

Kelsey McGuire
April 26, 2009

Women in the Military

Journal Entry 1
November 25, 2008

This semester I took Modern Middle Eastern Studies. As a class we decided that we wanted to look into the treatment of Women in the Military. This is a very broad category so we decided to narrow it down. Recently there has been a lot of talk about how U.S. Women have been treated during the current war. This war is something very close to home for many of us. We then decided that looking into this could be very important. We discussed how we should go about this research project because it would require a lot of work to be as in depth as we had hoped.

My part of this in depth research project was to get in contact with people personally and interview them. These people include but are not limited to, people in military offices who hold reports about rapes, abuse, and other acquisitions made by women about unfair treatment while serving in the Iraq or Afghanistan wars, and women in the military, presently, or vets, who can be questioned about their time spent and feelings towards women's treatment in the military.

Journal Entry 2
November 30, 2008

Research:

To start this part of my research I decided I wanted to get a hold of someone in a military office. This led me to a long strand of events. I first called the MPSA, Military Postal Service Agency. When speaking to someone on this line I was given no answers and not a real confident response to try a local recruiter for my research. I did this and called a Springfield area recruiter, he was very friendly and said that he wished he could help me more but really did not have any information that I would be looking for. He was confident however that the Public Affairs Office would be able to help me with this research. I googled and got the number for U.S. Army Public Affairs. I was so sure at this point I would get some real answers. However I was wrong, there was no answer at this number and no way to leave a message and hope for a response. I then tried to find an email to a specific person in this office, but there was nothing on the web site. I searched some more and found a Military Once Source 24/7 service. So I tried this number and the women on the phone had no idea where I could call for information on accounts like this, and went further to tell me she did not think anywhere would give out this information. I was obviously very frustrated and discouraged after this phone call and decided I would wait until our library research time to try more numbers.

Journal Entry 3
December 1, 2008

Comments:

I felt that I was never going to get information that I was looking for from an office of the military, people who had actual accounts of important events that went on

for women during the times of war. I do not think that this is information that should be kept from the public. Recruiters are said to give false information to people, especially women when trying to get them in a branch of military. The information about women's troubles faced in war is something that should not be kept secret from the public, and women who are involved in the wars and have strong feelings about their treatment are going to be the people who I gain the most information from. That is where the next part of my research will go.

Journal Entry 4
December 2, 2008
Personal Contacts

After some frustration I got in touch with Kelly Dougherty who is a Veteran of the Iraq war. She is also co founder and now Executive Director of the *Iraq Veterans against War*. I have been in contact with her over email and she is willing to answer any questions I had for her. She is also going to forward these questions to other Women veterans from the Iraq war and we are hoping for some responses from them as well. My first response however was Kelly's. The questions and her responses follow along with a personal comment section from what I got out of reading her answers and how I felt about them.

Journal Entry 5
December 3, 2008

Questions and Answers from Kelly Dougherty.

Basic Information:

Name: Kelly Dougherty
Age:

- **How long you were enlisted –**
I enlisted in the Colorado Army National Guard (N.G.) at age 17 while I was a high school senior. I served for 8 years, from 1996 – 2004.
- **Where you were located –**
As a part of the N.G., I went to drill one weekend a month and then for 2 weeks in the summer. I enlisted as a medic and was assigned to a Military Police (MP) company, first in Pueblo, CO and later in Denver, CO. Later, I transferred to a medical unit in Aurora, CO. I deployed to Hungary and Croatia with the MP Co in 1999 – 2000, and to Iraq with the same Co from Feb '03 – Feb '04.
- **Why did you enlist? –**
I joined the N.G. to get money to go to college, as well as medical training.
- **What did you know about Iraq before going into war, what did you think you were getting into? How do you feel after being there? –**

I knew that Iraq had been under very strict UN sanctions, dominated by the United States, since the first Gulf War and that one million Iraqis, mostly children, had died as a result of the sanctions. I knew that the U.S. had continued to bomb Iraq throughout the 1990's and that there had been little reconstruction/repair on much of Iraq's infrastructure due to the sanctions. This included electrical plants, water treatment facilities, and hospitals. Also, I knew that the U.S. military's use of depleted uranium munitions was a likely cause for wildly increased rates of birth defects and childhood cancers in Southern Iraq.

I was opposed to the invasion of Iraq and didn't trust the Bush administration. I was surprised to find out that information discrediting the reasons for going to war were easily available, yet never talked about. Instead, there was practically no discussion or debate and many people blindly and fearfully supported a war that would clearly kill many people.

I did not want to deploy, but as a sergeant in the N.G., I did not have many options and felt a duty to be there to support the other people in my unit who were making more personal sacrifices than I was. Although, I greatly respect soldiers/Marines who refuse to deploy because I know it is a very difficult, personal decision. Also, I admire people who can see that there is more than one choice, because the military instills a feeling that you don't have any choices and it can be difficult to see past that.

After being to Iraq, I became very disheartened and more distrusting of our government. I saw how horribly the Iraqi people were treated and how demolished their country was. They had been beat down to a level of basic survival and then blamed for the violence and disorder in their country that had been created by the U.S. war and occupation. Like most people in an impossible situation, though, the Iraqi people have no choice but to continue on and try to maintain their dignity and livelihood as best as possible.

One of the things I was most shocked and upset by was the disregard and hostility that many of my fellow soldiers had for the Iraqi people, as well as Arabs, Muslims, and non-American, non-whites in general. Everyone was a "hadji", not just the Iraqis, but also the Third Country Nationals (TCNs) who worked for the U.S. defense contractors. These were people from countries like Nepal, Pakistan, and Philippines who worked as truck drivers and laborers for companies like Halliburton. While I think I understand the dynamics behind dehumanization and the characterization of people as the "other," I was not prepared to see this behavior so starkly in real life. Now, as a veteran, I've seen how the act of dehumanization and violence impacts the people who perpetrate these actions (soldiers) once they are removed from the war/occupation environment and allowed the time to reflect on their experiences.

During war, the social constructs and behaviors that people accept and take for granted their whole lives are completely broken down. Reality stops making

sense and people shift to a mode of survival. I think this is universal and not unique to any one conflict.

- **How are you treated as a woman in the war? –**

I had several very good friends, both men and women, while I was in Iraq. However, the military is notorious for being a hostile environment for women. This was definitely true in my case. My unit was about 10% women (about 15) and many of them were in the support roles, not as military police. For those of us who were MPs, there were only a few women in leadership roles. The women leaders seemed to be under more scrutiny and criticism than the men. Men, including sergeants and officers, would openly make derogatory, insulting remarks about women, including women in the unit, with impunity. Pornographic movies and magazines were openly watched/read. Once, I told two male Specialists in my tent (the tents were organized by squad, not by sex) that it was unacceptable to be looking at porn while in the common living area and not to do it again. They agreed, but my squad leader overheard and began to argue with me about why porn wasn't offensive. Even though Army regulations prohibit the use of pornography, I was in a position of having to defend myself to my squad leader who was my boss. But it wasn't that surprising since my platoon sergeant frequently got together with other people in the unit to watch pornos in one of the tents. That's just a small example, but one that sticks out in my head.

Also, apart from unit dynamics, there was the reality that women were not safe on base. This is true on any military base in the world, but made starker when you have to go out on patrol every day and worry about your safety, then come back to base and continue worrying about your safety. When I first arrived in Kuwait, the women were told that there was a man who had been hiding in the women's shower stalls with a gas mask on to conceal his face and had been trying to attack women. Later, in Iraq, women were told that a woman had been attacked while running, so we were no longer allowed to run by ourselves. Also, on base in Kuwait, women weren't allowed out alone after dark. Most women I know who are/were in the military know women or have themselves been victims of sexual assault and it is generally understood that a woman who reports a sexual assault will only become a further target of ridicule and harassment. In my experience, Army leadership has not done their job of looking out for the welfare of their soldiers, particularly women.

- **What jobs are women assigned to? –**

When I was in Iraq I was part of an MP team. Over the course of my deployment I performed all three jobs, team leader, gunner, and driver. We would drive patrol routes throughout southern Iraq, escort military contractor convoys, and respond to incidents that happened in our area of operation.

- **Are you told before hand about ALL of the jobs you will be involved in? –**

No, things change often and you may end up doing things you weren't ready for. For example, I was a medic in a medical unit, but was involuntarily transferred to the Military Police unit and re-classified as an MP in order to deploy. Also, many

of our mechanics, cooks, medics, and admin personnel ended up working as MPs because we were short handed.

- **Are you aware of sexual harassment based on your own experience or others? –**
Both, see above.
- Do you know what the Government policy is on this? – Well, there is a training that everyone has to go through about “Equal Opportunity Education.” In my experience, though, it’s pretty much a joke. You sit through the class, sign the paper, and then it’s over. From there, you only have the behavior of your peers and leaders to reinforce the culture. In my experience, the culture was one of hostility and degradation towards women. This isn’t that surprising, as our society as a whole is demeaning towards women. I think that it’s more prominent in the military though because there are less social controls keeping people from expressing sexist behavior.
- How has the Government responded to these cases? – In the stories I’ve heard from many of my fellow women vets/soldiers, when a sexual assault is reported, the woman is often told not to make an official report. The reasons for this usually are one or more of the following: 1. You will ruin the man’s career/family, 2. You can’t prove it, 3. No one will believe you. Also, sometimes women who report assault are punished for submitting false reports, thereby discouraging other women from making reports. There definitely are women and men in the military who have zero tolerance for violent behavior like this, but it is not reflective of the overall culture.
- What did you learn about sexism from being a woman in the services? – One thing that I noticed is that the women generally did not form a strong bond amongst themselves. I mean, women were friends with other women, but there was not overall female solidarity in the unit. Other women may have had a different experience with this. Since women were generally already under attack and feeling like they had to work harder to prove themselves and be respected, it set up a dynamic where women were working against, rather than with, one another. In the Army, a woman (military or civilian) is generally classified as a bitch, a slut, or a dyke. So, you have to think about what category you’d rather fit into. I think that I was typically in either the bitch or dyke category.

I would like to point out that my experiences while in the medical unit were very different than in the MP unit. I really enjoyed the medical unit. There was a higher percentage of women, and our company commander was a woman, our first sergeant was a man. The medical unit, though, was a lot different in that the medical field generally has more women in it than the MPs, our unit was a headquarters unit. This meant that we spent our time doing support work, not combat drills, and there were a lot of officers who were Drs, nurses, Pas, etc in the

civilian world. In general, at the medical unit, the atmosphere was much more laid back, encouraging, and enjoyable.

- **What did you witness in terms of treatment against Iraqi women? –**
We generally did not have contact with the Iraqi women. We would see Iraqi women, but culture dictated that we not interact. I had several experiences interacting with the Iraqi women without the company of the military men. What was interesting to me was the way the Iraqi men viewed us as U.S. military women. I think that they get their ideas of women through American media and porn. In American media, women tend to be representative of an idealized beauty standard and are often hyper-sexualized. I don't think I have to say anything about the porn angle. Also, the American GIs give the Iraqi men magazines like Maxim and FHM, which further reinforce this stereotyping of the American woman. This image is very different from the way the Iraqi woman is portrayed and thought about. So, the Iraqi men would say and do things to the U.S. women that I don't think they'd ever do to an Iraqi woman. For instance, make kissy faces and sexual innuendos and try to sell us bootleg porn DVDs. Since women in Iraq don't serve in the military, carry guns and publicly boss men around, I think that it totally blew the minds of Iraqi men to see women doing this. Plus, they thought it was so weird that we would be in the Army in Iraq. What about our families, our children, they would ask. I felt like female soldiers were looked upon with a sense of bewilderment, curiosity, sexual desire, and (depending on circumstance) friendliness or contempt. And the male soldiers would get pissed at the Iraqis because they thought the Iraqis were disrespectful to women, but they didn't get the irony of the fact that they would give the Iraqi men soft-core porn every day, or that they themselves behaved in sexist ways.

Journal Entry 6
December 4, 2008

My Thoughts and Reactions:

I would first like to say how exciting it was to hear back from Kelly. Her responses were detailed and very informative. They gave me a real insight of the struggles women face during war, and what she has seen in her experiences in the war in Iraq.

There was a wide range of questions I asked Kelly, and before I start discussing how I felt about the treatment of women I would like to point out how and why Kelly got into the services and how much she knew about the war before being thrown in the midst of it. Kelly joined the National Guard to have money to go to school. This is a decision that in this day in age many are faced with. Some feel as if it is not a choice but more the only way to be able to afford school, among other things. This is a sad truth. Kelly was also enlisted in the National Guard at the age of 17, before even finishing high school. This too was surprising to me. Kelly was both a medic, and later assigned to the military police force during her time.

The next part of the interview with Kelly was about the knowledge she had before she was sent to Iraq. Kelly knew about Iraq politically and economically, however she was not in full support about the war she would soon be fighting in. Kelly's remarks about how people were blindly supporting the war without much knowledge about what we were fighting for were upsetting but still believable. Our administration has tried to keep as much from the public as possible and keep the people as ignorant as possible about foreign politics. Sadly most of our country has let this happen with no argument. Kelly also said that she became even more distrusting of our government after being in Iraq. I am surprised by this because I was under the impression that most of the Iraq soldiers were supportive of the Bush administration, but then again Kelly was co founder of the Iraq Veterans **Against** the War. "Reality stops making sense and people shift to a mode of survival. I think this is universal and not unique to any one conflict." This quote was a very good ending to this question I asked Kelly and I think that it is a very accurate account of war in general.

The jobs Kelly would be doing were not something she was fully informed about before her deployment. She was sent over as part of the Military Police team. Kelly was a team leader, a gunner and a driver. Kelly informed us that you are not always told what jobs you will be doing when you get there. You may be asked to do things that you are not prepared for. When the military is short handed people are taken out of the jobs they are assigned for to help out other parts of the military. Women in general are not supposed to be in combat or the front line, but in Iraq right now, everywhere is the front line.

The responses Kelly had to some of my next questions were disturbing and aggravating, but very informative. Her experience with the treatment she and other women with her faced was that women were treated negatively. Derogatory and insulting comments were openly made by men in their unit as well as men in leadership roles. I was unaware that pornography was prohibited by army regulations, although as Kelly explained to us, this law is not very enforced. Men will openly look at and watch porn in the tents, with women there or not, it does not phase the men as demeaning. The stories she told about women's safety made me sick. I can not imagine who would stand in shower stalls to try to attack women, and can not imagine being told this and ever feeling safe. The idea that no matter where you were, in combat, or in your tent, you were never safe is one I would never want to live with. Another thing I found interesting was that even with all of the negative treatment towards women, women still did not form a tight bond with each other or become closer because of it. The classifications of women were terrible, words such as bitch, dyke, or a slut is what the women were commonly referred to.

The Iraqi women did not have much contact with the U.S. soldiers, the culture dictated this. Kelly said what was more interesting than the treatment of Iraqi women was the way the Iraqi men treated the U.S. women. The Iraqi men would make sexual innuendos and sexual gestures towards the U.S. women. Kelly believed the reason for

this was because of the way women are portrayed in the U.S. this is something many people see everyday but are blind to. This information really makes it clear how our country portrays its women as sex symbols. The Iraqi men get these ideas from porn and the media, and it does not help that the American men give the Iraqi men magazines such as Maximum, and other porn magazines. The treatment of the U.S. women from the Iraqi men was very surprising, I was not expecting to hear anything about this topic because I had never heard of anything like this happening before.

“Most women I know who are/were in the military know women or have themselves been victims of sexual assault and it is generally understood that a woman who reports a sexual assault will only become a further target of ridicule and harassment.” This comment is exactly what this report is dealing with, and what we were trying to determine by doing this report, that most women in the war are or have the threat of being sexually harassed. This is terrible because they are women fighting for our country, putting their life on the line to help us, just as the men are doing. The most drastic form of sexual harassment involved rape and other physical activities. However name calling, the watching of porn, and all of the other things that Kelly discussed are also forms of sexual harassment that women in war are faced with everyday.

Our Government has been discussed by Kelly in a negative manner before, and when discussing the ways the government “tried” to prevent and punish sexual harassment cases, nothing has changed. The “Equal Opportunity Education” class is something all military personnel must take part in, but Kelly told us that she, and most likely everyone else sees this class as a joke. The class is something they must sit through, and then the class signs the paper saying they understand the policies and that is the end of this training. Once outside of the classroom the culture we live in takes over and nothing changes the way men act towards women. The way the government responds to sexual harassment cases is just as bad if not worse than the way they try to prevent it. Most cases brought up are dismissed and the women become more of a target for sexual harassment cases. “In my experience, Army leadership has not done their job of looking out for the welfare of their soldiers, particularly women”. Women are told that they will ruin the man’s life or family, and that no one will believe them because they can not really prove it, so to not even bother making the report. So in summary basically the government does nothing to prevent sexual harassment and does even less to punish people for sexually harassing someone.

After analyzing Kelly’s reports about her experiences in Iraq I was overwhelmed with feelings. I was ashamed of our government and the way sexual harassment cases are responded to. I also felt terrible for the women who are told they should not report these violent acts that they are faced with. No one should have to experience the terrible things these women did, and then not have any ability to do anything about it. Brushing something so serious off so quickly, is a very hard concept to comprehend. I think this interview with Kelly was very informative to our research project, and also to me. I learned so much and have such a better understanding about the difficult life style women in the military are faced with. Not only are these women fighting for our Country, they

are being sexually harassed physically and mentally. They are called names and put down because of their sex, and they are not taken seriously because they are women.

Journal Entry 7
February 18, 2009

The research was put on hold for a little while. During this time I got in touch with another veteran Jennifer Pacanowski. I asked her the same questions that I had asked Kelly in order to be able to compare the material. Her responses follow this along with comments from myself about her interview. Jennifer is also working on a book and would be thrilled to answer any other questions about these topics.

Journal Entry 8
February 18, 2009

Interview with Jennifer Pacanowski

Basic Information:

Name Jennifer Pacanowski

Age 29 years old

How long you were enlisted 2003-2005

Where you were located

Germany and Iraq

Why did you enlist?

To pay off my college loans that I had acquired but never got a degree. When you join the Army you can give up your GI Bill and pay off loans, since at the time I thought I would be in for life, I figured I could get my degree while enlisted.

What did you know about Iraq before going into war, what did you think you were getting into? How do you feel after being there?

Not much, didn't really follow news. I just knew we won, or at least that's what I thought when I enlisted after that "Mission accomplished" banner.

How are you treated as a woman in the war?

By most of the people I worked with very well and protected by my leader. I did convoys and the Iraqi men would glare at me with disbelief and disgust.

What jobs are women assigned to?

I think everything but Infantry, I was a combat medic

Are you told before hand about ALL of the jobs you will be involved in?

No, only if you ask or look it up yourself. The recruiters try and tell you only certain jobs are open but that's not true. They have certain jobs that they need spots to fill their quota or just needs of the army. you can get any job you want sometimes you just have to wait a

little. I waited 6 months for my job.

Are you aware of sexual harassment based on your own experience or others?

We take classes, everyone is aware of it and makes jokes about it with close friends, some people are too sensitive or use it to benefit their career. I do not respect women like that. I never experienced sexual harassment and if I did I handled it without the help of the military.

Some of the guys can be relentless and when they don't get the hint you can go to your command and get help.

Do you know what the Government policy is on this?

I think some kind of zero tolerance with consequences to people who break the rules.

How has the Government responded to these cases?

Mostly a slap on the wrist for first offenders or transferring problem people and probably consequences as high as jail and getting kicked out.

What did you learn about sexism from being a woman in the services?

It is always the same when entering as new career. If you want respect and to be taken seriously you work for it. Some guys would talk shit about being better at everything and than you prove them wrong or blow them off. Some guys treat you like a sister or look to you to be a mother. It is a lot of stress because I believe women step up and take care of everyone else and forget about themselves. Especially as a medic.

What did you witness in terms of treatment against Iraqi women?

Generally, that the women and their daughter's lives are not worth as much as a man and they are treated like more women or girls will come along so we will abuse and use up these women. Health care is non-existent from what I saw and girl children are last in the village to receive any treatment. I was teaching little girls how to suck on cough drops, that's how behind the Iraqi people are.

There you go.

If you have any more questions, I would love to answer them. I am working on a book so I have a lot to say.

Jennifer Pacanowski

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Journal Entry 8

February 19, 2009

My Comments:

After reading this questioner from Jen I was very excited to hear that she will be writing a book. She seemed to have a lot of good information in your answers. Jen had many similar things to say as other women who have been involved in this war. She said that the class they take on sexual harassment is more of a joke than anything else and no

one really listens to what the class really means. She said that guys tend to make more jokes about it after the class then taking it seriously and thinking about it.

Jen also said that when someone is accused of sexual harassment not much is done. There is a slap on the wrist for first offense. This is crazy for me to think because as a woman can you imagine being harassed by someone one day, reporting it, and then nothing being done to get him away from you. Waking up day after day with the nightmares of being harassed haunting you and having to see the face of the man who did that to you day after day. This is something no one should have to live with.

I laughed when I read the part of her interview that stated the government had a zero tolerance policy. I feel like this is what they tell people. However many accounts have told us that there is no way the government has a zero tolerance policy. Many women are victims of sexual harassment and nothing is done for them.

I also was surprised to hear how behind the country was in medical advances. Jen told us that she was teaching young girls how to suck on a cough drop. Something to us that seems so basic, that is done everyday, is so new and different to the people of this country.

Journal Entry 9
February 22, 2009

This project has become something much more important to me than a paper. The women I contacted are some of the bravest I know. They are true heroes for our country and have been treated with more disrespect than anyone should ever encounter. I was fortunate to be able to talk to Jennifer and Kelly about their experiences. The interviews were painful to read but they let me see the reality of what is going on for our military women.

One thing I and anyone reading this needs to remember is that these are not the only two women who have faced the tragic treatment of war. Sexual violence has been and will continue to be a predicament that the U.S. military will have to deal with. This form of violence will not end until the idea of 'masculinity' and gender roles are changed.