

# READER'S GUIDE

## *Out Standing in the Field* by Sandra Perron

### INTRODUCING *Out Standing in the Field*

In her revealing and moving memoir, Sandra Perron, Canada's first female infantry officer and a member of the Royal 22e Régiment — the legendary “Van Doos” — describes her fight against a system of institutional sexism. Though repeatedly identified as top of her class throughout her training, she was subject to harassment by her male colleagues. Her military experience, however, wasn't all negative. Through two deployments to Bosnia and Croatia, Perron forged lasting friendships with men and women, serving her country with courage and compassion, and her determination helped pave the way for women's inclusion in the Armed Forces.

*Out Standing in the Field* is the story of a soldier who refused to let her comrades or her country down, even while serving a military institution that failed her repeatedly. Beautifully written, Perron's memoir is a testament to her fortitude and patriotism, and serves as proof that the spirit of

### IMPORTANT THEMES

#### *Perseverance and Determination*

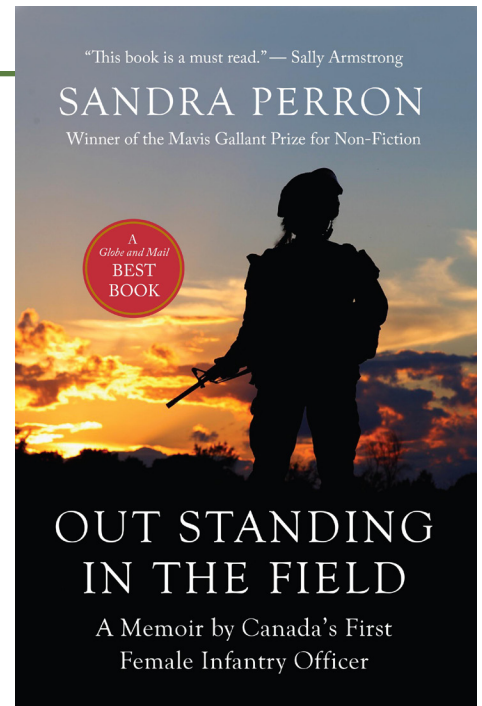
Perron's determination and perseverance are evident on every page as she struggles to prove herself to her colleagues and superiors. While her perseverance sees her through tough challenges and helps her become a brilliant soldier, there are times when it hinders her relationships with her family, friends, loved one, and colleagues. At times Perron fights herself in order to forge ahead. Throughout her memoir is an abiding determination to forge past all obstacles, change minds, and prove herself worthy.

#### *Gender Roles*

At the heart of Perron's struggle is the question of gender and what it means to be a man or a woman. Many times Perron finds herself adopting traditionally male attitudes and mannerisms while avoiding the company of women in order to be accepted. At other times, she is made wholly aware of her femaleness by the attitudes of other soldiers, her enjoyment of female company, and her relationship with Kevin. Although trying to fight gender stereotypes, Perron shows her own susceptibility to them, making her struggle to remain herself within the gendered atmosphere of the Canadian Forces more complex.

#### *Relationships*

Throughout her military career, Perron forges new friendships while losing others. Her relationships with her family and her spouse are also strained by her determination to join the infantry. Her desire for a husband and children and her desire to succeed in the military are often at odds.



## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider the different treatment Perron received from her colleagues and superiors in each stage of her training. How did this affect her self-image?
2. Multiple times Perron disregards health advice in pursuit of joining the infantry. Do you think she made the right decision?
3. How does Perron react when the nurses in Bosnia surprise her with a spaghetti dinner? How has her view of women changed?
4. In Bosnia, Perron tells a reporter that “Soldiers, and their loved ones, make sacrifices that can’t be easily understood by most civilians.” Does her memoir help you better understand those sacrifices?
5. Perron says that she “never felt betrayed by the army.” What does this statement say about how Perron saw the army during her career? Based on the final pages of the memoir, have her feelings changed?
6. Do you believe military culture has changed since Perron’s experiences?



### ABOUT SANDRA

Sandra Perron was Canada’s first female infantry officer, and the first woman member of the Royal 22e Régiment, the legendary “Van Doos.” She is now a senior partner with A New Dynamic Enterprise Inc. After serving in the military, she specialized in advanced quality engineering with General Motors and Bombardier Aerospace, then rounded out her skills with trauma-informed practices, neuro-linguistic programming, and mind mapping techniques, all of which have made her a unique and popular keynote speaker. She has chaired the Minister of Defence’s Advisory Board on Employment Equity and has consistently served in one capacity or another on boards of governors, focus groups, or committees to help promote and mentor women in non-traditional fields. She is the founder and president of the Imagine Project, a non-profit organization mentoring an orphanage in Boma, Tanzania.