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(Theme music)

Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is *Pritzker Military Presents*.

(Applause)

Havers: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* for a discussion given by Pamela Toler about her book *Women Warriors: An Unexpected History*. I'm your host Rob Havers, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago and is sponsored by the members of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. This program and hundreds more covering a full range of military topics is available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. From Vikings and African queens to cross-dressing military doctors and WWII Russian fighter pilots, these are the stories of women for whom battle was not a metaphor. The woman warrior is always cast as an anomaly, like Joan of Arc, not GI Jane. But women it turns out, have always gone to war. In this fascinating and lively world history, Pamela Toler not only introduces us to women who took up arms, she also shows us why they did it and what happened when they stepped out of their traditional female roles to take on other identities. By considering the ways in which their presence has been erased from history, Toler reveals that women have always fought, not in spite of being women but because they are women. Pamela D. Toler goes beyond the familiar boundaries of American history to tell stories from other parts of the world as well as history from the other side of the battlefield, the gender line, or the color bar. She is the author of *The Heroines of Mercy Street: The Real Nurses of the Civil War*, among other books. Her work has appeared in *AramcoWorld*, *Calliope*, *History Channel Magazine*, *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, and *OnTime.com*. Please join me in welcoming back Pamela Toler to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.

(Applause)

Toler: Good evening everyone. It's a delight to be back here at the Pritzker Museum. In fact I spent many hours here writing this book, so this feels a little bit like coming home. It would be really easy to spend our time together just telling you stories about women warriors that you've probably never heard of, and would actually be kind of fun, but doing that won't give you a good feeling for what my books is about. There's a long tradition of collective biographies of notable women, warriors and otherwise, and they tend to emphasize the heroic aspects of individual women's stories. Increasing today they're aimed at adult audiences, but traditionally they were written to give girls female role models. That's a worthy goal. I loved those books when I was a kid. I still love them today. But *Women Warriors* isn't that kind of book. Quite frankly, a lot of the women I write about aren't a good role model for anyone. (Chuckles) But more importantly those collective biographies tend to look at each woman's story in her own time and place. And that's appropriate for those books, because they're setting out to show you what she had to overcome to accomplish the things she accomplished. I wanted to do something a little bit different. I wanted to look at women warriors across geographical boundaries, across time, to see what patterns emerged if any. So tonight what I'd like to do is talk about some of the big ideas that appeared as I researched and wrote the book, and then tell you some stories along the way that illustrate those points. But first I'd like to start with a little bit of general context. In 1993 a highly respected military historian named John Keegan published a book titled *A History of Warfare*. *Time Magazine* said it was

one of the best books of the year, and they described Keegan as one of the century's most distinguished military historians. And in the introduction to *A History of Warfare* this is what Keegan wrote about women and war. "Warfare is the one human activity from which women with the most insignificant exceptions have always and everywhere stood apart. Women have followed the drum, nursed the wounded, tended the field and herded the flocks when the man of the family has followed his leader, have even dug the trenches for men to defend and labored in the workshops to send them their weapons. Women however do not fight, and they never in any military sense fight men." It's an idea that a lot of people have shared over time, but I'm hoping that some of you are thinking, "But, but wait a minute," and coming up with some immediate counter examples. Because even though he was indeed a distinguished historian and *A History of Warfare* is otherwise an excellent book, in this case Dr. Keegan got it wrong. Women have always gone to war. Women have fought to avenge their families, to defend their homes or cities or nations, to win independence from a foreign power, to expand their kingdom's boundaries, to satisfy their ambitions, or in a few hardcore cases just because they could. The earliest example that we have for a woman warrior comes from a burial mound in the Caucasian region of Georgia on the Eurasian steppes. It was excavated in 1927 when women warriors were not a hot topic. That mound dates from the 2nd millennium BCE, which is about the same time as ancient Crete, and three women were buried in that mound with grave goods that included a bronze sword, iron spearheads, and a horse's head, because horse-riding nomadic tribes were a feature in this period of the world for a long, long time. Now, when a male burial includes weapons, the assumption is that the man was a warrior. When a woman is buried with those same grave goods, many scholars, male and female alike, are reluctant to acknowledge that she might have used them to fight. Instead they speculate on why she might have been buried with male grave goods. Maybe the weapons were purely ceremonial. Maybe they belonged to her husband or her father and had been buried with her as a mark of respect. Maybe they weren't weapons at all. Maybe they were kitchen implements. One of the most egregious examples of this comes in the discussion about the Oseberg Ship, which was found in a burial mound in Norway in 1904. The ship was in a burial mound with two women, was part of grave goods that included a lot of weapon, a lot of traditional male grave goods, no traditional female grave goods. And it has generated all the usual discussion about why they might have been buried this way. One scholar however suggested that the man who owned the weapons in fact had originally been buried in the ship but that his remains had subsequently been removed for ritual purposes and had been removed so carefully that it left no trace in the earth. And all I can say is, you have to give that scholar points for imagination. In the case of the burial mound found in the Caucasian mountains, no one raised these kinds of objections, because the women showed traces of wounds that are typically associated with battle so that even people who would normally have questioned her status believe that there's-- agree there's every reason to believe that she was in fact a warrior. And we don't know anything else about her. We don't even know if those women were part of a culture that valued women warriors or if they were heroic exceptions. What we do know is that if you skip ahead about a thousand years, we start to find multiple burial sites in that same part of the world that have the remains of what seem to be women warriors. So it appears that women warriors have been part of the horse-riding nomadic tribes of the Eurasian steppes for a long, long time. I'd like to sidetrack for just a minute and look at this question of grave goods and gender from a slightly different angle, because not only do archeologists assume that a man buried with weapons was a warrior, until very recently they've also assumed that a person buried with weapons was a man. And a classic example of this made the news a couple of years ago. A Viking warrior who had been

long known as the Birka man was determined by DNA testing to in fact be the Birka woman, and this caused enormous flap in the world of Viking studies. People who had never doubted that the Birka man was a warrior began to raise all kinds of objections about that conclusion once they knew the remains were those of a woman. Now, what that suggests to me is those conclusions were drawn based not on the archeological evidence itself but on the cultural assumptions of the archeologist. But we have had an interesting questions raised as a result of that discussion, and that's a few archeologists have begun to ask just how many sets of remains might have been misidentified as male on the grounds of a sword. That's a question that's never going to be answered for the past. It's just not feasible to go back and retest all the remains. Even if it were financially possible, the chain of evidence isn't as clear for many sets of remains as it was for the Birka woman. But it's an important idea. One thing I'm going to be talking about in a little while is ways in which women warriors get removed from history. One way that you forget women warriors is that you deny that they're women. But before I start talking about how we forget women, let's talk a little bit about the women who do get remembered, because not all women warriors are forgotten. I'm sure everyone in this room knows the name Joan of Arc. She is the single most famous woman warrior in western history. This is how most of us imagine she looked. The only contemporary drawing we have of here looks a little bit different. We can only assume that the clerk who doodled this had never actually seen here, because the one thing we do know about how she looked is that she wore armor into battle. Beyond Joan of Arc I'm sure most of you are aware that several hundred women disguised themselves as men to fight in the American Civil War. The history nerds among you, and I'm sure there are at least a few in this room tonight, may have heard of Boudica, the Celtic queen who led a rebellion against the Romans in Britain in the 1st century CE, or maybe you know the name Lozen. She was an Apache woman who fought as one of Geronimo's warriors in the 19th century. And her brother who also fought with Geronimo described her as a shield to her people. Yeah, if you hang out in the places on the Internet where popular culture reigns, you've probably been introduced to the all-female regiments of the West African king of Dahomey. They found a place in the popular imagination when the Marvel Studios film *Black Panther* came out, and there were some small parallels that caught people's attention. In addition to these women whose names you probably know, there are women who are remembered in their own countries as national heroines, even if their stories aren't remembered here. For example, the Trung sisters of Vietnam. In 39 CE they led a rebellion against China, which had ruled their country at that point for 150 years. The Trungs led an army that was largely untrained, included a lot of women, some sources claim their elderly mother was among them. And the rungs and that untrained army drove the Chinese out of Vietnam, and they created an independent Vietnamese state, which they were able to rule for about two years. Then according to Chinese sources in 41 CE the Chinese emperor sent his best general back to retake Vietnam from the Trungs. They did successfully defend themselves for a time. They were ultimately defeated, but they weren't forgotten. Centuries later when Vietnamese nationalists were beginning their own struggles for independence first against the Chinese, later against the French, they held up the Trung sisters as an example of nationalist courage. Today they're honored as national heroines of Vietnam. They are sometimes described as the Joans of Arc of Vietnam, and there's a national holiday in their memory. But the hard fact is the women you've heard about, the women who are honored as national heroines in their own countries, are really just a small example of the historical reality. For the most part women warriors have been pushed into the historical shadows or buried in the footnotes. And that's happened for a lot of reasons. At some level the disappearance of women warriors from history is just a subset of our

larger tendency to write history as if it's spelled his-story. If you look at any subject, you're apt to find an example of a woman whose contribution has been minimized or dismissed or forgotten. A good example of this is the women whose stories were told in *Hidden Figures*. But there's some forms of erasure that are specific to women warriors. For instance, many of them in some ways disappeared themselves when they disguised themselves as men. They only appear in the historical record as women when those disguises fail. The numbers aren't large. The group that we have the best count for, the largest count for, are in fact the 400 to 600 women who fought in the American Civil War. But they aren't the only ones. It's a very old phenomenon. Our earliest account of it is a twelfth century Byzantine historian writing about third century Persia, and he describes the aftermath of a battle when people went out into the battlefield to help the wounded and take care of the dead and found that many of the Persian soldiers were in fact women dressed as men. Yet some women warriors disappear long after the fact in the case of a historical study through a historians process of definition. This is a tricky one, because all historians have to define their terms. Certainly I left some wonderful stories out of my book, because when I looked at them closely the women just weren't quite women warriors. So the problem isn't that historians have definitions. The problem comes when they don't apply those definitions uniformly. One really egregious example of this appeared in a study of the French invasion of Spain during the Napoleonic wars. The historian involved claimed that a woman who we know fought at the Siege of Zaragoza in 1808 didn't count as a combatant, because her life was in danger, and she was just defending herself. Now, what the sources tell us is that she was fighting alongside a number of artillerymen whose battery was under attack by the French. Those artillerymen count as combatants. The woman fighting with them doesn't. She gets defined out of history. Sometimes the attempts to downplay women's roles is a deliberate choice by their contemporaries. For example, after WWII the Soviet government explicitly told Russia's squadrons of highly decorated female fighter and bomber pilots not to speak of their wartime experiences. I could give you a lot more examples. There are a lot more ways in which this happens. But the really important thing is that the effect is cumulative. Military historian David Hayes sums this up really well. He wrote, "The assumption that war is something essentially male, be it the apotheosis of masculinity or the incarnation of the patriarchy has banned the study of the female combatant to academic purgatory." A woman from the Crow Nation named Pretty Shield makes the same point in much simpler language. In the 1920s she was talking to an ethnographer, and she was telling him the story of a woman named The Other Magpie, a Crow woman who served as a scout with the United States Army in the 1870s, and she told the ethnographer, "All woman could tell this story, but the men won't talk about it." Whether you look at the absence of women warriors in our history book in terms of David Hayes' academic purgatory, or thinking about it in terms of Pretty Shield's assertion that the men won't talk about it, the result is the same. Once you don't believe women warriors exist, it's harder to see them. My goal in writing this book was to make it easier for us to see them, both actual individual women and also the idea that women warriors existed. I came to that task with a fat file of stories, and I had a few ideas about their roles in history. And in the course of writing I learned a lot more stories, and I came to the conclusion that there's some times, some places, some situations that are more accepting of women warriors than others. And the first of those conditions is that, as a general rule, nomadic cultures and tribal societies are more accepting of women warriors than large empires or regular armies. Now, I've already mentioned those horse riding nomadic tribes of the Eurasian steppes. We also find examples of women warriors as an accepted fact in the Celtic and Arabic tribes that were contemporary to the Roman Empire, and they often were located around the edges of the empire. Boudica is the

most famous. She's not the only one. For instance in the 4th century a woman named Mawiyya led a confederation of Arab tribes against Rome in what's now Syria. She was successful enough that the Roman army sued for peace on her terms. We find similar examples in several West African cultures. Certainly we find them among the Native American nations of the western plains. For instance we have the Cheyenne warrior Buffalo Calf Road Woman. She earned her reputation at what's known to historians of the American west as the Battle of Rosebud River. The Cheyenne call it "the battle where the girl saved her brother." In 1876 a group of Cheyenne including Buffalo Calf Road Woman, her brother, rode out and fought against a small band led by General George Crook. It was part of a three-pronged campaign to drive them out of the area. And during the course of that battle her brother's horse was shot out from under him right in front of the American infantry lines Buffalo Calf Road Woman rode through the enemy gunfire. Her brother got up behind her on the horse. She carried him to safety. Eight days later she fought at the Battle of Little Bighorn, and a few years ago the Cheyenne official storytellers told their versions of the Battle of Little Bighorn for the first time. They not only acknowledged that she was there but believed that she might have been the one who actually gave the blow that knocked Custer off his horse. Every rule of thumb has an exception. And I'm not gonna go through every exception for every rule of thumb, but in this case we have one that is too large not to talk about it. And that's the curious case of China. China has been an organized state with some version of a regular army for a long, long time. It's also been home to women warriors for a long, long time. In fact the first woman warrior whose name and story we know is General Fu Hao. She flourished during the Shang Dynasty in Bronze Age China around 1200 BCE. She was one of three major wives of the emperor Wu Ding. She was also a successful military commander in her own right. We tend to know the stories of women warriors in the ancient world from sources that are written long after the fact and are often written by the decedents of the people they fought against, so not only is there always this question of how accurate they are, but there's always this feeling you have to adjust a little bit for bad attitude. In the case of Fu Hao, we actually know her story from an honest-to-goodness primary source, from a contemporary source. She doesn't show up in the traditional Chinese dynastic histories, which were in any case written long after the fact, but her name appears on about 250 oracle bones, which are the earliest Chinese written records. And we also have further proof of her historical reality, because in 1976 Chinese archeologists found in a previously untouched Shang burial site--it was very rich, it was full of bronze castings, it had lots of weapons, and at first the archeologist assumed that it belonged to a high-ranking Shang male, until they began to find inscriptions that said it was Fu Hao's tomb. So we know she existed. Those oracle bones were never intended as a narrative account. They're used for divination so that in fact they're very short snippets, and scholars have put together a chronology from those snippets. And while the chronology may vary from scholar to scholar, what doesn't vary is the fact that she took part in most of the important military campaigns in Wu Ding's reign. She directed her own troops, but she also seems to have served on occasion as the ancient Chinese version of a task force command so that she was leading groups of several armies with their own generals in campaigns. And the amazing thing is, she's not alone. We have the names of at least a hundred other women who were active in the Shang military campaigns. After her death, Fu Hao vanished from Chinese history for a long time until the late 19th century when historians began to realize that those oracle bones were in fact historical documents. But the idea of women warriors never entirely vanished as a possibility in China. We find examples of Chinese women leading troops in unsettled times from as early as the 3rd century BCE to as late as the Ming Dynasty, which ended in 1644. That idea of unsettled times brings me to the second condition in

which women warriors thrive, and that's periods of national crisis. In China that typically meant the change of a dynasty. In other places it often meant political coups, revolutions, resistance against an occupying army or colonial government. Juana Azurduy de Padilla for example fought in the Latin American wars of independence in the early 19th century. Together with her husband she put together a small rebel army of guerilla soldiers, and she continued to lead them in to fight long after his death. We know she fought in at least sixteen major battles, and she rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the revolutionary army, and she certainly wasn't the only woman who fought in the Latin American wars of independence. We have examples of women who fought in the ranks, not just women leaders. But we've also got a lot of examples that are closer to us in time. **Parda Sanes** took up arms in the Spanish civil war, and later some fought as part of the anti-Nazi resistance movements throughout Europe in WWII. After WWII, women fought in the anticolonial wars that spread throughout the empires. In the 1950s Kikuyu women fought as part of the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya. And Muslim women fought in the Algerian war for independence. In the late 20th century thousands of women joined revolutionary guerilla armies in Africa, Asia, Latin American. More recently yet somewhere between seven and 10,000 Kurdish women have fought against ISIS in the Middle East. National crisis doesn't always mean the overthrow of a regime. The other form of national crisis that we've seen is in the case of the First and Second World Wars when a desperate manpower shortage led governments to use women in the military in ways they'd never done before. Now, for the most part that didn't mean fighting. If a woman joined the yeomanettes in the United States Navy she was freeing up a man to fight. In Russia though, in both WWI and WWII, women fought. I've already mentioned Soviet female fighters and bomber pilots. In WWII Soviet women also served as tank drivers and as snipers. And WWI though Russia formed fifteen all-female battalions. We know one definitely went into battle. That was the Woman's Battalion of Death, which was led by Maria Bochkareva. The women's battalions were formed with the idea that they would raise morale among the troops or at worst would shame male soldiers into fighting a little harder. (Laughter) So when the women's battalion of death was sent into the field, they were deliberately sent to an area that was suffering from mass desertions. And one of the things that was causing trouble in the field was, after the February revolution the provisional government formed what they called soldiers committees, and the idea was that those committees would help with leadership of their unit at a grassroots level. Military units needed to be able to partially lead themselves, kind of like a boy-led scout troop. So the Woman's Battalion of Death got their first taste of battle on July 9, 1917. They also got their first taste of what democracy on the battlefield looked like. As the Germans advanced, the order came down from the regiment that they were attached to to attack, and nothing happened because their male counterparts called a soldiers' committee to debate whether or not they were going to fight, and after several hours Bochkareva and her companions got impatient, and they decided that they were going to attack against the Germans with or without the men in the regiment. And they slowly did gain help from their comrades as they took two lines of the German trenches with very few casualties. And then they held off six German counterattacks until they ran out of ammunition. So we've got periods of national crisis. A third condition that leads to the creation of woman warriors is pretty much the exact opposite, and that's periods of chronic warfare, times when war is as much a way of life as it is a political reaction to a problem. In Medieval Europe for instance we find noble women and queens who organize the defense of besieged castles or lead troops into battle. It was common enough that by the 14th century a woman named Christine de Pizan, who was the first woman that we know of who earned a living as a writer and who wrote several important books about woman, she included military skills in the list of

things that a noble woman ought to learn. She wrote, "She ought to know how to use weapons and be familiar with everything that pertains to them so she may be ready to command her men if the need arises. She should know how to launch an attack or defend against one." That's not the statement of someone who thinks that women do not fight. Now, for the most part these women fought in the name of an absent husband or a brother, or as a regent to an underage son. But because you've got this defined space that accepts that noble women go into battle, we also get examples of women who fought in their own name, and the most dramatic example of this is a woman called Matilda of Tuscany who turned out to be both one of my favorites of the women warriors and also one of my greatest challenges. Her name means "mighty in war," and it was certainly true. She was one of the largest landowners in the Holy Roman Empire in the 11th century. She also was an active and successful military commander for forty years. She didn't just defend her own lands against both internal and external threats; she also was the primary military support for three successive popes in their ongoing wars with the Holy Roman emperor of the time, Henry V. We see some similar examples in Shogunate Japan, and in some ways this illustration is very misleading. It's a 19th century print of a woman named Tomoe Gozen, who was the most famous woman warrior in Japan. If she fought, she fought in the Genpei War in the 12th century, but there's a lot of argument about whether or not she existed. And there's also a lot of argument about whether or not women ever fought as samurai warriors. If by that we mean putting on armor, going into the battlefield, fighting alongside male soldiers. If we just deal with the written evidence, it seemed that only a few women became what we loosely and inaccurately call female samurai. Recent use of DNA testing like with the Birka woman is beginning to suggest that there may have been more women on the battlefield than we previously believed. But what no one argues about is that women of the samurai class like their counterparts in Medieval Europe defended castles against sieges. They had specific jobs they needed to do including preparing trophy heads for viewing. But in some cases they took that idea of defense one step further, and they led what were basically forlorn hope missions against their besiegers. One of the most striking examples of this came very late, the siege of Izu in 1868. At that point the world of the samurai was ending thanks to the Meiji Restoration. The army was being modernized, but a number of samurai families were fighting against the end of their privileges, and they were going up against that modernized army fighting as samurai. When the siege of Izu came a number of women reacted. Like a lot of samurai women the women of Izu had received some formal weapons training. The primary purpose of that training was so that they could defend themselves or defend their families' honor, but they moved beyond the idea of self-defense when the imperial forces attacked Izu. Most of the women in the castle either committed suicide or were killed by their relatives in an effort to avoid capture, but a group of thirty samurai women chose instead to fight. They were an ad hoc group of volunteers. They have been trained to use weapons, but they had certainly never been trained to fight on a battlefield or to fight as a unit, but they came together as a group the day after the imperial army attacked the castle. They were under the leadership of a woman named Nakano Takeko. As you can see this is a lot less colorful than the representation of Tomoe Gozen. On October 10, 1868, Takeko and the other women cut their hair short, they put on clothing similar to what young men would wear so that they had some freedom of movement, and then they charged the imperial army. Now, the imperial army was a modern army in 19th century terms. Takeko and her companions were armed only with traditional samurai weapons. There was no reason to think they would have any impact at all. But there was a moment when the soldiers realized that they were not fighting a group of teenaged boys as they had first thought, but they were fighting women. And the word began to spread that they

should take the women alive. And given the way most of these sieges went there was no reason to think that those were for matters of chivalry, but that brief hesitation gave the women a chance to do some real damage. They managed to kill a number of soldiers before they themselves were gunned down. And that brings me to my final condition favorable to the creation of women warriors. The biggest surprise for me as I got into my research was a group of women warriors who in some ways were hidden in plain sight, and that was women who helped defend a besieged city. Now I certainly went in expecting to write about sieges, but I assumed I would be writing about high profile individual heroines and the kinds of noble women I just discussed leading the defense of a besieged castle. And I did write about those women because they show up in lots of places, not just Medieval Europe or Shogunate Japan. But to my surprise it turned out that the most common type of woman warriors throughout history were ordinary women who fought to defend their homes. In the 4th century BCE a Chinese statesman named **Yong Shan** called them the army of adult women, and he recommended that military commanders use them to the greatest extent possible to help defend a besieged city. And pretty much for all of history besieged cities have done just that. Over the centuries those armies of adult women have outnumbered many times over the combined forces of queens and individual heroines and women who disguised themselves as men to enlist and women who fought undisguised alongside their male counterparts in times of crisis. And yet they are the most forgotten women in this large category of forgotten women warriors. They seldom appear in collective biographies, and when they do appear in historical studies of sieges their contributions are often dismissed. Now in part that's because the most common jobs that women did in sieges can be seen as an extensions of traditional gender roles. They carry food and water to people who are fighting on the ramparts, and I will just say that's an enormously dangerous job. If you read those accounts, those women get wounded a lot. That takes courage. But they're carrying food and drink; they're caring for the wounded. At day's end they're clearing away the rubble where a wall has been breached and are helping patch those fortifications, which I sort of think of as extreme housekeeping. Those jobs were all critical, but they weren't the only jobs women did. In relatively modern sieges like the siege of Leningrad in WWII women dug anti-tank trenches, and they built machine gun nests, and they patrolled the city with rifles, and they threw Molotov cocktails under approaching tanks, which I gather doesn't really do much, but it was what they had. And in the days before mechanized warfare when cities were defended literally on or at the walls, women threw things down on besieging armies. And today that doesn't sound like warfare, but for a long time that was a perfectly valid military technique—just dropping a big rock or boiling oil or boiling water. And when attackers got closer yet, some women picked up weapons, and they fought on the walls alongside or in a few dramatic cases in front of the city's male defenders, and they had every incentive to do so. In early modern Europe there's this recurring metaphor for the fall of the besieged city as a rape. Well, that metaphorical rape of a besieged city often led to the literal rape or death of many of its female inhabitants. They had every reason to fight. One of my favorite examples of women in a besieged city is the defense of Argos in the 5th century BCE when the Greek poet Telesilla led the women of Argos in a backs-to-the-wall defense of their city against the Spartan army. At the time Sparta was the dominant power in Greece. They conquered or made alliance with most of the other powers in the region. And in 494 BC, Sparta attacked Argos, which was at that point the last remaining independent city-state. The Spartans quickly defeated the Argive army, and the remaining Argive soldiers fled and took sanctuary in a sacred grove. The Spartans pursued them, they set the grove on fire, and there were no survivors. With the Argive army destroyed the Spartan king led his forces to the city of Argos where they expected the inhabitants would surrender.

That's not quite what happened. Inside the city walls Telesilla called on the women of Argos to defend their homes and their children. And under her leadership they armed themselves with any weapons their men had left behind, with the ceremonial weapons from the city's temples, with the Bronze Age equivalent of carving knives and cast iron skillets. And they followed Telesilla to the city walls where they waited for the Spartan attack. And when the Spartans broke through the city gates, the Argive women fought ferociously until the Spartans retreated. When the battle was over the surviving Argive women buried their dead along the road to the city gate, and then they erected a statue commemorating their own deeds, sort of the equivalent of those WWI monuments that you see in the town square in small towns all across the United States. The Spartans never attacked Argos again. I love this story for a lot of reasons, but my favorite part of this story is the fact that they commemorated their own deeds. Because one of the things that holds true about women in sieges across the centuries is, we don't know their names. For the most part they're remembered not as individuals but as a group. Now, obviously there are exceptions. We know Telesilla's name, and in fact we know her story because she was a poet of some renown in the classical world. These two women were commemorated in broadsheets during their lifetime, which is a little bit like having your picture on the cover of a supermarket tabloid. The woman on your left is named **Geshay Myberg**. She was known as the Maid of Brunswick, and when the city was under siege in 615 he stood on the fortification and fought, armed with a sword and a musket. The woman on your right is Kenau Simonsdochter Hasselaer, a middle-aged Dutch businesswoman who organized a force of women to defend the city of Haarlem when the Spanish besieged it in the 17th century. When I first told people I was working on a book about women warriors, almost everyone said, "You mean like Joan of Arc?" And to be honest at first I sort of did, and I certainly discuss a lot of women in the book who were individual heroic figures, but in many ways it's these anonymous, often overlooked women who fought to defend their homes who are the real archetype for women warriors. A 17th century French chronicle who was reporting on the siege of a city in 1621 wrote, "The women demonstrated their usual courage." Think about that for a minute. The women demonstrated their usual courage. That's an extraordinary statement given that we tend to think of women warriors as exceptions-- as Joan of Arc, not GI Joan. And in fact you could argue that many of the women I write about were exceptions in their time and place, whether they were queens or revolutionaries, saints or patriots or poets, or just ordinary women doing extraordinary things in times of crisis. As long as you focus on one historical figure or one cluster of women or one time period, it's easy to accept that any individual woman warrior was indeed an exception, who not only stood outside the norm of her time, but outside the norm of history as a whole. There is only one Joan of Arc, right? And the number of women who enlisted disguised as men in any given war or probably in all the wars put together is statistically insignificant. The circumstances that led women to fight at the Siege of Argos or Zaragoza or Leningrad were desperate. When you look at women warriors in isolation, it's also easy to accept the way in which the accomplishments or even the existence of a specific woman warrior are dismissed. But when you step back and look at women warriors across the boundaries of geography and historical period, larger patterns appear. There are parallels not just between the stories of the women themselves, and some of those are fascinating, but there are also parallels in the ways their stories are told, and more importantly in the ways they're not told. But the main thing that struck me when I looked at woman warriors across cultures is how many examples there are and how lightly they sit on our collective awareness. You could say, "What does it matter if a few set of remains have been misidentified or a woman at in an obscure siege doesn't make it into the history books?" 'Cause it doesn't fundamentally change what we know

about history, does it? Except, yeah, it does. Here's the deal: if you leave women out of the historical records, then it's easy to look back and say women never fought. If we don't show up in the history books, then it's easy to forget that women calculated rocket trajectories for NASA or were instrumental in discovering DNA or trained to be astronauts alongside the men of Mercury 7 or painted in the Renaissance or solved codes during WWII or captained fishing boats in the North Sea. Looking at woman warriors is important, not--at historical women warriors, not Wonder Woman. But it's important not just because we're involved in continuing debates about the roles of women in the modern military. It's important because they're part of what journalist Rachel Swaby describes as "a hidden history of the world." When you put half the population back into history, you get a very different story. Thank you.

(Applause)

1: How do you get selected to be in the Women's Battalion of Death?

Toler: You volunteer.

(Laughter)

Toler: They were astonished. At the point that they put those battalions together, the men were so worn down. Russia had just been bludgeoned in that war. But with the February revolution a lot of women really believed the rhetoric that the revolution brought with it equality, and they believed that it was both their right and their duty as a citizen to fight. And they petitioned for those battalions for a long time before they were established. And they were stunned at how many women volunteered.

2: Hi. I was wondering if you can kind of talk about how the narratives of these women warriors change over time or even based on location.

Toler: Remarkably little, is I think the answer there. The one thing that really changes is, we start getting more sources. But even when we're talking about women in the 16th century, you get sources that are very late. You get people saying maybe she didn't exist, maybe she didn't really fight. It's remarkably consistent. That was one of the things that surprised me in fact.

3: You said that women weren't always good role models and not always, I guess, heroic. Did they serve in the SS, or what are you referring to?

Toler: There are women who led battle--led wars that were just as bloody and stupid as any of their male counterparts. But you also get--let's see if I can give you a really good example. The Tigress of Forli, Caterina--and I cannot pronounce her last name. It's S-Z...sorry, I'm gonna lose that. But in any case, at one point she's been captured. She's been besieged in a tower. They capture her children and bring them and say, "We're going to kill your children if you don't turn over the castle." And by some accounts, she flipped up her skirts, pointed to her genitals, and said, "I have the means to make more." That's the kind of thing I'm talking about, as opposed to serving in the SS. There are women--just because you're forgotten, doesn't mean you're heroic. Doesn't mean you're nice. There are plenty of tough broads with questionable actions in this story.

4: In the research of your book you mentioned the females who had just got their ranger tabs in the army. During this longest war that have we have right now, the culture war of the middle east, the Lioness program came out, and these women had to fight long and hard to get recognition and veterans benefits. And then the marines took that concept and started the female engagement teams, and I was just wondering, did you talk to any of these women?

Toler: I did not because I focused on the historical rather than the current, mostly because the current situation is in so much flux. So much interesting stuff is happening. The world is changing so quickly. But those women were amazing, from what I have read. Right now we're at a point where women in the military tend to have to be

amazing. I'd like us to get to the point where that isn't the case, but those women, yes, pretty amazing. Thank you all.

(Applause)

Havers: Thank you to Pamela Toler for a great discussion, and thank you to our members of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library for sponsoring this program of *Pritzker Military Presents*. The book is *Women Warriors: An Unexpected History*, published by Beacon Press. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

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(Theme music)

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(Theme music)

Voiceover: The preceding program was produced by the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.