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# War and Women

## War knows no gender

In ancient times, war was a woman. Athena, the goddess of war was a fickle and jealous woman whom men found hard to resist; women, however, had no love for her or her wars.

As early as 6000 B.C. women owned and learned to use weapons. This is seen through the tales that still survive where men and women fought side by side. Later, in 2000 B.C., came a band of women made husbandless by war who fought in armed battles to protect themselves. These women, the Amazons as they are commonly known, fought well enough to keep their freedom from the men's armies that confronted them. During the Persian wars, the Spartan practice of providing warrior-like training to women allowed them to fight alongside their men.

*"Women were to experience the freedom of self-support for the first time..."*

Women took an active role in the Crusades as fighters as well as the victims. The gypsy tribes that were killed off during the crusades trained their women to fight. This was necessary since the camp was often the battle ground and more than just the adults were at stake. With their families at stake all available warriors were necessary, regardless of their gender.

The concept of war being against a woman's sensitivities did not surface until the 1400s. It was at this point that women, for the most part, stopped fighting. Women began to stay at home while their men were away, and they attempted to take over the running of affairs of the house. Women were put in charge of defence of estate and the money matters while the man of the house was away. As an old Italian proverb says: "The tongue is feminine, the arm is masculine". In this era women hated war, yet they were expected to support any war which was noble in cause, that is, any conflict in which honour, life and liberty were at stake. During this era men neither fought women nor took them as prisoner, for fear of the dishonour it could bring upon them. During wars, women of good standing would volunteer to do such things as carry baskets of dirt on their heads to build up protective walls and the like. In November 1502, the ladies of a dukedom offered their jewels to their duke for the purpose of supporting the war to keep Caesar Borgia out of their area.

Some women of this time period did fight in the wars they strongly believed in, others were so supportive of the war they forced their husbands into the battle. An example of this

was Beatrice d'Este, who dragged her husband to the camp for the purpose of arousing his own desire to fight. The women who did fight in the battles did so for their own reasons. Isabella Villamarina disguised herself as a man and went off to war to remain close to her husband. Others were like Anne of France, who disguised herself to fight with the men in a war she strongly believed in.

The twentieth century saw the two big wars, and also saw the majority of women at home. During World War I, women stayed at home and in both North America and Britain the war saw many women working outside the home for the first time. The lack of available male workers led companies that supplied the war effort to hire women to man the assembly lines. So it was that while "our boys" were away fighting, women were assembling cars and planes and other essentials for the war effort.

Women during this war were to experience the freedom of self-support for the first time and many resented the layoffs that occurred when the soldiers returned. World War II was in some sense welcomed by the women that had experienced the independence of the First World War. As men left for the battlefields, women hit the workplace once again. In 1940-41, the need for more aid in the battle became so desperate that Churchill asked for the conscription of all single women between the ages of 18 and 30. These women formed the Auxiliary Territory Service (ATS) and the Air Transportation Auxiliary (ATA). These groups put their women through tough training and gave them terrible conditions in which to live, but the women did not seem to mind. The ATS women were placed on searchlight and anti-aircraft sights, they drove trucks, filled sandbags and dug roads. The ATA functioned as an escort service for military planes flying from the factories to the bases. This was the first time in many years that women died in service as well as men.

Recently, women were for the first time allowed to serve, as soldiers, in combat zones. War is once again in the hands of the world, not only the male half. Going to war is by no means a good thing, but perhaps the influence of women will allow for more talk and less death. Women and men have always died in war together; now, they may also fight in war together, as it was in the beginning.

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