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Women In Combat Arms

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to inform you of how women in combat arms roles been a dilemma since the early 1940s around the world. Why woman should be allowed in combat arms? Is society ready to see women in combat arms roles? Is it American Ideology that women should not serve in combat arm or is this a political battle that continues to suppress our women in arms? You decide.

“Dilemma With Women In Combat Arms Roles Caused by American Ideology? You decide!”

Women in combat arms roles have been a dilemma since the early 1940s around the world. Many feel that with the current war in Iraq, where there is no real “front line”, it is time to recognize our women as the dedicated selfless Soldiers they are. Why should women be allowed in combat arms? Is society ready to see their women in combat arms roles? Is it American Ideology that women should not serve in combat arms or is this a political battle that continues to suppress our women in arms?” You decide?

Historical Arguments used to keep women out of combat arms billets

The Military history chronicles only some of the cultural accepted roles. Linda Grante De Pauw, a professor of history at George Washington University, a founder and president of the Minerva Center in Pasadena, Maryland, says that women are unrepresented in war because the “mythology of warfare” recognizes only the roles is “warriors”, victims and whores”. The first role is reserved for men and latter two generally for women (*Women at War, Gender Issue of Americans in Combat* by Rosemarie Skanie). In an effort to help identified the real dilemma that is masked by political view, American Ideology, and religious views we must first understand the history. When discussing the history of women in combat, I want to think of Joan of Arc who in 1412, at the age of 17, successfully led the French troops into battle against the English. Hundreds of women disguised themselves as men to fight in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Beginning in 1942, separate military services for women were established, but women did not gain professional military status until 1948 when President Truman signed the *Women’s Armed Services Integration Act* which limited their number

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to two percent of the total military (*Minerva Spring 1994*). Some argue that, should combat slots be open to women, women may be subjected to the draft. The male only was considered to be constitutional in 1981 in the *Rockster V Goldberg case*, largely because the draft was viewed as a way to fill combat slot, slots from which women were barred. Proponents of opening all positions in the military to women argue that military readiness is enhanced when there is a larger pool of applicants, whereas, opponents insist that due to politics, quotas would be undeniable, thus allowing unqualified women into key military positions. Opponents of allowing women to compete for combat billets argue that that it is too dangerous to put women in the position of becoming prisoners of war. Without a doubt, there is a greater probability for acts of sexual molestation and rape with the addition of women to the front lines. The “front line” in modern combat, however, are fluid. Another argument against women in combat is that they simply do not have the physical strength and endurance needed. Despite this, all experts agree that there are some women, although perhaps small in numbers, who have the physical standards for military occupational specialties (MOS) should be identical for both men and women. Another argument used to keep women out of combat billets is that they would disrupt the cohesive unit and undermine the *esprit de corps*. The effectiveness of the military hinges on cohesion, every member must completely trust and respect one another. Many argue men would not be able to trust women to be capable of accomplishing the physical demands of combat, which could lead to serious problems. Romantic relationships and pregnancies also concern many experts. The argument is that romance may undermine *esprit de corps* and that pregnancies will hurt readiness.

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Although pregnancy is a major concern of many, statistics show it has little bearing on military readiness (*Minerva Spring 1994*).

More than 40,000 women served in the war against Iraq. The Marine Corps awarded twenty-three women the combat Action Ribbon for service in the Persian Gulf War because they were engaged by Iraqi troops. Desert Storm was a huge turning point for women, much like Vietnam was for African Americans, and it showed that modern war boundaries between combat and non-combat roles are being blurred. It makes no sense to cling to semantics (combat vs. combat support) given the reality of war (*Minerva Spring 1994*).

Despite all of the accomplishment of the women in arms the Army women cannot serve in the following: Infantry, armor, canon field artillery, and short range air defense artillery (*Minerva Spring 1994*). In the Navy women are excluded from Submarine Warfare, Special Warfare (SEAL) and ratings particular to submarine service such as fire control technician and one aspect of sonar technician (*Minerva Spring 1994*). Women can be sonar technicians; however, they cannot serve in the submarine component of the rating. The Marine Corps assignments closed to women are infantry, armor, field artillery, security force guard protecting nuclear material, and several positions related to armored, amphibious, assault units and fleet antiterrorism security teams (*Minerva Spring 1994*).

Why should women be allowed in combat arms?

Hundreds of thousands of women engaged in combat. They served on both sides, and on every front (*Minerva Spring 1994*). The German women Soldiers helped inflict casualties on American and British forces, and in turn were killed, wounded or captured.

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Likewise, Soviet and British women fought bravely (*Minerva Spring 1994*). American women were not sent into combat. The question is why not--and what does that tell us about gender roles in America? Historians in recent years have been exploring the changes in gender roles during World War Two. **The general consensus is that on the home front women temporarily assumed new roles ("Rosie the Riveter") but that no permanent or radical transformation took place. The question is more open regarding military roles: making women soldiers was the most dramatic government experiment in changing traditional sex roles ever attempted. Putting these women Soldiers into combat constituted a radical inversion of the traditional roles of women as the passive sweetheart/wife/sex object whose ultimate mission was to wait for their virile men folk to return from their masculine mission of fighting and dying for "apple pie and motherhood" (that is, for traditional social values.)** The Pentagon was well aware of the performance of European women Soldiers, and General George Marshall conducted a full-scale experiment to see how well American women could perform. There was never a question of an all-female unit; the issue at stake was whether mixed gender units could perform combat roles effectively. The experiment stunned the General Staff: mixed gender units performed better than all-male units. As the draft scraped further and further down the barrel, the availability of large numbers of potentially excellent Soldiers became more and more an anomaly. The demands of military efficiency called for assigning women to combat.

Although women were technically in support roles two female U.S. Soldiers were taken captive and one was sexually abused by the Iraqi in the Gulf War. This situation

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made those who were already skeptical about putting women in such a compromising position further question whether women should be subjected to the horrors of combat. Many, however, argue that adult women who make the decision to join the military are aware of the consequences (*Minerva, Spring 1994*).

The rescue of Jessica Lynch starkly reminds us that woman Soldiers are on the front lines in the war with Iraq. Emerging details about the ambush of Lynch's convoy indicate that the 19-year-old Army private tenaciously fought for her survival in a fierce struggle. Now debate has resurfaced about U.S. military policy concerning women in military roles, including that which officially prohibits them from serving in most ground combat units. But as Lynch's encounter with Iraqi troops points out, warfare rarely follows the textbook when it comes to when and where violence will erupt (Martha Ackmann). While no one wants to see men or women endangered, the calls for stronger restrictions on women in combat roles are particularly dubious. All too often appeals to protect women end up prohibiting women from what they have a right to do (By Martha Ackmann). Certainly the case of Lynch's ambush is a tragic one. Along with other members of her 507th Maintenance Company, Lynch was attacked outside Nasiriya on 23 March 2003. Members of her company were killed and captured, including two other women. Shoshana Johnson remains a POW, and Lori Piestewa was confirmed dead. The country reacted to the news of Lynch, Johnson and Piestewa with the same respect that is shown their male comrades. But some have used the case of the 507th ambush to argue that women in the military should be better protected.

Elaine Donnelly, president of the Center for Military Readiness and a former adviser to President George H.W. Bush, argued for a reversal of the Clinton

administration's lifting of some restrictions concerning women's military assignments. Donnelly says the risk of sexual assault necessitates the prohibition of women in combat. The prospect of enemy rape and sexual abuse hands women an unequal opportunity to survive. Donnelly is correct about one matter: The threat of sexual assault diminishes every woman's life, whether she is on the battlefield in Iraq or jogging through Central Park. But attempting to curtail rape by restricting women from professional opportunities in the military is a little like forbidding women from going outside their homes to make sure they won't be attacked.

Is society ready to see their women in combat arms roles?

“Direct ground combat” means engaging or attacking the enemy with deliberate offensive action under fire. It is more than the experience of being in danger or “in harms way.” Direct ground combat units, coded “P1,” are required by current Defense Department regulations to be all male. Examples of DGC units include Army and Marine infantry, armor, and Special Operations Forces like those that fought to liberate Baghdad in March 2003 and Fallujah in November 2004. Female Soldiers are also exempt from placement in support units that embed or “collocate” with smaller direct ground combat battalions 100% of the time. Most brigade level positions, which do not involve constant collocation, are coded “P2” and are open to women. These regulations, including the collocation rule, were adopted in January 1994 and remain in effect today. If Army leaders want to change these regulations, current law requires formal notice from the Secretary of Defense to Congress 30 legislative days (about three months) in advance. Current law also requires a report on the effect of proposed rule changes on women’s exemption from Selective Service

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registration. Retired generals have fired volleys at Donald Rumsfeld, but he will stay as Secretary of Defense. This is only fair, since Rumsfeld should have to deal with the consequences of problematic personnel policies that were set in motion on his watch. Under Secretary Rumsfeld, social engineers have accelerated their agenda. Rumsfeld is known for abrading subordinates, but not Army officials who continue to violate policy and law on the issue of women in land combat. All deployed Soldiers, men and women, are serving “in harm’s way.” But even without a “front line,” the missions of direct ground combat units have not changed. Infantry, armor, and Special Operations Forces attack the enemy with deliberate offensive action under fire. These fighting battalions, and support units that “collocate” with them 100% of the time, are required by Defense Department regulations to be all male. If the Army wants to change the “collocation rule,” the Secretary of Defense must approve and formally report the change to Congress approximately three months (30 legislative days) in advance. The law also requires an analysis of proposed changes on young women’s exemption from Selective Service obligations. These requirements have not been met, even though the Army has placed female Soldiers in formerly all male support units that collocate with infantry/armor battalions in the Third and Fourth Infantry, 101st Airborne, and First Cavalry divisions. Army Secretary Francis Harvey denies a need to inform Congress of such assignments—but there is a “catch.” Female soldiers are administratively “assigned,” on paper only, to legally open (brigade level) units. In reality they are placed in “attached” forward support companies that collocate with land combat battalions, and are required to be all male. Secretary Harvey has claimed that female soldiers will be removed

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(somehow) when battalions begin “conducting” or “performing” direct ground combat. Even if the Army had sufficient resources to evacuate women on the eve of battle, the disruption could cause missions to fail and lives to be lost. Where is Congress on this? In 2005 House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter conducted an investigation, and led the first major debate on women in combat in 15 years. Army officials initially denied illicit assignments, but later used semantics and sophistry to justify them. Dissatisfied members of Hunter’s committee passed legislation to codify current Defense Department regulations. Instead of issuing a swift order to bring the Army back into line, Secretary Rumsfeld persuaded Chairman Hunter to withdraw his legislation. A substitute amendment in the 2006 Defense Authorization Act mandated a detailed report on women in land combat, due on March 31, 2006. Secretary Rumsfeld’s office ignored the deadline and diverted the task to RAND Corporation, which will not produce a report until December 31, 2006. If a Democratic administration displayed such contemptuousness, Republicans would be up in arms. But congressional oversight on matters affecting women in the military should not be a partisan matter. Some legislators on both sides of the aisle are taking this issue seriously, but most seem unconcerned about the consequences of decisions being made by default. The cost of doing nothing starts with confusion among soldiers who are beginning to doubt the judgment of their leaders. No one has provided data proving shortages of men for the combat arms, but deficiencies could occur if the institutional Army continues to supply CENTCOM with an unsuitable “inventory” of Soldiers who are not eligible for the infantry. Substituting women for men in combat-located support units increases danger for everyone. Female

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Soldiers are brave, but proximity matters. In combat collocated units Soldiers need to be strong enough to individually lift and evacuate a wounded infantryman under fire.

Closing Comments:

Allowing both women and men to compete for all military occupational specialties is not an equal rights issue, but one of military effectiveness. If the United States is to remain the world's most capable and most powerful military power, we need to have the best person in each job, regardless of gender (Authored by Jake Willens, 7 August 1996). Women are unique because they have chosen to serve and in so doing have to endure an initial form of "culture shock" unknown in any other profession. Women today undergo strenuous mental and physical training that many men will and have not been able to finish. The women that serve in our armed forces today understands the prejudice against them and yet they volunteer to serve with us selflessly and giving there all and saluting our nations flags so proudly as they serve to defend. She is not in the service to "Free a Man to Fight" anymore, but more so she is in the military to fight, if necessary, along with her fellow servicemen and for that.... I SALUTE. Women are serving proudly in Operation Iraqi Freedom... in, around and near hostile territory, where I would argue that there is no "front line". We have lost both men and women in the line of duty, but now is not the time to advocate removing women from certain roles in the military nor is it the time to use the issue of casualties and prisoner to decry allowing women to serve in combat roles. Furthermore, as for me, a dedicated and passionate seasoned soldier and a Sergeant Major in the Army, I recognize this is not a

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dilemma, but simply traditional American Ideology and today it is time to accept change.

Many will argue that this is a dilemma; I have made my decision and now YOU DECIDE!