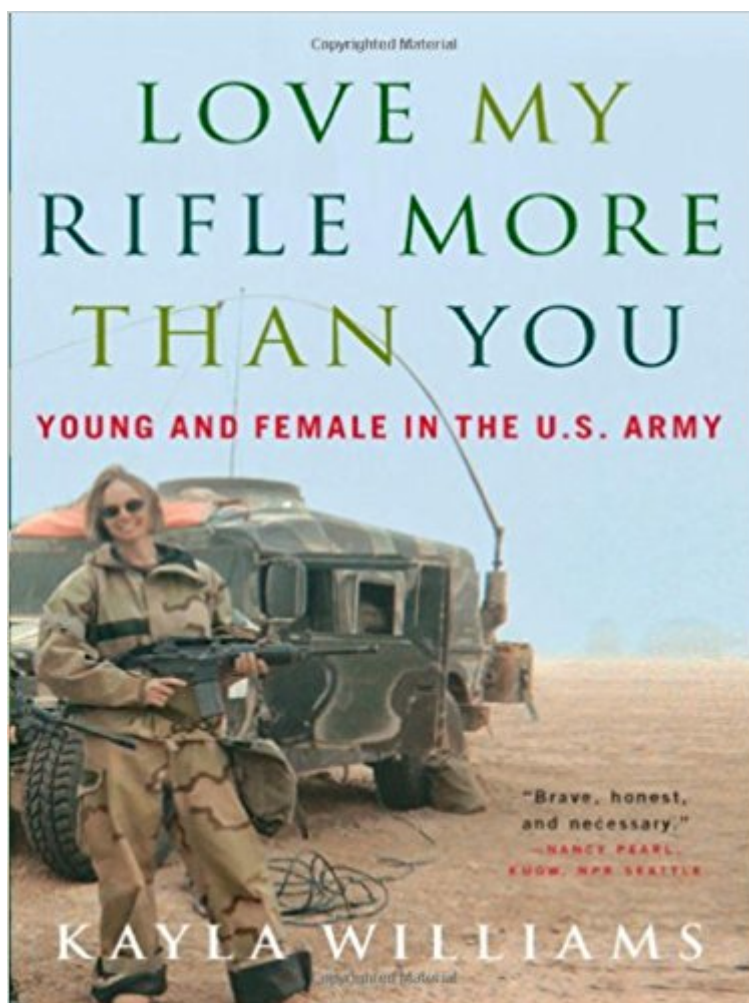


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Love My Rifle More Than You: Young And Female In The U.S. Army



Synopsis

“Brave, honest, and necessary.” Nancy Pearl, NPR Seattle
Kayla Williams is one of the 15 percent of the U.S. Army that is female, and she is a great storyteller. With a voice that is “funny, frank and full of gritty details” (New York Daily News), she tells of enlisting under Clinton; of learning Arabic; of the sense of duty that fractured her relationships; of being surrounded by bravery and bigotry, sexism and fear; of seeing 9/11 on Al-Jazeera; and of knowing she would be going to war. With a passion that makes her memoir “nearly impossible to put down” (Buffalo News) Williams shares the powerful gamut of her experiences in Iraq, from caring for a wounded civilian to aiming a rifle at a child. Angry at the bureaucracy and the conflicting messages of today’s military, Williams offers us “a raw, unadulterated look at war” (San Antonio Express News) and at the U.S. Army. And she gives us a woman’s story of empowerment and self-discovery.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Williams’s account of her Iraq service tries very hard to be a fresh and wised-up postfeminist take: Private Benjamin by way of G.I. Jane. Showy rough language peppers every paragraph, and Williams’s obsessive self-concern, expressed in a lot of one-sentence paragraphs beginning with “I,” verges on the narcissistic. The surprise is the degree to which the account succeeds and even echoes military memoirists from Julius Caesar to Ernie Pyle. The fear, bad weather, intermittent supplies, inedible meals (especially for the vegetarian author) and crushing boredom of life in the

field are all here. Williams's particular strength is in putting an observant, distaff spin on the bantering and brutality of barracks life, where kids from the Survivor generation must come to terms with a grim and confusing reality over which they have little control. The differences are less in the sexual dynamics (which mostly are an extension of office politics) than the contradictions of the conflict in which the troops are engaged, which Williams embodies more than illuminates. She learns Arabic; there's a Palestinian boyfriend and a short, failed marriage during her state-side training. While an ex-punk, Chomsky-reading liberal, Williams questions the day-to-day conduct of the war without ever really engaging with its underlying rationale. Such nuance, though, might be too much to ask. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Williams's war memoir is just one in a string that originated from recent U.S.-led forays into the Middle East, and its uniqueness comes from its female perspective. Critics agree that *Love My Rifle* is no deep piece of literature. Instead, it's a shocking, on-the-ground view of one military woman's experience in Iraq. Williams spares no details about the stress of combat, the questionable treatment of Iraqi prisoners, and her scathing opinion of the U.S. administration, though she never explains why she enlisted in the first place. As one of only 15 percent of women employed by the Army, Williams possibly overplays the sexual harassment she suffered; or so claim a few of the more suspect male reviewers. But the story's not over: Williams can be called back to duty any time. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

SGT Williams has written an important memoir, which should be mandatory reading for all Army leaders, but especially at the company-level. The most valuable aspect of her book is that it presents clearly-articulated, unvarnished truth about conditions female soldiers face in today's Army. The kinds of situations SGT Williams encountered during her deployment and at Ft Campbell are definitely not unique to her. I have heard and seen similar stuff during my own Army service, stateside and in Iraq. What she related rings true, both the good and the bad. What is particularly sad is how the double standard ends up driving a lot of superbly talented female warriors from our ranks, when we can ill-afford to lose them. SGT Williams was not shy about revealing her strengths and weaknesses, and definitely doesn't come across as one of those "holier than Thou" critics, where everybody but her is screwed up. By sharing her vices and personality quirks, SGT Williams gained a lot of credibility when she described her reaction to incidents inside and outside the wire.

My unit had almost identical things occur during our year in the war zone. Because her writing style is crudely direct and pulls no punches, I think it will connect with the mix of generations which make up our current Army. Much of what SGT Williams described has happened to soldiers of both genders, which again reinforces its accuracy. While there are undoubtedly soldiers who will characterize what SGT Williams documented as exaggeration and hyperbole, I submit those same soldiers are either in serious denial, haven't spent any time with female soldiers, or haven't experienced a combat deployment. For civilians who are shocked at SGT Williams' revelations, well, her story is a hell of a lot more authentic than "The Hurt Locker". Either way, it'll help folks to understand why we have a huge problem with sexual assaults and suicides in our military. There are really clear examples of good, bad, and indifferent leadership sprinkled throughout the book. Similar anecdotes can be found in almost every book, fiction or non-fiction, that has been written by a soldier. Those stories are universal because they really happen, every day, in every unit. Our good leaders learn from those stories, and our bad ones have absolutely no clue that they are the ones being pointed out as examples. For all these reasons, "Love My Rifle More Than You" should be on the reading list of our NCOs and Officers, and a highly essential, eye opening preparatory manual for every female contemplating military service. Knowing what to expect is one of the keys to surviving, and thriving in the Army. It's an important addition to this generation's story.

This book was published around 2005 well before sexual assault in the military became a hot topic. Anyone interested in this topic should read this book. The book doesn't necessarily have an agenda aimed at sexual assault but vividly brings out typical situations women often face in a war zone. The language can be crude and graphic, which fits the author's war zone experience perfectly. Books are few that I couldn't put down--this was one. Her story is riveting and she has a way to keep the book suspenseful. For me, as a retired senior officer, the most disappointing aspect of the author's story is the poor leadership shown by so many company and battalion level commanders. Their lack of sensitivity to having a single female on a combat team is appalling. Until the services are able to better develop young officers the sexual assault problem will continue.

This is probably the finest Soldier's-eye-view account of this particular war that I've read. Not all of these things happened to me during the war (obviously, because I'm a guy and it's unapologetically written from the female perspective), but many the vignettes that make up this book brought back vivid memories of my own experience in the sandbox. I would go so far as to say this is a must-read for any young woman considering military service, and anyone of any gender in a position to affect

the policies that shape the functioning of the armed services.

Thank you Kayla Williams for this gift. Your grit, your values, your challenges are beautifully articulated. This is raw, real and a must-read for everyone - especially for those of us who have not served. We can't even begin to understand the world of our soldiers, Marines, sailors and airmen and women who are serving without reading the reporting of those who have. This woman salutes all of you and sends special kudos to the 18% of our service population who are women.

Should be read along with the sequel, "Plenty of Time When We Get Home". The two books are a powerful illustration of what war does to veterans. And of the payment society owes to those veterans.

Twice, I woke up in the middle of the night with my heart in my throat while reading this book - my anxiety pulling me from a deep slumber. It was so honest and painful, it broke my heart to read it. I feel a deep kinship with the author, her biography similar in some ways to mine, but it was the honesty she displayed that won me over. As a fiction writer who creates worlds where women can be warriors on their own terms, it was disappointing to read about a soldier who performs all of her duties as expected and endures the realities of war without complaint, but in the end is still reduced to a pair of breasts. There are some fundamental truths between the sexes that cannot be overridden, even by sheer force of will. I have the privilege of hosting Kayla as a part of a panel discussion for Litquake in San Francisco in October 2014, and I am looking forward to discussing this book and her newly published work.

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