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For the program companion website, visit pbs.org/independentlens/lioness

**“LIONESS” REVEALS COMBAT ROLE OF WOMEN IN IRAQ
ACCLAIMED DOCUMENTARY TO PREMIERE ON THE PBS SERIES
INDEPENDENT LENS, NOVEMBER 13, 2008 (Thursday at 9 PM)**

(San Francisco, CA)—**LIONESS**, a new film by Meg McLagan and Daria Sommers, tells the untold story of a group of female Army support soldiers who became the first women in American history to be sent into direct ground combat. Against official policy and without the training given to their male counterparts, but with a firm commitment to serve as needed, these dedicated young women ended up fighting in some of the bloodiest counterinsurgency battles of the Iraq war. Yet these women are rarely—if ever—mentioned in news accounts of those battles. **LIONESS**, which brings this story to light, will have its broadcast premiere on the Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard, Thursday, November 13, 2008 at 9 PM (check local listings.)

On April 6, 2004, a Marine combat unit made its way through Ramadi’s narrow streets on a hunt for insurgents. As the soldiers turned a corner they were ambushed by hundreds of Iraqis; a series of firefights erupted and spread rapidly across the city, igniting a week of bloody combat. Spc. Morgan, 23, and Sgt. Ruthig, 28, squad automatic (SAW) gunners, both survived this bloody battle; others soldiers fighting along side them were not as lucky. The press has reported similar scenes and stories since this war began but what set this story apart is that both Spc. Morgan and Sgt. Ruthig are women.

Despite Department of Defense policy banning women from direct ground combat, military commanders have been using women as an essential part of their ground operations in Iraq since 2003. The role of *Lioness* was a solution born out of necessity. Battalion commanders noticed how tensions exploded when male soldiers interacted with Iraqi women during house raids and decided the presence of the right female soldiers would help reduce violence. They began to regularly “attach” pairs of women to all-male combat units.

The film tells the *Lioness* story through the narratives of five key soldiers. Their personal stories, variety in backgrounds, and post-Iraq challenges as wives, mothers, and daughters collectively take us through the complex issues that female participation in combat provokes. **LIONESS** is the first film to bridge the gap between the perception and the reality of the essential role women are playing in Iraq, capturing an historical turning point for American society.

-More-

To learn more about the film and the issues, visit the companion website for **LIONESS** at pbs.org/independentlens/lioness/. Get detailed information on the film, watch video clips, read an interview with the filmmaker and find related links and resources to explore the subject in depth. The site also features a Talkback section for audiences to share their ideas and opinions.

The Women of Team Lioness

SPC Shannon Morgan, Mechanic

Shannon's journey from innocent Arkansas "country girl" who never expected to be sent into ground combat, to soldier who experienced the darkest side of war, lends the film dramatic intensity and poignancy as we watch her struggle to come to terms with her inner conflict between faith and duty.

SPC Rebecca Nava, Supply Clerk

A feisty New Yorker of Puerto Rican heritage from Queens, she has played every role in the military family's drama—soldier in combat, half of a dual military couple, mother of a baby daughter, wife of a soldier serving in Iraq and female combat vet whose younger sister recently deployed as well.

Major Kate Guttormsen, Company Commander

A West Point graduate and the highest ranking female in the battalion, she offers a clearly articulated understanding of the "grey zone" in which these women operated and the distinction between what they were trained for and what they were called upon to do.

Capt. Anastasia Breslow, Signal

Half Chinese, half Russian and thoroughly all-American, she followed in her father's footsteps and joined the military. Her diary readings document the hidden history of the Lioness program and the personal experiences of what it feels like to be on the cutting edge of change in the military.

Staff Sgt. Ranie Ruthig, Mechanic

A tough, Midwestern woman, ace mechanic, respected NCO and mother, she was often requested by the Marines for the toughest missions. Her observations of encounters with Iraqi women and children underscore the complicated role Lionesses play in an urban combat environment.

About the Filmmakers

Meg McLagan (Director) is a New York-based documentary filmmaker and cultural anthropologist. Her half-hour film, *Tibet in Exile*, which she co-directed, co-produced, and shot, portrays the experience of displacement through the eyes of Tibetan refugee children smuggled out of Tibet. It aired on public television and was screened at festivals and museums in the U.S. and Europe. McLagan also worked as a producer on *Paris is Burning*, which won the Grand Jury Prize for Documentary at Sundance and both the New York and Los Angeles Film Critics Circle Award for Best Documentary. She received her BA from Yale and a PhD from New York University, where she taught anthropology and documentary production in the Program in Culture and Media for eight years. McLagan has been funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Pacific Pioneer Fund, Wenner Gren Foundation, and the Sony Corporation. She has also had fellowships at the MacDowell Colony, The Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College, School of American Research, and the Content + Intent Documentary Institute at MASS MoCA. In addition to her film work, McLagan is co-editor of *Visual Cultures of Nongovernmental Politics*, forthcoming from Zone Books.

Daria Sommers (Director) Daria Sommers is a New York-based director, writer and producer of both documentaries and narrative films. Her work includes the award winning *Eastern Spirit Western World* a portrait of Chinese-American artist Diana Kan, which was broadcast nationally by PBS, CBC and the BBC and premiered at the Smithsonian Institution; *Duncan's Shadow* a dramatic short which premiered at the Georgetown Film Festival; and the Audience Award winning half-hour drama *Ready to Burn* which received a New Director's Award from Panavision. Ms. Sommers began her career at the PBS series *Smithsonian World* and her work has garnered awards from the NEH, NEA and CPB. In addition, Ms. Sommers served on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Program for Art on Film review panel. She has been an artist-in-residence at the MacDowell Colony and at the Content + Intent Documentary Institute at MassMoCa. She recently completed *Sawadika American Girl* a feature-length screenplay about Americans living in Bangkok during the Vietnam War. Ms. Sommers is a graduate of Oberlin College.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities and moments in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens.

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