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Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War (review)

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offered more in being made aware of how historians both produce and contest the “diffuse knowledge” of the First World War.

Although “not an original work” (p. 1), as the author explains, this book nevertheless makes a contribution in the way it draws together well-known English language published sources and those in Dutch, German, and French. Some of this latter scholarship will be unfamiliar to many readers, and therefore it is very useful indeed to have the compare and contrast effect of experiences and imaginings of wartime suffering. Moreover, this book is quite accessible to ordinary readers and will be useful for undergraduates seeking broader understanding of the impact of the First World War beyond the focus on the British experience.

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Kara Dixon Vuic. *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War. War/Society/Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. xii + 271 pp. Ill. \$50.00 (ISBN-10: 0-8018-9391-7, ISBN-13: 978-0-8018-9391-9).

Women are more broadly engaged in the military in Iraq and Afghanistan than in any other conflict in our country’s history. As pilots, mechanics, and military police and serving on battleships or in more forward strategic supply positions, women are a growing and critical part of our armed forces and shape our gendered notions of militarism and women’s work. In her book *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War*, Kara Dixon Vuic examines one of the most traditionally masculine and controversial institutions, the U.S. military, and provides an important foundation for understanding how military women reflect social and cultural gender roles, how institutions respond to and influence gender norms, and how the response shapes and challenges our understanding of citizenship and nation. Vuic uses nurses, a highly gendered profession, to illustrate her argument, which situates gender as a critical factor for understanding and acknowledging social change. Her title ensures that we acknowledge the complexity of women’s roles in the military while also contesting traditional notions of gender, femininity, and masculinity.

The book begins with a narrative from one of her female informants and ends with an analysis of the controversy surrounding the Vietnam Women’s Memorial in 1993. Throughout, Vuic provides the context for understanding, as her title suggests, the tensions between women of military rank who also worked in highly gendered roles as nurses during wartime. Using oral histories of men and women who served as military nurses as well as other rich primary and secondary sources, Vuic weaves together an explanatory framework to illustrate changing and conflicting gender roles. Female nurses served dual roles as icons of sexuality (especially when recruited for officers’ parties) and nurturers while also

expanding the traditional roles nurses held in civilian hospitals. Vuic explicates these competing images through discussions of the absurdity of requiring white uniforms in combat zones (as both sexual imagery and reminders of home) and an emphasis of female nurses' boot camp experiences (how to wear the uniform rather than weapons training) and contrasts these images to the advanced medical and nursing training the nurse recruits received before shipping out.

Female nurses worked with the military in both unofficial and official roles for over a century, fortifying their formal integration and officer status after World War II. The Army experienced a shortage of nurses even before President Lyndon Johnson committed large numbers of U.S. troops in 1965. The Army began major nurse recruitment efforts in the early 1960s during a time of changing roles for women, protest against the war, and the crucible of the civil rights movement. Vuic is at her strongest as she analyzes the Army's efforts to recruit nurses through various advertisements and education programs. Portraying nurses in magazine ads and posters as heterosexual, wholesome, and beautiful (and primarily white and female) while also highlighting their competence and expertise betrays the tensions within the Army about the role female nurses occupied in military hospitals and bases. But Vuic also complicates her gender argument by including and acknowledging men who nursed and the competing and conflicting expectations they also experienced.

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of the tensions Vuic illustrates (in chap. 2) is an episode during the promotion ceremony for ANC Chief Anna Mae McCabe Hays to the rank of brigadier general, one of the first women generals in the U.S. Army. After pinning on her stars, Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland kissed General Hayes on the cheek, instead of the typical salute or handshake. The kiss bestowed during a public military promotion ceremony highlighted the underlying sexual tensions while also exposing the politics of difference for female officers of high rank. The Army's promotion of women to this rank came after convoluted efforts to remedy a discriminatory promotion system based on sex while avoiding any appearance of affirmative action.

Vuic does achieve her aim of examining gender roles as both influencing and influenced by the military. One of the few issues one could take with the book is the brief attention to race. The military remained a fairly segregated institution during the Vietnam War despite the growing numbers of racial and ethnic minority men who were drafted and unable to escape war duty. With an Army Nurse Corp of primarily white men and women, the intersection of race and gender (as well as class) surely shaped the experiences of men and women who served, as well as society in general. Gender, race, and class are difficult to untwine and their relationship even more difficult to illustrate. But more attention to these aspects of military service would have pushed this book further. Even so, Vuic's book will be important for scholars of the time period as well as those interested in gender, women's work, nursing history, and the military.

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