

Females in Direct Combat Roles.

MSG Thomas K. Sparks

Student # 132 R09

FA: SGM Rogers

Class # 56 USASMA

3 NOV 05

Females in direct combat roles such as Infantry, would disrupt overall combat effectiveness.

The subject of females in direct combat roles has long been a heated topic of debate and continues to distress soldiers today. Females serving in combat infantry units would disrupt combat effectiveness primarily due to the extreme physical demands and interpersonal relations with their male counterparts. Though many disagree, arguing that females would have no impact on combat effectiveness and could do the job just as well.

The physical demands of an infantry soldier are extreme and grueling. The basic combat load of a rifleman averages 40 to 50 pounds for the rucksack and 30 pounds for the load-bearing vest. In some cases, such as the 240 gunner, or assistant gunner, that weight can almost double. The physical make up of the average female cannot support carrying that much weight for any length of time. The rifleman may need to conduct a movement over rough terrain for long distances with heavy loads to make it to the objective. If the weight cannot be supported, the mission cannot be completed thus compromising combat effectiveness.

Another basic task of a rifleman is to pick up a wounded soldier and carry him to the casualty collection point, or a safe place. All soldiers have a mutual understanding going into combat operations that if needed they will perform this task for each other. Leaving no fallen comrades behind is one of the greatest driving factors for soldiers going into the uncertainties of combat. The average soldier's weight ranges from 155 to 185 pounds, in

addition to any equipment the soldier may have on. The physical ability of a female soldier to quickly throw a 180 pound wounded soldier over her back and carry him for a long distance would be impossible for most. This would also destroy the mutual understanding that no fallen comrade will be left behind.

Relationships with fellow soldiers would have many negative effects on females in direct combat roles. Males, by nature, tend to focus their attention on females. Due, in large part to the way society has instilled values and norms into males. They tend to the needs of females, shield and protect them, open doors for them and always are gentlemen. This alone could have a dramatic effect on any combat operation. By basic instinct alone a male soldier would run to a walking wounded female soldier before a litter urgent male soldier.

The distraction of a female soldier and a male soldier from the same fire team, squad, or platoon that become attracted to each other could damage the units combat readiness and effectiveness in many ways. The soldiers in a fire team and squad must, without question, trust each other and have a mutual respect for each other. When interpersonal relationships occur within the small unit, the bond of trust will slowly become broken. Other soldiers may easily become jealous of the relationship and attempt to disrupt it. If the relationship fails, tension between the two could become hostile. This would destroy morale and lead them down a path of mistrust,

which would eventually lead to destruction of all teamwork within the unit. In a combat scenario this is not the ideal situation to be in.

The basic attraction between the different sexes cannot be overlooked. During long operations and deployments in remote sites, far from the field trains or BSA, inappropriate relations most likely will occur. This is not limited to peers, but to all ranks and superiors. Once again, this will lead to a breakdown in morale and possibly worse, sexual assault and misconduct.

There are many other issues that may arise as a result of females in direct combat roles. Long training events and combat operations with no facilities for personal hygiene could be a factor. Duel standards would have to be put in place for schools, such as Ranger School. The families and politicians of America would be faced with the fact that their daughters are engaged in direct combat situations as a combatant and not in a combat support role.

Many say allowing females to serve in direct combat roles would not change anything. In fact, with the current operation in Iraq, females are serving in combat support operations, engaging the enemy in direct contact and doing a great job. Just a few weeks ago, a female was awarded the Silver Star for her combat actions during an ambush.

Many would argue that females would bring added benefits to the unit, such as better organizational skills, planning and greater attention to detail. This alone could increase combat effectiveness. They would also argue that

not all males are able to meet the physical standards needed to be a rifleman, so why stifle the females that could? One of the biggest arguments is that many other countries, past and present, allow females in combat units. In some cases even leading large combat units into battle, and with much success.

In closing, females serving in combat infantry units would disrupt combat effectiveness, primarily due to the extreme physical demands of combat and interpersonal relations with their male counterparts. For these reasons alone, we should not place females in direct combat roles such as the infantry.