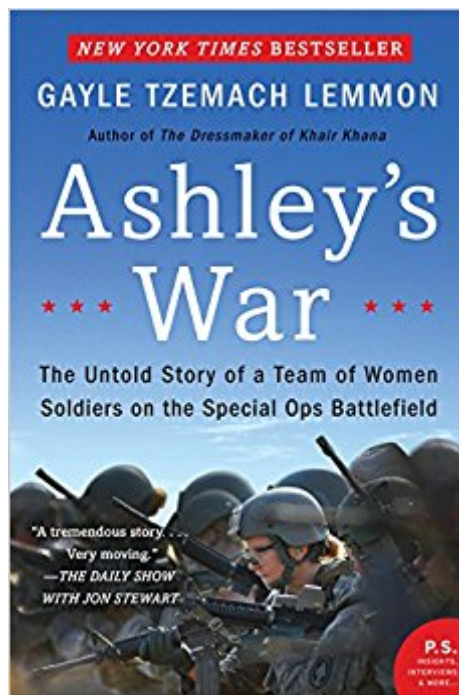




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# Ashley's War: The Untold Story Of A Team Of Women Soldiers On The Special Ops Battlefield



## Synopsis

In 2010, the Army created Cultural Support Teams, a secret pilot program to insert women alongside Special Operations soldiers battling in Afghanistan. The Army reasoned that women could play a unique role on Special Ops teams: accompanying their male colleagues on raids and, while those soldiers were searching for insurgents, questioning the mothers, sisters, daughters and wives living at the compound. Their presence had a calming effect on enemy households, but more importantly, the CSTs were able to search adult women for weapons and gather crucial intelligence. They could build relationships—woman to woman—in ways that male soldiers in an Islamic country never could. In *Ashley's War*, Gayle Tzemach Lemmon uses on-the-ground reporting and a finely tuned understanding of the complexities of war to tell the story of CST-2, a unit of women hand-picked from the Army to serve in this highly specialized and challenging role. The pioneers of CST-2 proved for the first time, at least to some grizzled Special Operations soldiers, that women might be physically and mentally tough enough to become one of them. The price of this professional acceptance came in personal loss and social isolation: the only people who really understand the women of CST-2 are each other. At the center of this story is a friendship cemented by "Glee," video games, and the shared perils and seductive powers of up-close combat. At the heart of the team is the tale of a beloved and effective soldier, Ashley White. Much as she did in her bestselling *The Dressmaker of Khair Khana*, Lemmon transports readers to a world they previously had no idea existed: a community of women called to fulfill the military's mission to "win hearts and minds" and bound together by danger, valor, and determination. *Ashley's War* is a gripping combat narrative and a moving story of friendship—a book that will change the way readers think about war and the meaning of service.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“An unforgettable story of female soldiers breaking the brass ceiling. The women who answered America’s call to serve show that our military is stronger when it engages both halves of the population. This book will inspire you and remind you of the power that comes with defying limits.” (Sheryl Sandberg, author of *Lean In*)

“Gayle Tzemach Lemmon expertly gives readers an inside look at what it takes to work alongside America’s elite forces. The book is a gripping, moving, and well-told war story, but more importantly it offers the first glimpse into a historic program.” (Kevin Maurer, author of *Gentlemen Bastards*)

“Lemmon has done her homework. . . . She is a strong and capable guide. . . . With a fine eye for detail, she shows us what set this program apart.” (Foreign Policy)

“A tremendous story. . . . Very moving.” (The Daily Show with Jon Stewart)

“Ashley’s War shares the remarkable stories of one of the first teams of women serving in the U.S. Army Special Operations Command. This team forged the path for American women who serve in harm’s way all over the world and continue to make the ultimate sacrifice.” (Senator John McCain)

“Ashley’s War quietly grips the reader with the untold story of a small group of women selected to serve in combat alongside the US’s best soldiers. . . . Rich storytelling. . . . Compelling. . . . In battle as in life, these women refuse to quit.” (Christian Science Monitor)

“Fascinating and often moving, Ashley’s War follows one of the early groups of women who volunteered to serve alongside special operations soldiers, vividly portraying their training, their early missions as they learn their jobs, their bonds of friendship, and their reckoning with the toll of war. Remarkable.” (Phil Klay, author of *Redeployment*)

“Rich storytelling. . . . Compelling. . . . In battle as in life, these women refuse to quit.”

Christian Science Monitor

In 2010 the U.S. Army Special Operations Command created Cultural Support Teams, a pilot program to put women on the battlefield alongside Army Rangers, Navy SEALs, and other special operations teams on sensitive missions in Afghanistan. The idea was that women could access places and people that had remained out of reach and could build relationships in ways that male soldiers in a conservative, traditional country

could not. Though officially banned from combat, female soldiers could be attached to different teams, and special ops recruiting posters urged them to join the mission and "become part of history." In *Ashley's War*, Gayle Tzemach Lemmon uses exhaustive firsthand reporting and finely tuned understanding of the complexities of war to tell the story of a team of women handpicked from across the Army, Guard, and Reserve. At the center of this story is a friendship cemented by Glee, CrossFit, and the shared perils of up close combat. At the heart of the team is the tale of a dedicated and beloved soldier, First Lieutenant Ashley White. Much as she did in her bestselling *The Dressmaker of Khair Khana*, Lemmon transports readers to a world they previously had no idea existed: a community of women called to serve a cause greater than themselves and bound together by danger, valor, and determination. *Ashley's War* is a gripping combat narrative and a moving story of friendship • a book that will change the way readers think about war and the meaning of service. Indeed, in the wake of *Ashley's War*, all combat roles have been opened to women. This story is one part of the march toward equality in the armed forces. "An unforgettable story . . . will inspire you and remind you of the power that comes with defying limits." Sheryl Sandberg, author of *Lean In*

PRO: As a retired female military officer this book intrigued me. It is a detailed account of a special forces program to attach female Cultural Support Teams to Ranger, SEAL and Green Beret teams in Afghanistan. Focuses on the remarkable life and death of 1Lt Ashley White. It will leave you Cheering and crying at the same time. CON: (these were what gave it a four star review) 1. As with author's other book, the timeline seems off. This could have easily been solved with her labeling the chapters with MM/YY. It seemed a sense of urgency was there to get the CST's on the ground but I couldn't really wrap my head around the amount of time that passed between selection and deployment. The story was energetic and emotional but this simple omission was like an itch that you can't ever get sufficiently scratched and created a constant, unnecessary distraction. 2. What? Happened? to Nadia? The interpreter was badly injured the night that Ashley died but we just simply never find out what happened after she woke up in the hospital and was told Ashley was dead. Nothing in depth but one or two paragraphs. Is she still in Afghanistan doing humanitarian work? Did SHE ever go see Ashley's parents? 3. Several of the CST's were mothers but there was never any indication of where they were leaving their children while they were deployed, or for that matter, ANY discussions of their children among themselves. Women, no matter how determined to go to war would be worried about and talk about their children, at least to some extent.

**An Important Story** If you've ever wondered about women in the military, or about how special forces like Rangers work, this is the book for you. Or even if you have never had the slightest curiosity about these things, you'll find this book interesting, especially if you're a woman. I'm not going to spoil the ending, but the story focuses on Ashley White, who was a top athlete, and wanted to participate in really making a difference in some important role in the military. Her chance came when the US started a program for embedding women with the Rangers in Afghanistan, so that they could deal with women and children. It's a great insult to the Afghans to have men not of the family, to be seeing or talking to women. Hence the crucial need for a woman who could manage the rigors of the searches the Rangers did at night, but who could reassure the women and children that she was a female soldier, and would not let the men come into their sanctuary. You learn about the training, the rigors, the bonding of the women who did their training together, and took on this challenge. These are women of the highest caliber, and by the end of the book, you feel you know them intimately, going with them on mission, seeing what they do, enduring what they endure, and being awed at their physical strength and skill. I highly recommend this book.

This book is simply excellent. The language is accessible; the story is a page-turner. But don't be fooled - it is anything but a "simple" book. I knew nothing about the military, and even less about women in the military (except that lately they've been characterized as victims). A friend with similar tastes as mine encouraged me to read this so I did. Ms. Lemmon's book opened my eyes in a skilled and powerful way. She uses the story of a women's special ops program - and the stories of several women participants - to take the reader through the complexities of military structure, politics, culture, and everyday life. She even shines a light on the experience of one woman's husband and family in the immediate aftermath of her loss. And yet, with all the texture and background, the story thread remains clear and unbroken throughout. Somehow, despite all the military lingo and profiles of strong, self-disciplined women, the book moved me to tears by the end. I also read *Dressmaker of Khair Khana* - with these powerful and inspiring stories, Ms. Lemmon is clearly on a mission to change the world through heroic - and true! - portrayals of women. I look forward to whatever she writes next.

This book made me proud to be an American, specifically because it shows the devotion to duty of a part of our society that is scorned when it attempts to put its actions in motion as patriots. Many show horror and disgust when women step up to the plate and do their part. Those who want

women to keep their mouth shut and mind their place, will not like this book. This book will only work for those who believe that America is a place where equality and courage can apply to all it's citizens. It's an experience to read. What it contains holds both tears and joy, but even more importantly, respect. Really good book.

This is the amazing story of a woman, a soldier, her team, both CST and Special Forces, and the groundbreaking start of the Cultural Support Team - CST. Ashley was one of a special group of women who led the way onto the battlefield. This is her story, this is their story. Gayle Lemmon did a wonderful job describing the experience these women went through preparing and competing for the honor of being chosen for this very new, very special opportunity, as well as their experience in Afghanistan. She captured so well the essence of these extraordinary women. Their sense of duty, drive, motivations, fears, doubts, desires, loyalty, honor, commitment and resolve. It is an eloquent argument for allowing those women, who are warriors at heart, to have the chance to serve their country on the battlefield. And this is Ashley's story. A heartwarming and inspiring tribute to an amazing woman who gave her life for her country. How she was a trailblazer, how she was loved, and respected by her peers, both men and woman. And the difference she made, the impact she had, and the mark she left on the world. Ashley is an American hero by any standard, and I thank Gayle Lemmon for writing this book and making us aware of this remarkable woman, group of women, and their story.

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