

## The Invisible War

Kirby Dick is one of those documentary filmmakers who thrives on controversial subject matter and pointedly picks controversial or adversarial subjects (e.g. “Outrage,” “This Film Is Not Yet Rated”). His latest, “The Invisible War,” fits that category and treats a troubling subject with very serious national implications, revealing one of America’s most shameful and best kept secrets: the epidemic of rape within the U.S. military.

“The Invisible War” doesn’t waste any time before it slams you in the face with its opening statements: a female soldier in combat zones is more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire; the Department of Defense estimates that there was a shocking 19,000 violent sex crimes committed in the military in 2010; twenty percent of all active-duty female soldiers are sexually assaulted, (mostly women younger than 21). From there Dick presents you with the human voices behind the statistics as he interviews a range of women who relate their stories.

Particularly touching are the testimony of women like Coast Guard Seaman Kori Cioca, who was raped by her commanding officer and left with a broken jaw and nerve damage; Airman First Class Jessica Hinves, who, after her assault, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder; and Navy Seaman Trina McDonald, repeatedly raped at a base in the Aleutian Islands.

The film offers a measured, convincing indictment of the systematic cover-up of these military sex crimes (which occurred in all branches), chronicling the women’s struggles (one man is also featured) to rebuild their lives and fight for justice.

Particularly unsettling for these rape victims is that they **cannot** appeal to an impartial police force and judicial system for help and justice. These uniformed victims have to turn to their commanders—some of whom committed the offense. Even appealing higher up the chain of command can be all too often met with foot-dragging at best, and even reprisals for “informing.” The film indicates that only eight percent of military sexual assault cases are ever prosecuted, with nothing like civilian punishments.

The film also features a miscellany of interviews with some high-ranking military officials, one of whom (a Rear Admiral) struggles to defend the system in general terms or, another (the civilian Director of the Sexual Assault Prevention Office) who seems clueless about the extent of the problem. The movie also shows a contingent of brave women who both try to bring suit against military authorities (they fail) and who press their case to members of Congress (several of whom are shown as sympathetic listeners).

Sad to note, this film touches particularly close to home in one sequence. Two women in the film speak candidly about assaults suffered when they were assigned as Marine officers at the Marine Barracks right in the heart of Capitol Hill.

One of them, an Annapolis honors graduate with service in Iraq, movingly testifies about her rape at the hands of her civilian supervisor and a senior officer in her own home in our neighborhood. She was, like many other victims, placed in the excruciating circumstance of having to file a complaint with her own boss, the perpetrator. That ex-Marine is now a plaintiff in a civil suit against the Defense

Department wherein she challenges the Marine Corps view that she must have welcomed the assaults because “she wore make-up and skirts” – which were part of her regulation uniform.

The film hardly condemns the entire Marine Corps itself or the Barracks contingent, which have long been a significant part of life Capitol Hill, participating in community events and inviting neighbors into their precincts. Still, to illustrate its telling of this sometimes lurid story, the filmmakers display footage of some of the bar signs on Eighth Street as well as some flashes of 8<sup>th</sup> Street SE streetscape (avoiding the Barracks themselves).

*(The film is rated “R” for sexual content and runs 97 min.)*

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