Love My Rifle More than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army by Michael E. Staub

A Unique Perspective On Enlisted Life At War, From The Point Of View Of A Mature, College-Educated Female

A brutal and honest account of being a woman among men in the United States Army.

A woman soldier has to toughen herself up writes Kayla Williams in this fiercely honest account of what it’s like to be part of the female 15% of today’s Army. Not just for the enemy, for battle, for death. I mean to toughen herself to spend months awash in a sea of nervy, hyped-up guys.…

By turns irreverent, vulnerable, angry, and humane, Williams describes what it’s like for a young woman to be surrounded by an ocean of testosterone, respected for her skills and qualifications, but treated variously as a soldier, a sister, a mother, a bitch, and a slut.

During her five years of service—including a year of deployment to Iraq during and after the invasion—Williams and her female peers navigate both extreme physical danger and emotional minefields. As a specialist in Military Intelligence, fluent in Arabic language skills, Williams finds herself at the forefront of the troops interaction with local people. Brave and patriotic, with a strong sense of duty to her country and her fellow soldiers, she is unafraid to level complaints and criticism against the inefficiencies and errors of the military—sketching a blunt portrait, inspired by Ayn Rand, of the U.S. Army as a vast communist institution.
Taking us from Baghdad to Mosul to a remote mountainous outpost on the Syrian border, Williams demonstrates a keen eye for the complexity of the U.S. militarys evolving and ultimately deteriorating relations with the Iraqis. Before she leaves the country, she witnesses death up close and sees soldiers cross the line in the handling of prisoners.

Through it all—the violence, boredom, and fear as well as the light-hearted moments of humor, comraderie, and flirtation—Kayla Williams brings home with vivid intensity and empathy what it is like for a woman soldier to serve her country today. 8 pages of photographs.

Williams opens her memoir by declaring that all Army females are either a bitch (they wont sleep with you) or a slut (they'll sleep with everyone but you). She stayed a bitch during her tour in the Army, but that didnt stop her from being the subject of some nasty rumors.

Williams is a bit older than your typical enlistee, shes college-educated, and shes dated a Muslim man, so she provides a unique perspective on the Army and her deployment to Muslim Iraq. Shes stationed for some time with 18-year-old infantry grunts, and while she has a much different (and understanding) attitude toward the locals, she understands how someone defending a position and getting attacked can do nothing but hate every Iraqi man, woman, and child as a potential insurgent.

Again and again, Williams questions the plan as a whole. Stop points and roadblocks are erected with no Arabic signage, Muslim women are afraid of strange men, and the last military in the country (Saddams) consisted of ruthless killers, so how are local Iraqi villages supposed to understand what is going on at roadblocks? Then again, there have been plenty of female suicide bombers, so what are the soldiers supposed to expect? Williams has to use underground circuits to get her vegetarian kosher/halal meals, even though most soldiers hate them and abandon them with the trash, because she cant officially get religious meals due to a personal dietary (vegetarian) preference. In one heartbreaking scene, Williams interprets during the search of a Catholic monastery. Her superiors are hot-headed, interrupting service, destroying property, and ignoring the priest who reaches out to them as a brother. Later, she gets someone to do a good turn for the monastery, which leaves the reader with some hope.

Williams also deals repeatedly with female leaders who put their soldiers at risk, dont understand the mission, dont grasp the political situation, and are incompetent when it comes to dealing with her groups equipment. Williams disagrees with the military system of promoting people due to time in grade unless something really bad happens. She comes across too many people
promoted to leadership roles who don’t have the skills to back their position up, but they happened to have served long enough to move up. In her closing comments, she discusses how the Army gives you no incentive to excel at your job—the bare minimum is just fine, and it will get you promoted just fine.

Williams provides an unparalleled view of life on the ground floor of the war in Iraq. She never provides any solid answers, choosing instead to reveal how confused and frustrated she was, yet how rewarding some parts of the experience were. Another reviewer commented that the memoir might be a little early, when her anger over certain situations was still too fresh. I rather like the fact that she is honest about her love/hate relationship with the Army and the mission in Iraq, and she transports the reader to the point of view of a foot soldier. I would have liked to learn a little more about what her tasks were doing signal intelligence for 12-hour shifts (on occasion), but perhaps she got legal advice not to reveal those secrets of the US Army.

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