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Ethics Paper: Women in Ground Combat Units

MSG Thomas R. Dixon

United States Sergeants Major Academy

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CSM(R) Williams, Diane

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Abstract

Women have proved over and over that they can succeed in combat and be effective leaders. The first Gulf War and the current Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) are a testament to women who are serving in combat support military occupation specialties (MOS). Retired Army Col. Dan Smith said “Modern wars will be fought 360 degrees, which means women will be on the ‘front lines’ whether the congress likes it or not.” There is no doubt that women can be leaders in any military environment. My ethical dilemma is with women in ground combat units. I am going to sound like a male-chauvinist pig but I believe that men still need to have their bastions of all male clubs or units. I also believe that the public is not ready for women in the trenches.

Writing a thought paper on an ethical dilemma facing our military today is my task at hand. Although this assignment didn't require any research, I felt obligated to research the internet for any information that would help me in preparing this paper. All you have to do is type in women in ground combat and you will get a slew of pros and cons related to this subject. I choose this topic for two reasons, its controversy and the debates it brings forth in the small group learning environment. Our society and the military as a whole have become so politically correct (PC) that it some times makes me ill. Would women in Ground Combat units altar the male physiologically and physicality in the beginning?

When I shipped out to basic training in the mid 80's, I never worked with women before. It wasn't until Advanced Individual Training (AIT) that I became integrated with females in the military. I didn't have a problem with the females that I went to school with as long as they performed their duties. I was raised to treat other people the way you want to be treated (The Golden Rule).

For the past 20 years, I served in special operations units that are ground combat units. My first duty assignment was as a combat medic with the 3rd Ranger BN (The Rangers are the kings of the he-man-women haters club). Myself and 14 other Rangers volunteered to do a one week recruiting demonstration in Atlanta, Georgia. We met men and women from all walks of life during this trip. While in the mall we displayed all the hardware Rangers use to conduct their daily training. I was put in charge of the rucksacks and scuba gear. Everything was combat loaded and rigged. I would show people the techniques and tips of the trade on how to stand up with a heavy load.

The majority of the people that we met couldn't believe that we trained with such heavy rucksacks or loads. We talked to numerous women and not one was able to pick up the

rucksack and put it on. Most women were cordial about it but some become belligerent saying that we just put heavy weights in the rucksacks to embarrass them. This was my first experience with this whole women equality stuff and it blew me away. While attending the Primary Leadership Course (PLDC) I talked to female soldiers in my small group about what they thought about women in Infantry units. Most of the women at that time said that if given the opportunity they wouldn't even consider going to a ground combat unit. A few women even said that it was the hard driving female officers who were eager for medals and promotions that combat offered. I never gave this much thought until many years later in my military service.

In the article *Women in Ground Combat (1993)* it was found that Most people, myself included, believe there is a federal law which bars women from serving in ground combat positions. I was shocked when I found out that there is no law that keeps women from serving in ground combat positions. Army and Marine Corps policy excludes women from assignments to units that are likely to become engaged in direct combat. According to the Army definition, direct combat is "engaging an enemy with individual or crew-served weapons while being exposed to direct enemy fire, a high probability of direct physical contact with the enemy's personnel, and a substantial risk of capture. Direct combat takes place while closing with the enemy by fire and maneuver. The army uses a direct Combat Probability Coding System (DCPC) established in 1983, to classify every position based upon the likelihood of engaging in direct combat. (Page 1)

Hoar (1993) states that if a policy change is made, and women are allowed into combat positions, then there must be a concerted effort to educate the American public on the increased likelihood that women will be raped, will come home in body bags, and will be exploited. Highly decorated American aviators who spent years of captivity in Vietnam told the Commission that

the presence of women would increase morale problems for male prisoners, as well as their vulnerability should the enemy torture women prisoners to coerce cooperation from the men. (Hoar 1) Numerous instructors at the Air Force Survival Evade Resist and Escape (SERE) School have observed a protective response among men when a female trainee was threatened. A survey at the school also noted that if a female Prisoner of War (POW) was to become pregnant, there would be a negative impact on morale and discipline in the POW camp. (Hoar 1)

Loy (2001) states that the physiological gender differences between men and women in the military is significant. Body composition, muscular strength, and cardio-respiratory capacity are a few of the comparisons. Compared to the average male Army recruit, the average female Army recruit is 4.8 inches shorter, weighs 31.7 pounds less, and has 37.4 pounds less muscle mass and 5.7 pounds more fat mass. In general, women are at a distinct disadvantage when performing military tasks requiring muscular strength because of their lower muscle mass. Since fat mass is inversely related to aerobic capacity and heat tolerance, the average woman is also at a disadvantage when performing aerobic activities such as marching with heavy loads (related to the lower cardio-respiratory capacity of women) and working in the heat. Women's physical advantages are that they are less susceptible to altitude sickness and have a greater tolerance for cold temperatures due to their extra body fat. Women can also sustain the G-force longer than men when flying combat jets.

Lt. Col. Stephen Smith, a Gulf War mechanized infantry commander, told a Commission in Los Angeles: "By introducing women, even women who have the physical capability to lift the rucksacks, walk the distances, raise the hatches, load the TOW missiles, break the track on those vehicles and put it back together again, you are still introducing into that equation other factors that weren't there before: sexual jealousies, intentions, our own social or moral values

come into play, and they make more difficult that job of that commander who is forward.(Hoar 1)

What would our enemy think or do if they engaged an all female unit? This is a question that needs to be researched as much as possible. The way our current enemy's philosophy is I think that the enemy would fight to the bitter end rather than retreat and fight another day. I do not think they would retreat either. The ultimate question for the 21st century is, Women in Ground Combat a viable answer to the shortage of male recruits in the military?

Conclusion

As Previously mentioned there are all kinds of opinions about the rights and wrongs of women in ground combat units. The physical make up between men and women can not be overlooked. All you have to do is look at the National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), and many more male dominated leagues to see the difference. There are two standards in the military, one for men and one for females. It has been proven that most females can't meet the basic standards that are set for men. When and if women make it into ground combat units without lowering the standards I will have to rethink ~~my~~ my stance on this subject.

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