

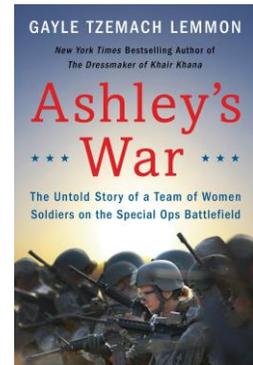
Reading Guide

Ashley's War

Harper

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Questions for Discussion

1. What were your thoughts about women serving in the military before you read *Ashley's War*?
2. Given that First Lieutenant Ashley White was in some ways discouraged to join the military by her father, what went into her decision to do so anyway?
3. What were the reasons for the “combat exclusion prohibition” for women formalized in 1994?
4. U.S. Special Operations Commander Eric Olson says of the war in Afghanistan that U.S. forces had “to learn to think [their] way through this fight.” What is an appropriate relationship between thinking and fighting, between intellect and force?
5. During the “100 hours of hell” assessment and selection phase, Rigby finds wisdom carved into a bathroom wall: “The mind is its own place. And itself can make a hell of heaven and a heaven of hell. Don’t quit.” What is the relationship between the mind and physical pain and suffering? How important is encouragement from others?
6. How does an idea like counterinsurgency, that the “population is the prize,” change traditional approaches to warfare?
7. Lieutenant Matt Pottinger, a journalist for the Wall Street Journal before becoming a Marine, combined “a reporter’s instincts” with his training. What might a journalist and a soldier have in common?
8. What’s significant about each of the three terms in Cultural Support Team?
9. Consider each of the women chosen to be part of the Cultural Support Team. What does each bring—in personality, skill, experience—to the group?
10. Cassie says at one point that “being female was a special burden in war.” What does she mean? Is this a necessary part of war or could changes be made?

11. Often the women of the CST are referred to—even by each other—as “guys” or “girls,” instead of women. Does this matter? How important is language in the push for equality?
12. Why is such extreme physical training so important to becoming and serving as a soldier in Special Ops?
13. What particular challenges face military couples?
14. Ashley worries at one point in the process that she is “a little bit too shy” to be a part of CST. Is extroversion an essential part of being a soldier? What are the essential elements of leadership?
15. There are many allusions to Hollywood films about war in the book. What role—positive or negative, for civilians or soldiers—do such films play in American culture?
16. Consider the role of the interpreters—“terps”—paired with soldiers and the CST. What are their particular challenges?
17. When Nadia, an interpreter from Orange County, CA, returns home from combat, she feels totally disconnected from the celebrations and normal lives of her friends. What awareness should be expected from civilians who have never been near combat when their country is at war?
18. What elements of Ashley’s performance as a Special Ops enabler win her over to the combat-hardened male soldiers?
19. At Ashley’s burial ceremony a woman brings her daughter so that she would know that “girls could be heroes, too.” What is the nature of a hero? Who are other women that should be recognized as such?