

WOMEN WARRIORS OF THE CRIMEA AND VIETNAM:
A COMPARISON OF FACT AND FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT

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Women have always been involved in wars. Until the nineteenth century, women were part of the “camp and train”: preparing food, washing clothes, sewing, and in times of disease or wounds, nursing the soldiers. Two wars—the Crimean War (mid-nineteenth century), and the Vietnam War (mid-twentieth century) “bookend” women’s official and traditional involvement in wars. During the Crimean War, the British government sent Florence Nightingale with a select group of women to nurse and care for the soldiers. Nightingale’s involvement paved the way for professional nursing’s development, and laid the foundations for civilian organizations such as the Red Cross. Approximately one hundred years later, the United States became embroiled in the Vietnam War. Thousands of women volunteered to serve in the military, support services, medical care, and civilian organizations.

War genre novels written by male authors, set in the Crimean and Vietnam Wars, depict the female characters as “madonnas”/“mothers,” “angels,” and “whores.” These stereotypes do not reflect the women warriors who served in either war. The Crimean

War novels are sleek, glossy, romance novels that present the stereotypes in a very Victorian manner, which presage the graphic, almost pornographic depictions of women in the Vietnam War novels.

The women's actual accounts do not support these stereotypical depictions. Military and civilian women have been silenced by the stereotypical representations in war genre fiction. Further, these stereotypes have trivialized and marginalized the service of women in the Crimean and Vietnam Wars. The actual accounts present the women who served as warriors. They deserve recognition for their service to their country as well as willing listeners to hear their stories. These listeners must be taught about both these wars since they "bookend" women's official and traditional areas of service during wars. Further, students must recognize that the women who served are warriors and veterans just like their male counterparts. Finally, the women who served in the Vietnam War must be encouraged to tell their stories before they are lost to history.

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Many people have helped me throughout the preparation of this dissertation. Because no project of this size and complexity can be completed alone, I would like to take this opportunity to thank each one not only for contributing to the information contained within these pages but also for the knowledge that I have gained as well as the friends that I made while researching and writing this dissertation.

First, I would like to thank Lynda Van Devanter for writing *Home Before Morning*. Lynda's year Incountry and her experiences after Vietnam sparked my initial questions about the roles of women in war. In addition, her account made me realize that women are not recognized as warriors; furthermore, after reading her work I began to realize that the representations of women in war genre novels lacked accuracy. Without her knowledge and straight-forward account, I would not have traveled this road learning so much about the valiant women who served during the Vietnam War.

Second, in December 1996, as I was searching the Internet for information about women, war, and combat, I found the web site of Marilyn Knapp Litt. Marilyn maintains an impressive home page devoted to the women of the Vietnam War. Contained within that web site was an invitation to join a group of women who discuss women and the Vietnam War. Not only did she invite me to join the group she also helped me to subscribe to the list since my computer knowledge was, then, in its infancy. Although Marilyn, who is our List Goddess, is not a veteran, she is a wonderful human being whose interest in women and war led her to create an open forum for women to tell their stories, share their experiences, find other women with similar experiences, and find healing. Even though the List is, primarily, for women, men are also part of the List and

contribute freely to discussions. I must admit that I was apprehensive about joining a group comprised largely of veterans since I am not one, but from the beginning, this wonderful list has made me welcome and accepted me as an “honorary vet.” Further, because of Marilyn’s invitation to join the List, I was invited to join those members that were going to Washington D.C. for Veterans’ Day in November 1997, and she also invited me to be a member of a Popular Culture Association panel in Orlando, Florida in April 1998. Without Marilyn’s initial invitation, and the List’s open acceptance of me, this dissertation could not have happened.

Third, I would like to thank each member of the list for her (or, in some cases, his) stories and assistance. To each of the following women and men: I thank you for your acceptance of me on the List, your willingness to share your stories, your support while I was writing this dissertation, your frequent questions about “was I done yet?” and your patience as I learned about the Vietnam War, and your tours of duty. I also thank each of you for being willing to go to war. Please accept my sincere, “Welcome Home.”

I owe so much to Dusty. She has given me her permission to use her very powerful poetry in my work. She has patiently answered every question that I asked, even when, I suspect, the recollection was difficult and painful for her. Dusty granted me the honor of placing a cross at the base of “The Wall” panel that has 1st Lieutenant Sharon Ann Lane’s name inscribed on it.

While I was in Washington D.C., I met Donna who “walked The Wall” with me. That day was a significant emotional experience for me, and one that I will never forget. She shared her stories and allowed me to see the depth of the emotional pain she still feels thirty years later. During the time I was in DC, I shared a room with Elaine, Mary,

and Donna. Our conversations enhanced what I had learned from the many emails I read.

My thanks to Beth Marie who has shared her past, given me encouragement, and said many prayers for me. Dee, Duffy and Lou not only allowed me to hear their stories and to ask questions, but each one gave me their insights and their friendship. Candi and Judy have helped correct misconceptions as they helped me get a feel for the day to day experiences they encountered. Norma Jean graciously granted me permission to use her words both from the List and her poetry. Without her strong views and perceptiveness I would have, at times, been at a loss for words. Carol K. and Nancy Q. have each shared their personal stories and their struggles to find peace. Thank you, Nancy Q, for telling me how the war affected you then and how the memories still affect you today. Mary Ann, Marilyn McK, Grace and Pre also shared their stories, their pain, and their understanding. Each of these vets helped me to picture life in a combat zone. Chris, the personal cards you sent, the pictures you shared, the articles that you sent, and the poster you made for me have each added another dimension to my understanding of the Vietnam War and the complexities of a year in a combat zone. I thank you for each of these tangible items and especially for the friendship we share.

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comments and thoughts plus articles that have clarified several muddy areas. Anna (Medford), through her tales of what living from day to day with geckos, lots of rain, sporadic electricity, and rocket attacks, helped me understand the tension that was and is still present in her life as well as in the lives of all the vets. Tommiiee, thank you for sharing your stories and your friendship.

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Although the List is primarily for women, the men are not excluded. I have read the men’s comments about what the women write about. The men of the List are there to listen and to learn. Many of them did not realize that women were in Vietnam, especially since so many men either did not see a “round-eye” or have blocked the memory of the war and some of the participants. These men have also given me quite an in-depth understanding of their view of the war. They, too, have patiently answered my questions, and I thank them for their patience.

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DEDICATION

To the women and men who served in the Vietnam War, and all wars past,
to my parents, my children, and especially
to my husband—Vietnam vet, best-friend, life-long partner and mate
my dissertation is lovingly dedicated.

“Your time has come to shine; all your dreams are on their way.”

“Bridge over Troubled Water” –Paul Simon

“Welcome Home”