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McKenzie, M. (2015). *Beyond the band of brothers: The U.S. military and the myth that women can't fight*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 218 pp. $98.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781107049765.

Editor's Note: This book has been reviewed independently by two scholars. Both reviews are insightful and offer different perspectives.

Review 1 by: Christine Fair, *Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA*
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The construction of American military identity has long privileged the all-male combat unit or band of brothers, while combat is envisaged as the single most important assertion of masculinity. Therefore, calls to integrate women into the military—especially in combat roles—are greeted with alarm because women are understood to be "potential spoilers" who will feminize and weaken the military if included. Ironically, these perceptions about the pernicious impact of women upon warfighting persist even though women have long been in de facto combat roles due to the changed nature of warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq. In *Beyond the Band of Brothers*, Mackenzie uses the combat exclusion, the principle means of protecting the military from the enervating influence of women in the U.S. military, as a heuristic device to analyze the construction of American military identity.

In the first chapter, she demonstrates that the combat exclusion has been a "fluid set of rules and stories" rather than a "concrete policy that has restricted women from combat" (p. 19). Women were initially excluded because they were superfluous: Male man power was abundant and including women was not seen as a benefit to the military's mission. She demonstrates that the ever-changing combat exclusion and concomitant definition of "combat" reflect "gender stereotypes, evolving political pressures, and historical events," rather than a response to accumulating evidence that women can perform the job (p. 19).

In the second chapter, Mackenzie documents the obviation of the combat exclusion on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, where front lines do not exist. The "disintegration of boundaries between combat and non-combat positions resulted in 'unprecedented levels of combat exposure for female service members'" (p. 45). Paradoxically, while the U.S. military formally sustained the combat exclusion, the

military disbursed combat pay to women in uniform and recognized them for their valor in combat operations while the American media reported the deaths of women in hostile operations. In practice, upholding the combat exclusion "prevented women from being part of the war narrative, relegating them to the fictitious 'support roles,' and [was a] formal obstacle for those women seeking promotion based on their combat experience" (p. 47). Even while the U.S. military clung to the canard of the combat exclusion, it interoperated with militaries in Iraq and Afghanistan that successfully integrated women into combat arms. In effect, while the U.S. military was "willing to accept coalition support from various forces, it seemed unprepared to observe any lessons learned" from those partners' experiences in integrating women (p. 47). This perception that women were not on the "front lines" also made it more difficult for them to receive treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other combat-related illnesses. In 2013, when the Department of Defense (DoD) announced the removal of the combat exclusion and while women's experience in combat underscored the abject absurdity of the exclusion, the U.S. Congress worked feverishly to defend the combat exclusion.

She observes that the band of brothers myth is used to demonstrate positive attributes such as "unit cohesion" and combat efficacy but ignored the reality that "bands of brothers were increasingly and repeatedly associated with unauthorized violence—sometimes perpetrated against their own comrades and civilians—as well as dishonorable and illegal behavior, military failure, and military traumas" (p. 66). Whether one looks at the abuses in Abu Ghraib, soldiers micturating on corpses in Afghanistan, or the stunning prevalence (and cover up) of rapes in the military, the band of brothers became associated with "group think and complicity" rather than a concept "essential to success of the all-male unit" (p. 66). Mackenzie presents horrifying data to buttress her claims about the negative externalities of the band of brothers. She sites Department of Veterans Affairs data according to which one in four women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan was sexually assaulted. DoD data suggest that between 20% and 40% of women in the U.S. military experienced rape or attempted rape during their military careers, with the caveat that DoD estimates that 80% of rapes are unreported. In 2012, DoD data indicate that there were more than nine reported sexual assaults per day. Women in Iraq and Afghanistan were far more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire. This is one facet of the band of brothers in action.

In the third chapter, Mackenzie explores the role of emotions in defending the combat exclusion. She quotes General Merrill A. McPeak, a former Air Force Chief, who said,

> I just can't get over this feeling of old men ordering young women into combat . . . I have a gut-based hang up there. And it doesn't make a lot of sense in every way. And I apologize for it. (cited on p. 75)

These feelings are not moored in data but rather in the emotive conviction that women generally—and mothers specifically—just do not belong on the battlefield.

The most important contribution of this chapter is Mackenzie's demonstration that these emotional arguments are embedded in so-called evidence-based positions on the combat exclusion. In practice, it is difficult to tweeze out irrational factors from empirical assessments of the issue.

In the fourth chapter, she exposits that, across the U.S. military, there are no robust or uniform physical standards for combat. When women do demonstrate that they can meet the posited standards, the standards often changed forcing women to navigate an ever-moving goal post. Many of the physical standards-related concerns dilate upon "menstruation, pregnancy, and PTSD," which suggests that these fears are really rooted in emotional assumptions and concerns about the ostensibly unpredictable nature of women's bodies (p. 132).

In the fifth chapter, she takes on the empirical literature that argues that all-male combat units are more cohesive and thus more effective than mixed gender units. This unit cohesion argument prevails as the most salient argument for preserving all-male combat units. She problematizes the evidence that links cohesion with performance concepts that are poorly defined and measured. The "cohesion hypothesis is both based on weak foundations" and leaves unanswered several questions including whether "women only hinder cohesion for combat troops? Do combat troops require a different type of cohesion from other units? And are training initiatives within the military ineffective in fostering task and social cohesion?" (p. 154). This latter question is important because the academic literature suggests that it is not the presence of women per se in units that correlates with diminished cohesion; rather male members' beliefs about women that matters most. Mackenzie concedes that including women may change or even undermine aspects of the hypermasculine military culture, but she submits that this is not necessarily an adverse outcome given that there is "no evidence that such a cultural shift will decrease the effectiveness of troops" and that including women may even have salutary impacts upon the negative effects of the band of brothers in the military (p. 154).

In the sixth chapter, she first develops an extremely helpful framework for analyzing the myriad data that can be extracted from online debates. Then, employing this methodology, she analyzes thousands of online comments made in response to three articles on the issues of women in combat. Not surprisingly, many of the tropes and themes she documents in this narrative analysis mirror the themes she had previously identified in the volume.

She concludes this volume by observing that while removing the combat exclusion at first blush appears to be a break from past practices and even a first step for asserting gender equality within the military and beyond, this optimism is ill-founded. When we view the combat exclusion removal from "the lens of the band of brothers, the decision to remove [it] has very little do with women. Instead, the policy change serves to recover the battered military image, rewrite the history of women's roles in Iraq and Afghanistan, and falsely portray the military as a gender-inclusive institution" (p. 196). She argues that the way the military thinks about gender has implications not only for warfighting but also for the U.S. propensity for war.

Mackenzie, in this brief but densely packed volume, has done yeoman's work to destabilize the myth of the band of brothers. This book is an important continuation of ongoing conversations in academic and policy circles about the nature of the American military and the role of women in the armed forces specifically and the role of women in American culture more generally.