that introduce them to working in the expressive arts, and to working with horses in equine therapy. It also sponsors meet-ups that incorporate adaptive indoor rock-wall climbing, and weekend retreats in the mountains or at the beach, with options for hiking, swimming, and walking (<http://www.wvsjnetwork.org/>). Boulder Crest Retreats in Virginia offer a variety of Warrior PATHH retreats for men and women veterans (separately), as well as veteran couples and families. These programs incorporate group recreational activities including archery, equine therapy, and instruction in yoga and meditation (<http://www.bouldercrestretreat.org>).

While funding may pose a roadblock, many of these programs (including those described above) are free to veterans. These programs solicit support from their communities through fundraisers and grants to provide all the necessary resources available to provide the veteran the opportunity to participate. For women with children, some of these pro-



Challenge Aspen



Boulder Crest Retreat

grams incorporate family experiences that help military and veteran children identify and connect with other children, while their mothers connect to other veterans. A message of “we are not in this alone” enhances a strong bonding experience for all participants.

For those women who have previous experience in individual or team sports and are ready for a higher level of skill set development, and/or want to participate in competitive sports, the U.S. Military Paralympics program offers local, regional, national, and international competition. As of 2014, the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) designated almost 200 local service providers as Paralympic Sport Clubs, many of which have programs specifically for veterans. These opportunities are funded by the VA in partnership with the USOC and third party grants (<http://www.teamusa.org/US-Paralympics/Military/Veterans-Affairs-Partnerships>). The VA has a website designated to assisting veterans in locating a Sports Club closest to them (http://www.va.gov/adaptivesports/va_clubFinder.asp).

While some women veterans may be interested in competitive, adaptive sports, many are not. Regardless of skill level or experience, we encourage more women to take a chance and find a program that can best accommodate personal and family needs.

Summary and Recommendations

Transition from military service to civilian life has proven to be difficult for many women who have spent time serving their country. Research and personal statements from veterans have shown that be-

sides police and fire services, there are few jobs that can fill the loss of camaraderie that is longed for after one leaves military service. The sense of belonging and trust that is earned among “battle buddies” and unit members is difficult to explain to those who have not had the same experience. Service to country is not only a commitment to serve the people, it is also a lifestyle. There is an urgent need for more alternative recreation and adaptive sports in the toolbox for helping wounded women veterans on the road to recovery.

Recommendations

Funding is needed to expand adaptive sports and recreation programs and will need to extend beyond funding from the Department of Defense and the VA. Corporations, veteran service organizations, sports teams at all levels, and nonprofit organizations (particularly those whose missions target outdoor, recreational, and athletic opportunities) need to be invited to underwrite more adaptive sports programs for wounded women veterans. Collaborative efforts to promote and host events at local, regional, and national levels, similar to those currently invested in the Warrior Games, are needed across a wide variety of sports for those women who are not ready for or capable of the rigorous competition of the U.S. Military Paralympics.

Female veterans also need to step up, self-identify, and begin to participate in programs. It is a cyclical battle for organizations to begin new programs, but they often cannot or do not know how to locate enough women veterans to participate. Women veterans have been asking for al-

alternatives to drug therapy, and adaptive sports and recreation opportunities are among the most viable and beneficial options. It is now up to us to seek out information on these programs, participate, encourage and invite other women to participate.

There is also a need for cooperative programming from community partners. Many organizations that are currently operating outdoor recreation programs could readily open their doors to begin working with women veterans and offering opportunities for them to experience new adventures. Barriers such as fixed incomes for veterans living on disability and the need for transportation to and from programs, limit their participation. Though there are programs that seek funding to cover all costs, there are many that cannot cover expenses associated with travel to and from program sites. This is a great opportunity for corporations or other donors to issue scholarships or grants to support transportation for veterans to participate in these programs.

Women veterans need to take leadership roles to create, expand, and lead adaptive sports programs for other women veterans. Participation in programs where few females are present opens the doors for more women veterans to feel comfortable, knowing there is one of her own there to support her. More women veterans are also needed in university and graduate programs offering sports and recreation degrees. These programs are largely staffed or managed by male instructors/professors, few veterans, and have almost no women veterans in teaching and research positions.

Women veterans need to be visible in their communities and become advocates for other women veterans. Volunteering to serve as advisors or board members for adaptive sports and recreation programs will increase the visibility of women veterans, as well as offer opportunities to serve as advocates for more women veteran programs.

Finally, there is a need for further research on the efficacy of offering adaptive sports to women veterans. Those of us who have participated in these programs know from personal experience that they do change lives, our perspectives on the world, and our belief in ourselves; however, without scientific evidence to support this, it is difficult to justify funding. For this reason, I have chosen to pursue research in adaptive sports and to develop more opportunities for disabled men and women veterans. I have experienced how the very act of placing one veteran's "butt in a boat", saved her from taking her own life because of feelings of worthlessness. We need to commit to our fellow sisters (and brothers) to do our parts to support these programs with research-based interventions, to promote programs for veterans who have no knowledge of the resources available, and to encourage all veterans to "get back to nature, the outdoors, and physical fitness". We may never be as fit as we were in basic training or while deployed, but we all know what it means and how it feels to be moving, marching, the endorphin rush, and the connection of heart, body, mind, and spirit.

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The Importance of Women Joining and Taking Leadership Positions in National Veteran Service Organizations

Teresa Lambert, USAF Veteran

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Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) began with the founding of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) in 1899. Since that time, largely in response to the needs of veterans following World Wars and major conflicts, thousands of other veteran organizations have been formed. The VFW and two others, the American Legion (founded in 1919), and Disabled American Veterans (DAV, founded in 1921), were among the first to emerge and continue to hold the largest memberships. Because of the success of these organizations, many others have followed, including organizations specific to

wars and branches of service. The largest of these include the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA). Through most of the twentieth century, women veterans were not invited to be members of the largest VSOs, let alone to be offered leadership positions. They were directed to join the "ladies" auxiliaries. Consequently, we developed separate women veteran organizations to network, promote women's issues, and honor women warriors.

All veteran organizations have a common

mission to serve unmet needs of veterans and offer a local presence of support and camaraderie. A review of the membership, mission, and current perceptions of the largest VSOs demonstrates the need for all to develop better communication of their purpose and their interest in attracting younger and women members, better long-term planning for transitions in leadership from older to younger veterans, and more effective campaigns in reversing their popular image of being "places for old (male) veterans to drink, smoke, and swap war stories". Why would women veterans want to join, let alone take leadership positions in, these organizations? A closer look at each organization's mission, accomplishments, and political power at the local and national levels highlights opportunities that we may be overlooking or discounting, and worth seriously reconsidering.

The "Big Boys"

The VFW was formed by the male veterans who had fought in the Spanish American War and in the Philippine Insurrection. They came together to offer one other support and understanding for those who had experienced the nightmare of war. This common experience of service, and recognition of the willingness to protect and defend our country, continues to bind members together today. Approximately 200,000 men were members by 1936 after chapters had opened in Colorado, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Membership peaked at 2.1 million in 1992. Today membership has dropped to 1.3 million, with an average age of 70

(<http://www.military.com/daily-news/2014/08/25/vfw-battles-to-reverse-a-decline-in-membership.html>). WWII and Korean veterans are dying at a high rate, Vietnam veterans hold most leadership positions, and there are very few new members from the Gulf War, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). In recognition of the need to be more responsive to women veterans, the VFW changed the language of its congressional charter in 2014 to remove "men" and substitute "veterans", and change "widows" to "surviving spouses". (<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/veterans/2014/11/30/vfw-updates-image/19524403/>).

In another move to engage younger veterans, the VFW entered into a partnership in 2013 with the Student Veterans of America (SVA) (<http://studentveterans.org/index.php/partnersponsors>). SVA was founded in 2008 to coordinate a national network for many student veteran campus organizations that emerged with the new GI Bill benefits and the surge of OIF/OEF and Gulf War Veterans enrolling in colleges and universities. The VFW offers assistance in helping student veterans obtain their GI benefits and has launched a VFW-SVA Student Veteran Fellowship program offering scholarships to students to participate in a week-long yearly National Legislative Conference (<https://www.vfw.org/StudentFellowship/>). The VFW is at the forefront of VSO advocacy. It demands benefits for veterans, changes in the Veterans Administration (VA), women services in VA hospitals and clinics, and accessible quality care for veterans. Its leaders work closely with

Capitol Hill to ensure veterans and military members are heard. It offers over \$3 million in scholarships to college, high school and middle school students, and gives recognition to educators, emergency service providers, military and veterans, and our fallen Service Members. Its membership includes several female post and state commanders. The first female Assistant Quartermaster General was appointed in 2015.

The American Legion is another organization that has a rich history, a large membership, and political power on Capitol Hill. The Legion, chartered in 1919 following World War I, soon had over 1 million members in all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and four foreign countries. Today, membership has swelled to over 2.4 million veterans and 14,000 posts. There have been \$5.2 million in scholarships awarded by the American Legion to America's youth. The Legion is also involved in local communities through support of homeless warriors, disabled warriors, and their families; baseball teams; and charities, the latter through the work of the Legion Riders.

As with the VFW, the American Legion needs and wants younger veterans and women to join (<http://www.legion.org/veteranshealthcare/women>). Their encouragement of women not only to join but to lead is evidenced in the number having served as Department Commanders. The American Legion has supported women in leadership positions at the state level for decades; one served as Commander in Italy (now no longer a department) from 1927-1929. Well over 40 women have served as Department Commanders at the state level in more than

twenty five states and countries (private communication, Daniel Wheeler, Nov. 2, 2015).

Disabled American Veterans (DAV) is the third of the large veteran service organizations developed after World War I. The DAV is dedicated to ensuring that service-connected disabled warriors and their families obtain the benefits to which they are entitled. They also work to educate communities about warriors reintegrating to civilian life. The DAV is another VSO that represents veteran needs and interests on Capitol Hill and at both state and local levels.

The DAV seems to have the most understanding of these three largest veteran organizations that women warriors have a unique set of needs and challenges. It has published a comprehensive report, *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home*, which identifies gaps in service for women warriors. In addition, it notes that approximately 300,000 women warriors are "put at risk" by the male warrior system. This downloadable report covers issues including women's health care, military sexual trauma, homelessness, unemployment, disability, and mental health (<http://www.dav.org/women-veterans-study>).

The DAV has been instrumental in coordinating screenings of the documentaries, *Service: When Women Come Marching Home* (<http://servicethefilm.com/>) and *Journey to Normal: Women of War Come Home* (<http://www.journeytonormal.org/>). It also founded the "Stand Up For Women Veterans" advocacy campaign (<http://www.dav.org/women-veterans>).

Women Veterans: Where do we fit in the "Big Boy" Veteran Service Organizations?

The earliest and largest veteran organizations have a history of assigning women to their auxiliaries. When men veterans joined during or after their military service, their wives and mothers joined auxiliaries to assist in fundraising and other supportive roles. The culture in the twentieth century and the belief in a patriarchal society minimized the recognition and celebration of women whom had gone to war. Our stories remained untold and our military-related traumas unaddressed. The United States' participation in the Gulf War in the late 1980's to the early 1990's sent more women to the battlefront. For the first time, they received recognition as combat veterans. Similar to the Veterans Administration, VSOs did not know how to handle the sudden surge in numbers nor how to recognize women as veterans and equals. They did not readily move to welcome them, when a shift in their language, programs, and structure could have embraced this new wave of potential members.

As the percent of service women has continued to increase, and as the number of women veterans having served during OIF and OEF has grown, the mindset of the "Big Boy" VSOs has changed about women being welcomed into membership. They now actively seek and welcome women into their organizations. New York State even has the first all-female VFW Post.



When Women Come marching Home



Journey to Normal: Women of War Come Home

After being a VFW member for only a year and a half, I currently serve as the Senior Vice Commander of my post, and am in line to be the next post Commander. Women veterans also have the capacity to move into officer roles and are making progress at the state and national levels.

Why is it so important to consider joining and taking leadership positions in these "Big Boy" VSOs, given our access to all levels of leadership within all-women VSOs? First, we can participate at every level in the development of policy and procedures and work toward the full integration of women veterans into these organizations. Second, we bring a different perspective on how to handle challenges and solve problems. Third, we are able to address women's issues, of which men have little experience or knowledge. Fourth, we can connect with a support system with an intergenerational network, both to discuss our military experiences and to use the lobbying power of a large membership to obtain more resources from Congress for the physical, emotional, and social costs of our service. We need more dollars in research and interventions for women veterans' post-traumatic stress, military sexual trauma, chronic pain, and other service-related injuries.

Women veterans can also help to design, implement, and lobby for integrated family programs in these organizations as a way to build family bonds and veteran community support. As a single parent, I can speak to the challenges of interacting with non-warrior men and women in the civilian community. It is a relief to have conversations with my sister and brother

warriors about military experiences, the continuing effects on family, and our adjustment since leaving the service. It is important that veteran mothers have a place to bring their children to social events, where we feel safe and connected to others who share veteran family values and experiences.

Several of the large VSOs have become clearly aware of the need to rebuild their posts and chapters to welcome women and families, and have taken action. A good number of families who are dual military also want to participate, but have young children. Some posts are building child care areas and hiring sitters to watch over the young ones during adult meetings. Others are creating outdoor recreation sites (ballfields, playgrounds, etc.) to encourage family participation.

VSO leaders are also aware of the need to neutralize their language and to redefine membership in their auxiliaries, the latter of which are changing by-laws to include men. In 2015, the VFW was the first VSO to change its by-laws to be gender-neutral.

Finally, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, and Disabled American Veterans hold political power on Capitol Hill. They have this leverage because of their large number of members and their long history of well-cultivated relationships with Congressmen and women. They fight for the benefits and rights of millions of Service Members including the National Guard and Reservists, veterans, and our families. Their efforts can only continue to be effective if they maintain or increase their membership numbers;

women veterans can help their numbers swell. They will effectively advocate for women's issues and benefits, only if we are working from the inside to inform and influence their proposals and requests for Congressional support.

As with any organization, their leaders need to plan for succession, and those of us who are younger veterans need to learn how to assume leadership roles to help guide veteran organizations into the future with good mentoring. We need to help them accept us by joining with them, sharing our views and talents, and pressing for women veteran representation at the national level. When we are willing to step into leadership positions, we are better able to help with the shift from the "boys club" mentality. Canteens no longer have to be smoke filled rooms with old men swapping war stories. Commanders no longer need to be older men. Those of us who are already members of other VSOs, including women-only VSOs, can help with cross-fertilization of ideas, avoid duplication of services, and develop collaborative efforts and partnerships among organizations.

Invitation

Consider looking at the websites of the "Big Boy" VSOs. Read about their histories, visit one or more of their local meetings. Ask other women and men veterans if they are members, if they hold leadership positions, and why. If there is a post or chapter that has treated you poorly or has shuffled you off to the auxiliary, notify the national organization and try mem-

bership in another post or chapter. Avoid dismissive comments about these organizations, and about all veteran organizations. Some may need more education about women warriors' needs, skills, and potential contributions. Many of us have the experience and interest to serve as leaders in these organizations. Don't back down from a challenge. We

managed to stand side-by-side and sometimes toe-to-toe with our male brethren in uniform. We have proven our mettle. We are WARRIORS! Hear us ROAR!



Women Veteran Social Justice and Digital Social Impact: Creating Online Community Networks and Using Mobile Technology

BriGette McCoy
U.S. Army Service Connected Disabled Veteran
Founder and CEO, Women Veteran Social Justice

BriGette McCoy, Founder and CEO of Women Veteran Social Justice Network, City of Atlanta Veterans Affairs Commission Vice Chair, served in the US Army as a Data Telecom Specialist during the Gulf War. She has been establishing e-technology and resource networks and leveraging them in non-traditional sectors for the military veteran community for the past 7 years. BriGette uses technology for civic engagement consulting to produce live streamed and on demand broadcasted veteran programming through WVSJ and Kennesaw State University and to the Emmy Award winning producers of Service: When Women Come Marching Home. She has been interviewed extensively by CNN, HLN, Good Morning America, Al Jazeera America, NPR News, Huffpost and many Print and Online Media Radio and TV Shows. Numerous organizations have requested BriGette as Conference Host, Keynote Speaker, and Key Facilitator. In Atlanta, the AJC, Atlanta Creative Loafing and Interfaith Broadcast Atlanta have brought her story of resilience to the community. She holds a BS in Psychology a ThM in Pastoral Care, and Masters courses in Education Media Design Technology. Her forthcoming book will be available in 2016. She can be reached through social media Twitter: @wvsjstandup and www.facebook.com/4wvsj and for booking or events at brigmccoy@wvsjnetwork.org or wvsjnetwork.org.

Online community networks and mobile technology connect veterans to communities that engage in conversation, networking, political dialogue, information resources, and social connections. Both reconnections for veterans who have not seen one another since basic training or since leaving military service, and new connections for veterans who would have otherwise never met.

Many veterans live in remote locations or in the silence of their self-imposed isolation. They now have options to manage their symptoms of combat stress, military sexual trauma, chronic pain, or other conditions by reaching out to online communities through their computer or mobile devices to contact one another and to expand their sense of belonging to a community. Another important aspect of online

community networks is their round-the-clock access. 24/7 online communication includes sites for specific branches and eras of service and allow veterans to connect with other veterans and community support systems, no matter what time of day or night around the globe. They also offer downloadable apps for stress, insomnia, sleep, and other issues that interfere with daily functions, and additionally, direct veterans to sites that can improve their health, housing, income, education, and spirit. These connections and resources can be immediate and specific, avoiding the long delays often experienced in trying to access information through the VA and veteran service organizations, where long waits and confusing compartmentalization can result in delayed access or giving up in pure frustration.

In 2008, I realized that my multiple physical and anxiety-related medical conditions were impeding me socially, compelling me to stay at home and self-isolate. Because I was interested in and involved with technology, I knew that technology would be my means of initially “connecting with others” from the safety of my home. It became clear that using my computer to engage people online and using a social platform tool like Facebook could be a way to connect with others, so I deployed multiple technological tools to connect with and pass along information to other veterans.

Since then, many veterans experience insurmountable challenges with health care, housing, the legal system, and VA disability claims. I learned that I was not the only one who felt alone, and turned to social media as an avenue of veteran com-

munity support. I came to realize that the journey is better with like-minded supportive people.

Connecting the community electronically, utilizing strategic relationships, and removing barriers to collaboration, became my ultimate goals. Helping veteran women better the quality of their lives and navigate the VA system through online peer information resourcing, became my areas of expertise.

In 2009, I decided to start a nonprofit organization that would promote, welcome and honor women veterans through online community networking. Since then, Women Veteran Social Justice (WVSJ) and other networks have grown exponentially. What made WVSJ unique was that we were targeting a community that most people didn't even consider at that time: women veterans. We were promoting the message that women veterans were serving, had served, and would continue to serve in the military. In addition, we were working to connect communities to one another. Veteran service organizations, not yet using e-networking effectively, had been working in isolation to promote their own missions, recruit their own members, and remain insular in funding, projects, and planning. It was imperative to connect across organizations, to truly network and share rather than duplicate resources, and to collaborate on initiatives to help veterans.

A collaborative, synergistic community can be more efficient in providing services to veterans, and can also impact and change legislation and policy at the local, regional, and national levels. It can also be instrumental in changing media per-

spective and coverage.

Online communities created a platform that gave typically disenfranchised, isolated, or less organized communities of veterans much-needed grassroots support and connections with larger, more organized groups to more effectively work on behalf of their local veterans.

The WVSJ digital footprint in 2009 was about 200. By 2010, we had 700-800 veterans linked in, and were part of several online networks of veteran community outreach. We were beginning to work with the directors of the documentary, "Service: When Women Come Marching Home" to identify women veterans who would speak on film. By 2011, there were 50 or so veteran-led online networks. WVSJ currently reaches over 12,000 people and connects with 120 or so other networks, reaching a total of two million plus weekly network connections.

Most organizations still do not understand that social media and mobile technology are viable tools to exponentially and positively impact their target markets and membership, be they grassroots programs with small numbers or national veteran service organizations (VSOs) with millions of members. Because of my technology background, I began consulting about the use of social media and e-networking technology. Many online communities are vigorously supported by multiple social media programs. For example, the WVSJ network uses Twitter, Facebook, online TV and radio, and Pinterest to keep our audience informed and engaged.

When a veteran in crisis reaches out to WVSJ for assistance, we can quickly as-

sess the need, based on our ongoing online relationship. We can gather information to support that person and at the same time, refer to an organization or person who can further assist. We have been able to work with teams collaboratively to direct online contacts who express suicidal thoughts or intent to get to offline emergency crisis intervention at local mental health sites.

Although the initial platform for speaking began with the gross injustices and residual fallout from military sexual trauma (MST), the focus of WVSJ is veteran *empowerment*: increasing social and economic awareness, skill sets and opportunities, reclaiming one's quality of life, educating our politicians, and MST and suicide prevention education and training. Our message on preventing sexual assault is not only for veterans, but people of all walks of life.

Electronic connections meet the enormous numbers of veterans in need. Both the DoD and VA have launched online sites, online assessments, and on a more limited basis, online treatment interventions as a way to meet the growing numbers of veterans with physical and emotional needs. Women Veteran Social Justice encourages all electronic platforms serving veterans, especially women veterans, to collaborate going forward: to remove barriers to access, to update resource guides, to partner in approaching donors and sponsors in funding the expansion of our networks, to host and participate in electronic roundtables to address these issues, and to ensure that every veteran is aware of and invited to join our community from anywhere in the world, at any time.

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Small group setting, facilitated by veterans, former VA/DoD
experienced providers, Walter Reed volunteers & nonprofit
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Past participant comment: "I feel that this weekend has restored my tattered spirit and renewed my optimism. I believe this has relit my candle so to speak and I've met people who can reflect my light back to me when things get dark and cold".

-Iraq Vet

Date: March 17-20, 2016

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Funded by Walter Reed Foundation, in collaboration with:

Invisible Wound, Warriors at Ease, and the Institute for the Health and Security of Military Families

*Note: Travel to and from the Retreat and Childcare are not provided

Overcoming Military Sexual Trauma: Moving Forward through Identification, Connection, and Empowerment

BriGette McCoy

U.S. Army Service Connected Disabled Veteran
Founder and CEO, Women Veteran Social Justice

Pride in Military Service

We are a warrior class. We stood, men and women with right hands raised, reciting our loyalty and commitment to our country, to past and future Service Members. We chose that we would lay down our lives for people we would never know, never meet, nor with whom we would never share the same ideologies. We determined it to be our calling: to extend our lives outside of ourselves, to become links in the everlasting chain of warriors, pre- and post-dated and forever marked with the Seal of Service. We cannot forget who we are, who we will always be, even after our deaths. No one can take from us or diminish the memory of what we have accomplished. History will only reveal the magnitude of the strength we held in every digit and the compassion we yielded to the world, even when the world didn't know it needed us.

When I think of my military service, I still have many overwhelming and mixed feelings. Even hearing Soldiers marching can

bring up a well of nostalgia and feelings hard to articulate. It wasn't until after I testified in 2014 before the United States Senate about military sexual trauma (MST) that I realized the feelings were a deep longing to be back in the military and have my career restored.

Truth be told, I was "all in" from day one at boot camp. My goal was to make my career in the military, earn a Master's degree while serving, become an officer, and retire as a Lieutenant Colonel, with all of the perks of retirement. I had no intention of doing anything other than that. My backup plan, prior to enlisting, was to continue to model, act and perform, and possibly after retirement, resume a career in that field.

No Way Out

When I look back, I was so very impressionable. I was easily shaped by my military experience. I wanted to be the perfect Soldier. I wanted to set the bar for excellence and achievement. I was trained

by the best. The Drill Sergeants and NCO's of the United States Army said they would train me to be able to handle anything. When I left AIT to be deployed to Germany in 1988, I was trained and squared away. It was in Germany that my career was interrupted and my life inexplicably changed. Two months after arriving in Germany, a senior enlisted NCO, who was my immediate supervisor, convinced me to go with him alone to a location off the military base and raped me. I tried to avoid being alone with him after that, but he continued to sexually harass me.

Other incidents followed. I never spoke of them because I thought no one would believe me. The final straw was when an-

other NCOIC, who had been harassing me for more than a year, worked to get me assigned to his team so that I would be working alone with him. I reported this assault, and this time a senior enlisted woman helped me. Because I reported the NCO, my First Sergeant wanted me out of the military. He was determined to "haze" me for making public what was happening in our unit. Before long, I was on extra duty, reprimanded for offenses I didn't commit, and told to sign papers to leave the military before my extended enlistment was up. He threatened that if I didn't sign, he would make sure that UCMJ (Uniformed Code of Military Justice) action would be levied against me. Those who assaulted me were not charged or tried. When I



was sent home and discharged after 3 years in the military, I was only 21 years old and the single mother of a chronically ill infant.

In 1991, the treatment for MST was not being handled through appropriate medical and legal processes. Tailhook (see separate article in this issue) would be all over the news the year I left the military. No one was listening to women reporting that they had been sexually assaulted by powerful men. Not even Congress was willing to do anything about it.

Residuals Persist

Overcoming personal tragedy, complicated by the criminal elements of sexual assault, is ongoing and continuous. There is no moment in life going forward where you take a deep breath and feel that these crimes have been resolved, adjudicated, and vindicated. For a long time, my life was deeply impregnated with the darkness that only this type of crime can bring into a person's psyche. The physical violation was magnified by the violation of trust of my superiors to protect me, and their further violation of allowing a rapist within their ranks to go unpunished while removing me from my chosen career. An unconscionable act by one rapist had been followed by a greater wrong by the military community at large. None of my family or friends knew why I was having breakdowns in my life, why I couldn't "pull it together." I never talked about it, because who would understand? Who would believe me? I thought it was an "old injury," part of my past, and shouldn't bother me this late in the game. Yet I couldn't get past being sexually assaulted

by another Service Member, a brother-at-arms, while serving in the military.

After years of silently struggling, including episodic homelessness, an unsuccessful marriage, and anxiety that grew into agoraphobia, I went to the VA out of desperation and in extreme crisis. I was screened at my initial visit for MST and sent to a mental health counselor. I was hurt, embarrassed, and extremely anxious. At times, I arrived at my individual appointments and group counseling sessions after they were over. Other times, I would attend group sessions where I would weep and vomit intermittently for the entire 90 minute session. When I could speak at all, it was through clenched teeth and with angry words about my perpetrators enjoying their life without consequences, while I was the one suffering.

My career suffered, my health suffered, and my children suffered. Even some 20 years later, the perpetrators did not. When would they suffer for what they had done? Sadly, in my eyes, they never have and never will.

In 2009, I went through a divorce that left me penniless, which consequently left my daughter and me homeless again. I ended up staying temporarily at a good friend's office, while my daughter stayed in my friend's second bedroom. After years of counseling, I was still trying, unsuccessfully, to get on with my life. Why couldn't I?

Identifying and Connecting

It struck me that I was not only alone, but I was very lonely. I then realized that



“The online community that I founded, Women Veteran Social Justice (WVSJ), embraces all women who served or are serving in the military.”

—BriGette McCoy



The images displayed here are the property of WVSJ . These photos depict a wide array of activities and adventures hosted by the group.

it might also be lonely for my tribe, the other women whom had served and were serving. The isolation and painful process of coming to grips with being sexually assaulted, having my career taken from me, struggling with the many problems that followed me after my trauma, and the long process it took to be validated as a disabled veteran, was overwhelming. I realized that if I were going to get past the trauma, I would need a community of my peers. That meant a community of women who had served and exuded strength through service, some of whom had also been wounded by their service. If I could find a few, just a few who would connect with me, I would feel better and maybe they would too. Maybe the opportunity for us to connect with one another could help us want to see another day, then another, and then to figure out a new direction in our lives.

This was my initial intent and simple emotional plea: to once again connect and belong to a tribe. So in 2009, at 38 years old, I decided to try social media to find my tribe by creating pages to connect with them on Facebook. At the time, there were few women veteran tribes on Facebook. Now there are thousands of online communities for veterans, most of which address a single issue, era of service, or branch. When I started, few organizations welcomed women veterans of any era, any length of service, and all ranks and branches, political affiliations, sexual orientations, heritage, or race. The online community that I founded, Women Veteran Social Justice (WVSJ), embraces all women who served or are serving in the military.

Empowerment

Since 2009, WVSJ media outreach has touched hundreds of thousands of veterans and those who genuinely care about us. I have publicly used my personal narrative to send out the signal that I served proudly, I was sexually assaulted while serving, and while I embrace the former, I will not allow the latter to define or stop me. My exit from military service and life afterwards has been challenging and at times tragic, but does not change my love of my military service and fellow women veterans. I am magnetized toward women of service. My purpose is not just connecting with my peers. It is also to see us claim our power, experience success, and take on leadership roles within the military in business, boardrooms, politics, finance, the arts, and other endeavors, with our community of peers to support us.

I joke that I am not only the founder of WVSJ, but a "client" too. Both the organization and I have experienced some tremendous highs and lows. For five years I had been privately funding this organization. It could not continue without more support. WVSJ launched our Inaugural Women Veteran Conference and retreats in 2014. Funding came from new donors. Our first major corporate donor was from the CEO (a male Marine) of a veteran owned business. He saw the need to support women veterans programs and his support has been tremendous, not just financially, but personally the continuation of this network. One of my first local supporters was also a veteran brother who reached out to WVSJ because of his commitment to connecting the commu-

nity of veterans to information and resources. A human rights organization has publicly supported me as a military sexual assault survivor, and WVSJ programs as well.

It is curious, and perhaps a reflection of women veterans' reluctance to help one another step up in business, as well as in service (see Toxic Leadership article in this issue), that WVSJ has had funding and peer support from male veteran-owned businesses and civilian-run businesses, but not from women veteran-owned businesses. It is imperative that we bring our successful veteran businesswomen together to identify how they too can connect and support not only our service organizations, but also individual women who need guidance in employment, housing, finances, and other basic needs. The WVSJ Second Annual Conference had many women step up to make donations of their time, their personal and professional resources, and their financial support for the vision of this organization. One of our women veteran ambassadors/advisors, for example, made available her university campus and its resources for our conference site. She sets the bar for other women veterans to use their influence and resources to connect and empower women veterans in their communities. In the military, it is our duty to leave no one behind. In the civilian sector, this must also become our mission. Building communities electronically and locally is of pressing importance. We need to assist in times of crisis, to support in times of success, and honor our fellow Service Members and veterans.

Connecting online to WVSJ Network and the community of networks is vital so that everyone with current or prior military service has a family of Warrior Women available to them. We will always be of the Warrior Class. Our blood type is that of warriors who fought and served selflessly for our country. It makes sense to make our current mission directive to utilize technology and the resources of the 21st century to make sure that every member of our veteran family, no matter where they live or whether they have experienced trauma, has access to communication with peers, and resources that can lead them to and provide them with what they need.



<http://www.wvsj.org/>

Women Veterans and Multi Modal Post-Traumatic Growth: Making the Tree Whole Again

Suzanne S. Rancourt

Suzanne S. Rancourt's book, *Billboard in the Clouds*, Curbstone Press, was the 2001 recipient of the Native Writers First Book Award. She is an Abenaki/Huron writer and holds a Master of Fine Arts in Poetry from Vermont College; Master of Science degree in Educational Psychology from SUNY, Albany, NY; and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Expressive Arts: therapy, education, and consulting from the European Graduate School, Switzerland. Suzanne is a Certified Facilitator and Affiliate of Amherst Writers and Artists. She is a NY Credentialed Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor. She teaches writing to a diverse group of people: victims of domestic violence, women veterans, mental health patients, women in homeless shelters, incarcerated women and men, the learning disabled, and many others. She is ranked in Aikido, Iaido and is an Armed Services Veteran of both the Marines and the Army. Suzanne can be contacted at kataahdin@gmail.com or through her website, www.expressive-arts.com.

What We Cannot Speak, We Sing

Even as I sit here, starting to type the beginning of a heuristic reflection of sexual trauma in the military, I am nauseated. I sip black Earl Gray to calm myself. My body remembers the sexual assault in the summer of 1978. I am 56 years old now and my body still remembers. How clever the human limbic system can be and how cleverly survival can ease into "resiliency" and Post Traumatic Growth when handled patiently and empathically by skilled practitioners.

In 1978 there were neither skilled practitioners, nor legal military systems to address the trauma in a manner that recog-

nized, let alone supported Post Traumatic Growth. What led me, in 1978, to purchase a 12 string guitar days after the assault? What led me to sing and immerse myself into song writing? What within my body tapped into Expressive Arts Therapy long before this intervention was considered a valid treatment modality within western medical and mental health fields? Assess, adapt, and overcome has led me to various corners of the world and into various halls of formal education where I have received degrees and certificates only to discover that I still needed to ask others for help. Granted, my willingness to learn continues to help me understand my trauma and its effects on my body, mind, and moral self. Being open to new

information is the key to moving forward in positive growth.

Does this mean that I have not encountered roadblocks (many of my own choosing) since 1978? No. It means that despite the alcoholism, several divorces, inability to maintain conventional civilian employment, and poor coping behaviors spawned by untreated trauma, I survived. I am Bear Clan of Abenaki/Huron people from the mountains of west central Maine. I am a fighter, a survivor. The Marine Corps cultivated who and what I am naturally.

I did not, however, survive without the support of others and immersing myself into occupations and art that allowed my buried trauma to emerge in its own time. Strong cultural identity, my multi-modal art making (writing, music, dance, martial arts, photography), and new regulations for military sexual trauma (MST) claims have allowed me to seek appropriate therapeutic assistance. Which, by the way, took another few years of trust building, job losses, alcoholism wrecking havoc yet again, threat of foreclosure on my home and one harder and darker winter than usual, before seeking help. I have been back in recovery for a year and a half now. Prior to falling off the wagon in 2003, I was clean and sober for 13 years. Dogs of trauma can lie quiet until kicked. September 2, 2014 was my first VA appointment with the MST coordinator whom I had met a year or so earlier.

I reside in isolation: in the Adirondacks, on the side of a mountain with my wolf dog. I write: sometimes poetry sometimes songs. The singing allows for a way to send voice, to tell the tale through the

vibrational modality of song. Singing is a way to put into sound the emotions and memories that are unspeakable. One may not even know what the emotions are, from where they come, or to what they are ultimately attached. I know from experience that trauma can cause one's Limbic System to activate responses that protect the more delicate sensory self. Some folks may call this a near death experience, or leaving the body or shutting down. Because this type of natural protective response can be controversial, it is seldom discussed. Singing or reading our stories aloud can soothe the limbic's "unsafe" response toggles (The Polyvagal Theory, Dr. Steven Porges, 2011). From the inside out, quite literally, my singing soothed the vagus nerve and its numerous connections. I was unaware of the physiological effects of my self-soothing until recently, however, when my graduate studies included neurophysiology.

Inspired by the profound stress and fear of being homeless in the dark winter of 2013, I gave myself permission to write and sing "The Sacred Light" (lyrics below; mp3 embedded in this issue). I was still reeling from the retriggering of my MST and other losses secondary to military service. I finally had access to current research facts and data that acknowledged my trauma, how my sensory and neurological systems dealt with my trauma, and that it was time for me to seek help. I had reconnected with veteran communities using all modalities of the arts that fit naturally with my culture, and who I am as an artist. This process allowed me to reconnect with my military experiences both good and bad. I began to heal. As my Native Elders often say, "Sometimes we have to go where no one else has the

courage to go because we might find someone who is ready, ready to be saved." My Marine Corps training is what continues to keep me alive. I cannot ask someone to do something that I am unwilling to do. As a Multimodal Expressive Arts professional, I must seek help to heal myself using the same services I ask of others. This is being authentic. The Expressive Arts Therapist leads and participates in activities with individual or group participants. I must be willing to take the same artistic risks that I ask of group participants, while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries, support, and honesty. And, there is one thing survivors of trauma know and that's bullshit.

"The Sacred Light" was composed in the winter of 2013. I was in a profoundly hopeless place emotionally. I was not yet in alcohol recovery, nor was I in therapy.

Perhaps this song was my way of saying, "let go, let God." Traumatic memories were emerging rapidly, almost too fast. You will notice when you listen to the mp3 that the guitar tempo is incredibly slow. I began to realize that trauma events and memories get slowed down too. A five second event seems like hours. I am still amazed at how our Limbic System is capable of protecting us via the creation of what some may call an altered state. This song is a pivotal point in my acceptance of trauma altered states as can be heard in the tempo, chord structure, key, and lyrics. This feeling of being in between realities is not uncommon for the trauma survivor.. A person can feel pretty crazy out there all alone in the "in between". This song is to let others know that they are not alone and that I am not afraid to talk about this odd space.



Press to play audio of "The Sacred Light"
Lyrics next page.

The Sacred Light

Chorus: And I'm just this side of freedom, just a membrane of memories holding me back, got lies I gotta deal with, got people I gotta see -
And I'm just this side of being free.

Verse: And someone ought to hold my hand through this one,
just to keep me from straying too far,
keep breathing in my ear to hold off my worldly fear -
I got so many questions; I need a place to think,
'cause somewhere down that long dark tube there's a green dancin' Eagle,
hmmmm, wisdom eyes, and someone ought to hold my hand through this one.

End with: repeat chorus with last line
"and someone ought to hold my hand through this one."

Making the Tree Whole Again -The Many Selves of Military Women

Sometime in the 1990's I had been selected to be a guest presenter and singer/songwriter performer at a Native Writers and Artists event in Pennsylvania, where I met a Bear Clan Cayuga Elder who had survived the atrocities of Indian boarding schools. Perhaps he recognized something within me that I had not yet recognized and acknowledged. We exchanged phone calls and conversed about trauma, how it hangs onto an animal, leaving a smell that the animal itself can't detect, but others can; especially if the "others" had similar experiences. I never spoke of having been in the military and certainly not about my Military Sexual Trauma (MST).

Resiliency for me was staying mission focused and keeping extremely busy. At that time, this equaled success for me.

Getting married, having kids, and working several very different types of jobs at one time allowed me to utilize my excess energy, multiple interests, and skills in productive ways. My Bear Clan Elder and I discussed what trauma can do to the person: body, mind, and spirit.

In 1979, I worked in Mud Lake, Maine, where I had the opportunity to participate in making Ash baskets with a well known Mic Mac basket maker. We trudged into swampy waters and selected a particular Ash tree. After cutting it into 4 foot lengths, we hauled it back to Mud Lake and let it soak in the shallow water for a day or two. When the cambium layers had swollen just so, we pulled them from the water and began the process of violently striking the pulp lengths with sledge hammers. With each strike, the cambium layers began to separate until we could pull the tree apart into several much smaller sections, which we then shaved into the thinner layers appropriate for the basket to be made. I shared with my Elder Clan Brother that trauma is like making baskets. There is violence applied to the tree and with each traumatic strike of the sledge hammer the layers separate naturally, which is needed to make baskets. Maybe basket making is just another way of making the tree whole again. Technically, it is the same tree; but transformed in shape, form, and function, with a new purpose. Is this a metaphor for Post Traumatic Growth?

In the act of art making, did I not have to first disassemble, deconstruct, my current

beliefs, experiences and self to then re-assemble myself through the metaphor of making this basket? Is this not another way for my limbic self to come back together?

How do military women restructure the various roles and identities required of us within the military culture and the civilian culture? And when those roles are at odds with one another, what then? And what happens when the mental health professional has a cultural perspective that is buried within a rigid clinical distance and a limited repertoire of interventions which do not allow the practitioner to view a client's narrative from any other perspective than the practitioner's own?

I have the good fortune of being connected to my Native American culture and ceremonies. The goal of many of these ceremonies is to make the participant whole again in their new form, new shape, and new function. Qualified Elders, designated by the Tribal community, conduct these ceremonies. (Just because western medical/mental health professionals from the western culture hold degrees, it does not make them competent to conduct these ceremonies. That is referred to as cultural appropriation, fraud, and ethnocentricity, i.e. unprofessional behavior.) Native American homecomings from military service are conducted upon return to the tribe according to each Tribal Nation's cultural and ceremonial traditions. This serves to honor each warrior and welcome him/her back into the tribe, and is an integral part of enhancing self-acceptance and community reintegration. The telling of one's military experiences are done through a variety of art modalities, including song, stories, dance, drumming, and

drama. Over time, without hurry, and with ample community support, we weave the various roles of self into a new structure, a new identity out of trauma (be it the effects of war, military sexual trauma, and/or physical injury), which has given us the gift of new form, new perspectives, and wisdom. In a process similar to harvesting, we select the parts of our experiences necessary for integration of our whole self that includes our military service. Does your current cultural membership honor this process and wisdom gained from answering the call to protect and defend?

The Traditional Tribal community is collective in its support of those who are serving, coming home from serving, or are veterans. When one family member serves in the military, the entire family, the entire community, is impacted. When one tree is taken from the forest, the forest changes. In my life, I have been both the military personnel and the family support person who has experienced the weight of receiving our Nation's flag in honor of those who have died serving, heard the rifle fire crack in the December Maine air, and lived with people with PTSD. These are all aspects that I include when I speak of the military woman's many selves. I am mother, sister, lover, comrade, daughter, intimate partner, and also have archetypal roles. Perhaps, as women, our many roles allow us to multitask and require us to innately be aware of all that is happening around us and within our environment. What happens to the military woman whose many roles have been tempered by military training, and then assaulted with military trauma?

I wrote "The Reticent Veil" in response to

learning of my Elder Bear Clan friend's passing. The poem was first published in *O'Dark Thirty*. The second and third writings are journal entries (June 19, 2013 and Sept. 13, 2014.)

It took me many years to publicly acknowledge my military service, first in the Marines then the Army for a total of 10.2 years and a half dozen days. My service time is what they call "broken time" with my most recent years being 2005 - 2008. Like many veterans and especially women veterans, self-identification has been a challenge. So has chronic pain stemming from my service. The combination resonates with the memories of MST, which until recently, remained a source of secret unspoken emotional and physical pain. To acknowledge my military service is to acknowledge my military sexual trauma, the ultimate betrayal by comrades to whom I still felt loyalty of shared service. I chose for years the path of numbing with drugs and alcohol to temporarily quiet my nerves, my stress, my memories.

All of these responses kept the cortisol and adrenaline engaged and spinning. The neuro-chemicals from this hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA axis) provoked inflammatory response mechanisms in my body, now linked to my Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia diagnoses. This systemic illogical, profuse and profound pain raging in

The Reticent Veil

This is really true.
I never had the grief wiped away
with White Eagle feathers or songs sung
or special foods prepared.

It is true that I dreamt you were sick and dying
and I awoke saying, "This can't be true."
But when our Bear Clan brother came and said it was
so
the grief appliquéd itself to my heart
as varicose webbing and loss
which I added to all the many losses
that came and went before you
and they all came back at Ceremony
when me and a Dance brother folded the flag
for the last time on the last day
that he handed to me in a shape that brought it all
back to 20 years before
standing on the hillside, looking over Wilson Lake
dress blues, rifles and chorfram dress shoes cracked
the unusually frigid December where a flag was folded
and handed to me in a shape
that equaled the grief of the world
which came and went as concrete and steel crushed
as
the bones and dust I wake up chewing
and it all came back
when me and a sister held taught
a Grande Parade of a royal blue silk veil
maintaining reticent tension -
lovers and wives of warriors, sisters of warriors,
mothers of sons who are warriors -
we folded sharp angled silence with the precision of
lock and load
we creased with steady cadence our losses and recog-
nized each other
not letting go

of the fabric the wind claims for a moment
and my words fluttered
"This is not a flag we are folding."

my body, coupled with devastating migraines, finally forced me to explore various pain management interventions. My doses of prescription pain killers no longer worked and doctors discussed adding more at higher doses. I said no, no more. And I found a legitimate alternative pain treatment using injections of Bupivacaine (Marcaine), Lidocaine, and a steroid to decrease nerve inflammation (administered by a licensed neurologist). These treatments allowed me to break free of the prescription drugs, while actually decreasing the inflammation. The success of this treatment is what allowed me to start reclaiming my life via drug and

alcohol recovery and taking the journey of addressing my trauma, my "stuff". I know why my mind must be clear of drugs so I can move forward through the fog; to remember, and never to forget. It is a long journey. It is a good thing I was trained for hard work and focus.

This does not mean that I am pain free or without challenges. It means that I am finding new ways and healthier methods to live. I must acknowledge and honor my trauma and the myriad of beliefs rooted to that trauma. And yes, guilt, a wee bit of guilt, goes a long way.

Journal entry June 19, 2013 My Lidocaine Love

I grieve the loss of innocence. My emotional account drained. Arms heavy
on late June grass Dali-esque the backs of my hands
fingers weave into one earth surface,
and Sun, the agent of Helios' will - the love of god
- orange pupil and dilated soul -
while I grieve the loss of innocence and revel
in the recurring recollections of absence and presence simultaneously.
co-exist. co-axel. the point at which the retina
goes blind, when a star is born.

Elitism has a way of deciduous saturation, subjectivity personified
bannered self-importance is a seepage of inaccurate perceptions.

Like the woman who thought she knew all there was to know about me only to discover 20 years later she did not, stated, "YOU?! You were in the military?!"

"Yes." I replied with the quake of an Aspen
a rustle of revelation, a shiver of satisfaction.

Journal entry Sept. 13, 2014
So many selves.

It is a crowded bus in a star riddled black night, sand fleas, black flag days.
It is a cattle car we stood in
shoulder to shoulder jostled like soda bottles in wooden crates
and canteens on web belts on young hips sloshed.

There was the loud self, the nonsense self, the mother self,
the fleeting self like autumn leaves twirling into torrents of dirt devils
disbursing into scattered calm self that placed a foot
into a left and right boot of quick lace black eyelets mountain gal survivor self.
Lost lovers self, ex-husband selves, drunken self, determined self.
A joist of connectedness geometric selves, multifaceted dynamic blue diamond self.
Only the brown skinned sun self can melt into any sense at all these selves
have become micro millennia of evolution of the self that I view, on occasion,
as a diorama, not straight forward like the wooden hand held gadget that Grammie
let us put post cards in and we peered through the bubble glass eyepieces
pretending we were everywhere
but in the front room, cold, and waiting for hot pie self.

The previous journal entry depicts the complexities of grieving my loss of innocence,
dreams, and hope with which I entered my military service. Trauma splintered my
wholeness. The Expressive Arts allow me to remember when I was whole and full of
hope. My art making honors my losses, and of equal importance, own my new form
and perceive my rejuvenated whole self.

**Post Traumatic Growth and the
Multi-Sensory Veteran
Expressive Artist**

I did not plan on becoming a drum maker. Then again, I didn't plan on a lot of things. In the late 1980's, I felt called to make a drum for my personal use and within a year, people were calling and requesting that I make them a drum. This led to my developing what I call my drum making weekend intensives. I learned that in the process of the art of drum making a change occurred within the participant from their own experience. This

change required that the participant deploy all of their senses: tactile, smell, vision, audio, and the internal sense of being in the present moment in a safe and non-threatening environment. This part included the Traditional Native sense of community and shared inter-dependent experience.

Since that first drum "birthing" experience to present day, I have had several participants get back in touch with me sharing their experiences. Some were survivors of rape, child sexual assault, combat, profound ritual abuse, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, survivors of sui-

cide, and the loss of loved ones to suicide. (There are hundreds more.) For some, the act of making the drum - literally, the doing, the placing the single head onto the frame, the methodical and rhythmic action of lacing the drum became a significant metaphor in reconnecting the severed and fragmented parts of themselves into a whole and resonant tangible drum. My role has been, and continues to be, akin to a midwife in supporting their process. In so doing, I support my own act of weaving my selves into wholeness. My words: "The change occurs in the process of the art making." Experiencing the art making and all the emotions that resonate in the moment is integral to being whole and being authentic. Given responsible guidance and a safe environment, could this multisensory Expressive Arts Therapeutic experience, i.e. drum making, be capable of transposing hypervigilance into positive, healing artistic expressions that emerge from within?

I quickly learned the difference between that which is an "arts and crafts" project and that which is not. When I began making drums, the field of Expressive Arts Therapy did not exist. Fortunately for me, my Native American culture was already practicing "alternative modalities" now identified in western medicine as Expressive Arts Therapy. It was my experiential work in Expressive Arts Therapy that led me to further my formal education: M.S. in psychology, M.F.A. in creative writing, CASAC, Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies, and currently, a Ph.D. candidate in Expressive Arts Therapy.

Even as a kid in the mountains of west central Maine, or spending time with my dad and granddad when they were work-

ing in the woods, lumbering, listening, feeling, sensing, and seeing were instilled in me. Survival and safety meant maintaining a situational awareness. I use my upbringing, combined with military training, to question, assess, review, adapt and move forward in my life - no matter how difficult. I have not done this without help, community, and damn good friends. For me, resiliency is being able to see the options, feel the openings, sense the amount of intensity with which I must proceed, know where to focus, and how to move. For me, balance and centeredness mean proficiency. As a human being I am not in perfect balance. No one is; so what do I need to do to bring balance back into my life? What strategies, tools, assessments, adaptations, are necessary to correct my human tiltedness?

Like many veterans, I have been involved with the martial arts of Aikido and Iaido throughout my life. Aikido and Iaido help to re-establish my balance in ways that match my warrior temperament. I use both of these Japanese martial arts as re-integration practices. In May 2015, I was honored to be a guest presenter at the second Military Experience and the Arts Symposium in Lawton, Oklahoma and was delighted that two full classes of men and women veterans from all eras and branches attended my workshop on Aikido: Holistic Approach to Trauma Recovery. Inspired by Thomas Osborn's years of Aikido http://keganinnosenshi.org/About_Us.html and his military service (101st Airborne, Special Forces, Vietnam combat veteran), I have integrated my own trauma experiences in teaching this unique form of martial arts. Because trusting others is a "biggie", his methods focus on breath, taking our time, and be-

ing aware, empathic, and sensitive to the unique needs of each participant. To quote Mr. Osborn, "We are not doing Aikido TO someone; we are doing Aikido WITH someone."

Western medicine focuses too heavily on what is broken (deficit model), as opposed to how one can turn shit to gold, colloquially speaking. For example: In both Aikido and Iaido, one has to focus, be fully present in body and breathe, while being attentive to one's surroundings. I asked the Oklahoma participants if they would consider, for a moment, to refer to hypervigilance as *Zanshin*, that which a seasoned martial artist cultivates. I then asked them to consider, for a moment, that *Zanshin*, when cultivated appropriately over time, can be soothed into strengths. Aikido and Iaido are two possibilities to reintegrate into society, families, and most importantly, into one's own body through breath, body movement, and the safe coordination of the two.

When I write, whether it is a song lyric, poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, I am taking note with all my sensory systems. When I am choreographing a dance or performing, I am constantly deploying situational awareness skills, and assessing both people and the environment that I am in and this informs my body how to move and my mind how to describe a scene or sound or tone. My *Zanshin* is not "broken". My hypersensitivity to smell is a significant tool in my writing. To be able to put a color to a movement or sound enhances my ability to paint a picture with words or vocal tones when singing or speaking. This allows more people to access a narrative, a scene, an event of which they have no knowledge or experi-

ence. How can I expect someone who has not had similar experiences to my own to comprehend how trauma memory FEELS inside me if that person is not provided with a safe and productive opportunity to enter into the essence of the traumatic experience?

I am a Multimodal Expressive Arts Therapist. This means that it is my professional duty to enter into my own traumatic events using the arts as the release valve for those emerging emotions and traumatic memories. Expressive Arts Therapy is NOT psychoanalysis, as the therapist is not "the expert" who interprets a client's work; nor is it simply arts and crafts. With each modality within the Expressive Arts, the participant deploys one or more of their senses to express, in metaphor, a thought, feeling, or memory. Within each sense, a type of "Reverse Access Pathway" is reestablished in a safe way so that the change occurs in the art making. Whether I am singing elongated vowel sounds in soothing minor keys akin to traditional lullabies, or breathing deeply the autumn mountain air, cedar and sweet grass, or moving my arms, head, and legs in rhythm with drum beats, I am responsive to the shifts in my body's chemistry. This brings calm and balance that contribute to my resiliency and Post Traumatic Growth. Expressive Arts Therapy has imaginal qualities that allow access to our traumatic memories in a safe and graduated way through our senses and through metaphor. Little by little, our memories of trauma and emotions attached to the traumatic event can emerge through the arts into a conscious narrative. This narrative allows us to examine the trauma, to consider how our beliefs about the trauma and our post-traumatic self can dictate our perception of

self and the world, and how this contributes to holding us back from full reintegration into self, family, and for veterans, into civilian culture.

The safety and quality of the therapeutic method is contingent upon the quality, experience, authenticity, and cultural empathy of the practitioner. Like many women survivors of military trauma, it took time for me to develop trusting relationships with the appropriate practitioners at my local VAMC (Veteran Administration Medical Center). I am grateful to all those who have had and continue to have a part in my journey to wholeness. For me, this is my ultimate drum birthing, as I continue to pull together the unique aspects of myself and my life. Every trauma survivor is unique in our experience, memories, and beliefs. Expressive Arts Therapy is a process piloted by the trauma survivor and his/her readiness for growth, and assisted by trained arts therapists who hold the process in metaphor and safe space. It is this gift that we need to give our veterans, in addition to the current therapeutic interventions offered through the VA and elsewhere. The following is a song that I wrote as I worked through a writer's block, while literally singing about what I observed. I encourage you to listen to

the mp3 (embedded in this issue) to hear the melody, tones, and chords. I am not a musician, but songwriting, singing, and playing guitar just simply makes me feel better.

The Wind (song lyrics)

VI: Some days the words don't come.
Some songs are as simple as the sun
shining down and them white pines
swayin' in a new leaf green spring.
Some days the words don't come.

Chorus: The melody escapes me. My
words negate me.

The song is the wind that blows across
the grasses.

Some days the words don't come.

VII: Some days the song is blue.
Cobalt and turquoise swirled in green
hues,
an ocean of life takes flight in color.
Some days the song is blue.

Chorus:

VIII: Some days the song is silence.
As hushed as dew at dawn,
as songbird light rolls into peepers' dusk
owls grace the night, bats clear the flight.
Some days the song is silence.

Finish with chorus.



Press to play audio of "The Wind".
Lyrics below

The following is a poem that I initially wrote over 30 years ago. I have experienced the loss of people whom I dearly loved, divorces, friends, jobs, but I didn't

give up. I didn't quit. For the sake of those I have lost, I live. And finally, finally, I am feeling good about that. In 2015, I revised this poem, and it now feels complete. I am finally coming home.

Fabric

The weaver has become the pattern and is plaid
full of angles and predictabilities
and the shuttling of husbands, children, lovers
wears her thin.

There are two movements: past and future.
The loose swatch of the present unravels,
always in ballet fashion,
dangle gracefully between creation, actuality, flying
and landing.

There is a texture in love that needs to be felt,
needs deft fingers to braid the over under of self.

Fingers that toe dance over warp and weft,
that understand the rhythm of the loom, the tapestry,
an arabesque of extended tones both subtle and
vibrant.

With eyes closed, the clatter of shuttle and feet
pumping the loom
like a grand pipe organ resonating across threads,
she remembers her last words to her first lover,
"like worn denim, love me like that."

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