

## **Female military expats:**

### **Sixty years of work in international war zones**

#### **Abstract**

This exploratory study focuses on the acculturation strategies of female career military ‘propatriates’ who worked and lived in combat settings. Based on an analysis of the oral histories of women who served in the Second World War, Korean War, Vietnam War, Afghanistan and Iraq, the research revealed that a strong commitment to their profession and camaraderie facilitated their adaptation to living conditions characterized by extreme danger, nominal domestic comforts, a hyper-masculine culture, and unrelenting work requirements in culturally distant contexts. The research highlighted the multiple physical and psychological stressors of living and working in a war zone and variety of coping strategies employed, particularly the prominent role of communication with family and friends, friendships with other military expatriates, and religion. As extant expatriate research has overwhelmingly focused on male executives in multinational corporations, this research is significant in extending the literature to an analysis of women in the military who lived and worked in extreme intercultural contexts at times throughout the twentieth century when not only were propatriates a relatively rare phenomenon but few women worked internationally.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Despite a long tradition of sending public sector personnel overseas for a variety of purposes, such as diplomatic and military service (Stening 1994), the literature on expatriate management has been dominated by discussions of people working in private industry (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Fenner & Selmer, 2008) with research on public sector expatriates and

their conditions of work being very limited (Anderson 2001; Fenner & Selmer, 2008). This paper analyses the oral histories of United States (US) female military expatriates deployed to war zones encompassing a sixty-year span of the twentieth and early parts of the twenty-first century across World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, and the Gulf Wars of Afghanistan and Iraq. The analysis extends expatriation focused on multinational enterprises and traditional expatriates (see, for instance, Altman & Shortland, 2008; Furuya et al., 2009; Lazarova & Tarique, 2005) by examining female military propatriate acculturation in an extreme context (i.e., a war zone). In analyzing their acculturation and identifying the coping strategies that were employed under these challenging, adverse conditions, this research contributes to expatriation research generally and female expatriation more specifically but also provides insights for organizations operating in extreme contexts and international businesses which are increasingly affected by international terrorism (Bader & Berg, 2013).

Achieving acculturation in a culturally distant and extreme context is important for civilian leaders, government and military – and it is an increasingly important area of research for fields such as aerospace, the military, medicine, and transportation, among others, where hazardous work settings are encountered. An extreme context could include a warzone, peacekeeping efforts in situations of civil conflict, or humanitarian efforts in cases of natural disasters. In this paper we take the US Army's (Anon, 2000) definition of extreme context as physical and mental stressors including various environmental (e.g. climate, chemicals/pollutants, infectious agents, light conditions), physiological (e.g. sleep deprivation, dehydration, malnutrition, poor hygiene), cognitive (e.g. unpredictability, organizational dynamics), and emotional (fear/anxiety, conflicting motives, grief, spiritual confrontation) issues experienced in combat or in combat-related duties. Given the ambiguous and dynamic nature of counterinsurgency warfare (Laqueur, 1977), the extreme context was omnipresent for the female expatriates in the Vietnam and Gulf Wars, while the

military nurses who served in Korea and WWII were generally located close to the front lines in mobile medical units.

Doucerain and colleagues (2013: 4) urge future research “to take into account the environment that acculturating individuals navigate and thus to focus on the concrete nature of their lived experience”. Of relevance to our study is the importance of ‘situatedness’, which underscores the interaction between ‘macro-context’ and ‘micro-context’. As argued by Doucerain et al. (2013: 3), there is a need for a deeper exploration of the ‘micro-context’ or the “immediate, concrete, local conditions of daily life”. This approach emphasizes the environment that acculturating individuals must navigate - an important consideration when conducting research on military expatriates who are embedded in a hostile, dangerous setting. Our paper thus embraces a ‘micro-contextual’ approach, while accounting for the influence of ‘macro-context’, in presenting the findings of the lived acculturation experiences and strategies of US female military expatriates who worked in extreme contexts in various combat settings. Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault and Sénécal (1997) have also advocated consideration of contextual factors in examining the process of acculturation. We concur and further argue that a limitation of current acculturation research is that it has focused on expatriates in business organizations in binary relationships with local employees and hence does not sufficiently account for the more complex relationships and behavior that occurs in an extreme context and by differing types of organizations - such as the military operating in alliances with other organizations within the host national context. Moreover, there may be distinct differences experienced by military personnel who operate across a range of cultural contexts as it has been previously noted that an extreme context has a bearing on the relationship between a large cultural distance and expatriate adjustment (Fisher & Hutchings, 2013). Finally, our research on the lived-experiences of female military expatriates operating in an extreme context responds to the call to focus on “contextualizing the acculturation

process based on three elements: diversity, time, and commitment” (Harvey & Moeller, 2013: 1).

### **Military expatriates**

Unlike self-initiated expatriates who voluntarily relocate to other countries, organizationally-assigned expatriates are individuals tasked by organizations to work and live in a country of the organization’s choice (Tharenou, 2009), thus as defined military personnel are also expatriates. Nonetheless, military expatriates are distinct from traditional expatriates from the private sector in a number of ways. Military personnel may be deployed overseas at short-notice (such as days or weeks in advance) or on a regular rotational schedule (such as a year’s advance notice). In a meta-review, Kane (2006) noted that, on average, 23 percent of all US service personnel were stationed in 54 different countries during 1950-2005. In 2005, 27 percent were deployed, while the historical highs were 31 percent in 1951 and 1968 during the Korean War and the Vietnam War, respectively. Typical deployments last from one to three years and may be accompanied or unaccompanied. During a time of war, however, military personnel are generally unaccompanied and rotated out of a combat setting every 12 to 18 months and returned stateside due to the psychological and physical demands of serving in an area under ‘hostile fire or imminent danger’. Military careerists typically have a career that spans a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 30 years of active duty with assignments that rotate location and type of duty every two or three years, depending on the branch of service and whether the nation is at war or peacetime, among other factors. Most armed forces personnel will serve overseas at least once in their career with the rest of the time assigned to bases in the Continental United States (CONUS), although this career pattern may change dramatically in response to national security needs. The military expatriate is thus a special form of professional expatriate—or propatriate (Harvey et al., 2013).

**Propatriates**

International staffing has evolved to include a much wider range of international assignees such as third country nationals, frequent flyers/commuters, self-selected expatriates as well as those who are organizationally-assigned on traditional long-term postings. Another form of global mobility that has been increasingly utilized by organizations is to employ professional expatriates (AKA “propatriates”) who are committed to a global career as mandated by their parent company (see Harvey et al., 2013). Propatriates are willing to relocate overseas as demanded due to their close ties and identification with their organization (Harvey et al., 2013). However, the evolving nature of their relocation assignments and limited notice of such means that they tend not to have the same opportunities for cross-cultural training and preparation as those who relocate for longer. The extant literature on expatriates has focused primarily on professionals in multinational corporations in mundane settings. For those who traverse cultures in extreme contexts an inability to acculturate may incur dire consequences given that contextual changes can have dramatic effects on organizational and employee behavior (see Johns, 2006); thus extending the literature to an understanding of the experiences of military propatriates is critical.

An exploration of the experiences of female military expatriates across a range of wars in the twentieth century informs our understanding of modern propatriate assignments in terms of impact of location and timing for acculturation along with individual’s commitment to their organization. Additionally, in reviewing female military expatriates’ experiences across time the research highlights variations in the extent to which the women acculturated as shaped by changing societal norms and organizational policies and how this was affected in an extreme context.

**Female expatriates**

Though the number of women working as expatriates has increased markedly over the last couple of decades they still remain very under-represented. A recent relocation trends survey

by Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2013) found that female assignees constituted 23% - a significant increase over 10% reported in 1993. Landmark research by Adler (1984a; 1984b) in the early 1990s identified barriers to women's international management opportunities. A twenty-five year meta-analysis of female expatriation conducted by Altman and Shortland (2008) reported that since Adler's work, three key trends have continued to be considered barriers to women's expatriation, namely: perceived resistance from the host country to accepting women in managerial roles; organizational resistance to selecting women and limited support when working internationally; and women's own disinterest in taking international assignments. Additionally, research has suggested that women's home country context can also impact on women's international careers with Shortland (2009) arguing home country prejudice in selecting women affects opportunities and it has been argued that social values suggesting women's primary commitment as care givers to immediate and extended family constrains their opportunities (see Hutchings et al., 2014).

Other studies (Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010; Makela et al., 2011) suggest that while on assignment women may experience different or additional challenges to their male colleagues in respect to caring responsibilities and lack of extended family support, and dual career conflict issues. An ongoing debate concerning male and female differences in overseas assignments is of relevance to our research. For example, there is some evidence that women expatriates adjust similarly (Selmer & Leung, 2003) or even more effectively than men (Halsberger, 2007; Tung, 2004). Conversely, other research suggests that women's overall job satisfaction may be lower (Culpan & Wright, 2002), and they appear to struggle more with the stress and isolation of an overseas posting (Tung, 1998).

Yet, within this context some women have had international careers over an extended period. Once such area is in extreme contexts where women have worked actively in the not-for-profit sector in peacekeeping and missionary roles and as aid workers. In the military,

specifically, women have moved into active combat units in recent years but have historically served important functions, particularly in major wars, in traditional roles as nurses and administrators (see Nuciari, 2000). Within the expatriate literature there has been limited consideration given to women propatriates (exceptions include McPhail, Fisher, Harvey, & Moeller, 2012), especially to women in propatriate roles in the military—an oversight given their longstanding contributions and service. Given the growing expansion of their roles in forward combat units (Lopez & Henning, 2012), there is need to understand their particular acculturation issues in respect to time and commitment. This research addresses gaps in the literature on female military propatriates and their acculturation experiences by exploring the following research questions:

***RQ1: What are the acculturation experiences of female military expatriates in an extreme context?***

***RQ1a: What are the general, interaction, and work adjustment patterns of female expatriates as shaped by an extreme context?***

***RQ1b: What are the stressors of female, military expatriates in an extreme context and how were these stresses mitigated?***

The following section presents a review of the literature and specifically considers cultural distance, adjustment, acculturation, and expatriate ghetto. This is followed by an overview of the methods. The key findings are then presented and a discussion highlights the key extensions to the extant literature. The paper concludes with a review of contributions, managerial implications and issues for future research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Research over several decades has highlighted that where expatriates experience culture shock in relation to anxiety of being in an unfamiliar context (see Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Oberg, 1960) expatriate failure is likely to occur. Though the cited extent of expatriate failure

has been critiqued (Harzing, 2002) it is considered to be greater where there is more cultural distance between home and host contexts (see Shenkar, 2001). For those who expatriate to extreme contexts the demands of acculturation include not only the ability to adjust to what may be short- or long-term propatriate assignments across a range of culturally distinct and distant locations and to work effectively with local people, but also to identify who is the enemy and to work within a threatening environment on a daily basis.

### **Cultural distance**

Successful acculturation may depend on the degree of cultural distance experienced (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006). The term *cultural distance* has been used to refer to the extent to which national cultures are similar or distinct; namely, a large cultural distance is where there are pronounced cultural differences (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006). The construct has been understood to include environmental factors such as language, the economy, and political and legal systems (Johnson et al., 2006) and might also be considered as including other cultural practices, religion and social values (Selmeski, 2007). It has been suggested that where there is minimal cultural distance between home and host cultures there should be less culture shock and greater ability of expatriates to understand the attitude and actions of local people or to predict behavior of local people (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988).

Fisher and Hutchings (2013) suggested that context matters and that cultural distance takes on more significance in an extreme context when there is threat of injury and to life and events occur which are unplanned (Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavarretta, 2009) and stress is more pronounced (for a discussion of stress and culture shock see also Redmond, 2000). So, where there is marked cultural distance, acculturation becomes more difficult yet the inability to adjust has potential implications—not only for achievement of assignment goals—but also barriers between locals and expatriate military may create ever-present physical danger. It may also be more difficult to achieve acculturation when security issues mandate



living apart and maintaining both physical and psychic distance from host nationals. Moreover, inability to bridge cultural differences can have further implications for how expatriates and locals interact in an extreme context. For instance, some studies have suggested that battlefield experiences and racism reduced soldiers' reluctance to kill, while other studies suggest that cultural distance (e.g. between Eastern and Western cultures) has been associated with war atrocities as it allows the soldier to dehumanise the victim (see Grossman, 1995) and this has been noted in relation to not only conflict with local military but also actions like rape of local civilian women as war crimes which has occurred throughout the history of war (see Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). It can be suggested that cultural distance highlights ethical variations between cultures which may result in conflict (Carroll & Gannon, 1997) and can also pose issues in peacekeeping operations (Soeters & Bos-Bakx, 2003).

Also, in the context of understanding cultural distance we need to be cognizant of how this may change over time - not only in respect to the length of time in which expatriates and locals interact as impacting on their ability to understand others' behavior and attitudes – but also that the overall perception of distance between nations alters as countries modernize and have consequent social change which may bring them closer together. Thus, in studying military personnel across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries it might be expected that the extent to which they encounter cultural differences in their international postings may be less pronounced over time - or may be greater as the range of countries in which they move into combat or peacekeeping roles expands. Alternatively, it might be suggested that as the nature of warfare changes to become increasingly technological and information-oriented (see O'Hanlon, 2000) there is less opportunity for direct or close interaction with locals and hence ability to develop understanding is reduced. Moreover, in respect to understanding how the military operates internationally there have been distinct changes in its own values in regards

to women moving into combat roles and being better represented in senior roles and greater acceptance of people of varying sexual orientations and promotions for people in minority groups; thus the extent to which individual military personnel encounter cultural distance in terms of their own acceptance in roles and working with locals is likely to be affected.

### ***Acculturation***

In the extant literature, there are several competing views on the meaning of acculturation, which may be broadly grouped at either the cultural (group) or psychological (individual) level (Berry, 2005). Our study is focused at the individual level as defined by Graves (1967) who first introduced the concept of psychological acculturation as the learning process experienced by an individual who is a participant in a culture contact situation. According to Aycan (1997a), the acculturation process is comprised of four distinct phases: pre-departure preparation, post-arrival initial contact, appraisal and coping, and psychological and adjustment outcomes. Adjustment is further conceptualized as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that assesses the degree of fit between the expatriate and the environment. As identified by the acculturation framework, there are three facets of adjustment: psychological adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment (Searle & Ward, 1990), and work adjustment (task effectiveness) (Aycan & Berry, 1996). Similarly in the expatriation literature, research on expatriate adjustment generally focuses on three dimensions: general, interaction, and work adjustment (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). General adjustment refers to expatriates coping with broader environmental conditions such as living quarters, climate, food, and dress. Interactional adjustment refers to the extent to which individuals comfortably socialize and interact with locals in a non-work context. Finally, work adjustment more narrowly pertains to work-related responsibilities, performance, and expectations (see Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991).

Unsurprisingly, there are large variations in how individuals acculturate (known as acculturation strategies) (Berry, 2005). Which strategies are used depends on a variety of antecedent factors (both cultural and psychological), which in turn lead to variable adaptive consequences (again both cultural and psychological) (Berry et al., 1989). The challenges and difficulties experienced by expatriates are frequently referred to as acculturative stress (or acculturational stress) (Organista, Marin, & Chun, 2010). Acculturative stress emphasizes individual differences in how people respond to the constellation of pressures to change (mainly employing the concept of acculturation strategies) and the presence of unfamiliar social and physical environmental conditions. In this sense, acculturative stress is a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation. Drawing on the broader stress and adaptation paradigms (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), this approach forefronts the process of how individuals deal with acculturative problems on first encounter and over time. Successful strategies in coping with these stressful conditions are thought to be related to an overall sense of well-being along with physical and mental health correlates (Organista, Marin, & Chun, 2010).

Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002) proposed a model to describe how female expatriates, specifically, might develop and employ relationships as part of their acculturative process. They suggested that women could draw on various sources of social interaction and support (such as family, colleagues, host nationals) that would address a multiplicity of needs, such as emotional, informational, and instrumental. Emotional support is seen as critical in the initial stages of an overseas assignment (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002) and such social networks provide feelings of affiliation, belonging, and psychological security (Adelman, 1988). Informational support assists in cross-cultural adjustment by reducing uncertainty and confusion in a foreign environment (Fontaine, 1986). Finally, instrumental support creates a supportive environment by helping the expatriate identify critical resources to address

tangible needs (Adelman, 1988; Fontaine, 1986). The complexity of the acculturating process is confounded by the typical requirement for military personnel to reside on base or in what is referred to in the literature as “expatriate ghettos”.

### *Expatriate ghettos*

Prior research has suggested that some international assignees may live in what is termed ‘expatriate ghetto’. In some instances this may refer to the actual practice of living in the same location in compounds exclusively designed for expatriates (Bjorkman & Schaap, 1994) which may be necessitated for reasons of physical security (e.g., in Papua New Guinea). In other cases the term expatriate ghetto refers to the practice of expatriates choosing to live in the same area as other expatriates and spending their non-work/social hours with other expatriates. In countries which are ‘dry’, such as within the Arab Middle East, there may be licensed venues at which expatriate congregate to consume alcohol. In other cases expatriates enjoy similar leisure pursuits and hence socialize within such socially-constructed ghetto, which may provide valuable support in the adjustment process to reduce isolation but may also reduce team effectiveness where cliques occur (see Kealey, 2004). Fish (2005) has suggested that expatriates need to possess the ability to deal effectively with frustration, stress, different political systems, interaction with strangers, intercultural and business dimensions. One way in which such issues might be addressed is through relationships with other expatriates, yet for propatriates in the military such relationships may be short lived as people are rotated in and out of assignments. Nonetheless, it is also acknowledged that even for expatriates who live in these ghettos, there are variations of degree of interaction with locals (Hutchings, Michailova, & Harrison, 2013).

For those who work in extreme contexts, such as humanitarian and aid workers and journalists and photographers there may be greater need to build trust with local people to achieve their assignment requirements and hence living in ghetto would be counter-

productive. For military personnel the situation may not always be clear: There may be cases where working effectively with locals and ascertaining who the enemy was necessitated greater interaction. On the other hand, deployments to hazardous and culturally distant contexts might have necessitated the maintenance of an expatriate ghetto ‘mentality’ based on both security concerns and recognizing that the support and camaraderie of fellow military expatriates was essential for psychological wellbeing. In some cases there may be a sense that those who work in extreme contexts simply have a job to do and they need to go in, do it, and leave – and building relationships and acculturating is not a key element of the assignment focus. Yet, also within this context of considering the extent to which expatriates may/may not acculturate and integrate in work and non-work contexts with locals we need to consider the extent to which they remain committed to their organization.

### **METHOD**

The study incorporated theory, history, and inductive analysis, of the insights and experiences of female military propatriates and exemplified the use of archival data for understanding a present-day phenomenon. The use of historical data was seen as a way to access “a broader understanding of human behavior and thoughts than would be possible if one was trapped in the static isolations of one’s own time period” (Berg, 1995:192), while oral historiographies facilitate the sharing of the ‘daily life’ for women expatriates embedded in highly dangerous settings. This approach was appropriate given the danger and difficulty associated with research in extreme contexts. The source for the oral interviews was the veteran’s history project: (XXXXXX.xxx). The data is publicly available - through the (XXXXXX) website. Under the fair use doctrine of the US copyright statute (Title 17 of the US Code), it is permissible to use limited portions of a work including quotes, for purposes such as commentary, criticism, news reporting, and scholarly reports. Trained interviewers recorded and transcribed face-to-face interviews which, on average, lasted 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews included a brief

autobiographical sketch by the interviewee before proceeding onto their military experiences prior to, during, and after the war/s. Primary data are defined in historiography as first-hand testimony or direct evidence concerning a topic under investigation and include autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories (Goodman & Kruger, 1988). It has been suggested that first-person accounts are critical if a researcher is to understand the real-life experiences and memories of a social group.

### ***Sample***

As of August 2013, there were 138 interviews of female veterans encompassing their recollections from WWII to the current war in Afghanistan available on the (xxxxx.xxx) website. All 138 interviews were downloaded and then organized into four categories: combat/non-combat and career/non-career. Forty-five interviews were categorized as combat, of which 24 were career militarists and 21 were non-career. All twenty-four interviews analyzed in the current research were selected from the combat/career category to highlight the experience of female military propatriates. The interviews were further categorized by age group at time of interview (from age 20 to 60 and over), war zone, occupation (i.e., medical, technical, support), military ranking (enlisted/officer) and PTSD/non-PTSD (as self-reported) as shown in Table 1.

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### ***Coding procedures***

The interview material was content-analyzed by two researchers, following a three-step procedure to ensure reliable classification and interpretation. The first step included data

preparation to ascertain whether all interviews and transcripts were included in the analysis. The second step comprised data coding. An initial hierarchical coding scheme for thematic categories (e.g., reasons for joining, military positions and postings, military context, extreme and foreign context, gender issues, coping mechanisms and assignment outcomes) was undertaken. Then, new subordinate categories were added and refined according to findings from iterative reading. The third step involved data examination and interpretation, resulting in final re-coding and minor refinements. In this third step, peer debriefing was used to enhance the credibility and validity of the emerging themes (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was achieved through a vetting process throughout the iterative coding process on each theme until agreement was reached between the two researchers. This approach helps minimize bias within the inquiry and authenticate researcher interpretation (Spall, 1998: 281). It is also noted that the lead researcher's prior military experience provided insider insight and knowledge of the military culture. The thematic content analysis was performed with the aid of NVivo 10, and assisted in identification of content and data associations reflected in the description and interpretation of research findings.

## **FINDINGS**

In this section, we present the salient themes that emerged from the analysis of the 24 historiographies as guided by the acculturation and expatriate literature. Our study generated over 112 themes that were coded and organized in the three broad areas of interest: acculturation experiences, adjustment patterns, and acculturative stressors and strategies. The salience of a particular construct was evaluated through the number of sources and frequency of citation within the data. Herein we focus on the themes that occurred most frequently in the content analysis and across the greatest number of interviewees. The findings are supported by numerous direct quotes from the interviews.

### *Acculturation experiences*

Research Question 1 asked “*What are the acculturation experiences of female military expatriates in an extreme context?*” In the data analysis, we looked for themes that would explicate the four distinct phases of acculturation as noted by Aycan (1997a): pre-departure preparation, post-arrival initial contact, appraisal and coping, and psychological and adjustment outcomes. In this section, we have also included gender-related issues that were noted by the women and relevant to the acculturating in a hyper-masculine environment.

*Pre-departure phase.* Military organizations are mission-driven, thus the pre-departure phase for deployment as reported by the female expatriates across all combat settings ran the gamut from a few days’ to more than eight months’ notice. For example, one officer graduated from initial training shortly after 9/11 and her reporting unit was in a state of ramp-up for immediate deployment, while a WWII veteran recalled: “*So, while we were there the band stopped, you could hear a pin drop, "All military personnel report to your base immediately."* (Medical, Officer, Multi). One common characteristic of military organizations is the frequent ambiguity of the exact nature of the assignment and the length of the assignment. An important distinction, too, from traditional MNE expatriates is that military personnel are typically tasked with the organizing, packing, and unpacking of critical infrastructure in support of their mission. For example, medical officers would coordinate medical supplies, from tents to hypodermic needles. Unsurprisingly, several of the women across all war zones noted that the pre-departure phase was filled with intense, busy activity, sometime with minimal notice and /or guidance, as illustrated in the following quote:

*So I said, guys, we got a job to do. I said, I want you to take tomorrow off, and go be with your families. . . We didn't know when we were going to be going, exactly where we were going to be going, but there were a lot of things you had to do. You had to get the unit ready, we had equipment we had to turn in, we had equipment that had to be issued. A lot of family affairs.* (Technical, Officer, Gulf)



Despite the ambiguity of the nature of the deployment, a common theme amongst the female expatriates was one of excitement and anticipation: *And a lot of us, after all those years of training, were excited to go to the war. We were looking forward to the war. We wanted to put into action all those years of training.*(Technical, Enlisted, Multi)

*Post-arrival contact.* In this acculturation phase, expatriates had arrived at their post and were attempting to rapidly adjust to the foreign environment and work demands. In an extreme context, however, like a war zone, much of the typical infrastructure taken for granted by business expatriates is not available. Moreover, a combat setting is both dangerous and dynamic, so there are rapid changes that the organizational unit constantly has to address. Many of the women reported to their unit and found a chaotic situation with little guidance. One physical therapist (Medical, Officer, Vietnam) found that her *“whirlpool is in a latrine and somebody forgot to clean it some months ago to top it all off”*. Also noted in the data were the compressed timeframe for settling in as demanded by the extreme workload in a forward combat setting. With rare exception, military personnel are expected to report to their supervisor for work upon arriving at their overseas destination.

*Appraisal and coping.* During the appraisal and coping phase, expatriates have had enough time overseas to begin to critically assess their international assignment and employ various coping strategies. Initial reactions as detailed by both enlisted and officers across all the combat settings was to immerse themselves in work. However, when confronted with the real and imminent danger of working and living in a war zone, some informants' reaction was to go into denial:

*My reaction to it was like I was watching a movie and not like I was actually there, and not like I was in actual danger myself because I was, I was close enough to see someone get hit with shrapnel and yet it didn't occur to me that I*

*could get hit with the same shrapnel. I didn't react the way I thought I would.*

(Support, Enlisted, Gulf)

During this post-arrival phase, the expatriates also remarked on the 'foreignness' of the people and their customs during the early days of their deployment:

*The guy who did this call to prayer, he must have had quite a set of lungs, because you could hear it for blocks. It sounds very much like chanting, like a Gregorian chant or something similar call to prayer. It is beautiful, but it is very haunting and it is very scary those first couple days as you get used to it.* (Support, Officer, Gulf)

*Hyper-masculine context.* In addition the women also spoke of the challenges of being the first woman or one of the few women in their unit. Analysis of the historical data revealed changing social norms in the US and the military. For example, a medical officer in WWII reflected on how military women were viewed by the public during her time in services: *Nurses were classified as lower than low, in those days, right along with the evening ladies* (Medical, Officer, WWII). Later anecdotes reflected a growing acceptance of women, but female leaders highlighted specific issues of being accepted by their male subordinates:

*Being the only female in a platoon full of men and our MOS being one that is mostly male-dominated, it was quite different being the only female in that guys either treat a girl like a sexual object or like their sister. It seems like they don't know how to treat a female as a coworker, a soldier. . . I wanted to be treated with the same respect as the next guy, but it's, sometimes they still saw me as their sister type and it was hard for me to relay to them how exactly to communicate with me.* (Support, Enlisted, Gulf)

*Psychological and adjustment outcomes.* Out of the 24 interviews analyzed, only four of the female veterans discussed ongoing difficulties in adjusting to life stateside due to traumatic

experiences during their deployment. Nonetheless, it was striking that three out of four were medical nurses during Vietnam. The majority of the female veterans reported that their wartime experiences led to greater professional recognition and subsequent promotions, suggesting that these military propatriates adapted well to the challenges of an overseas deployment in a hazardous environment. The prevailing theme across all war zones, both enlisted and officer, was mostly satisfaction and pride in the challenges of a military career despite the risks as noted by this combat-decorated veteran:

*To me the medal meant...it's not something I wanted to ever get, or course, but for me to get it, I felt honored. I felt honored because I was a survivor. That's what it meant, just surviving. Facing difficulty, adversity, and not giving up. Not just laying in the bed and accepting your situation, but trying to change it. I was so ecstatic when I got my Purple Heart. (Enlisted, Support, Gulf)*

### ***Adjustment patterns***

Research Question 1A asked “*What are the general, interactional, and work-related adjustment patterns of female expatriates as shaped by an extreme context?*” In this section, themes were identified that were relevant to the three dimensions for expatriate adjustment: general, interaction, and work adjustment (see Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991).

*General adjustment.* Themes related to general adjustment were categorized by the expatriates’ reaction to the local food, the environmental conditions, accommodations, and living conditions. Both Korean and Gulf War veterans noted the extreme weather conditions, with the Gulf expatriates remarking on the intense heat in the desert and the constant presence of wind and sand, while another veteran recalled the bitter cold of the Korean winter.

The quality of food depended on whether the expatriates were living on a well-established base with good infrastructure or less permanent quarters. Some interviewees reported enjoying fresh fruit and vegetables; others had to make do with “Meals Ready to

Eat” (MREs). Typical of most soldiers’ experiences, the MREs were not popular: *It all has a shelf-life of like 10 years and it all taste the same. It is designed to help constipate you on purpose, so when you're in a field environment, that eliminates that need from occurring often, so you can imagine how much fun that is.* (Support, Officer, Gulf). However, when travelling outside the base or socializing with locals, the women expressed concern about the lack of sanitary conditions. One expat stated that *“if you ever find yourself in a situation where you need to eat meat, it needs to be charred beyond recognition...”* (Support officer, Gulf).

The quality of accommodation varied based on the war zone and specific location and assignment. In WWII, an expat recalled how they initially lived in foxholes:

*So, we lived in foxholes. And that's when I learned why the Army told me to keep my butt down, 'cause we had to crawl to the other foxholes and drag the kids back that were injured. And we had a--they made us a rather large foxhole, and that was the first aid station.* (Medical officer, over 60, WWII)

Women in both the Gulf War and the Korean War remarked on the challenges of living in tents due to overcrowding and harsh weather conditions:

*They put everybody in tents just after they moved (...) and so they had this whole tent city set up. (...) and it is just miserably hot and there are sand storms and they are trying to get the tents up. . . There were ten women already in an eight-person tent.* (Medical, Officer, Gulf War)

*In the winter time, you'd wake up in your sleeping bag and we slept on cots with sleeping bags and looked up and there were icicles because our potbellied stove line would be frozen and no heat. Then we didn't want to get out of the sleeping bags because then we had to go to the latrine -- and there's a picture of that, too.*

*It's a tent where the seats would be frozen. That's a wild, bad awakening in the morning. (Medical, Enlisted, Korean War)*

The living conditions were also varied, with comments that noted the austerity of living and lack of privacy when living in a temporary situation with make-shift toilets and shower facilities:

*In that war, things were very austere, we didn't have portable potties or flushing toilets, you had made up potties, I mean, at one point it was like two pieces of wood across a trench, and that was the potty and your bathroom door was like a pile of dirt, you know you can see people going by, they can't really see you. But you just had to say, "Okay" so modesty could not be an issue. (Medical, Officer, Multi-War)*

*Interactional adjustment.* Contact with host nationals was limited as to be expected in a war zone. Nonetheless, both Vietnam and Gulf War veterans reported that they enjoyed meeting and socializing with locals, as shared by one Vietnam veteran who reflected on her experience of meeting ‘tea girls’ who cajoled Allied soldiers in to buying them expensive drinks in local bars:

*And for many of the women who were not educated being a tea girl was the best way they could make the most amount of money in the least amount of time. I really enjoyed meeting these gals but I am sure that after America left and it fell to the North Vietnamese, these gals probably, even though they liked the Americans and they would have loved to come to America, they just kind of melted into the background and became ... because they didn't want to go into concentration camps ... reeducation camps. (Support, Enlisted, Vietnam)*

Close analysis showed distinct differences in the quality of interactional experiences based on the particular war zone. For example, some of the women soldiers in the Gulf regions

complained about wearing the 'abaya' (head veil) and not being allowed to drive, in contrast to their male counterparts who had more freedom of movement. On a more frequent basis, women who participated in the Gulf Wars reported incidents of intimidation by host soldiers:

*I hated it there because there were Saudi soldiers. And (...) being a female there (...). So we're going out there, the women would go out and try to run, the men would try to run you over with vehicles. They would throw things at you, and it got to the point that the men could go out, but we couldn't. The men could do this, but we couldn't. They would yell things at you (...) (Technical, Officer, Gulf)*

On their rare opportunities to go outside the military base, the Gulf War soldiers reported feeling discounted based on their gender: *But I went into a carpet store with this guy and the carpet owner was talking to him about the carpets and I said something and the guy totally ignored me. I just -- like I wasn't even there. It really -- really opens your eyes. (Technical, Officer, Gulf)*. Still other female soldiers were pleasantly surprised by their treatment as reported by another Gulf War veteran:

*Before I left, and then, I just already had the mentality that they would just treat us awful because they don't respect women, . . . But when I got over there, the Iraqis that I worked with, they were very respectful. When I was there, they were very friendly. . . And they treated me so respectfully, I couldn't even say anything about it, though. I know how they treat their women, but as far as being a US soldier, as far as being a female soldier, being an African-American female soldier, I was not treated bad by them at all. (Support, Enlisted, Gulf)*

*Work adjustment.* In this category, themes related to work-load and performance demands were identified. The most prominent theme in this category, however, for both enlisted and officers and all three occupation types, was their recognition of their military career as profoundly satisfying and a professional calling as captured below:

*And I just decided that I preferred to have a profession. And I respected Marine Corps. And actually the Marine Corps -- it's hard to explain but it became a family to me . . . So I felt like it took care of us, and I wanted to join this group of individuals, the Marines, which I thought were superb -- I still think are superb. (Technical, Officer, Gulf)*

*And that -- really, that experience of people with such really bad gunshot wounds and injuries walking and their buddies helping me, it really changed my life forever; that night changed my life forever because I knew I could never -- seeing this great spirit and this taking care of each other as they had, that I would never be able to go back to civilian nursing where, you know, little old ladies need their aspirin and they can't wait five minutes. That -- that is when I really kind of decided that I wanted to make the military my career. (Enlisted, Medical, Vietnam)*

As part of their professional work, the veterans also reflected on the satisfaction of making a profound difference in someone's life: *I felt a feeling of deep gratitude to God for helping this man come through that war alive. I felt a great pride and personal satisfaction and reward that I was able to help him. (Officer, Medical, Multi)*

Another shared theme among both officer and enlisted women military across all war zones was the 24-7 nature of the work as captured in the following excerpt:

*Everybody, we'd work, depending on the patient load, if we worked 16 hours, 18 hours, until you were ready to flop, really, and then somebody else would take over until they were ready to flop. (Medical, Enlisted, Korean War)*

### ***Acculturative stressors and coping strategies***

Research 1b asked "What are the stressors of female, military expatriates in an extreme context and how were these stresses mitigated?" In this section, themes were categorized

broadly by the types of stressors and the various coping strategies as reported by the interviewees.

*Acculturative stressors.* In a combat setting, there is the omnipresent danger of being killed or wounded in an attack. The female expatriates noted the possibility of chemical weapons and incoming missile attacks;. However, their reaction was remarkably pragmatic:

*We had -- always had SKUD missiles incoming. .. But I was working 18, 20 hour days from the start of -- start of being deployed. . . I just kind of -- my assumption was by the time it got to us it was too late. So I just stayed in bed and got my sleep. There was a couple that exploded right around us. (Technical, Officer, Gulf War)*

Nonetheless, some of the women acknowledged their fear:

*[Attacks] at least once every two weeks. While I was there, there were about three attacks, and then there was a mortar that had failed to...it was about 300 or so feet from us. So that was scary. To hear it and to feel the vibration, and hear the siren go off, yeah, that was really scary. (Support, enlisted, Gulf War)*

Of particular concern were that a minority of the interviewees remarked on security issues due to being women in a war zone, with the majority of episodes reported by women in the Gulf Wars (Iraq, Afghanistan), and were more frequently mentioned by the female officers. Sexual harassment from allied male soldiers and male co-workers, often under the connivance of superiors, was a specific concern. The following is an illustration of this specific threat:

*Then I had a peeping Tom. . . I come out and I see this guy staring at me through my window -- through the window. . . So I go after him and he's starting to run away from me and it was just classic. This lieutenant comes out. She takes her weapon out of her holster, loads it, and I mean you could just hear that hammer go back, and points it at him and says move and we went over the company office.*



*They didn't press charges. Nothing happened on that. I'm disappointed on that, but I just liked how she told him to move.* (Technical, Officer, Gulf war)

Based on the analysis, however, the most salient and dominant stressor as reported by the female expatriates across all war zones and occupations was the psychological strain of working with or seeing the dead and wounded:

*With a group of paramedics assigned to me, we would have the task to sort out bodies of dead soldiers that could come in plastic black bags and put them together, with heads, limbs of the same skin colors . . . Could you imagine the incredible task he had to try to identify these bodies? I felt that at least we were helping him by putting skin colors together. I'm sorry . . .* (Starts to cry). (Medical, Officer, Multi)

*Acculturative (coping) strategies.* A number of themes emerged under coping strategies: relational (communication with family and friends; co-worker support), personal (humor; religion; crying; denial), and leisure activities (drinking; socializing; working out).

Relational: Almost without exception, the female expatriates relied heavily on support from family and friends for their own and their co-workers emotional support:

*We would kind of help each other out as (...) -- and then I would share my care packages with other people, as well. So we became a big family out there, and a lot of people don't have people who are supporting them. So when that happens, you always share what you have with people who are not receiving letters and things.* (Technical, enlisted, Multi-Wars)

Personal: The importance of a strong religious faith in dealing with the daily stress of working and living in an extreme context was prominent across all war zones as noted in the following reflection:

*I really believe that you need, in the circumstances that I- was in, to believe that there is a power beyond us human beings, that you need to ask that - Power whatever you want to call it, for me it is God, to please come down and help you, - because you get to a point where you wonder if you are going to make it.*

(Medical, officer, Multi-war)

Women also reported breaking down and crying as an emotional release, particularly during major traumatic events. Some women reported, too, that they would cry with a male co-worker, without any shame or embarrassment felt by either party. One veteran recalls that she “... cried a lot. I talked to people who were in similar circumstances. I cried on the job. I must admit. (Technical, enlisted, Gulf war)

Recreational: In a war zone, there is very limited leisure time. Many of the Gulf veterans reported working out or running as a way to relieve stress; this did not appear to be an option or consideration for the veterans in earlier wars. All of the women enjoyed the entertainment provided by organizations like the United Service Organization (USO) and welcomed the break from non-stop work. Women in the wars prior to the Gulf also enjoyed drinking alcohol and partying with male counterparts and host nationals. Some women also hinted at romantic liaisons, but emphasized the need for companionship. One Vietnam War veteran remarked: *Believe me, it was not a matter of sex, it was a matter of enjoying each other's company when we needed it the most and just being good friends. .. And that was a great help for both of us to keep ourselves sane.* (Medical, Officer, Multi)

## **DISCUSSION**

The analysis highlighted the multiple challenges of working and living in an extreme context. The female military expatriates remarked on a wide variety of physical and mental stressors including various environmental (e.g. extreme heat and cold), physiological (e.g. sleep deprivation, dehydration, poor hygiene), cognitive (e.g. unpredictability, organizational

dynamics), and emotional (fear/anxiety, grief, ethical/moral) issues that are commonly associated with combat settings (see Anon, 2000). While much of the extant literature on expatriate adjustment and acculturation has shown that the perceived quality of living conditions and the host country's threat level contribute to stress levels (Bader & Berg, 2013), our findings suggested that the impact is smaller than expected. This suggests that the female expatriates were effective at dealing with difficult circumstances and adapted over time to the extreme context even if they were not integrating into the local culture. Challenging living conditions and restricted freedom of movement might be of less importance when expatriates spend most of their time at work or in their protected residential complexes or expatriate 'ghettos', thus minimizing need for informational (Adelman, 1988) and instrumental (Adelman, 1988; Fontaine, 1986) types of support. While relationships (both stateside and in-country) were essential to their overall well-being (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002), the women in our study revealed a tendency to "get the job done" as effectively and efficiently as possible, thus they did not necessarily want to interact with host country nationals or explore the country with the exception of some from earlier wars who mentioned partying with locals.

The analysis identified the women's strong commitment to their profession and also the important role of camaraderie in facilitating their adjustment to living in extreme contexts in culturally distant contexts, which presented physical, emotional and mental demands. As noted by the veterans across all war zones, they endured uncomfortable living and accommodation conditions, long work hours, isolation and long absences from family, in addition to having to navigate gender-related issues in a hyper-masculine culture (both amongst their own colleagues and with local soldiers in some war zones; particularly the Gulf). The historical data allowed for a nuanced analysis that highlighted the changing roles of women in western society (see Altman and Shortland, 2008) over the past six decades as reflected in the growing acceptance of women in the military generally (in WWII and the

Korean War) and in combat settings specifically (Gulf War). The interviews also revealed the expanding technical and support roles available to military women, which has presented its own set of challenges as women assume leadership roles in non-traditional jobs. These findings provide further empirical support for research that women's home country context can impact on women's interest in and selection for international careers and perceived or real acceptance in host country contexts (see Hutchings et al., 2014; Shortland, 2009).

The findings provide additional empirical support that women expatriates may adjust similarly (Selmer and Leung, 2003) or even more effectively than men (Halsberger, 2007; Tung, 2004) and extend these findings to the propatriates outside the business community and whom work in a dangerous setting. The historiographies, however, challenge other research that suggests that women's overall job satisfaction may be lower (Culpan and Wright, 2002), and they appear to struggle more with the stress and isolation of an overseas posting (Tung, 1998). In looking back over their military career, many of these military propatriates were grateful for the remarkable professional experiences and personal relationships that they had enjoyed. While the women looked forward to being united with their family and friends, some veterans stated that they would have like to have done an additional combat tour.

The comparison of female expat experiences across time and location also allowed for important differences to emerge in the analysis. Namely, for Gulf War veterans, the perceived resistance from the host country to accepting women in managerial roles and being treated differently than their male counterparts was a significant stressor noted by several of the women. More seriously, there was some evidence that women deployed to the Gulf regions were under greater threat of rape and harassment by both host nationals and their own military counterparts. These anecdotes provide important empirical evidence for studies that suggest that cultural distance (e.g. between Eastern and Western cultures) has been associated with war atrocities as it allows the soldier to dehumanise the victim (see Grossman, 1995) and this

has been noted in relation to not only conflict with local military but also actions like rape of local civilian women as war crimes which has occurred throughout the history of war (see Watts and Zimmerman, 2002).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The research highlights the changing roles of female military expatriates over the past six decades in international assignments in various war zones. The research identifies not only the women's strong commitment to their profession but also the important role of camaraderie and coping strategies such as socialising or religious faith in facilitating their adjustment to living in extreme contexts in culturally distant contexts, which presented physical, emotional and mental demands. In addition to facing nominal domestic comforts, long work hours, isolation and long absences from family and all that was familiar, the women also operated within a hyper-masculine culture.

### **Contributions**

The research makes a significant contribution to the expatriation literature in extending it to an extreme (military) context with an analysis of the organizational and national acculturation experiences of female propatriates. First, it extends the expatriation literature to consider the acculturation experiences of female expatriates in non-traditional assignments. In so doing the research contributes to broader debates about workplace inclusivity by considering the extent to which women overcome prejudices, surmount institutional barriers, and make contributions to enhance corporate performance, and maximize their own human potential. Second, it extends the expatriation literature from an overwhelming focus on MNEs to consider the experiences of military expatriates working in extreme contexts in the public sector. In our study, context is fore fronted in our exploration of the psychological, physical, and behavioral processes of acculturation and context takes on even greater salience in a high stress, uncertain and dangerous combat environment in which failure to acculturate in both work and

non-work domains could have potentially fatal consequences. Third, this historical study presents the experiences of women propatriates at times when very few women had opportunities to have international careers, thus providing insight into a previously overlooked, but important, population. Fourth, in reviewing female military expatriates' longitudinal experiences the research highlights variations in the extent to which the women acculturated and how this was affected by their propatriate roles as well as being in an extreme context and the changing nature of their professional work.

### **Managerial implications**

In extending research on female expatriates from an overwhelming focus on those working in traditional assignments in multinational corporations this research has important implications for organizations operating in extreme contexts. The research highlights that as the women often had limited opportunities for interaction with local communities and worked in real and virtual expatriate ghetto, they relied very much on camaraderie and support from their fellow military expatriates. While professional commitment was a critical aspect of what kept them focused in challenging cross-cultural contexts, the findings suggest the importance for organizations to provide opportunities to develop collegial mentoring and knowledge sharing within such extreme contexts.

### **Limitations and issues for future research**

One criticism of this study is the sole focus on 'women only'; however, it was our aim to explore the issues most relevant to women military propatriates. Future research could compare the experiences of female military expatriates with women who have worked in other extreme contexts as aid workers, journalists, photographers, and humanitarian peace workers to identify differing acculturation experiences.

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*Table 1. Attributes of Female Veteran Sample*

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Medical</b>	<b>Technical</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>AGE GROUP</b>				
20-30	0	0	1	1
31-40	0	1	2	3
41-50	1	1	0	2
51-60	3	3	1	7
Over 60	7	0	4	11
<b>MILITARY RANKING</b>				
Enlisted	4	2	6	13
Officer	6	3	2	11
<b>WAR ZONE</b>				
WWII	1	0	0	1
Korean War	1	0	0	1
Vietnam War	2	1	0	3
Gulf Wars	3	4	5	12
Multi Wars	4	1	1	6
<b>SELF-REPORT OF TRAUMA</b>				
PTSD	2	0	1	3
Non-PTSD	9	5	7	21