

1-1-2002

Martin van Creveld on Men, Women and War

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Recommended Citation

Bunker, Robert J. "Martin van Creveld on Men, Women, and War." Rev. of Men, Women, and War by Martin van Creveld. *Military Review* 87.6 (2002) 102-104. Print.

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4. Richard M. Connaughton, *The Republic of Ushakovka: Admiral Kolchak and the Allied Intervention in Siberia, 1918-1920* (London: Routledge, 1990), chap. 5.
 5. John Albert White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 18-22.
 6. Connaughton, 45-46; Kennan, 65-71; James William Morley, *The Japanese Thrust into Siberia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 95-100.
 7. Connaughton, 137; White, *The Siberian Intervention* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 150-51. See also John M. House, *Wolfsounds and Polar Bears in Siberia: America's Military Intervention* (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1986), chap. 9.
 8. Bolshevik partisans ambushed and killed all but 8 of the 300-man Tanaika detachment of the 72d Infantry Regiment, 12th Infantry Division. Although reported in the Japanese newspapers, this reverse caused nothing like the sensation over the massacre of Japanese soldiers and civilians at Nikolaevsk a year later. The incident is virtually forgotten today. Nothing exists on the incident in English. A description of the battle is in Takahashi Osamu's novel *Hahei [Troop Dispatch]*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1973), 411-28.
 9. White, *Siberian Intervention*, 286-92.
 10. House, 141-54.
 11. Connaughton, 113-17.
 12. *Ibid.*, chap. 7.

13. *Ibid.*, 131-33.
 14. James D. Starr, "American Film Propaganda in Revolutionary Russia," *Prologue* (Fall 1998), 167-79.
 15. White, *Siberian Intervention*, 134-35, 144-50; Kennan, 64-65.
 16. Connaughton, 171-72. Graves makes his own case in *America's Siberian Adventure, 1918-1920* (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1931).
 17. Halliday, *The Ignorant Armies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), describes the action in North Russia.
 18. Operational questions concerning MOOTW are taken from Joint Publication 3-0, *RSD* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 10 December 1999), chap. 5, 2-6.
 19. Richard Goldhurst, *The Midnight War: The American Intervention in Russia, 1918-1920* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1978); Christopher Dobson, *The Night They Almost Bombed Moscow: The Allied War in Russia, 1918-1920* (New York: Atheneum, 1986); Benjamin Rhodes, *The Anglo-American Winter War with Russia: a Diplomatic and Military Tragedy, 1918-1919* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Connaughton, 171-72.
 20. Kennan, *Soviet American Relations, 1917-1920: Russia Leaves the War*, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), and Kennan, vol. 2, 398; Betty Miller Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition, 1918-1920* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1956); Unterberger, *American Intervention in the Russian Civil War* (Lexington:

D.C. Heath, 1969); Unterberger, *The United States, Revolutionary Russia and the Rise of Czechoslovakia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).
 21. Robert James Maddox, *The Unknown War with Russia: Wilson's Siberian Intervention* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1977).
 22. Ilya S. Somin, *Stillborn Crusade: The Tragic Failure of Western Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1918-1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996).
 23. Victor M. Fic, *The Collapse of American Policy in Russia and Siberia, 1918: Wilson's Decision Not to Intervene* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1995); Fic, *The Rise of the Constitutional Alternative to Soviet Rule in 1918: Provisional Governments of Siberia and All-Russia: Their Quest for Allied Intervention* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1998).
 24. Halliday, xvi.

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MR Review Essay

Martin van Creveld on *Men, Women & War*

Dr. Robert J. Bunker © January 2002

I was at first apprehensive when approached about writing a review essay on Martin van Creveld's new book, *Men, Women & War: Do Women Belong in the Front Line?*¹ The topic was not a key interest of mine, and more pressing real-world needs required my attention. While the sporadic conversations I have had with van Creveld over the last couple of years made me aware of his growing interest and deep fascination with the topic of women in general, this work seemed a diversion from his repertoire of such seminal works as *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallerstein to Patton*; *Command in War*; and *Technology in War: From 2000 B.C. to the Present*.² Luckily, I relented and decided that I should expand my knowledge base by reading van Creveld's book. As I read and reflected on his new text, I realized that by following his instincts he has once again created a unique work.

The immediate benefit I gained from reading the book is a better understanding of the military historical context of women in relationship to future warfare. The book also helped explain why emerging mercenary companies are male-dominated. I had long ago recognized but never really placed this trend into a gender

context. While these lessons might or might not have been van Creveld's intent, it is of primary interest to me and, I suspect, to many *Military Review* readers. The danger many of us fall into is getting too operational in our thinking and focus. The revolution in military affairs, operations other than war, and stability and support operations are examples of such focus. Sometimes we must take in more encompassing views at the cultural and societal level in which war is waged. Since women make up at least half of our populace, understanding their historical roles in warfare is important. This understanding will allow us to better understand the current context in which they operate in the Armed Forces, with the U.S. Army of particular interest, and what their future roles in warfighting might be.

Overview and Analysis

Men, Women & War sports a camouflage cover, making it look somewhat like a field manual. The preface discusses how poisoned the relations between the sexes are in this field of scholarship and lays out van Creveld's historical view concerning how it has been the man's "duty to protect woman, by fighting for her if necessary."³

The introduction provides van Creveld's intent. He goes beyond "construction of gender" arguments to instead seek to show that a "great illusion" exists concerning women in the military today. He states "that the influx of women into the military, far from representing some historical step in women's unstoppable march toward liberation, is both symptom and cause of the decline of the military in question. The process was triggered by the introduction of nuclear weapons over 50 years ago. Since then, the armed forces of no developed country have fought a major war against a major opponent who was even remotely capable of putting its own national existence in danger; compared with the recent past, and with very few exceptions, all they have done was to engage in skirmishes."⁴

He argues that this process has been ongoing for about 30 years, as has the rise of military contractors and mercenaries who are almost completely absent of female personnel. The former South African mercenary group Executive Outcomes and the private security group Military Professional Resources Incorporated founded by retired U.S. Army generals are two examples of the types of groups of which van Creveld is

speaking. He states that “it might almost be said that those armed forces that have been forced to incorporate women no longer fight; whereas those that still fight have very few, if any, women.”⁵

Part I surveys how women have been caught up in wars—as instigators, causes, objects, or as protégés of men. Van Creveld views women as critical to war in these capacities and claims that to some extent war owes its existence to women as much as it does to men because it is an organized social and political activity; that is, take away women, and war would not exist.

Part II, which covers actions of women in war through the ages, is the most interesting section to read because of the various case studies discussed. The chapters on the “Warrior Women of Dahomey” and the role of women in “Revolts, Revolutions, and Insurgencies” are particularly noteworthy.

Part III looks at the period from 1945 to the present. Van Creveld details the decline of the military in one country after another and how, in his view, this has allowed the influx of women. He contends that this has exacerbated the problem and led to further military decline, which, continuing the cycle, allows more women to enter the military.

Based on van Creveld’s detailed analysis in the middle sections of the book, his conclusions appear to focus on three items that, from a women’s-studies perspective, might light the fuse to a powder keg. He says “pro-feminist scholars, attempting to prove that women can and should take an active part in armed conflict, have inflated the role played by women in the past out of all proportion.”⁶ He dispels the myths relating to the over significance of the Amazons, the warrior women of Dahomey, the Soviet women in the Russian Civil War and during World War II, and the Israeli women serving in the Israel Defense Forces.

Van Creveld contends that “contrary to the claims of some, it was not feminist pressures but the beliefs entertained by politicians, soldiers, and scholars concerning the shape of future war that first enabled

women to gain a prominent toehold in the military during the years after 1945. [In] most countries it was not feminist pressures but military requirements—meaning a shortage of men—which triggered the growth of that toehold from about 1970 on. Often women, instead of freeing men for combat, simply took up positions men no longer wanted; in which respect the military are [sic] quite typical of other feminizing professions.”⁷

He continues, “Military women are often absolutely detested by the male majority. As a result, the more determined and the more successful their quest for equality the more their special privileges were taken away and the more exposed they felt to ‘sexual harassment,’ both real and imaginary.”⁸ In 1998, this resulted in some U.S. servicewomen demanding the process be put in full reverse with the return of separate chains of command and facilities. As a result, “women’s attempt to improve their social positions by joining the military has not only failed but backfired. Instead of showing they are equal to men, it has proved they cannot do without special protection.”⁹

An underlying secondary theme in this work, which is likely to be seen as controversial for various branches of the military, is van Creveld’s projection that as “the number and importance of wars between states, particularly developed ones, continue to decline it is likely that more women will enter the armed forces of those states. As more women enter them, the armed forces in question will become both less willing to fight and less capable of doing so.”¹⁰ Van Creveld suggests that “true warriors” will eventually be found only in the U.S. Marine Corps; other elite, male-dominated units; and mercenary corporations.

Because van Creveld is not an established scholar of women’s studies, he has done an immense amount of research on the topic. He draws on English, German, Italian, French, Hebrew, and Russian (via scholar support) works and cites more feminists and women’s studies literature than I ever imagined existed. In fact, this book has more notes than have any of his other books. This level of

research and detail, one supposes, will somewhat protect van Creveld from the firestorm of criticism he might well be subjected to by his treatment of this controversial topic.

The major strength of the book is van Creveld’s willingness to take risks. Time and again he wades into uncharted territory and places it into context with his own form of intellectual overlay. That overlay helps define each topical area, such as logistics in war, and is something other scholars and military professionals have been forced to contend with even years after the publication of one of his books. This topical area without a doubt will be no different.

My specific criticism of the book is minor and based on van Creveld’s superficial knowledge of American pop culture. His references to *Charlie’s Angels* and *Xena, the Warrior ‘Queen,’* are inaccurate.¹¹ But these are minimal mistakes. He was able to accurately pinpoint a subplot focus of the U.S. film *GI Jane* found in its infamous one-liner indicating Demi Moore’s character’s “symbolic growth” of a male sexual organ, which allowed her to pass survival, escape, resistance, and evasion training.¹²

The only real difficulty I had with the mechanics of the work was matching the three conclusions of the book listed on page 13 with the actual text discussing those conclusions found in the “Change and Continuity” chapter which spans pages 228-37. No clear-cut listing of the conclusions existed in the final chapter, which made it somewhat difficult to highlight them. That I might have missed some part of van Creveld’s conclusions is troubling. Better delineation of each conclusion is needed. While acknowledging my limited background in gender studies, to me this work appears to be tightly written. Also, I cannot suggest that the book’s political incorrectness is a weakness, because the book is meant to be incorrect in the sense that its point is to challenge a woman’s right to be a front-line combat soldier.

Because of his academic freedom as a tenured professor, van Creveld simply calls it as he sees it. He can play the devil’s advocate quite well,

but I think he has gone way beyond it here in scope and intent. He is sincere about the topic and passionate about his views that, he argues, are quite convincingly historically accurate. In my view, he has literally created an “intellectual grenade” with this book. He has opened the door on the women in combat roles debate and tossed in some controversial contentions. Since he does not have a dog in that fight, he can now walk away and let the fragments fly where they may.

Future Implications

The future implications of this book are twofold. On an individual level, it portrays the broadening in van Creveld’s scholarship to include the study of women. He has published many books on the topics of strategy and military history and has, to some extent, exhausted the study of men and war. For this reason, this is a transitional work for van Creveld. We can expect, at some point, for him to write stand-alone works on the topic in addition to his more familiar martial-focused books.

At a societal level, this book also has direct implications for the U.S. Army. The conceptual link to his brilliant work *The Transformation of War* is quite clear.¹³ If a viable and real state-based threat should appear, then “the expanded role of women in the military will vanish like the chimerica it is.”¹⁴ So unless a peer competitor or hostile regional power should emerge some time in the near future, the long-term prospects for the U.S. Army—the military institution that fights and wins the Nation’s wars—is rather bleak by van Creveld’s analysis.

The current war with the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda network, an early form of a transnational non-state, warmaking entity, only serves to support van Creveld’s thinking. The postmodern, criminal-soldier, and new-warrior-class “blackfords” (criminal opposing forces) represent networked entities who seek nothing less than the destruction of America and the way of life it represents. As a result, national archetypes of 21st-century soldiers are now based on the front-page photos of U.S. Special Forces on horseback in Afghanistan

and firemen raising the U.S. flag over the still-smoldering ruins of the World Trade Center. Women viewed through van Creveld’s lens would, in this context, have no place in either venue because these venues represent war at its most primitive and brutal.

Those who see push-button, standoff war as the future will probably find van Creveld’s work backward looking and out of sync with current gender realities. Others, including male and female service members, will take issue with his thesis, observations, and conclusions. But, while no one must agree with him, no one can ignore him. He proves to be one of the most influential military writers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Whether van Creveld will focus more and more on “Venus” or whether his past association with “Mars” will ultimately prevail, he will continue to create a unique synthesis between the two fields of study. Regardless, *Men, Women & War* has now put him on a collision course with the profeminist scholars of the world. Let the battle be joined! **MR**

NOTES

1. Martin van Creveld, *Men, Women & War: Do Women Belong in the Front Line?* (London: Cassell & Co., 2001, distributed by Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., New York).
2. Van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallerstein to Patton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); *Command in War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); *Technology and War: From 2000 B.C. to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).
3. *Men, Women & War*, 7.
4. *Ibid.*, 10-11.
5. *Ibid.*, 12.
6. *Ibid.*, 228.
7. *Ibid.*, 232-33.
8. *Ibid.*, 234.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 236-37.
11. On pages 63 and 64, van Creveld calls the three “angels” policewomen. In the 1970s television series, they were private detectives (*Charlie’s Angels*, Columbia Pictures Television, Hollywood, California). Van Creveld calls Xena, a warrior queen. The name of the 1990s series is *Xena, Warrior Princess* (Oxygen Media, New York).
12. Ridley Scott, director, *Gl. Jane* (Hollywood, CA: Hollywood Pictures Studios, 1997).
13. Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).
14. Van Creveld, *Men, Women & War*, 237.

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