WOMEN AT WAR
Written By Megan Carney
Directed by Tara Mallen
About Rivendell Theatre Ensemble
Rivendell Theatre Ensemble is a professional theatre company committed to advancing women’s lives through the power of theatre. Rivendell was born out of a specific need: women theatre artists are vastly underrepresented in American theatre, a situation which limits the range of stories produced for audiences. This situation skews our perception of the American experience and limits career opportunities for women artists, perpetuating the disparity. Rivendell’s mission counteracts these circumstances by providing women theatre artists a creative home where they can nurture, develop, and produce their craft and by producing plays where audience see new voices and stories, including, in many cases, their own.

Rivendell burst onto the off-Loop theatre scene with the 1994 world premiere of WRENS, which earned three Joseph Jefferson awards. The company's mission was evident and its focus clear. Since then we have staged 42 productions, been honored with 23 Joseph Jefferson Award nominations and 6 awards, and emerged as a national force in new play development and a home for women theatre artists.

About WOMEN AT WAR
Seven years ago, Rivendell recognized an important need in the community strongly related to its mission and began to address this need. Today's American military is nearly 15% female (2013, Department of Defense), ranging from 7% of Marines to 19% of the Air Force and Reserves. In addition, there have been over 1.8 million female US veterans. However, a male perspective continues to dominate our collective images and tales of war shared in books, movies, theater, and elsewhere. This is a disservice to women military personnel and veterans and it distorts our shared understanding of history and armed conflict.

Over the past seven years Rivendell has forged deep relationships with veteran service organizations across Chicago including the Illinois Department of Veteran Affairs, Student Veteran’s Centers at UIC, Northeastern Illinois University and Kennedy-King College, Illinois Health and Disability Advocates, Pritzker Military Library, the National Veteran’s Art Museum and VetCAT (Veterans Creative Arts Therapy). These partners helped Rivendell connect with over 70 female veterans and collect 28 personal interviews. The result of this work is WOMEN AT WAR, a devised piece crafted from diverse, rich, and complex stories of women during and following military service.

In November 2014 Rivendell Theatre Ensemble mounted a full-scale production of WOMEN AT WAR in our home theatre in Edgewater. In addition to the sold-out performances we conducted a series of town hall discussions cultivated with veteran partners around specific themes. The post-show discussions were remarkable, sparking comments such as "I didn't even think of myself as a veteran" to "How can we ensure greater equity in military honors and storytelling?"

Based on the overwhelming response to the WOMEN AT WAR project, we began a tour of the of the performance alongside the discussions to extend our reach so that civilians, veterans, and military families in communities that don’t often have access to the arts can benefit from the transformative experience of this groundbreaking work. In using the play as a catalyst to incite a meaningful dialogue, we hope to begin vital conversations that will help to bridge the gap of understanding between civilians and women who have served.
National Recognition of WOMEN AT WAR
In addition to typical performance reviews of WOMEN AT WAR’s unique subject matter and focus has secured local and national attention.

Art in the Service of Understanding: Bridging Artists, Military, Veterans, and Civilian Communities
Tara Mallen, Artistic Director and WOMEN AT WAR Director, alongside Megan Carney, writer for WOMEN AT WAR, were invited to participate in this national session by the New England Foundation for the Arts. Artists, veterans, presenters, funders, and more came together to share learning and strategies and forge new connections to use the arts to reach veteran communities.

Theatre Communications Veterans Group
Artistic Director, and WOMEN AT WAR Director, Tara Mallen, was invited to participate in Theatre Communications Veterans Group in Theatre Conference on October 6, 2014 in New York. This brainstorming session on how theatre can further work with veterans not only brought Rivendell to a national conversation but has also introduced us to additional creative partners.

Imaging America
Megan Carney, writer for WOMEN AT WAR, and Meosha Thomas, one of our key veteran partners, were invited to attend the Imaging America conference in Atlanta October 9-11, 2014. They presented alongside other national partners, including Willa Taylor, on our work with veterans. This participation gave us a chance to connect with a national audience of educators and artists and develop our thinking for the town-hall series specifically how we are working with social workers and faith leaders.

Volunteers of America
Megan and Tara collectively received the Volunteers of America of Illinois’ Silver Star Award in 2014:

"This award is given to an individual who has distinguished themselves as a real advocate of Veterans and/or members of the Military through either significant philanthropic activities or other personal acts of notable service. The Individual Star Award is being presented to the two of you for being true advocates for female Veterans in the important work you have created to highlight the experience of women in the military. Your work will provide the larger community with an opportunity to learn about the experiences of the women who serve in our military, the challenges they encounter and the sacrifices they make to serve our Country."
Veteran Involvement in WOMEN AT WAR

Rivendell’s priority throughout this process has been to be true to the veteran experience. To ensure our accuracy and commitment to the mission of WOMEN AT WAR Rivendell has included veterans as key partners for the past five years.

We are thankful for our veteran and military partners who shared their personal stories and honored us with their trust:

Iris M. Alvarado
Liz Ambrose
Erica Borggren
Monica Delphy
Robin Frick
Shandelon Guy
Rachel De Guzman
Cynthia Hines
Elaine Little
Jill Morgenthaler
Cynthia A. Mullen
Elisabeth Pennix
Jessica Rose
Robles
Mariah Sciacero
Emily Siefken
Melissa Stockwell
Lisa M. Stremel
Willa Taylor
Callandra D. Tapp
Meosha Thomas
Angela D. Tyler
Carla Wages
Sabrina Waller

Moving forward we have two veterans that will continue with the project on tour:

Meosha Thomas has been a key advisor on WOMEN AT WAR since its inception. Ms. Thomas served 10 years of active duty as an Information Systems Technician in the United States Navy in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. She was honorably retired from service because of injuries she sustained in 2006. She returned home to Chicago and began teaching through the State of Illinois’ Troops to Teachers Program. A single mother of two children, she graduated from Kennedy-King College in May 2012 as class valedictorian and delivered the commencement address to the City Colleges of Chicago graduating class. Ms. Thomas served as the Veterans Services Specialist at Kennedy-King College until 2014 when she founded One Savvy Veteran to encourage, educate and empower women veterans experiencing economic hardships with comprehensive assistance needed to successfully navigate the transition from military service to civilian life. Meosha will accompany WOMEN AT WAR and moderate the town-hall discussions.

Cynthia Hines is a native of Milwaukee and joined the U.S. Army in 1994 as a paralegal specialist, where she served 11 years and spent another eight years as a civilian in the Middle East, most notably Iraq and Afghanistan. During her time on active duty, she was deployed to Germany, Korea, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. A graduate of the University of Maryland, she is pursuing a career in theatrical and voice-over acting as well as playwriting. She has taken acting classes at ETA and Acting Studio Chicago. Cynthia is an actress in WOMEN AT WAR and is currently a Mission Continues fellow as part of her work with the production.
Statements of Support for WOMEN AT WAR

"When I returned home, I was physically disabled and mentally broken. It was not until I had the opportunity to be a storyteller with WOMEN AT WAR, that I realized that I had a voice and an outlet to share my story with people who had a genuine interest in ensuring that my service, along with other women veterans, was honored and remembered. Rivendell Theatre Ensemble and the WOMEN AT WAR production has been instrumental in my road to recovery. I have been given my life back while helping to bridge the gap between civilians and military. I take ownership of my service, am more proud of sacrifice to my country and now look forward to life after the military."

- Meosha Thomas, US Navy Veteran and Founder, One Savvy Veteran

"Deeply touching play revealing the inner spirit of women navigating all of the damage wrought by war magnified by the still pervasive sexism and inequality in our society.

I am grateful for the opportunity to experience the artistic production of WOMEN AT WAR and proud that the Trust provided funding to support the thoughtful development of this profound work."

- Terry Mazany, President and CEO, Chicago Community Trust

“As a veteran myself, I had the privilege of seeing the production which was based on the real stories of women veterans, brought to light many issues universal to all veterans, but most importantly it gave a voice to our female veterans who more often than not do not self-identify as “veterans.” This is a known challenge in the State of Illinois – reaching women as they return home and then providing them with the services and care to which they are entitled. A demonstrated truth in Illinois is that because we are not reaching them as well as we are the male veterans, the women veteran demographic is rising rapidly within the homeless community.

I was in tears during various portions of the production reliving some of the moments of my service that I hadn’t previously identified as universal to the women veteran experience. I was more than ever, proud to be a part of this community and inspired to assist my sisters in arms because of WOMEN AT WAR."

– Elisabeth H. Pennix, Senior Program Manager, Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs
“A sharp cast under the direction of Tara Mallen…”
_The Chicago Tribune, 11/11/14, by Nina Metz_

“Highly Recommended…riveting…directed with steel and heart…superbly played…”
_The Chicago Sun-Times, 11/9/14, by Hedy Weiss_

“4 Stars…uncomfortable, thrilling, and honest…an emotional cadence that can turn on a dime…feels important”
_Time Out Chicago, 11/11/14, by Kevin Thomas_

“…the finished product’s ability to spark those important conversations…has been what is most satisfying.”
_Chicago Red Eye, 11/17/14, by Gwendolyn Purdum_

“You can add ‘combat soldier’ to the list of careers relegated as ‘women’s work’.”
_DNA Info Chicago, 11/17/14, by Linze Rice_

“…a gallery of individual portraits as small as the revelations they render…a level of verisimilitude rarely seen.”
_Windy City Times, 11/19/14, Mary Shen Barnidge_
Performances & Civic Engagement of **WOMEN AT WAR**
Throughout the **WOMEN AT WAR** process we have believed the performance is a catalyst to the conversation between women veterans, military, and civilians. The process of collecting stories through 6 story circles and 28 personal interviews of over 70 veterans has had a impact in-and-of itself by validating that we want to know the stories of these women warriors. Additionally the town-hall series we have conducted as part of the performances are critical to this project by providing a platform for discussion between veterans, military, and civilians.

Performances & Town-Hall Discussions to date include:

University of Chicago Illinois: November 21, 2013 – workshop reading

**Audience Reached: 160 with a even split of half veterans and half civilians**
Rivendell premiered a staged reading of **WOMEN AT WAR** at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The standing-room-only crowd of 160 people embraced the thought-provoking work. Following the performance Willa Taylor (U.S. Navy veteran and Director of Education and Community Engagement at the Goodman Theatre) led the audience in a vital, energetic conversation. In addition to Willa the panel was composed of three female veterans: Elaine Little (Veteran storyteller), Meosha Thomas (One Savvy Veteran Founder), and Jill Morgenthaler (Colonel Ret.), and one military service representative: Tenisha Fennie (Evanston Vet Center).

Swissotel Chicago: March 21, 2014 – excerpt performance

**Audience Reached: 100 primarily composed of civilians**
Rivendell presented an excerpt of **WOMEN AT WAR** at the National Association of Schools of Theater (NAST) session *Establishing Roots in the Community: Cultivating Connections*. The room was filled with approximately 100 university and college educators at the NAST conference. Presenting alongside Black Ensemble Theatre and the Q Brothers, Rivendell also presented on the process of creating **WOMEN AT WAR** and working within the community. The panel discussion focused on using theatre for social change and discussion of Rivendell’s work within the veteran community was key to this dialogue.

Oakton Community College: April 12, 2014 – excerpt performance

**Audience Reached: 100 with a even split of half veterans and half civilians**
Rivendell presented a workshop performance of **WOMEN AT WAR** at Oakton Community College as part of their annual *Creating Justice Thru The Arts* Symposium. Following the excerpted performance, Rivendell Artistic Director Tara Mallen and several of the artists participated in a robust panel discussion on the importance of theater in social justice movements, describing our process and goals in creating socially engaged theater. Over 100 attendees from the Oakton community, including students, faculty, and civic leaders, participated in the event which also featured Jamil Khoury from Silk Road Rising and Donna Blue Lachman. Again the panel discussion focused on using theatre for social change and discussion of Rivendell’s work within the veteran community.
Union League Club: May 7, 2014 – excerpt performance
Audience Reached: 200 primarily composed of veterans
Rivendell performed a substantial excerpt of WOMEN AT WAR at the Union League Club’s Women in Service Symposium presented by their Military Affairs Subcommittee. Following the performance, Megan Carney, Rivendell Ensemble Member and Director of the Gender & Sexuality Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago, led the audience in a critical conversation with veteran panalists: Erica Borggren (Director, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs); Valerie Creedon (Jesse Brown VA Medical Center OIF/OEF/OND Coordinator); Jenny Garretson (Jesse Brown VA Medical Center Women’s Clinic Director) and Meosha Thomas (One Savvy Veteran Founder). The 200-person audience was primarily veteran and led to rich discussion including the comment “I didn’t realize I was a veteran until now”. This event also included a resource fair for veterans with many service groups in attendance.

100 Women Who Care Quarterly Meeting: October 21, 2014 – excerpt performance
Audience Reached: 100 primarily composed of civilians
Rivendell performed an excerpt of WOMEN AT WAR for the Chicago chapter of 100 Women Who Care to report back on what their funds allowed Rivendell Theatre to accomplish. As a result several members of 100 Women Who Care organized a group to attend a performance of the full run at Rivendell’s home theatre in Edgewater where they had the opportunity to participate in a fall series panel discussion.

Audience Reached: 250 primarily composed of veterans
In advance of Tara Mallen and Megan Carney receiving the Silver Star award at the annual Veteran’s of America luncheon an excerpt of WOMEN AT WAR was performed alongside Tara and Megan speaking to the process of creating WOMEN AT WAR. During the keynote address Dan O’Shea, Former Navy Seal and warfare specialist, made several observations on the universality of serving in war from Odysseus to the performance of WOMEN AT WAR.

WOMEN AT WAR full run at Rivendell’s home theatre in Edgewater: November 5 – December 6, 2014
Audience Reached: 651 with an estimated 20% veteran attendance throughout the run
The full production of WOMEN AT WAR was an overwhelming success with several sold-out performances and critical acclaim. In addition to the performance run Rivendell hosted a series of town-hall discussions with moderated by Megan Carney with a panel of female veteran on a series of themes:

- **Out of the Shadows**: Life for Lesbian and Bisexual Females in the Military Since the Repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.'
  - Panelists Included: Willa Taylor (U.S. Navy veteran and Director of Education and Community Engagement at the Goodman Theatre), Lori Luscri (Hines Veterans Hospital), and Jean Albright (Air Force veteran and Director of New Media at Windy City Media Group).

- **Family Connections**: Choices Related to Parenting and Family Sustainability
  - Panelists Included: Jennifer Garretson (Women Veterans Program Mgr at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Ctr), Oluwatoyin Olabisi Hines (Pastor at Body Builders Ministry and IL Army Nat'l Guard Family Life Chaplain), and Elaine Little (26 year veteran with the Army, Army Reserves and Nat'l Guard as well as a writer and mother of three).
- **The New GI Bill**: Female Veteran Experiences in Higher Education
  - Panelists Included: Meosha Thomas (One Savvy Veteran Founder), Laila Farah (professor of Women's & Gender Studies at DePaul University), and Kimyada Wellington (Army veteran).

- **Looking the Part**: Policies for Female Military Uniforms and Hairstyles
  - Panelists Included: Oluwatoyin Hines (Multi-Faith Veteran Support Project Coordinator), Janice Pytel (*WOMEN AT WAR* Costume Designer), Delia Rogo, (Lead female tailor for marine officers for 30 years).

- **Silent No More**: Debate Regarding Legal Jurisdiction and Accountability Related to Military Sexual Assault
  - Panelists Included: Oluwatoyin Hines (Multi-Faith Veteran Support Project Coordinator), Linda Beliveau (Evanston Vet Center), and Zach Hunsinger (Assistant Director of Veteran Programs at Housing Advocates).

---

**Evanston Vet Center Tea: March 11, 2015 – excerpt performance**

**Audience Reached: 50 primarily composed of veterans**

Rivendell performed an excerpt of *WOMEN AT WAR* for the Evanston Vet Center for a full room of female service veterans. The afternoon was completed with a conversation engaging the full room in giving voice to their own stories of service.

**DePaul University: May 19, 2015 – full performance**

**Audience Reached: 65 with an estimated even split of half veterans and half civilians**

Rivendell performed the full performance of *WOMEN AT WAR* for at DePaul University as part of the DePaul’s Egan Office for Urban Education and Community Partnership (UECP) Multi-Faith Veteran Support Project (MVP). Following the performance the audience divided into group peace circles for focused discussions.

**Edelman: October 1, 2015 – full performance**

**Audience Reached: 100 primarily civilians but many veterans also included**

Rivendell performed the full performance of *WOMEN AT WAR* for the Edelman corporation in celebration of their Founder’s Day. Following the performance Willa Taylor (U.S. Navy veteran and Director of Education and Community Engagement at the Goodman Theatre) led the audience in a discussion with four other female veterans on women in the military and their transition home, as well as their personal role as storytellers for the project. In addition to Willa the panel was composed of: Meosha Thomas (One Savvy Veteran Founder), Oluwatoyin Hines (Multi-Faith Veteran Support Project Coordinator), Jessica Rose Wallace (University of Chicago student with a focus on Masters of Social Service Administration), and Jenna Maravillas (active reservist, first enlisted female Field Artillery soldier in the state of Illinois).

**Jesse Brown VA Medical Center: November 7, 2015 – full performance**

**Audience Reached: 130 primarily veterans but civilians also included**

Rivendell performed the full performance of *WOMEN AT WAR* at the Jesse Brown VA as part of their Veterans’ Day programming. In advance of the performance a resource fair was conducted with 12 different veteran service organizations. The Director of the hospital, Ann Brown, welcomed everyone to Jesse Brown including Mike McAleer who provides public affairs oversight to the entire VA system. A representative from Congresswoman Duckworth’s office read a letter from her conveying the importance of programs such as *WOMEN AT WAR*. The National Women Veterans United Color Guard posted the colors and one of our cast members sang the National Anthem to kick off the
performance. Following the performance panelists included Kimberly Boyer, Oluwatoyin Hines (Multi-Faith Veteran Support Project Coordinator), Jenna Maravillas (active reservist, first enlisted female Field Artillery soldier in the state of Illinois), Jessica Rose Wallace (University of Chicago student with a focus on Masters of Social Service Administration), Meosha Thomas (One Savvy Veteran Founder), and Sabrina Waller.

College of Lake County partnered with the Gurnee American Legion: November 13, 2015 – full performance
Audience Reached: 70 primarily civilians but veterans also included
Rivendell performed the full performance of WOMEN AT WAR as part of the Veterans’ Day programming for the Gurnee American Legion at the College of Lake County. In advance of the performance a resource fair was conducted with 6 different veteran service organizations. This was a great opportunity to bring the story to a college campus where there is an inherent diversity of veterans and citizens. The post-show panel included Ashley Jones, Meosha Thomas (One Savvy Veteran Founder) and Cynthia Hines (WOMEN AT WAR cast member and veteran). The audience also included many members of the Gurnee American Legion that were active participants in the discussion.

Audience Reached: 35 civilians
Rivendell performed an excerpt of WOMEN AT WAR as part of the Network of Ensemble Theaters’ National Symposium. Following the excerpt Tara Mallen, Megan Carney, and the WOMEN AT WAR cast engaged with the audience of artists of the creation of community devised work. The conversation also focused on using theatre and performance as an outreach tool with the veteran community and how to build bridges between veterans and civilians.

Oakton Community College: November 10, 2016 – full performance
Audience Reached: 75 primarily civilians but veterans also included
Rivendell performed the full performance of WOMEN AT WAR at Oakton Community College as part of the Veterans’ Day programming. Again the college campus brought an inherent diversity of veterans and citizens. The post-show panel included Oluwatoyin Hines (Multi-Faith Veteran Support Project Coordinator) and Cynthia Hines (WOMEN AT WAR cast member and veteran).

Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center Women Veterans Program, WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease, and Edwards Lifesciences Foundation presentation: November 16, 2016 – full performance
Audience Reached: 100 primarily veterans but civilians also included
Rivendell performed the full performance of WOMEN AT WAR as part of the Veterans’ Day programming for the Lovell Health Care Center. Sponsored by WomenHeart there were heart screening services in advance of the performance along with other veteran resources. The panel for this discussion included Kelsey Gumm, Ashley Jones, and Sabrina Waller.

To book a performance and town-hall discussion of WOMEN AT WAR to your community please contact Jackie Banks-Mahlum, Rivendell Theatre Ensemble Managing Director, at jackie@rivendelltheatre.org or 773-727-3824