

MEMORANDUM FOR Faculty Advisor, Group Room R12, Fort Bliss, TX 79918-8002

SUBJECT: Women in Combat

1. Thesis Statement. Societal attitude, physical limitations, pregnancy, and the destruction of combat unit cohesion are legitimate factors that should continue to exclude women from infantry units.
2. Discussion. Throughout history women have contributed to the Armed Forces. Today, women account for 14 percent of the active U.S. Army. Public policy and Federal law which prevent women from serving in infantry units remains a controversial issue. The proponents of women in combat argue from the standpoint of equality and fairness. Those opposed to women in combat focus on women's effects on the Army's ability to carry out its combat mission.
3. Conclusion. American culture and the U.S. Army face potential vulnerabilities if women are allowed to serve in infantry units. Societal attitude, physical limitations, pregnancy, and the destruction of combat unit cohesion are legitimate factors that should continue to exclude women from infantry units.
4. Counterpoint. Feminist groups continue to claim that women's exclusion from infantry units amounts to unconstitutional discrimination. They see combat exclusion laws as a roadblock against women; essentially labeling them as "not good enough."
5. Haines Award. We do not request that the Haines Award Selection Board consider this paper for the General Haines Award for Excellence in research. *Writing Research Papers*, 10th Edition by James D. Lester, is the guide used in the preparation of this research paper.

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Women in Combat

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Outline

Thesis: Societal attitude, physical limitations, pregnancy, and the destruction of combat unit cohesion are legitimate factors that should continue to exclude women from infantry units.

I. Background

- A. Historical contributions
- B. Evolution of women in the Army
- C. Current status of women in the Army

II. Societal Impact

- A. Christian belief
- B. Societal values
- C. Opposing view

III. Physical Constraints

- A. Lack of endurance and upper body strength
- B. Pregnancy and non-deployable status
- C. Opposing view

IV. Training Constraints

- A. Effects on unit cohesion
- B. Opposing view

V. Conclusion

Women in Combat

Female soldiers are almost taken for granted in today's Army. Few, if any, would argue that women have no place in the Army, but mention females in the infantry and immediate debate will commence. Societal attitude, physical limitations, pregnancy, and the destruction of combat unit cohesion are legitimate factors that should continue to exclude women from infantry units.

The history of women in the military began long before the existence of the United States. The tradition of the French and British armies of the time involved something akin to our present day command sponsorship of family members to overseas posts. Officers and senior NCOs would often bring their female relatives with them to posts throughout the frontier during the French and Indian War. The British officers stated female camp followers brought civility among the troops, and uplifted morale. The Continental Army adopted this custom during the Revolutionary War. The sight of General Washington's wife at winter quarters heartened the soldiers throughout the war.

Not all women were content to sit at home during the Revolution, however, and many disguised themselves as men and enlisted to fight. One soldier was Deborah Samson (aka Robert Shirliffe) who enlisted in 1778 from Massachusetts. Samson fought for several years, and was wounded twice, once by a musket ball to the shoulder, another from a sword stroke. She contracted a fever, and her enlistment terminated shortly afterward. She received a pension from Congress in the late 1780's. Another such woman was the famous Molly Pitcher, a camp follower who ran water to the gun crews during the battle of Monmouth, New Jersey. When her husband fell wounded, Mrs. Mary McCauley took up his station as cannon loader and fought on

throughout the battle. During the War of 1812, Lucy Brewer (aka George Baker) became the first woman Marine, serving aboard the "Constitution," engaging in many sea battles during that time.

With the westward expansion of the United States during the 1800's, the camp followers began to perform basic functions for the small isolated posts on the frontier. The Post Commander contracted wives and daughters to cook, clean, sew, and perform laundry services. During attacks, they stood behind the men and reloaded firearms.

During the Mexican-American war in 1846, General Zach Taylor enlisted one of the first women into the Army as a cook. Sarah Borginis enlisted in the 8th Cavalry stationed at Fort Brown, Texas. When the fort came under attack, she was issued a musket and used it with deadly efficiency, but never missed cooking a meal. General Taylor gave her the brevet rank of Colonel, the first ever in the U.S. Army. During the Civil War an estimated 80 women were killed in action. Over 400 women served in various other capacities (not including nurses). They performed duties as sutlers, vivandiers (present day class VI supply), spies, and secretly as front line soldiers. Dr. Mary Walker was the first woman to receive the Medal of Honor for her role in the Civil War. Another famous soldier was Cathy Williams (aka William Cathay) who enlisted in the 38th Infantry from 1866 until 1868 with the Buffalo Soldiers.

The Spanish-American War in 1898 saw the creation of the Army Nurse Corps, established in 1901 through legislation as a permanent part of the Army through the work of Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee. Dr. McGee became the Acting Assistant Surgeon General in charge of the Nurse Corps. While the Corps was part of the Army, the women served without equal pay, rank, or benefits.

World War I saw a large change in the role of women in the military. The Navy

ignored the War Department and enlisted over 13,000 women into the Navy and Marine Corps on equal status to men. The Army created the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, a reserve Corps. The War department denied the Army's request to enlist women as clerks, but over 300 women served in the Signal Corps as long distance operators, given the brevet rank of Lieutenant. Brevet rank gave responsibility but little authority. Women couldn't command men, or hold leadership positions. Over 30,000 women served in WWI, adding particular impetus to passing the 19th amendment to the constitution.

Eleanor Roosevelt spurred Congress and the Truman administration to admit women into the Armed Services on a permanent basis during the late 1930's and early 1940's. Congress stalled until General Marshall ordered the creation of a Women's Corps in the regular Army. In 1942, Public Law 78-110.9 established the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Mrs. Roosevelt applied considerable pressure to the Navy and the Women's Auxiliary Volunteer-Enlisted (WAVEs) followed in 1943.

During World War II, over 400,000 women served in some capacity in the Armed Services. There were over 8,000 WACs stationed throughout the European Theater and 5,000 in the Pacific Theater. Over 200 Army nurses died, and the Japanese held nearly 80 Army and Navy nurses captive for 3 years after the fall of Corregidor.

On 12 June 1949, President Truman signed Public Law 625, the Women's Armed Services Act of 1948. This was the beginning of equality in the military services, and allowed women to serve during peacetime. The military services integrated, with the notable exception of the WACs. In 1947, the Army-Navy Nurse Act passed allowing nurses permanent commissions, no longer brevet rank. Women still could not command integrated units, and were held to a rank cap of E-7 and O-5.

The role of women in the military was expanding. No longer held to specific nurse, clerk, and supply functions, by the 1960's women filled over 90 Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) in the Army. In 1962, a proposal for interchangeable table of distribution spaces reached the Chief of Staff. By 1964, it was a reality, expanding the role of women into 110 MOSSs, and allowing them to serve in certain combat support units. The Vietnam War era saw expansion of women in medical, clerical, intelligence, and personnel positions. 1972 heralded the inclusion of women in aviation and airborne assignments, command authority granted permission for mixed gender units, and women began to hold command positions in those units.

Department of the Army General Order #20, effective 20 Oct 1978, discontinued the Women's Army Corps. Women were no longer a separate Army entity, they were fully integrated soldiers. The Defense Authorization Act of 1992 repealed the combat exclusion law for women pilots. President Clinton signed a military bill in 1993 that ended combat exclusion for women on military combatant ships, and in 1994 Defense Secretary Aspin approved a policy to allow Army women to serve in some ground combat units during fighting.

M.L. Chancey, a social activist, states:

Women have served in support positions throughout history. They have provided food, clothing, and nursing care for soldiers, have worked hard to conserve resources on the home front, have inspired men to defend what is more precious and vital for our survival than anything else: the next generation. Yes, there are stories in history of the women who have disguised themselves as men in order to serve in actual combat. The feminist love to trot these out as proof that a woman can fight like a man and take a bullet like a man, but instead of serving as evidence that women should be placed on the front lines,

they reveal a fatal flaw in the thinking of those who believe that women and men should be treated the same in all situations. When it comes down to it, the question is not and never has been “Can some women fight like men and go into battle?” Obviously, there are historical examples of women who have stood the test of the battlefield. But exceptions do not make the rules. The question we ought to be asking is not “Can women stand in the line of fire?” but “Should we place women in harm’s way?”

When examining the social aspects of “Should we place women in harm’s way?” there are considerations such as Christian moral beliefs, cultural values, and violence against women.

In *Women in Combat – A Time for Truth*, Albert Mohler writes:

Christian moral teaching holds that military service is for men; not women. The Bible presents a comprehensive pattern of differentiation between men and women. Men are to protect women, even as women bear a special responsibility as nurturers...as wives and mothers. Scriptural texts indicate that war is for men, and “wives,” “little ones,” and cattle are to remain in the land while men go to war [Joshua 1:14]. Christians have understood this pattern for centuries; even if some appear confused in the present...The presence of women in combat forces degrades humanity, putting women in the line of fire while sending all the wrong messages about family, gender, and moral honor.

The American culture raises its little girls to be non-aggressive, nurturing, caregivers and its little boys to be competitive, chivalrous, protectors. For women to be true warriors on the combat battlefield then the U.S. would have to sacrifice the current balance of passive girls and aggressive boys. R. Cort Kirkwood claims that “turning a woman into the kind of person who views such gore without blinking an eye, or who participates in the wanton killing war requires, is a step down to pagan barbarism and cultural suicide. It will require training men and women

to regard brutalization of women, and a woman's brutalization of others, as normal and acceptable. To train the men properly, we must erase everything their mothers taught them about chivalry: i.e., that a real man protects a woman from harm." Society has been taught that women are to be protected as noted by Gretchen Cook who asks the questions, "Would you send your wife downstairs at 2 a.m. to investigate a suspicious noise? If there were a fight on the corner, would you send your sister to break it up? Then why would you send women into combat?"

Another American cultural value that concerns socialists is the family dynamic. Mothers are going to war and into conflict, and have died as witnessed by the death of PFC Lori Ann Piestewa, a single mother of two preschoolers. "Many polls taken in the past two years echo a 1991 Associated Press survey that found 64 percent thought it was unacceptable for the United States to send women with young children to the war zone" (Cook). Feminists, attempting to prove that women are as tough as men, have missed an important factor of who will care for their children when they die in combat. Chancey contends, "Deep down, we know that mothers are the best providers of care for their offspring. No one else has that child's best interest at heart, no matter how well intentioned that person might be. Mother love isn't a commodity that can be bought or traded on the open market; it is absolutely not dispensable."

Mohler cites a 2001 article in Newsweek, which offers a glimpse into a world in military service and its impact on the family. In the article, U.S. Army MSG Kelly Tyler told of her 10-year-old son. "You know how kids are always changing what they want to be when they grow up?" she asked. "The other night (her son) told me he wanted to be a war protester so that I wouldn't ever have to leave him." This little boy's protest says it all.

The inclusion of women in combat units is a challenge to the moral character of the American people. The concern for women dying in combat is not interpreted as more important

than men. Chancey writes, "Fathers and mothers are equally important in the life of a child. However, God has given the unique role of childbearing and nurturing to women, and because of this role, women must be protected and defended at all costs if a society is to survive. If mothers go into the front lines in the same proportion the fathers do, we will be in serious trouble."

For years, the U.S. has campaigned the slogan "Violence Against Women" but do not seem to correlate this to war. The likelihood of rape and sexual abuses are far greater for female soldiers. One website states:

In 1992, the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the services filed an official inquiry with experts who have studied the experiences of former POWs in all of our wars. In response, they told the Commission that male POWs were subjected to many forms of incredibly brutal torture techniques, but sexual abuse was not one of them. Women, on the other hand, are almost always subjected to sexual abuse of varying degrees. Tolerance and even encouragement of combat violence against our women undermines American cultural values (Women in Combat).

The reality of combat is that the capture and torture of women is, and will be, uniquely cruel. Societal non-acceptance of rape and torture of a female soldier is recognized through the Army's months of secrecy and media diversion that surrounded the capture of PFC Jessica Lynch, who survived the ambush of her 507th Maintenance unit in Iraq. A website states, "According to American doctors who examined Army PFC Jessica Lynch after her rescue by Special Operations Forces, she was brutally raped and sodomized by Iraqi thugs during the three to four hours after the ambush, when she was unconscious. The violence reportedly occurred at the Fedayeen headquarters that also included a medical facility and torture devices such as a medal bed, car battery, and electrodes" (Women in Combat). Another website claims, "Citing

privacy considerations, the Pentagon nevertheless kept silent while the appealing legend of Lynch's capture continued to mislead the world. If Defense Department officials cannot bring themselves to tell Americans the truth about women fighting our wars, perhaps they should not be sending female soldiers that close to the combat zones in the first place" (Jessica Lynch Reality Shatters Amazon Myths).

Proponents for integrating women into the infantry do not debate Christian belief, but do counter the issue of reproduction. Captain Adam N. Wojack, writes:

The actual percentage of women in direct combat would probably be quite low. No one can imagine the total number of women in ground combat units surpassing 25 percent of all personnel anytime in the distant future after any type of integration. With 10 divisions in the Active Army totaling 500,000, 25 percent equates to 20,000 women in direct combat roles. Twenty thousand women represent about .03 percent of the approximately 60 million American women who are currently in their reproductive prime (70-71).

Major M. Nicholas Coppola, Major G. LaFrance, and Henry J. Carretta point out that society accepts women in other dangerous occupations, they state, "Not allowing women to serve in combat units runs counter to trends in American society that show that women can perform equally with their male counterparts in law enforcement, firefighting, and other civilian occupation. Although the Army has aggressively recruited females in the last 10 years, female participation Army wide has not kept pace with civilian industry" (55).

Whereas the Christian traditionalist and socialist ask "Should women go to combat?" others ask "Can they do it (handle the rigors of combat)?"

In the early 1990's, Kirkwood was a staff member on the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces. He writes:

The evidence the commission gathered was clear on one thing: Women do not belong in combat. The evidence showed women lack the necessary physical prowess. The strongest woman recruit, generally, is only as strong as the weakest man. Given that the services try to weed out the weakest men, it is counterproductive to recruit even the strongest women. And our volunteer military, remember, does not get the strongest women; it gets average women.

Infantry soldiers rely heavily on physical strength and stamina to survive, fight, and win. The Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces heard an abundance of expert testimony about the physical differences between men and women that can be summarized as follows:

Women are shorter, have less muscle mass, and weigh less than men, placing them at a distinct disadvantage when performing tasks requiring a high level of muscular strength and aerobic capacity, like ground combat. Female dynamic upper torso muscular strength is approximately 50-60 percent that of males.

Female aerobic capacity is approximately 70-75 percent that of males. In terms of military significance, at the same marching velocity and carrying the same load, the average woman works at a higher percentage of her aerobic capacity. This means that women cannot carry as much, as far, or as fast as men, and they are more susceptible to fatigue.

In a 1988 study of Army recruits, women were found to be more vulnerable to exercise-induced injuries than men, with 2.13 times greater risk for lower extremity injuries, and 4.71 times greater risk for stress fractures. Men sustained 99 days of limited duty due to injury, while women incurred 481 days of limited duty.

The experience of other countries shows little evidence that women are suited for ground combat. For example, of 103 women recruited for infantry training after Canada repealed its combat rules in 1989, only one woman succeeded in meeting the physical requirements necessary to complete the training.

In a test of ROTC cadets using the standard Army physical fitness test, it was found that the upper quintile of women achieved scores equivalent to the bottom quintile of men. Only 3.4% achieved a score equal to the male mean score. On the push-up test, only 7 percent of women could meet a score exceeded by 78 percent of men. Few women can meet the male mean standard. Men below the standard can improve their scores, whereas the women who have met the standard have already achieved a maximum level beyond which they cannot improve.

Age also makes a difference: A 20 to 30-year-old woman has about the same aerobic capacity as a 50-year-old man. Because women begin losing bone mass at an earlier age than men, and are more susceptible to orthopedic injuries, those initially selected for the combat arms would probably not survive to career-end.

Proponents to the integration of women into infantry units argue the strength and endurance issues by pointing out that since the women's movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's women have become stronger and more athletic.

Consider the world record progression in the marathon. "In the past 30 years, the men's record has gone from 2 hours, 9 minutes (2:09) to 2:05, a 3 percent improvement. Over the same period, the women's record has improved from 3:01 to 2:18, an almost 24

percent improvement. The women's record went from being 71 percent of the men's record to 90 percent" (Wojack 68).

Proponents also point out the 1995 Department of Defense (DOD) study that put forty-one female civilians through twenty-four weeks of intense physical exercise. This included running an obstacle course with a seventy-five pound rucksack and lifting heavy boxes. Women worked out five days a week for ninety minutes, which far exceeded the requirements for basic training recruits in any of the military services. "In the end, 78% of the civilian subjects were physically qualified to work in the Army's "heavy" coded jobs. At the conclusion of the study physiologists were amazed however; there appeared another even more beneficial result to the study. The women who finished the program also displayed higher levels of self-confidence" (Gest 20).

One of the advantages that Operation Desert Storm utilized was the use of modern, high-tech weaponry, which proponents argue is another reason for allowing women into combat roles. Dr. Harold DeGroot, a military affairs expert, contends that there should be "no doubt that women can be as effective as men in combat. Modern weaponry no longer requires physical strength, rather only the resolve to kill" (258). In other words, high-tech weapons are reducing the battlefield to a push-button war where one can kill the enemy from miles away without ever seeing the bodies. As the Army becomes further removed from direct killing, this will open more positions for technical combatants. Proponents contend that our military technology is requiring less physical energy and more mental skills, something women excel in.

At the onset of the Gulf War, "non-deployability rates were three to four times higher among women than men" (Donnelly & Pfluke 19). A unit cannot be effective if a

large number of them cannot go to the fight. Pregnancy in soldiers contributes to poor readiness and performance of a unit. The Navy admitted to this when it reported that “25% of women assigned to a ship will not deploy when the ship is ready for sea duty, and of the women who do go, 15% become pregnant” (Gutman 21).

Pregnancy becomes a problem, especially when in the middle of a combat zone. An article in *Stars and Stripes* reported, “One woman was evacuated from Bosnia for pregnancy every three days” (Gutman 21). This becomes a huge distraction for commanders who are focusing on preventing a major conflict. “It happens all the time,” claims Specialist Carrie Labertus. “Pregnant soldiers are given the option of staying in the service with a six- week’s maternity leave or taking an honorable discharge” (Gutman 21). Opponents claim that in many ways this is similar to a self-inflicted wound many frightened female soldiers have used to get out of a combat situation.

Brigadier General Vaught served as Chairperson of the NATO Women in the Allied Forces Committee and as the senior military representative to the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. Currently she is the President of the Board of Directors of the Women in the Military Service for America Memorial Foundation, Inc. When questioned about opponent’s concerns with pregnancy and readiness, General Vaught was quick to point out the faultiness of this argument. She indicated that many overlook the numerous health problems and family issues that hamper a male soldier’s time in duty. These also detract from readiness. During Desert Storm and Shield, she contended that men would use back problems as women used pregnancy to escape duty in the Gulf. She also pointed out that of the number of pregnant women sent home from the Gulf; many were unaware of their pregnancy at the time of deployment. In the end, however, she concluded that one has to look at the total time lost. If a

woman soldier serves an entire career, losing time only to pregnancy, the time lost is really insignificant.

Women in infantry units pose a threat to unit cohesion. In 1997, Retired Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker (R-Kansas) led a Department of Defense study on integrated basic training. In her final report she claimed "that mixing women and men has led to unit cohesion being broken down and training being undermined" (Newman 33). A bigger problem lies in the "new" definition of cohesion. "Surveys ask questions of whether one likes being in their platoon or not, if they care for other members of their unit and how they would assess the feeling of closeness of their platoon. This is not combat cohesion, but rather a sensing session where commanders can rate cohesion statistically in peacetime. True combat cohesion requires the adversity of war, not surveys, and feelings" (Donnelly 19).

In fact, many feel that bonding between men and women in combat would be impossible, or at least inappropriate. Staphanie Gutman contends "that the type of bonding between men and women wouldn't be platonic, but rather more exclusive and intimate; this becomes distracting and disrupts male cohesion" (21). The equation is simple to many opponents. "What the Greeks called *philia*, or friendship, is the source of bonding among desperate men facing death in combat together; it is the glue of unit cohesion and it demands loyalty and fairness. *Eros*, or erotic love found between men and women disrupts this process as it manifests itself in the form of sexual competition, male protectiveness and favoritism" (Owen 39).

Ann Simmons, a Harvard sociologist who spent a year studying the Army's Special Forces, claims, "Women in combat would inhibit the necessary bonding between men. It is this type of bonding that enables men to survive the stress of working closely in the difficult conditions of cramped space, long hours, hardships, and extreme danger" (Clinton 38). Placing a

woman into this mix tends to complicate things. Edward Luttwak, an official at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, points out that, "So long as men and women are in the Army together, the lines of power get entangled with sexual lines. . . preventing this is ridiculous. . . the Army can't do something that eluded the Franciscans; it can't run a mixed monastery" (Clinton 38).

A website clarifies the proponents to women integrating into infantry views on the unit cohesion argument as follows:

They fall back on the old "unit cohesion," "male bonding," and "good order" balderdash that is left over from the Roman Legions. It is rather like saying that women cannot play major league baseball because they cannot spit, scratch, and rearrange their codpieces as well as the boys, regardless of whether or not they can throw a baseball from left field to third base. Units comprised of women and men have bonded, cohesed, and maintained good order for centuries, or did they have separate sex wagon trains pioneering the west? Military units mixed sexes have quietly maintained order, accomplished missions, and passed operational readiness inspections with flying colors. They're too busy doing their jobs to worry about who uses which latrine. Desert Storm is a classic example of mixed units performing as cohesive and effective teams even under fire (Women in Combat, Why Not?).

The proponents of women in combat argue from the standpoint of equality and fairness. They see combat exclusion laws as a roadblock that discriminates against women, essentially labeling them as "not good enough." Most of their argument weighs on the issue of equal opportunity. Because women cannot serve in combat roles, they consequently are unable to hold a number of high ranking and influential positions within the military hierarchy.

Opponents disagree, valuing instead the morality (or amorality) dictated by war. To them war is unfair, and it has little regard for fairness. The law excluding women from combat was always considered a privileged exemption, not sex discrimination. It was the thoughtful recognition that women should be spared the carnage and cruelty of war. Kirkwood states:

A battlefield is not a boardroom, a courtroom or an operating room, and the contrary notion is hyperegalitarianism rooted in feminist fantasies that women "will have made it" when they have commanded troops in battle. Women do not have a "right" to serve. Military service for volunteers is a privilege; for draftees, it is a duty. No one has a "right" to serve, a civilian idea equivalent to having the "right" to be a doctor or lawyer that has no place in the military, whose principal purpose is to kill the enemy and destroy his capacity to fight. In "Crimson Tide," Gene Hackman's submarine skipper explained the point: The armed forces defend democracy; they do not practice it.

A step back from this controversy reveals an important fact repeated throughout history. War is a cruel and terrible instrument of our society. It is a paradox that forces the peace-loving to resort to barbarianism in order to protect their peaceful society. Because of this, ideas such as equality and fairness in a military environment become secondary to the commitment to preserve the strength of infantry units and societal ideals and values.

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