

An Unladylike Profession: American Women War Correspondents in World War I

Chris Dubbs

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Chris Dubbs's *An Unladylike Profession* jumps into the trenches with the women reporters of World War I—groundbreaking journalists who explained the war to readers in the US, and who shared stories from the war's brutal aftermath.

Mary Boyle O'Reilly is among the women profiled; she wrote some of the first dispatches on battlefield brutality in Liege and in the ransacked areas nearby. The experiences of her fellow journalists—some seasoned writers and editors; and including photojournalist Helen Johns Kirtland—were remarkable, too. Some were suffragists. Others were newcomers eager make their ways. Some wrote for national publications, some for syndication, and others for smaller papers, but all went into unknown territory to help readers back home understand the war. Photographs of the journalists are a compelling addition.

Passages about the women's individual tours of duty fit together like jigsaw pieces, following the larger arc of the war with telling quotes from their work and from archival records. These include journal entries from two novelists-turned-reporters, Mary Roberts Rinehart and Edith Wharton, who was living in Paris when she was enlisted by Scribner's to report on France.

Their experiences make it clear how different warfare, journalism, and career opportunities for women were a hundred years ago. O'Reilly reported in Belgium when women were not even allowed to ride in automobiles there, for example, and the women's stories about refugees, bread lines, and overcrowded hospitals were often consigned to the "women's pages" of papers back home. Also incredible are the different methods the women used to access sources, and the processes they invented to evade censors and post or wire the news home in an age before news was immediate.

An Unladylike Profession is a fascinating history about the gutsy women reporters of World War I.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (July / August 2020)

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