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USASMA, Class R11

6 November 2005

Allowing Women in Combat Arms?

Is allowing women to serve in combat arms ethical? Today all MOS' are open to females with the exception of five Infantry, Armor, Cannon Field Artillery, Short -Range Air Defense Artillery, and Special Forces. With the ongoing War on Terrorism the Department of the Army is again looking at the structure of its fighting force. Women became an increasingly important part of the Army after the creation of the all-volunteer force in 1973. Women proved that they are essential to the success of our military, during the Persian Gulf War, approximately 40,000 women served, representing seven percent of the total deployed force primarily in combat service support and medical roles. In January of 1994 the Secretary of Defense lifted the "Risk Rule" which prevented women from serving in units which had a high probability of engaging in combat, partly in recognition of the fact that there is no safe place on the battlefield. According to a 1997 poll conducted by Time magazine, 67 percent of Americans polled supported the statement that women should be allowed to serve in combat roles. With today's Global War on Terrorism, would the results be the same? The questions still remains are women mentally and physically capable of serving in combat arms MOS'? Some of the concerns the Army must address are:

How will America's society react to their mothers and daughters fighting and dying in War? We as a society have accepted the realism of war, Soldiers die. But are we ready to allow women to die while engaging the enemy with direct and indirect fire? Will the Army have to lower the qualifications for entrance into combat arms MOS'? Although not all males qualify for combat arms jobs, should we allow our fighting force to lower their standards to meet gender goals? We also need to look at the potential for pregnancy. By allowing females in combat arms MOS' there lays a potential for an essential member of a gun crew or squad leader to become pregnant and become non-deployable. How will this affect the readiness of our units? Lastly, would current combat arms units give females equal treatment? These are just a few questions that arise when giving this ethical problem consideration. FM 22-100 outlines four steps to ethical reasoning:

1. Define the problem
2. Know the relevant rules
3. Develop and evaluate courses of action
4. Choose the course of action that best represents Army values

The ethical problem is clear, should women be allowed to serve in combat arms? The rules are there is no safe area on the battlefield. Allowing women to serve in combat arms would require definite changes in attitude. The Army must choose a course of action that reflects fairness and will provide its combat arms units with the mindset military units, not individual Soldiers, win wars. We must take into consideration not all females, if given the opportunity would choose to be in a combat arms MOS. I have personal experience with women serving as Field Artillery Surveyors and Metrological

Specialist, both MOS' in the 13 series career management field. These Soldiers were utilized as training NCOs rather than serving in their MOS. Is this fair to the females Soldier and their male counterparts?

I leave you with this quote from General J. Lawton Collins the former Army Chief of Staff. "I am confident that an Army of strong individuals, held together by a sound disciplined based respect for personal initiative and rights and dignity, will never fail this nation in a time of need". I am confident that in the near future women will fill vital roles in combat arms units and prove that they are just as capable as men in protecting and defending the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign, and domestic.

Works Cited