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**Title:** Putting a Female Face on the Military

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**Synopsis:** This an article about Master Cpl Renee Russell, a reservist from Barrie, Ontario, stationed in Afghanistan. When looked at in the context of coverage of women in the armed forces in Afghanistan, it offers an interesting contrast to coverage of Michelle Mendes. In the case of Mendes an interesting archetype was created—that of an ambitious, intelligent woman who could retain her traditionalism and femininity.

Russell, on the other hand, is “not a dress-up kind of girl” who would rather play football with the boys than put on a dress.” Russell herself admits that she doesn’t own a dress. The article implies that Russell needs not to be tough in a masculine sense in order to survive and flourish in a male-dominated army as well as a conservative misogynist society.

She must be strong in the masculine sense of the term to help a backward, impoverished, devastated society as well as ward off men who frequently propose to her.

**Quotes:**

“Sgt. Mark Miller has seen her tough side. "Renee's not a dress-up kind of girl," he says. "She'd rather play football with the boys than put on a dress. She can handle herself." In fact, laughs Russell, "I don't even own a dress."

“So far, her unit has rebuilt schools and bridges, and dug wells. By working closely with the community, Russell's group also hopes to create an atmosphere of goodwill. "We've already had some success," she says. "We were approached by children who kept saying, 'Mine, mine.' So we followed them and they brought us to an unexploded ordnance. That sort of thing is exactly what we want."

“Most Afghans have never seen a female soldier; some of the men have been so taken by her that they have proposed. "I was standing guard when a van drove by filled with men," Russell recalls. "It stopped and 12 guys poured out. One that spoke English started asking me, 'Do you have a family? Do you have brothers?' And then, of course, 'Are you married?' I said no and right away he asked me to marry him."

“Putting a female face on the military can sometimes help in the work the Canadian troops are doing. In a suburb of Kabul, Russell displays her skills when an old woman hesitantly peers from her crumbling house at a menacing group of soldiers. It's Russell who approaches, gently coaxing her out. Some questions are resolved about the state of the village's water supply and its mosque -- another rebuilding project. "We have to be careful about giving these people false hopes," says Russell afterwards. "It doesn't help us if we come here and then nothing happens." That's a heavy responsibility for soldiers such as Russell -- and for the governments they represent.”