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The Battle Within: Sexual Assault in America's Military

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MARY F. CALVERT

The Battle Within: Sexual Assault in America's Military

Editor's Note

Photojournalist Mary F. Calvert's photographic calling is documenting the underreported humanitarian struggle of women and children worldwide to secure the most basic human rights. She has been awarded the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award twice and was a finalist in 2007 and 2010 for the Pulitzer Prize in Feature Photography.

Her project *The Battle Within: Sexual Assault in America's Military* can be viewed in its entirety at maryfcalvert.com. From the website's introduction to the photographs:

Women who join the U.S. Armed Forces are being raped and sexually assaulted by their colleagues in record numbers. An estimated 26,000 rapes and sexual assaults took place in the armed forces last year; only one in seven victims reported their attacks, and just one in ten of those cases went to trial. Most military rape survivors are forced out of service and many are even compelled to continue working for their rapists.

The effects of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) include depression, substance abuse, paranoia, and feelings of isolation. Victims spend years drowning in shame and fear as the psychological damage silently eats away at their lives: many end up addicted to drugs and alcohol, homeless, or the victims of suicide.



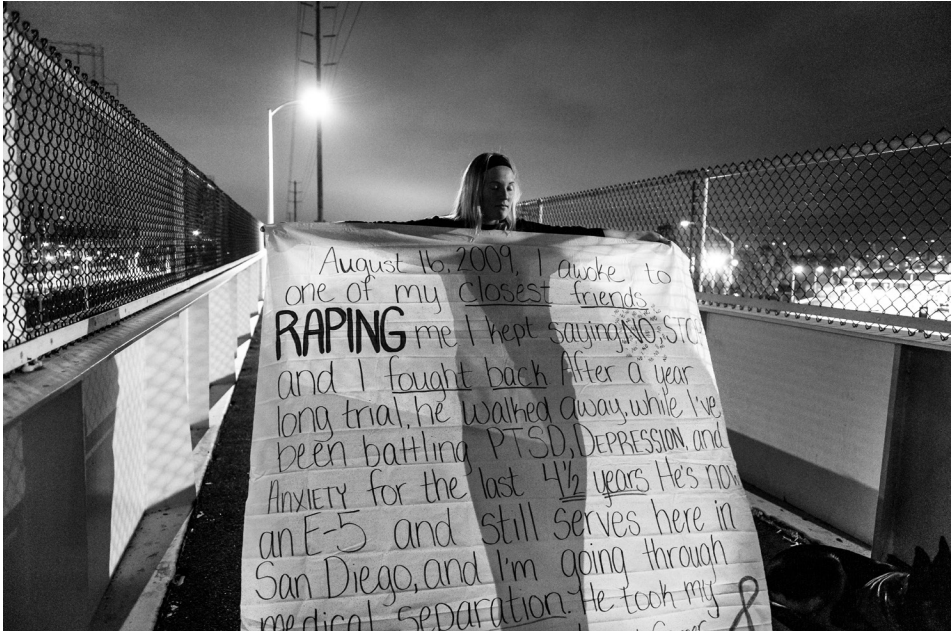
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U.S. Army Spc. Natasha Schuette, 21, was sexually assaulted by her drill sergeant during basic training and subsequently suffered harassment by other drill sergeants after reporting the assault at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Her assailant is serving just four years in prison for assaulting her and four other female trainees. Natasha suffers daily from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) because of the attack. She is now stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.



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Brittany Fintel served in the U.S. Navy. She was grabbed and pinned down on a bed by her lead petty officer while she was stationed in Bahrain on the USS Gridley. Another sailor witnessed the attack but turned and left as she screamed and fought off her attacker. She reported the attack and was told she had an “adjustment disorder”; she was then taken off the ship and eventually separated from the navy because of PTSD. She joined the military to see the world and get college paid for, but her experience in the Navy shattered her sense of trust. “They kick the victim out. The victim is more fucked up in the head than apparently the rapist,” she says, weeping on her couch at home in San Diego. Her PTSD service dog, Indiana, is never far from her side.



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Melissa Bania holds a banner that she inscribed with the story of her sexual assault before hanging it on the footbridge across from the entrance to Naval Station San Diego. U.S. Navy military sexual trauma survivors, including Felicia Valenzuela, Alicia Padilla, Brianna Roepke, and Melissa Bania, got together at Brittany Fintel's San Diego home to make banners inscribed with their sexual assault experiences in the U.S. Navy. That evening, under the cover of darkness, they hung them on the footbridge. The nonprofit #nolongervictims sponsored the event in April 2014 during Sexual Assault Awareness Month to raise awareness of military sexual assault.



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Virginia Messick was raped by her drill sergeant at Lackland Air Force Base during basic training. Her rapist was convicted of raping ten women under his command and is serving a twenty-year prison sentence. She holds her old uniform at home in Marysville, California.



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Jessica Hinves, right, was an Air Force fighter jet mechanic when she was raped by a member of her squadron at Lackland Air Force Base. She has a word with military officers after a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Capitol Hill to receive testimony on sexual assaults in the military. The case against her rapist was thrown out the day before the trial was to begin by a commander who said, “Though he didn’t act like a gentleman, there was no reason to prosecute.”



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TSgt. Jennifer Norris was drugged and raped by her recruiter after joining the U.S. Air Force when she was twenty-one years old. She testifies on Capitol Hill before the sparsely attended House Armed Services Committee hearing to discuss sexual misconduct by basic training instructors at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.



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Connie Sue Foss was raped while in the U.S. Army and has found it difficult to hold down a job to care for herself and her daughter. She bears scars from punching a window during a PTSD episode and holds a molar she lost from grinding her teeth at night.



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Suzie Champoux mourns the death of her daughter, Army Sgt. Sophie Champoux, who committed suicide under suspicious circumstances after being repeatedly raped while in the U.S. Army. Suzie places a picture of her daughter in a display case at her local Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter in Clermont, Florida.