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# AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

## STUDENT REPORT

Women In Combat  
 Pros and Cons

Major Thomas H. Cecil 88-0490

*"insights into tomorrow"*

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REPORT NUMBER 88-0490

TITLE WOMEN IN COMBAT--PROS AND CONS

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of  
requirements for graduation.

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE  
AIR UNIVERSITY  
MAXWELL AFB, AL 36112

**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED		1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS		
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY		3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT STATEMENT "A" Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.		
2b. DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE				
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) 88-0490		5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)		
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION ACSC/EDC	6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION		
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Maxwell AFB AL 36112-5542		7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION	8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER		
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS		
		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO	PROJECT NO	TASK NO
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) WOMEN IN COMBAT--PROS AND CONS				
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Cecil, Thomas H., Major, USAF				
13a. TYPE OF REPORT	13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 1988 April	15. PAGE COUNT	
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION				
17. COSATI CODES		18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)		
FIELD	GROUP			SUB-GROUP
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) This report investigates the pros and cons of assigning military women to combatant roles considering basic American values. The military, social and political impacts are considered both in peacetime and wartime.				
20. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED		
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL ACSC/EDC Maxwell AFB AL 36112-5542		22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (205) 293-2483	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL	

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## PREFACE

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This topic was chosen with the express intent of using concepts taught at Air Command Staff College (ACSC) to analyze a real world problem. I was influenced by the entire ACSC curriculum and have cited specific textbooks that directly apply to this topic. I would especially like to thank Ch, Lt Col Dave Fahner for his helpful guidance.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Maj Cecil graduated from the University of Missouri in Columbia in 1972 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, a major in accounting, and a commission from ROTC. He entered active duty in the Air Force in 1973 and served in budget or accounting and finance offices at base, MAJCOM, and HQ USAF level. He holds a Masters of Arts in Management and Supervision from Central Michigan University and is a graduate of Squadron Officer School, Professional Military Comptroller School, and the National Security Management Program.

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Force will continue in peacetime to be supplanted with conscription during wartime. Assigning drafted women in combat could affect military power even more.

IV. Conclusions: Women's roles are determined by basic American values. As women's roles change to approach more equality with men so will their responsibilities, including the defense of their nation. The American people are free to keep or change their values concerning the role of women in combat. However, divisiveness over the role of women in the military can weaken military unit cohesion and our will to effectively maintain and use our military capability.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Part of our College mission is distribution of the students' problem solving products to DoD sponsors and other interested agencies to enhance insight into contemporary, defense related issues. While the College has accepted this product as meeting academic requirements for graduation, the views and opinions expressed or implied are solely those of the author and should not be construed as carrying official sanction.

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REPORT NUMBER 88-0490

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR THOMAS H. CECIL, USAF

TITLE WOMEN IN COMBAT--PROS AND CONS

I. Problem: Considering basic American values, what are the pros and cons of assigning military women to combatant roles?

II. Objective: Considering basic American values, investigate the military, social and political impact on military power of assigning military women to combatant roles. In peacetime how does our policy on this question affect military cohesion, the recruiting market, acceptance of draft registration, political support and willingness to spill blood. Investigate what the effect would be during wartime.

III. Discussion of Analysis: \*The role of women in society and the military is changing and this change could affect military power. Military power is a function of the perception of our military capability and our will to use that capability. Military capability may suffer if conflicting values adversely affect unit cohesion. This same conflict could affect the recruiting market and social acceptance of draft registration requirements. Policy concerning the role of women in combat could affect political support of the military and willingness to spill blood. This affects the perception of our will to use our military capability. The paper assumes an All Volunteer

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how change in basic American values concerning the role of women in our society and armed forces could affect our military power. First, military power will be defined. Next, examples will be provided to establish the change in the role of women. Then the question of what roles women should have will be differentiated from the question of what roles women are capable of. The last item of background will be a short disclosure of definitions and assumptions. Then the impact in time of peace of allowing women to serve in combatant roles will be investigated. The direct impact on military capability and the social and political support for a policy concerning this issue will be considered. Because the impact could change due to conscription during war, this scenario will also be considered. Finally, the paper will conclude that change in basic American values concerning the role of women does affect our military power.

### MILITARY POWER

Military power is a function of the perception of our military capability and our will to use that capability (2:31; 18:156; 19:45; 20:34,43; 26:para 1-3). Military capability is the ability of military personnel to use military equipment to destroy or neutralize an enemy. One determinant of military capability is military equipment. This paper is concerned about the other determinant of military capability, our military personnel.

Military capability depends upon military personnel knowing what to do, knowing how to do it, and being motivated. Unit cohesion is a very important determinant of military capability (1:45; 8:53-55; 9:--; 13:208-210; 17:--). Military personnel work in groups and are supported by groups. Teamwork is an essential determinant of group success.

The United States has serious political constraints to the use of military force. One very large constraint is the fact that our society places great value on human life and is able to hold political authorities in the administration and legislature to a strict accounting for any loss of life in military operations (15:79). Our Constitution's first amendment allows a powerful media to aid in this constraint against use of military

power. It also allows our allies and adversaries to observe the mood of the public and Congress and better calculate our willingness to use our military capability.

This paper will investigate how change in basic American values could affect both our military capability, with particular emphasis on unit cohesion, and our will to use that capability. Both our military capability and our political debate on whether to use it are observable.

### CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN

Although the role of women in our melting pot society is now pluralistic, our culture has evolved from a less divergent history. The role of women in society evolved slowly until the impact of modern wars and technology. The struggle for blacks to gain equality and civil rights inspired similar efforts on behalf of women. Exponential changes in the role of women have occurred this century.

The people who initially settled our country and their ancestors lived in a patriarchal society (16:13). The word *family* derives from the Latin word meaning domestic slave. The Roman head of household had absolute authority over his wife, children and slaves, his family (3:102). Around the thirteenth century wives began to form more partnership roles in agricultural, commercial, and artisan occupations (4:3). But this ended with the industrial revolution when women were forced into domestic service as wife and mother with no legal rights. "Her body, her services, her domicile, her children, and her earnings belonged to her husband" (4:5; 7:Ch 1).

To support our modern wars entire societies were mobilized. When men went off to fight women began to fill their jobs in the economy. Most of these roles changes were temporary but many new doors were being repeatedly opened. During our Civil War "women became nurses, seamstresses, teachers, clerks in government offices, and farm laborers" (4:6). Employment gains made in the necessity of WWI were soon lost in the Depression and then advanced even further in WWII when women were mobilized to "Release a Man" to fight (4:7; 12:25-39).

Technology further aided role changes after WWII. Labor saving devices and products and social services for the sick and elderly helped reduce the burden of domestic service. Childbearing became much safer and, with contraception, controllable (4:8,9).

The sexist treatment of women in the antislavery movement spawned a renaissance of thought concerning women's rights which culminated in the proposition of an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)

in 1972 with an 84 to 8 majority in the Senate and 354 to 24 majority in the House (6:121; 7:5). Although the ERA was three states short of adoption, 35 states did ratify the amendment (6:106). "At a convention in March 1971 the Intercollegiate Association of Women Students (IAWS) adopted a resolution expressing the view 'that the major issue concerning the ERA is the question of women's involvement with the draft'" (7:55; 5:249,351; 6:92; 12:4). In fact women have achieved the legal right to pursue almost any endeavor but military combat. Table 1 provides evidence that women have achieved equality in the number of bachelor's and master's degrees earned and are awarded an ever increasing percentage of doctorates and degrees in professional areas. Table 2 indicates that women continue to leave the home in ever increasing numbers to join the work force. In addition, the relative earnings of women are slowly approaching equality with men.

Values have been changing dramatically relative to the role of women in the military (13:13). Public Law 90-130 repealed the two percent ceiling of women. The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act required gender free promotion opportunities. The All-Volunteer Force (AVF) opened access to military jobs (29:v). As a result, the percentage of women in the military has grown from approximately one to ten percent in barely a decade (5:xiv; 28:327; 29:iii). The Air Force had the highest percentage of women, 12.1% as of September 30, 1986, and was directed by Congress in the FY 85 DOD Authorization Act that 19% of FY 87 and 22% of FY 88 enlistees must be women. The Air Force objected to rigid quotas and obtained relief for the FY 87 quota in the DOD Authorization Act for FY 87 (25:4). In sharp contrast to this forward movement toward equal opportunity for women has come a blunt reminder that women are not equal yet. When the draft registration was reinstated, Congress specifically exempted women, stating that "women should not be intentionally or routinely placed in combat positions in our military services" (5:359). The Supreme Court upheld this decision which was against the wishes of the President and had been ruled unconstitutional by a lower court (5: Ch 23).

In summary, our society does not have unanimous values concerning the role of women. Some women have remained in the home in the role of wife and mother. But more and more women are receiving advanced education, are entering the work force, and are achieving a vocational identity beyond wife and mother. The concept of equal opportunity was supported as a constitutional amendment by the vast majority of the federal and state legislatures. However a sufficient minority was able to block passage, in no small part because of the implications for military service.

## VALUES VERSUS CAPABILITY

Two reasons to include or exclude women from combat would be based either on values or the capability of women. Capability, both psychological and physical, can be measured. It can also be changed by re-conditioning and training. "A Chinese military strategist, Sun Tzu, wrote in 500 B.C. that even the palace courtesans could be turned into effective warriors if the right training were used" (10:75; 17:4). Lastly, job tasks can be designed to accommodate both the physical and mental abilities of the employee. For these reasons it may have been true that in the past women were not capable of combat. Their upbringing did not develop the psychological or physical attributes necessary to succeed in combat. Equipment and tactics required more brawn than brain.

As the role of women is changing more of our female youth are being imprinted with different expectations and are competing on the sports field, in the classroom, and in arenas off limits to their grandmothers (12:13). At the same time, military occupations are shifting emphasis from brawn to brain power as technology pervades our weapon systems (5:396).

The current exclusion of women from combat was based upon gender. Title 10, United States Code, prohibits assigning Air Force females to duty in aircraft engaged in combat missions. It also prohibits assigning Navy women to duty on vessels or in aircraft that are engaged in combat missions, or other than temporary duty on Navy vessels not expected to be assigned combat missions. Lastly, it provides the Secretary of the Army the authority to determine assignment policy for soldiers. Pursuant to that authority, a Combat Exclusion Policy was issued in 1977 preventing women from serving in Infantry, Armor, Cannon Field Artillery, Combat Engineer, or Low Altitude Air Defense Artillery units of a Battalion/Squadron or smaller size (27:6,7). The above Title 10 restrictions were the legacy of the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee in 1948 without public debate (5:395). This policy may be challenged if basic American values continue to change (24:--). Then roles would be determined by measurable tests instead of gender and a significant proportion of women may be as suitable for combat as men (6:15).

## ASSUMPTIONS AND DEFINITIONS

In addition to being pluralistic America is also polarized on some issues, including the role of women in combat (5:353). For the purposes of discussion those who are against women in combat will be identified as *traditionalists*. Their Judeo/Christian religious traditions and heritage support their belief in patriarchal rule over the family. The male is the

head of the household and his identity derives from an occupation used to support his family. The identity of the female derives from her primary role to support her husband and children. Employment outside the home is regrettable and secondary to domestic duties. Combat is directly opposed to a women's nurturing role and is wrong because of both values and perceived deficient capability.

On the other hand, those who disagree will be labeled as *nontraditionalists*. Roles are not determined by gender. Responsibilities as well as opportunities should be equal, including the right and duty to defend your country. Discrimination for employment should be based upon objective and measurable job standards, not on gender. Women and men should compete for education and employment opportunities without gender restrictions. A subset of this group is known as *feminist* and support equal opportunity to volunteer for all types of military service but oppose conscription (5:351; 12:4).

Finally, the scope of this paper will be limited to exploring possibilities under the assumption that conscription will not resume during peacetime and will resume during wartime.

TABLE 1

DEGREES CONFERRED

Earned Degrees Conferred - Percent of Women to Total  
(28: 146,148)

	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1984</u>
Bachelor's	35.2%	41.5%	49.1%
Master's	32.0%	39.7%	49.5%
Doctorates	10.2%	13.4%	33.6%
	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1984</u>
Medicine	5.5%	8.4%	28.2%
Dentistry	.8%	.9%	19.6%
Law	2.5%	5.4%	36.8%
Engineering	.4%	.8%	12.2%



TABLE 2

## INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

## Median Income of Year-Round Full-Time Workers (28:441)

	<u>1970</u>	<u>1984</u>
Male	\$9,184	\$24,004
Female	\$5,440	\$15,422
Female Percent	59%	64%

## Employment Status of the Noninstitutional Population 16 Years Old and Over (28:374)

	<u>1950</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1985</u>
Percent of Labor force that is Female	29%	37%	44%
Percent Not in Labor Force that are Female	84%	76%	68%

## Female Labor Force As Percent of Female Population (28:382)

<u>1940</u>	<u>1950</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1986</u>
27%	31%	35%	43%	51%	55%

## Chapter Two

### POLICY IMPACT IN PEACETIME

In peacetime our country relies on volunteers to serve in the military. Personnel are recruited, not drafted. This chapter will investigate what the impact would be during peacetime on our military capability if we changed our policy to allow women to serve in combat. Then the social acceptance of this policy will be considered. Finally, the political consequences of this policy will be discussed.

#### MILITARY CAPABILITY

Military personnel receive a wide range of compensation. Although many members are attracted to join the military by prospects of personal gain, especially in areas like training, job experience, and education; military members also value the respect, honor, and gratitude of their nation. Military personnel and the society from which they come share strong values concerning military service. One of these important values has always been that combat was a male activity. This value is currently embedded in law. War heroes are held as role models for our male youth. If women were allowed to serve in combat that would denigrate the profession for many male servicemen, especially combatants. It would offend their self-esteem and conflict with their perception of what makes a warrior. This lack of acceptance could result in dysfunctional prejudicial behavior toward women and possibly a decision by some men to separate from the service. Many feel that allowing women in combat units could stop required male bonding and promote nonmilitary attachments (7:Ch 7; 10:--; 12:--). This desired bonding excludes sexual relationships of either a heterosexual or homosexual nature. Some believe that this bonding would degenerate into sexual relationships if sailors aboard ships, soldiers on field maneuvers, personnel on remote assignments, etc., were sexually integrated. Spouses of military members recognize this danger. For instance, wives of missile launch officers objected to the sexual integration of Minuteman launch crews who work in pairs for long hours together in isolation for months at a time (21:--). All this would reduce unit cohesion which is required for the military to function effectively. It would also result in heavy economic costs, reducing efficiency as well.

In contrast, the prestige of female members would be greatly increased. The highest status, honor, and opportunity have always belonged to the combat forces of the military. In addition to the overall increase in all women's morale, the military would also be more effective and efficient by using the full talents of female members (5:253-255; 12:65-81). Currently, the combat exclusion policy limits the career fields and billets open to women. In the summer of 1987 the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services was particularly critical of Navy policies, indicating "women were stuck in dead end jobs that offered no career advancement" (22:--).

Despite long term savings that could accrue from not restricting the contributions of female military members, there would be a real economic cost to implement such a change. Policy and regulations would have to be rewritten. New standards and tests would have to be developed to classify recruits. Marketing, indoctrination and training programs would have to be revised. Personal equipment for women would have to be designed and stocked. Some tactics and job standards may require modifications. All these changes would require up front funding. If taken out of hide it would reduce readiness. If funded with incremental appropriations the burden would still be borne elsewhere. However, such costs would be an investment, one that either would or would not pay for itself over the long run.

#### SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

The greatest social impact of a policy change regarding women in combat would be on the recruiting market. The military vocation would lose its current sex appeal if neutered (12:181). The author believes that could drop interest among males, reduce male applicants, drive up recruiting costs and lower overall composite recruit quality. This would directly reduce military efficiency and effectiveness.

On the other hand, the status and opportunity of female members would greatly increase, making a career more appealing to women. That could spur interest among females, greatly increase female applicants, drive down recruiting costs and increase composite recruit quality.

Another significant impact of allowing women to serve in combat could be public reaction to changes in conscription laws. One could argue that there would be no rational reason to exempt women from registration if combat restrictions were abolished. This could generate opposition to registration by those nontraditionalist females who want to avoid any possibility of combat and those male and female traditionalists who believe it morally and practically wrong for women to serve as combatants. This opposition could be strong and result in civil disobedience

to registration laws and possibly result in termination of registration itself. Either prospect would be a strong signal to both friend and foe of a decline in both our military capability to mobilize and our will to maintain and use a strong military force. Either would reduce military power. On the other hand, some male nontraditionalist support for registration could increase because the perception of equity would increase.

#### POLITICAL REACTION

Finally, political reaction to policy concerning women in combat must be considered. This is an indirect form of the above mentioned social reaction since politicians must eventually support the wishes of their constituency in order to stay in office. Currently this issue is on the back burner. Before our current laws could be changed some catalyst would be required to generate majority support in Congress. On the one hand, such a required majority support would bode well for the success of the policy. On the other hand, because the issue is divisive, a strong minority of dissent could be ready to oppose the myriad of authorization and appropriation legislation needed to implement the policy. This type of obstruction, designed to prove the correctness of the minority position, would end up decreasing both the effectiveness and efficiency of our military. Even more dangerous would be the signals of weakness due to our lack of national cohesion to maintain and use a strong military. The values of traditionalists include the concept that men should protect their families from danger. Sending women to defend men is alien to their value system. Having women in combat units could make the traditionalist portion of our government more reluctant to spill blood. All this would weaken our military power.

## Chapter Three

### POLICY IMPACT IN WARTIME

As stated at the end of Chapter 1, this paper assumes that conscription will not resume during peacetime and will resume during wartime. If the author's assumption is correct then the impact of removing restrictions on women serving in combat could be very different in wartime than peacetime. This chapter will investigate that impact on military capability, consider the social reaction, and discuss the political consequences.

#### MILITARY CAPABILITY

In the author's opinion only strongly motivated women would volunteer for combat duty in peacetime. In a real shooting war large numbers of draftees and draft-motivated volunteers would prefer to stay away from combat duty. These nonvolunteer women would be even more unacceptable to traditional male military members than their truly motivated volunteer sisters. If the only women assigned to combat duty were volunteers then male nonvolunteers would demand similar treatment. Men readily notice when women do not pull their weight. For instance, men in Minuteman missile launch crews complained when segregated female crews failed to fulfill their fair share of crew duty (21:--). In a similar vein the Navy recognizes that "more women must enter nontraditional ratings or their increasing percentage of Navy end strength will adversely affect male sea-shore rotation... The rotation policy has been an irritant for many male sailors in the sea-intensive ratings because they spend such little time ashore" (22:--). In the author's opinion it would be difficult to rationalize declaring women fit to serve in combat but allowing them to decline the honor while at the same time forcing men to serve in combat against their will. It may be even more difficult to devise a fair method of exempting those truly not fit for combat duty. Regardless, in the author's opinion, military cohesion would suffer seriously if the services tried to conscript a large number of female nonvolunteers during wartime. The confusion and morale problems would seriously reduce military effectiveness and efficiency.

## SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

Conscription is about as popular with the public as taxes. Both are tolerated only when deemed truly necessary and everyone pulls their fair share. In all our previous wars, the male cohort alone has usually been larger than the total requirements resulting in selective rather than universal service. The fact that only a few are chosen produces a feeling of injustice. Only universal service would be considered fair, but if women were subject to conscription then the probability of selection would be lower for all. This movement away from universal service would only exacerbate the perception of unfairness even more (13:9). In addition, traditionalists would be totally opposed to forcing women to defend our country in combat. If accepting volunteer combatants is considered wrong in peacetime then forcing nonvolunteer women to serve in combat would be totally unacceptable (6:92).

Conscription in and of itself produces dysfunctional behavior. Some people negatively alter their life style just to avoid conscription. Draft eligibles enroll in college, get married and beget children, acquire a criminal record, leave the country, go underground and all other sorts of similar behavior to avoid getting drafted. Resentment of conscription became a focal point in the anti-Vietnam protests (12:85). An attempt to draft women might generate a lot of public opposition to conscription and produce similar dysfunctional behavior by women unwilling to join the military.

However, if women have achieved substantial equality with men in higher education and employment then men may be less willing to submit to a draft that women were exempt from. Although women have been mobilized in noncombat roles to support our past wars, most of their jobs and status were lost when the war ended and men returned home. Before the next war even starts, many men will have already have lost to women in competition for college admission, a good job, or some other opportunity that in the past was not open to women. Those men will probably expect women to have equal responsibility to accompany their equal rights (6:12-15; 13:13). In addition, many women in the armed forces may resent being removed from career fields or billets if a war starts. For example, the Coast Guard has 146 enlisted and 52 officer females serving on cutters, six of whom are commanding officers. During war the Coast Guard becomes part of the Navy and could be forced to replace these experienced women with less qualified males (23:--).

### POLITICAL REACTION

Congress is charged with the responsibility to raise armies. Congress would react to the divided sentiments of their constituents, some of whom would favor exempting women from conscription and combat and some of whom would demand equality. The issue would be settled by the voting power of the opposing interest groups and skill of their lobby. Even if the side that would draft women prevailed, the minority position might be able to exert considerable obstruction to the authorization and appropriation legislation necessary to prosecute a war with women combatants. Political tolerance for casualties might be a lot lower if losses included women. In the author's opinion the divisiveness of this issue would detract from our ability to negotiate national security interests from a position of strength. Lack of national political cohesion only encourages an enemy to prolong conflict.

## Chapter Four

### CONCLUSION

Our nation used to have a consensus that women should not serve in combat. The values used to recruit and motivate combatants have always reinforced the concept that combat was a male activity. This shared value on the role of women always facilitated efforts to man our armed forces.

In the future our nation may be able to form a strong consensus that women should serve in combat. If these values were shared by the military institution then each recruit would be tested and allowed to serve in whatever role that could use best the talent and capability each individual has. Such unrestricted use of any labor force should be more efficient and effective than one with unnecessary limitations.

Currently our nation does not have a consensus concerning the role of women in combat. The ERA had the support of a strong majority in Congress and state legislatures but did not pass. A primary factor in the debate over the ERA was whether women should serve in combat (5:249,351; 6:92; 7:55; 12:4).

This current lack of consensus does not serve our national interests. In the last decade women have composed an ever increasing proportion of our armed forces. This increase in the percentage of women causes two concerns. First, inhibitions about exposing an ever increasing proportion of one's armed forces to combat seems illogical to many. Secondly, as demonstrated in November 1987 at a meeting at F.E. Warren AFB of representatives of missile launch officers, male members want females to pull their fair share of military duties (21:--). Also, male sailors want equitable sea-shore rotations (22:--). But we continue to deny women equal opportunity to contribute by restricting them from the most important and rewarding mission of the military, combat. These restrictions might frustrate women and reduce the effectiveness and efficiency of the military if war ever does break out.

Eventually this restriction could be opposed by men. If women continue to achieve equal opportunity in civil society the day will come when they will be expected to assume equal responsibility also.

A lack of consensus could even be more detrimental if women were allowed to serve in combat. Without consensus military



cohesion could be affected. Allowing even volunteer women to serve in combat would be an anathema according to the values of most male combatants today. Obviously nonvolunteer women would be welcome less. This policy would be very harmful to military efficiency and effectiveness. Social reaction to drafting women could lead to dysfunctional behavior. Politicians would be even more reluctant to spill blood. The result of all this divisiveness would be weakened military power.

General consensus on issues as important as the role of women in the military would greatly strengthen our military power. Leaders in our country in a position to formulate and implement policy concerning the role of women in our armed forces must recognize that the military is a microcosm of society whose values concerning sex roles are in a state of change. The institutional values of the military must evolve to accommodate both our society at large and the ever increasing proportion of female members in the armed forces. Intransigence concerning this issue could cause significant problems. On the other hand, these leaders must also be sensitive to the large portion of society that still wants to exclude women from combat. A consensus on this emotional issue can not be forced but should be sought as we gradually expand opportunities to women. In the meantime divisiveness on this issue could reduce our capability, our will to use that capability and the perception of our allies and adversaries of our strength. Anything we can do to lessen this divisiveness will increase our military power.

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