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**TESTIMONY ON MILITARY CULTURE, June 25, 2009**

**By Helen Benedict**

Professor of Journalism at Columbia University and author of *The Lonely Soldier:*

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**Contents: Military Culture; Prevalence of Sexual Assault; The Psychology of Assailants; Military Misogyny and the Lack of Consequences; The Iraq War and Sexual Violence; Reforms; Appendix: Testimony from a victim.**

I am a professor of journalism at Columbia University and the author of *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq*, published in April 2009. To research this book, I interviewed over 40 female troops who served in Iraq, as well as women and men who had served in Afghanistan, Korea and elsewhere. I also spent three years examining veterans studies and surveys about sexual assault and military culture. Here are some of my findings.

Military women are being sexually assaulted by their comrades-in-arms in alarming numbers. Rape in American civilian life is already unacceptably frequent (one in six women is raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime, according to the National Institute of Justice<sup>1</sup>), but in the military the picture is

even worse. Rape and sexual assault appears to be twice as frequent within the military as it is among civilians, especially in wartime<sup>2</sup>; soldiers are taught to regard one another as family, so military rape is like rape plus incest; and most of the soldiers who rape are older and of higher rank than their victims, so are taking advantage of their authority to abuse the very people they are supposed to protect. Department of Defense reports show that nearly 90 percent of rape victims in the Army are junior ranking women, average age 21, while most of the assailants are non-commissioned officers or junior men, average age 28.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, this sexual violence against military women persists in spite of numerous Congressional hearings on the subjects and recent DoD attempts at reform. It is time to ask why.

Soldiers commit sexual assault because of a confluence of military culture, individual psychology, and the nature of war, particularly of the war in Iraq.

### **Military Culture**

Two seminal studies have been made of military culture and its attitudes towards women, one by Duke Law Professor Madeline Morris in 1996, and the other by University of California professor and folklorist Carol Burke in 2004,<sup>4</sup> and both found that military culture is deeply misogynistic. Misogyny is, of course, at the root of all kinds of abuse of women, from denying them promotions to rape.

As Burke pointed out, the military defines itself in relation to the outsider: us versus them. The outsider is not only the enemy but any soldier who does not

conform to the hyper-masculine and aggressive norm: the weak, the homosexual, and the female. As one recent Iraq war veteran wrote about his Marine Corp training:

“The Drill Instructor’s nightly homiletic speeches, full of an unabashed hatred of women, were part of the second phase of boot camp: the process of rebuilding recruits into Marines.”<sup>5</sup>

Both Morris and Burke show that military language reveals this “unabashed hatred of women” all the time. Even with a force that is now over 15 percent female and with rules that prohibit drill instructors from using racial epithets and curses, those same instructors still routinely denigrate recruits by calling them *pussy, girl, bitch, lady* and *dyke*; the everyday speech of soldiers is still riddled with sexist insults; soldiers still openly peruse pornography that humiliates women (pornography is officially banned in the military, but is easily available to soldiers through the mail and from civilian sources, and studies have found a correlation between violent pornography and rape<sup>6</sup>); and military men still sing the misogynist rhymes that have been around for decades, like this Marine training chant:

*Who can take a chainsaw*

*Cut the bitch in two*

*Fuck the bottom half*

*And give the upper half to you...<sup>7</sup>*

This language not only perpetuates an antagonistic view of women but teaches it.

At the root of these insults lies the belief that the very antithesis of soldier is woman. Soldiers, the lore goes, are by nature brutal, muscular, overly sexed, aggressive, hyper-masculine, ruthless and deeply contemptuous of all that is feminine. As a sergeant wrote to me an email from Kuwait, where she was serving in 2007, "In the Army, any sign that you are a woman means you are automatically ridiculed and treated as inferior."

This view of women as inferior soldiers is upheld by the Pentagon itself. As long as women remain banned from ground combat (despite the fact that they are the ground combat all the time in Iraq), the message is sent from the top that women are second class soldiers who will never be able to earn the true respect of their comrades.

Women are not only seen as inferior in the military, however, they are also seen as sexual prey. An Army specialist, who served in Iraq for eleven months from 2005-2006, put it this way: "There are only three things the guys let you be if you're a girl in the military: bitch, a 'ho, or a dyke. You're a bitch if you won't sleep with them, a 'ho if you only have one boyfriend, and a dyke if they don't like you. One guy told me he thinks the military sends women over to give the guys eye-candy to keep them sane. He told me in Vietnam they had prostitutes, but they don't have those in Iraq, so they have women soldiers instead."

### **Prevalence of Sexual Assault**

The view of women as sexual prey has always been part of military culture -- civilian women have been seen as sexual booty for conquering soldiers

since the beginning of human history -- so it should not be surprising that the sexual persecution of female soldiers has been going on in the armed forces for decades.<sup>8</sup> In 2003, a survey of female veterans from Vietnam through the first Gulf War, who had come to a VA hospital for medical help, found that 30 percent said they were raped in the military. A 2004 study of veterans from Vietnam and all the wars since found that 71 percent of the women said they were sexually assaulted or raped while serving. And a 1995 study of female veterans of the Gulf and earlier wars reported that 90 percent had been sexually harassed, which means anything from being pressured for sex to being relentlessly teased and stared at.<sup>9</sup> Especially heartbreaking is a 2007 finding by the Department of Veterans Affairs that homelessness among female veterans is rapidly increasing as women soldiers come home from Iraq and Afghanistan, and that 40 percent of them say they were sexually abused while in the service.<sup>10</sup>

The DoD shows much lower rates of rape, but that is because it counts only those rapes that soldiers have been brave enough to officially report. Having the courage to report a rape is difficult enough for civilians, where unsympathetic police, victim-blaming myths, and the fear of reprisal prevent some 60 percent of rapes from being brought to light, according to a 2005 Department of Justice study.<sup>11</sup> But within the military, reporting is even riskier. Military platoons are enclosed, hierarchical societies, riddled with gossip, so any woman who reports a sexual assault has little chance of remaining anonymous. She will probably have to face her assailant day after day, and put up with

resentment and blame from other soldiers who see her as a snitch. She risks being persecuted by her assailant if he is her superior, and punished by any commanders who consider her a troublemaker. And because military culture demands that all soldiers keep their pain and distress to themselves, reporting an assault will make her look weak and cowardly. For all these reasons, some 80-90 percent of military rapes are never reported at all, as the DoD itself acknowledges.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Psychology of Assailants**

The economic reasons behind enlistment are well understood: the military is the primary path out of poverty and dead end jobs for the poor of America. What is less often discussed is how many soldiers also enlist to escape troubled or violent homes. Two well-respected studies of Army and Marine recruits, conducted in 1996 and 2005 respectively and published in the journal *Military Medicine*, found that half the male enlistees had been physically abused in childhood, one sixth had been sexually abused, and 11 percent had experienced both.<sup>13</sup> This is significant because, as psychologists have long known, childhood abuse often turns men into abusers.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1970s, when the women's movement awakened public awareness of rape, criminologist Menachim Amir and psychologists Nicholas Groth and Gene Abel conducted separate but groundbreaking studies of imprisoned rapists.<sup>15</sup> They found that rapists are not motivated by out-of-control lust, as is commonly thought, but by a mix of anger, resentment, sexual sadism, and the need to

dominate, urges that are usually formed in childhood. The best way to understand a rapist is to think of him as a torturer: he uses sex as a weapon to degrade and destroy his victim.

Nobody has yet proven that abusive men like this seek out the military because it gives them a violent, misogynistic culture in which they are free to rape, but the likelihood that the military attracts violent men is so obvious one hardly needs a study to prove it. Still, for the doubters, Rutgers University law professor Elizabeth L. Hillman, author of a forthcoming study on sexual violence in the military, has found that sexist and violent men are indeed volunteering for the military.<sup>16</sup> Worse, the military has been exacerbating the problem by applying an increasing number of “moral waivers” to its recruits since 9/11, which means taking men with records of domestic and sexual violence, according to the DoD’s own reports.<sup>17</sup>

### **Military Misogyny and the Lack of Consequences**

One especially destructive aspect of the misogyny within military culture is the set of assumptions that women invite rape, that women who report sexual assault are liars intent on ruining a man’s career, and that men must be protected from such accusations at all costs.

Thus, a woman who finds the courage to report an assault often finds herself up against a solid wall of male camaraderie determined to silence her by any means. (Please see Appendix containing a testimony by a woman who had just this experience.) Some women are silenced by the threat of counter-charges.

Some are physically threatened or beaten into silence. Some are punished on other charges to undermine their credibility. And so on.

Because of this attitude, the military has an abysmal record when it comes to catching, prosecuting, and punishing its rapists. In 2007, only about one twelfth of reported sexual assaults went to court-martial, and this was an improvement over earlier years.<sup>18</sup> In 2008, a mere 10.9 of all reported assaults went to court-martial, and among those men found guilty, 62 percent were given "nonjudicial punishments" or "administrative actions and discharges" so mild they amounted to no more than a slap on the wrist.<sup>19</sup>

The workings of misogyny within the military thus run deep: it admits sexually violent men, it feeds their violence once they are in, and protects them when they act it out.

### **The Iraq War and Sexual Violence**

Robert Jay Lifton, a professor of psychiatry who has written books on the Nazis, Vietnam and Abu Ghraib, theorizes that in a war of brutal occupation, like that in Iraq, where the enemy is the resistance and the fighting is driven by what he calls "profound ideological distortions," soldiers are particularly prone to commit atrocities because they have no moral center to guide their behavior.<sup>20</sup> The recently revealed fact that our government condoned the use of torture, sexual violence and extreme brutality in the treatment of prisoners adds to this, suggesting that we have created a culture for our own military personnel in which brutality and sexual assault are not only tolerated but fostered.

### Reforms

These explanations for why soldiers rape -- a traditionally misogynist military culture, sexually violent recruits, lack of consequences for those who commit assaults, and the corrupting and brutal nature of the war in Iraq -- are certainly dispiriting to contemplate, but they do at least point to the possibility of the following reforms:

- \* End the Pentagon ban against women in combat, which is paradoxical and archaic, and promote and honor more women soldiers, thus elevating more of them to positions that command respect.

- \* Educate all officers and enlistees that rape is torture and an international war crime.

- \* Expel all men who are found guilty of attacking military or civilian women in any way from the military forever.

- \* Increase the severity of punishment for violence against women to be more in line with those in the civilian justice system.

- \* Ban the use of sexist language by drill instructors.

- \* Enforce the current ban against pornography.

- \* Educate all officers to insist that women be treated with respect, and to take as much pride in protecting their soldiers from harm at one another's hands as from the enemy.

- \* Train counselors to help male and female soldiers not only with war trauma but with childhood abuse and sexual assault.

\* Cease the practice of admitting soldiers with background of domestic or sexual violence.

Professor Helen Benedict, June 25, 2009.

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<sup>1</sup> www.rainn.org. Website link to all cited stats.

<sup>2</sup> Madeline Morris, "By Force of Arms: Rape, War, and Military Culture" (*Duke Law Journal*, 1996), 653

Anne G. Sadler, et al., "Factors Associated With Women's Risk of Rape in the Military Environment," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 44 no.1 (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Uniform Code of Military Justice, 10 USC § 920, Art. 120. www.sapr.mil. Department of Defense, annual reports, 2006-2007. www.sapr.mil.

<sup>4</sup> Morris, "By Force of Arms"; and Carole Burke, *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-And-Tight: Gender, Folklore, and Changing Military Culture* (Beacon Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Martin Smith in *Warrior Writers: Re-Making Sense*, edited by Lovella Calica, published by Iraq Veterans Against the War, 2008, p.34.

<sup>6</sup> Morris, "By Force of Arms." (1996), 715.

Sadler, et al. "Factors Associated With Women's Risk of Rape in the Military Environment." (2003).

<sup>7</sup> Burke, *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-And-Tight* (2004), xi.

<sup>8</sup> Deborah J. Bostok & James G. Daley, "Lifetime and Current Sexual Assault and Harassment Victimization Rates of Active-Duty United States Air Force Women," 13 *Violence Against Women* 927, 940 (2007).

Colleen Dalton, "The Sexual Assault Crisis in the United States Air Force Academy," *Cardozo Women's L.J.* 177, (2004).

Terri Spahr Nelson, *For Love of Country: Confronting Rape and Sexual Harassment in the Military* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Sadler, "Factors Associated With Women's Risk of Rape in the Military Environment" (2003). See Erratum: *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*: 44:110

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(2003), which corrects rape rate from 28 to 30 percent.

Maureen Murdock, "Prevalence of In-Service and Post-Service Sexual Assault among Combat and Noncombat Veterans Applying for Department of Veterans Affairs Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Disability Benefits," *Military Medicine* 169 no. 5 (2004).

Murdoch M, Nichol KL, "Women veterans' experiences with domestic violence and with sexual harassment while in the military," *Archives of Family Medicine*, 1995 May; 4 (5): 411-8.

<sup>10</sup> Erik Eckholm, "Surge in Number of Homeless Veterans Is Anticipated," *The New York Times*, Nov. 8, 2007, A22. Source, interview with Pete Dougherty, the V.A.'s director of homeless programs.

<sup>11</sup> National Institute of Justice & Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. *Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey*. 1998. U.S. Department of Justice, *2005 National Crime Victimization Study*. 2005.

<sup>12</sup> [www.sapr.mil/HomePage.aspx?Topic=Sexual%20Assault&PageName=reporting.htm](http://www.sapr.mil/HomePage.aspx?Topic=Sexual%20Assault&PageName=reporting.htm)

<sup>13</sup> L.N. Rosen and L. Martin, "The measurement of childhood trauma among male and female soldiers in the U.S. Army," *Military Medicine* 161 (1996): 6, 342-345.

Jessica Wolfe, Kiban Turner, et al. "Gender and Trauma as Predictors of Military Attrition: A Study of Marine Corps Recruits," *Military Medicine* 170(2005): 12, 1037.

<sup>14</sup> Author interviews with Nicholas Groth and Dr. Gene Abel, above, and research for author's book, *Recovery: How to Survive Sexual Assault*.

<sup>15</sup> Menachim Amir, *Patterns in Forcible Rape* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), 341. Nicholas Groth and H. Birnbaum, *Men Who Rape: The Psychology of the Offender* (New York: Plenum Press, 1979). Helen Benedict, *Recovery: How to Survive Sexual Assault* (Doubleday, 1985, and Columbia University Press, 1994) pp.6-9.

<sup>16</sup> Morris, "By Force of Arms," (1996), 680, 721.

Elizabeth L. Hillman, Professor of Law, in an email conversation and interview with me, March 14, 2008 and in "Front and Center: Sexual Violence in U.S. Military Law," unpublished paper, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Lizette Alvarez, "Army Giving More Waivers in Recruiting," *TheNewYorkTimes.com*, Feb. 14, 2007.

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"Moral Waivers and the Military." *TheNewYorkTimes.com*, Feb. 20, 2007.

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Mark Benjamin, "Out of jail, into the Army," *Salon.com*, Feb. 02, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> DOD, "Annual Report on Military Services Sexual Assault," March 14, 2007 and March 13, 2008. [www.sapr.mil](http://www.sapr.mil).

<sup>19</sup> DOD, "Annual Report on Military Services Sexual Assault," 2009. [www.sapr.mil](http://www.sapr.mil). And, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/helen-benedict/the-pentagons-annual-repo\\_b\\_177563.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/helen-benedict/the-pentagons-annual-repo_b_177563.html)

<sup>20</sup> Robert Joy Lifton, "Conditions of Atrocity," *The Nation*, May 31, 2004, and several books.

## Appendix

**(Testimony received by author via email, June 22, 2009)**

My name is Christina Baker and I am a civilian, a recent recipient of a Master's degree from the University of California-San Diego, a teacher, a dancer, a sister, a daughter, and an activist for victimized women.

On Feb. 1, 2009, I was raped by a Captain in the US Marine Corps and later physically assaulted by him (on St. Patrick's day - no alcohol or party involved). I reported the rape 10 days after the event occurred to both the San Diego Police Department and NCIS.

My assailant has been a member of the Marine Corps since 2001, and although he has served in Iraq, Okinawa, and other sites around the world, his actions are completely unjustifiable and out of line with the Marine Corps code of conduct. Being a civilian, my access to military resources is limited. This is only exacerbated by the fact that military officers do not return my phone calls, and give me inaccurate information, enervating my capacity to ensure my personal safety.

I reported the rape to the San Diego Police Department on February 12, 2009 and the Marine Corps on February 13, 2009. No NCIS Special Agent ever made unsolicited contact with me and I was not granted a meeting with my police detective until March 19, 2009.

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I had to personally appear at the NCIS office at MCAS Miramar to get an NCIS Special Agent to speak to me about my case. Not only that, but it was not until May 11, 2009 that I was given the name and contact information for the agent assigned to my case.

As a result of NCIS's failure to act on my initial report, my assailant was permitted to take leave en route for over a month and a half to Costa Rica. He was in Costa Rica for six weeks, awaiting his transfer to Okinawa, Japan. This vacation has stalled the San Diego Police Department's investigation.

The fact that my assailant was allowed a vacation sends the repulsive message that because I am a female civilian, the injustice committed against me does not matter. I protested and finally my assailant's orders to be stationed in Okinawa, Japan were cancelled. This member of the United States Marine Corps does not embody the ideals of an active, commissioned officer, let alone a law-abiding citizen in the civilian sector.

I am requesting that someone with the authority to make decisions regarding my case and my safety help me in ensuring this Marine is made available to the San Diego Police Department for investigation and punitive action. I implore those of you with authority to take my case seriously, as it is disconcerting the way I have been treated, the way I have been ignored.

Best regards,

Christina Baker