

Out of the Shadows: Voices of American Women Soldiers

Ron Farina

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Out of the Shadows is a gripping book that brings the courage, valor, and dedication of American women soldiers into the light.

In Ron Farina's *Out of the Shadows*, nine American women veterans share the raw truth of life on the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Despite the common belief that women soldiers deployed to war zones are kept out of harm's way and serve in the shadows of men, these eye-opening accounts from women veterans unveils a different reality. Indeed, the book notes that women have been serving on battlefields for almost two decades, and they make up many of the thousands killed or wounded in those conflicts. Nonetheless, the book says, women's service, bravery under fire, and sacrifices all too often go unrecognized.

These stories are powerful in their depictions of the hellishness of war. They reveal the costs of combat for those who survive, too, with instances of relationships lost, internal struggles, post-traumatic stress syndrome, and disabling physical wounds. The contrasts between the women's lives before entering the military and what they became on the battlefield are stark. In one story, Connie Neill, who was seventeen and a rodeo rider before becoming a soldier, describes the partnership between her and her eager horse; the smells of the arena, leather, and horse sweat; and the electricity of the crowd. These details contrast with her memories from Iraq, including grueling work in the sun, numbing routines, and surprise missile attacks. She was hit by shrapnel, received a Purple Heart, and returned to her unit, where no one spoke about what happened to avoid seeming weak.

The terrors of surprise attacks and sustaining wounds recur throughout. There are painful periods of recovery represented too; the women discuss feeling a sense of urgency to rejoin their units in battle, regardless. And their returns home are covered, including their struggles readapting to civilian life. Some took on the work of helping other veterans adjust to post-military life as well.

The women's motivations for enlisting in the military are also shared. These include the attacks of September 11, 2001, the examples of relatives, and the desire for higher education. Though each woman's personality and voice is distinct, they still have elements in common, including a sense of commitment to the nation, the military, and their fellow soldiers. Their stories are violent, disturbing, and heartbreaking, sometimes complemented by raw photographs, as of them undergoing treatment for wounds.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (August 23, 2022)

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