

## The Lady Machine Gunner goes to War

I only met the Lady Gunner once, when she was in grade school.

Her father had come to visit me at Chanute Air Force Base, in the little town of Rantoul.

She was quiet and did not say all that much, in fact I hardly heard her speak.

One might have gotten the wrong impression she was timid or a little meek.

I had known her father's family since I was in high school.

I would go over to her grandparents' house and try to be my "70s" cool.

Her father was younger than I, and he would hang on my every word.

When I suggested he not join the military, unfortunately these words he heard.

Vietnam had just ended and staying out of the Army was on every one's mind.

I was not going to go into the services either, I admit in those days I was a little blind.

Who was I, giving advice on such an important subject - I knew so little about.

But the military in those days was something you worked hard, at keeping your children out.

The Gunner's grandfather was a Cavalry Officer back in 1943.

His old military memorabilia kept in his den, held a strong interest for me.

He started out on Army horses with a scabbard rifle at his side.

He finished that war going through Germany on a long tank ride.

The Gunner wanted to go to college and then on to Medical School.

The Illinois National Guard, with its tuition assistance was just the tool.

Go to basic training and get a technical skill.

Then go back home to college, and just do your weekend drill.

In the Guard she started out as a Medic and then became an Army M.P.  
I was a cop in the Air Force, so her being an M.P. was just fine with me.  
She attends Eastern Illinois University, out in the prairie, in the land of very few trees.  
Again this was fine, that is where I got my master's degree.

I have a tradition of phoning "old" veterans on Memorial and Veteran's Day.  
The list gets ever longer, but some years my condolences to the family is what I have to say.  
The Lady Gunner's grandfather is at the top of the list, I use to make the call.  
Last year on Veteran's Day I added the Gunner and we talked on the phone in her  
dormitory hall.

The Lady Gunner's unit got called up for the second Iraq war and send to Fort McCoy.  
I did not get to talk to her this Memorial Day because she was preparing to deploy.  
We did a few e-mails and a letter now and then.  
Then she went "in-country" and the communication has gotten rather thin.

The Lady Gunner is now in Iraq trying to sleep at night in that miserable desert heat.  
As an MP she works a checkpoint on a dangerous Baghdad street.  
In the turret of her Humvee she scans the area for terrorist activity in that town.  
Every mindful she is a ready-made target for an RPG round.

I watch the news about the Middle East on TV every night.  
I am always looking for the Gunner, in hopes to see, she is all right.  
We keep losing fine young troops to attacks every week.  
I keep watching the TV screen, looking for the Gunner on a bloody Baghdad street.

It looks like the Gunner is going to be there for at least a year.  
That is a long time to live with a tent, the damned heat and the constant fear.  
They don't really want us there, they allege they want their country back.  
But that is politics and for the Gunner, she only needs to worry about the next attack.

My daughter and I send the Gunner a "care-package" and I heard it finally got there.  
We sent a couple of Air Force T-shirts for this Army Gunner to wear.  
I hope she uses them and her limited ties to the Air Force not sever.  
Because they have American Flags on them and the words "Freedom-Forever.

We as a nation just need to get this over with and get our troops back-that's all.  
I want her back by next Veteran's day so I can make my regular "old veteran's" call.  
This time she will be a combat veteran who has matured beyond her years.  
We just want her home, to see she's well and relieve her family's fears.

The Lady Gunner has seized the moment and met her Nations Call.  
She is not like a lot of young people her age, who have in life, no-clue at all.  
She cares; she knows what she needs to do and what is profoundly right.  
Please God, keep Lauren safe in that dangerous Baghdad night.

The Lady Gunner goes to War.

-Major Van Harl USAF Ret.