

# THE HERITAGE LECTURES

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Experimentation  
In the Military

*By Elaine Donnelly*



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# Social Experimentation in the Military

By Elaine Donnelly

My subject today is national defense, one of the chief responsibilities of the federal government under the United States Constitution. As you know, Ronald Reagan won both elections as President because he stood for low taxes, less government, and national defenses strong enough to counter what he called the “evil empire.”

On the night that Ronald Reagan celebrated his first victory, over President Jimmy Carter, soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines serving on military bases around the world whooped and hollered and celebrated more than anyone else. The reason was that during the Carter Administration, men and women in uniform suffered a great deal from the effects of reduced defense spending, plus the burden of social experimentation that made their job more difficult and more dangerous.

Contrast that jubilant feeling with 1992, when Bill Clinton was elected President. Within days of his election—on Veterans Day, no less—the President-elect announced his intention to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military. It was the first of many times that the new President put political payoffs and ideology ahead of military considerations and showed his lack of understanding and respect for the realities of life in the armed forces.

Instead of putting the needs of the military first, this Administration has been yielding to demands that the armed forces pay any price, and carry any burden, to advance the career ambitions of a few.

That value judgment has consequences, and much of what I will talk to you about today flows from the basic, primary decision to put other considerations ahead of the primary needs of the military.

It's important to remember that as an institution, the armed forces are uniquely vulnerable to social experimentation. All of the uniformed services must follow orders in a chain of command from the President on down, without political dissent. People whose lives are affected by questionable policies are simply not free to defend their own interests.

At the present time, military people in uniform are facing two main problems:

- ❶ **What is being taken away from the armed forces**, because of severe budget cuts and misdirected priorities, and
- ❷ **What is being imposed on the military by liberal activists**, within the Pentagon and in the civilian world, in the name of “equal rights.”

Much has been said, here at Heritage and on the floor of Congress, about severe budget cuts that are beginning to “hollow out” the volunteer force. Despite the drawdown, deployments are still increasing, often at the behest of the United Nations.

But money alone cannot buy a strong national defense. Technology and hardware are important, but it would be a mistake to focus only on that.

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Wars are deterred, or fought, not by computers and weapons, but by people—young men and women who willingly volunteer to defend their country in spite of great risk and personal sacrifices. We owe these people the best equipment we can afford and a comfortable quality of life, but we must also avoid imposing unnecessary burdens on them that make military life more difficult or more dangerous.

At a time when the forces are drawing down but deployments are being stepped up, sound personnel policies are more important than ever. It is essential that Pentagon officials, both civilian and military, keep their priorities straight.

If a ship's captain turns the wheel off course only two degrees and keeps on going for a long time, he can wind up in the wrong ocean. Several years ago, the personnel policies that govern the military were wrenched off course by a powerful force known as "sexual politics."

The diversion from a steady course occurred in 1991, just prior to the infamous Tailhook convention in Las Vegas, which brought disgrace upon the entire Navy because of the misconduct of a few. In the aftermath of that scandal, and despite a full year's work by the Presidential Commission that studied the issue of women in the armed forces, objective discussion of women in combat became virtually impossible.

We now know that as bad as it was, the worst of Tailhook happened not in the fog of alcohol, but in the cold light of bureaucratic day. For one thing, a disastrous double standard was set in disciplinary matters—men were punished for sexual misconduct, but women were not.

Secondly, Representative Patricia Schroeder and her feminist friends at the Pentagon have used Tailhook—in the tradition of Anita Hill—to advance a political objective. The objective was to repeal the laws exempting women from combat obligations—on land, at sea, and in the air.

Navy Lieutenant Paula Coughlin, a central figure in the Tailhook incident, was one of several women who were allowed to push for repeal of the combat exemptions in the summer of 1991. She was also permitted to lobby Members of Congress while in uniform, despite the normal rules against such activity.

In the aftermath of Tailhook, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Frank Kelso reversed his stand on women in combat, and the entire issue was framed in terms of women's rights, not national defense. Never mind that Pentagon figures indicate that female officers and enlisted have been promoted at rates equal to or greater than men.

Logic cannot explain the political connection between Tailhook and the drive for women in combat. If violence against women is the problem, putting them in combat is not the answer. Proposing combat duty as the remedy for sexual harassment is like suggesting that street crime is wrong, but organized crime is okay.

Still, some people have been inclined to go along with the idea of women in combat as long as it is voluntary. There is no such thing as "voluntary" combat. The Pentagon has already conceded that if the combat exemptions are repealed, women will have to be assigned in or near combat on an *involuntary* basis.

Furthermore, if women are to be used in combat units, the exemption from Selective Service obligations will be challenged in court, as it was in 1980, when the American Civil Liberties Union challenged women's draft exemption on behalf of men. The Supreme Court ruled that since women are not used in combat, for which draftees are called, draft registration of women is not required.

But if the combat rules are changed, count on the ACLU to bring yet another case on behalf of men challenging women's exemptions from Selective Service registration. This time, they will probably win.

Some of the finest, most professional women in the country are serving in the armed forces today. Because women have always served their country well in noncombat support roles, and we are proud of the job they do, some people say they are inclined to go along with women in combat as long as the qualifying standards are equal.

Because of the unrelenting pressure of sexual politics, however, qualifying standards are simply *not* equal.

Recruiting quotas are forcing the lowering, gender-norming, or redefinition of qualification standards so that women will not fail. Gender-norming is a scoring technique that compensates for physical differences between men by "enhancing" the women's scores. With gender-normed scores in physical training events, an "A" grade for a woman is equivalent to a "D" grade for a man.

Instead of equal performance, equal effort sets the standard, which means that the word "qualified," as in "qualified to do the job," has no objective meaning. The reason is: battlefields are not gender-normed. We cannot assume that for men war is hell, but for women it will only be heck.

It may surprise you to know that there are no objective physical standards that must be met by recruits who apply for heavy-duty jobs, other than a minimal lifting test in the Air Force. An attempt was made by the Pentagon more than a decade ago to establish a system of objective standards, designed to rate the physical demands of each job and match individuals to each one. However, the system was never fully implemented because women had a harder time passing the tests.

An Army official appearing before the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces said that as many as 40 percent to 50 percent of enlisted women are assigned to jobs beyond their physical ability, and reassignment costs about \$16,000 in retraining costs.

The Presidential Commission compiled abundant evidence that physical strength differences between men and women are considerable. On average, women are known to have 40 percent to 50 percent less upper body strength than males and 25 percent to 30 percent less aerobic capacity—both of which are important for endurance in a combat environment.

We also know that the few women who can compete with men in the lowest percentile ratings cannot improve beyond that level. Men can improve a great deal, however, because of their advantage in muscle mass and size.

Recently, the Army has tried another way to get around these realities by reintroducing co-ed basic training, an experiment that was tried late in the Carter Administration and discontinued because of excessive injuries among the women and lack of challenge among the men.

The key to making co-ed basic training work, as it is now being implemented at Fort Jackson and Fort Leonard Wood, is to redefine "soldierization," take out most of the physical challenges, gender-norm the rest, and replace military concepts such as "cohesion" with a touchy-feely kind of group psychology that makes everyone *feel* good.

And yes, you must have an aggressive public relations campaign, playing to ill-informed reporters who think camouflage face paint is the key to combat readiness.

It may be difficult to understand why highly decorated generals and admirals who run the armed forces would allow standards to be redefined, gender-normed, and lowered for women. The answer, again, has to do with sexual politics—a technique that feminists use to substitute emotion and intimidation for rational debate.

For a visual picture of sexual politics in action, think back to last year, the spring of 1994. Staging a replay of their 1991 march in support of Anita Hill, Representative Patricia Schroeder and a dozen other liberal Congresswomen marched from the House to the Senate to protest the retirement of Admiral Frank Kelso with all four stars.

It didn't matter that Admiral Kelso had given those women everything they wanted as a peace offering for Tailhook. The Congresswomen's performance was so bizarre it should have qualified for a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The true objective of it was pure sexual politics and intimidation—not just against the hapless Admiral Kelso, but against any admiral or general who would dare stand in the way of the feminist agenda.

Sexual politics sparked another major controversy in the Navy a few months later, making it painfully obvious that anyone who holds military women to the same standard of achievement puts his own career at risk. The number two admiral in the Navy, Admiral Stanley Arthur, was nominated by President Clinton to become Commander in Chief Pacific (CINCPAC). But Admiral Arthur missed out on that promotion, and has recently retired, because he made the political mistake of standing by the principle that female aviators in training should be judged by a single standard.

The controversy began when a female helicopter pilot, who was not doing well in training, charged that she was getting low marks because of retaliation by her instructors after she had filed a successful sexual harassment complaint against one of them. She turned for help to then-Senator David Durenberger (R-MN), who called upon Admiral Arthur, one of the Navy's most distinguished aviators, to review her record.

Knowing that his promotion might be at risk, Admiral Arthur still maintained that she could not fly well enough to win her wings. Senator Durenberger put a hold on the Admiral's nomination, and the No. 1 man in the Navy, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jeremy Boorda, folded his cards and allowed the nomination to fail.

The worst part of the story was not the loss of a distinguished four-star Admiral. Rather, the worst of it was and is the lingering message that anyone who holds women to the same standard is putting his career at risk.

Admiral Boorda recently admitted publicly that the Admiral Arthur incident has been the biggest mistake of his career. Nevertheless, evidence is now mounting that even in the dangerous field of combat aviation, some women are simply not being allowed to fail.

Recently, the tragic story of Lieutenant Kara Hultgreen, the female pilot who was killed trying to land an F-14A, broke into the news once again. The real question is, will the Navy be candid and honest about what it is doing to achieve its goals for women in aviation? The perception, and perhaps the reality, of double standards in combat aviation goes beyond one female pilot, to an apparent pattern of special treatment that undermines personal integrity, morale, and the safety of everyone concerned.

The issue here is not women in combat, but the integrity of qualification standards and the selection process.



The question of high standards and equality of treatment has become even more important now that new policies forcing women to serve in or near land combat units were allowed to go into effect last October 1. Of course, the changes were not billed that way. The Pentagon's announcement focused on increased "career opportunities" in units previously closed to women.

The initial plan for women in land combat, as drawn up by civilians who will never see the inside of a fox hole, was leaked to my organization. We released it to the media, and a storm of controversy ensued which forced the Secretary of the Army to tear up the document.

A new version was then released, which leaves out some of the units that were supposed to be opened, such as combat engineering units, multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS), and special operations helicopters. Air cavalry helicopters remain on the open list, however, which—in the name of "consistency"—may lead to eventual repeal of all the land combat rules in incremental steps.

Never mind that air cavalry helicopters, which do reconnaissance in close tandem with land armor ahead of the front lines, are often shot down. The prevailing bureaucratic logic at work here is that since air cavalry troops end up fighting on the ground only part of the time, it's all right to put women there.

At the same time that land combat rules were redefined and partially repealed, something called the Defense Department Risk Rule was also repealed. This is extremely important because it means that women and young mothers in combat support positions will be sent, on an involuntary basis, much closer to the front lines.

The problem is that in or near close combat units, women don't have an equal opportunity to survive or to help fellow soldiers survive.

The military is unlike any civilian occupation, and unit strength and cohesion are crucial for survival and accomplishment of the mission. Contrary to the popular notion that wars are primarily fought on computer screens these days, soldiers must carry their food, water, ammunition, and weapons with them, under all terrain and weather conditions, for long periods of time. Soldiers can't send their equipment ahead via United Parcel Service.

In recent months, the armed forces' unprecedented social experiment has gathered steam. It is designed to prove feminist theories that men and women are interchangeable in all roles and that it makes no difference who does the soldiering and who does the mothering.

It is now becoming increasingly apparent that the experiment cannot go forward unless certain things happen that are bound to demoralize the military. Lowering physical standards is only part of it.

If you look up the definition of the word *demoralize* in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, you will find it has three meanings. The first is "To undermine confidence or morale." The second is "To disorder, or confuse." The third meaning is "To debase the morals of; to corrupt."

Social experimentation accelerates the demoralization of the military and promises to change the culture in disturbing ways. Plans to put women and mothers in or near combat units amount to an endorsement of violence against women. It signals that in our culture, men will no longer be raised and expected to defend and protect women. By any measure, this is a step backward for civilization, not a step forward.

