

June 14, 1991

## WOMEN IN COMBAT: WHY RUSH TO JUDGMENT?

### INTRODUCTION

Should America send women into combat? This question is again before Congress as part of the intense debate over a defense budget bill. At stake is a policy change that could affect millions of women and men, have major cultural implications and alter America's military readiness.

On June 18, the Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel will hold hearings on "the utilization of women in the military." Last month, without debate, an amendment by Patricia Schroeder, the Colorado Democrat, was added to the 1991 Defense Budget Authorization Bill in the House of Representatives. The amendment would repeal the ban on women in aircraft engaged in combat missions. If the bill that includes this provision becomes law, it would change military policy profoundly and have possibly wide-reaching effects. Among them:

- ◆ It would lead to the subjection of women to any renewal of a mandatory military draft. In 1981, the Supreme Court ruled women ineligible for the military draft on the grounds that the draft is for the purpose of raising combat personnel.<sup>1</sup> Removal of the combat exclusion would eliminate the reason for excluding women from the draft.

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<sup>1</sup> *Rostker v. Goldberg*, U.S. Supreme Court, June 25, 1981. The Court stated: "The fact that Congress and the Executive have decided that women should not serve in combat fully justified Congress in not authorizing their registration, since the purpose of registration is to develop a pool of potential combat troops." Cited in Ellen C. Collier, "Women in the Armed Forces," Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, May 6, 1991.

- ◆ It would almost certainly lead to assignment of women to all combat jobs, not just those aboard aircraft.
- ◆ It would give credibility to those groups that seek gender-blind government policies. For better or worse, the armed services are often on the cutting edge of social policy.

Since 1948, when Congress passed the Combat Exclusion Act, women have been barred from combat positions in the Air Force, Marines and Navy. The Army, although not covered by the act, maintains its own regulatory ban on women in combat roles.

Whatever the merits of the proposal to put women into combat positions, the issue is too important to be resolved without a full, open public debate. Recent statements and actions indicate, moreover, that military officials have not always addressed the issue with candor. In fact, cross-examination at the Virginia Military Institute trial in April in Roanoke, Virginia, revealed vast discrepancies between official pronouncements from United States military officials and actual conditions regarding the integration of women at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

**Data Needed.** With the Gulf war over, there is no compelling reason to rush to a decision on whether American women should be sent into combat. A General Accounting Office study of women's roles in Operation Desert Storm is not due until January. Congress should wait at least until then before addressing the issue.

Then Congress, too, must evaluate such vital information as how women affected and were affected by operations during the Gulf war and elsewhere. To obtain data for this, Congress should authorize an independent study of women's roles in the military, including projected costs and advantages or disadvantages associated with placing women in combat units. The study should focus on training standards, current attrition rates among officers and enlisted personnel, performance records, the effect of family policies, and projected manpower needs in light of current plans to reduce military forces.

The Schroeder Amendment would leave it up to the military to decide whether to include women in combat roles.<sup>2</sup> But it would be more appropriate and more in the American tradition for civilian authorities to make

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2 In a May 7 letter responding to inquiries from Senator John McCain, the Arizona Republican, Christopher Jehn, Undersecretary of Defense for Manpower, writes: "If current combat exclusion laws were repealed, the Department of Defense would be obligated to allow women to enter any career area for which they qualify. Conversely, in time of need the Department could utilize women in any career area for which they qualified." This would seem fair on the surface, but standards have been lowered or eliminated to accommodate women at the nation's service academies and in the armed services generally, so the concept of "qualified" may have to become elastic to meet social pressures rather than the needs of military preparedness.

Q This is a memorandum about cadet perceptions on quotas. Correct?

A That's right.

Q And one of the things it talks about down at the bottom under 2-B is the issue of proportional representation?

A Correct.

Q And it states in there that in an effort to achieve proportional representation, we may well place a lesser but fully qualified cadet ahead of another fully qualified cadet. Correct?

A That's what it says.

Q And this is a memorandum to the superintendent of West Point. Correct?

A It's by the current, by the then chief of staff, Colonel Derring.

Q Over on page two it gives some examples.

Q Some examples of some other impacts of the quota system, correct, specifically under paragraph two about engineer branching. Do you see that?

A Yes, but what quota system are you talking about?

Q Well, let's look at the specific issue that he addresses. I think that will be clear. He indicates in the last sentence of subparagraph two that, "Five of six women who went engineers stood lower in the class than any of their 107 male counterparts."

He says that probably contributes to the cadet perception of bias.

Does that help you with respect to your statement you were unaware of any quota system?

A No, because the Army sent to the Military Academy a set of quotas for each branch that has a gender difference, so there is a set of quotas, if you will, for engineers that are for men and a set of quotas that are for women. And those quotas have got to be met, and so when the women are going for the engineer branch quotas, they are being compared with the performance of women, and the men are going for the men. It has nothing to do with the Military Academy and it has nothing to do with any specific unit.

Q But in the judgement of Colonel Derring., at least, or Deering, excuse me, that may contribute to the perception of cadets, that there is some bias operating. Is that right?

A That's right.



## APPENDIX

*Following are excerpts from the transcript of proceedings in Civil Action No. 90-0126-R before The Honorable Jackson L. Kiser, Roanoke, Virginia, on April 8, 1991, in United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia, Roanoke Division. The excerpts are typed exactly as they appear in the testimony.*

*The witness (A) is Colonel Patrick Allen Toffler, Director, Office of Institutional Research, U.S. Military Academy, West Point.*

*The cross-examining attorney (Q) is William A. Clineburg, defending the Virginia Military Institute, et. al.*

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BY MR. CLINEBURG:

Q There is turnover every year in the cadet corps, correct, Colonel Toffler?

A Yes.

Q And because of that turnover, it's necessary to educate the incoming cadets about these physiological differences, and in your judgment the integration of women has been a success?

A That's right.

Q It's fair to say so far the cadets have not bought your argument?

A No, that's not not fair to say.

Q It's not true that there are studies which show that the male and female cadets at West Point believe that integration has not been a success?

A The current information we have comes from a survey that we do of first classmen just prior to graduation, and that survey indicates that there are substantial portions of the corps, both men and women, who do not view the integration of women as having been fully successful.

Q So, that's a yes answer?

A That's my answer.

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- ◆ Since dual standards for physical regimens are in effect at the service academies, will males and females be subject to dual standards in all the services?
- ◆ Of those single parents in Operation Desert Shield/Storm who had custody of their children, how many were mothers with young children?
- ◆ Did child care problems, including reassignment requests, affect morale or slow the deployment of troops?
- ◆ Did any problems result from quartering male and female troops in proximity with little personal privacy?
- ◆ How many complaints have been registered concerning sexual harassment, fraternization, assault or rape?
- ◆ How do enlistment and re-enlistment rates for men and women compare with those before Operation Desert Storm?
- ◆ How would the Schroeder Amendment affect the National Guard and reserves of the Air Force, Navy, Marines and Army?

Answers to these and other serious questions are essential before the nation decides whether to send women into combat. This is not an urgent matter requiring a quick decision. There is no emergency. On this issue, therefore, America should not rush to judgment.

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Elaine Donnelly of Donnelly Media Associates, author Brian Mitchell, Heritage research assistant John M. Slye and Heritage intern Debbie Goswami contributed to this study.

This is the sixth in a series of studies analyzing the impact of federal policies on American culture and cultural values.

*All Heritage Foundation papers are now available electronically to subscribers of the "NEXIS" on-line data retrieval service. The Heritage Foundation's Reports (HFRPTS) can be found in the OMNI, CURRNT, NWLTRS, and GVT group files of the NEXIS library and in the GOVT and OMNI group files of the GOVNWS library.*

1987 to February 21, 1991, some 342 women were enrolled in Canadian army combat units, and 79 graduated. More than half the graduates were radio operators. Of 102 women who enlisted in infantry training, only one graduated. That woman served her three-year mandatory term and recently left the army.<sup>29</sup>

Canada's five-year training program for fighter pilots has produced two female pilots, Harper said. No figures are available for training costs, although U.S. Air Force spokesmen report that it costs more than \$2 million to train a military pilot to fly an F-111D, and from \$1.4 million to \$2 million for seven other aircraft.<sup>30</sup> If women pilots were to drop out of the program because of pregnancies, it would prove very costly to taxpayers.

The other nations without combat exclusion laws or policies — Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway and Portugal — have not tested women in battle and have little probability of doing so.

## CONCLUSION

Putting women into combat roles would be a policy change with major cultural and military implications. If women become eligible for combat, then all women of draft age would be subject to conscription were the military draft renewed. For this reason alone, the American people are entitled to know the facts before any decision is made about allowing women in combat.

An open and thorough debate on this is essential. Congress needs to review all information available, including the General Accounting Office's forthcoming study on women's roles in Operation Desert Storm. In addition, an independent study of the effects of current policies regarding women in the military should be conducted because the military has not always been candid about this topic.

In any independent study, at least several questions need to be answered:

- ◆ Would combat roles for women be optional or assigned? If optional, would combat assignments for men also be optional?
- ◆ Is there an objective monitoring process to determine whether allowing women in combat would aid or hinder military effectiveness?
- ◆ If all laws and regulations against women in combat are repealed, will there be any reason for female soldiers to believe that they will not be subject to combat roles in any theater on an equal basis with men?

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> "Representative Officer Aircrew Training Costs," U.S. Air Force document AFR 173-13 Table A34-1, figures in 1989 dollars. Also, telephone interview with United States Air Force Air Training Command Public Affairs Office, Randolph Air Force Base, Randolph, Texas, June 10, 1991.

historian Edward N. Luttwak of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, who has written a book about the Israeli military: "Men moved to protect the women members of the unit instead of carrying out the mission of the unit."<sup>23</sup> Luttwak adds that women are integrated into the Israeli military at many levels, and conduct most of the training. Women also serve in the Mossad, Israel's elite counter-terrorist force. But women are excluded, Luttwak notes, from infantry and other combat positions based on "the pragmatic experience of 40 years."<sup>24</sup>

The Israelis also bar women from combat for cultural reasons. After the War of Liberation, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion said that placing women in combat violated the Jewish concept of womanhood and women's status as mothers.<sup>25</sup> At a Washington briefing this month, a senior Israeli military official said that even tentative experiments with women serving aboard missile-defense boats had failed miserably. Furthermore, he said, because of its cultural heritage, Israel "is not ready to pay the price of a woman being held hostage, a woman returning crippled."<sup>26</sup>

In hearings before the Military Personnel Subcommittee of the House Committee on Armed Services in November 1979, Brigadier General Andrew J. Gatsis, USA (retired), testified that Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan told him that during Israel's War of Liberation, "we had a constant fear of what the Arabs would do to our women if they captured them." The men, Dayan told Gatsis, "could not stand the psychological stress" of watching women being killed and captured. Gatsis also said that Dayan "felt that [having women in combat units] knocked down their combat effectiveness."<sup>27</sup>

### **Canada**

In Canada, combat training was opened to women in 1987 as part of CREW Trials (Combat Related Employment of Women). The Canadian Defense Ministry had planned to form an infantry unit with 40 men and 40 women and compare them with a unit of 80 men. The experiment was never completed because not enough females volunteered, according to Commander Judith Harper of the Canadian Defense Ministry in Ottawa.<sup>28</sup> From

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23 Telephone interview, June 10, 1991.

24 *Ibid.*

25 Interview with senior Israeli military official, June 12, 1991, Washington, D.C.

26 *Ibid.*

27 "Women in the Military," hearings before the Military Personnel Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, November 13-16, 1979 and February 11, 1980, pp. 281-282.

28 Telephone interview with Heritage Foundation researcher on June 7, 1991.

proved view of women in the military is presented to the American people. In so doing, it has fostered cynicism and resentment among military men....”<sup>18</sup>

5) Last October, the Committee on Women’s Issues, an advisory panel appointed by U.S. Naval Academy Superintendent Rear Admiral Virgil L. Hill Jr., issued a report criticizing the academy for not moving fast enough to accommodate women, who now make up 10 percent of the academy’s enrollment. Committee member Senator Barbara Mikulski, the Maryland Democrat, demanded “an attitude change” at the academy. The committee report, according to *The Washington Post*, calls for “immediate dismissal of senior officers who question the role of women in the military.”<sup>19</sup>

6) A U.S. Naval Academy Report, “The Assimilation of Women in the Brigade of Midshipmen,” presented to the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Military spring meeting in April calls for combatting the “widespread misperception that [the] academy’s mission is to produce warriors and only warriors,”<sup>20</sup> and states that officers who “foster the opinion that women should not be midshipmen should be relieved.”<sup>21</sup> The report also reports a “strong likelihood of backlash [from male midshipmen] as policy changes [are] implemented,” announces a “zero tolerance” policy against backlash, and reports that “there has been no backlash.”<sup>22</sup>

From these and many other examples, it is clear that the issue of women in combat has not been sufficiently and objectively explored.

## OTHER NATIONS’ EXPERIENCE

### Israel

The only reliable record of women in combat is provided by Israel, a nation whose policy is widely misunderstood. The popular conception is that Israeli women fight alongside men as equals. The truth is that although Israel drafts both women and men for military service, Israel has excluded women from combat units since 1950.

To be sure, female soldiers fought alongside male colleagues in Israel’s War of Liberation, which ended in 1948. Because of the problems that this created, Israeli women never again were sent into battle. Explains military

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18 Brian Mitchell, *Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military* (Regnery Gateway: Washington, D.C., 1989), p. 9.

19 Lisa Leff, “Sex Bias Study Takes Naval Academy to Task,” *The Washington Post*, October 10, 1990.

20 “The Assimilation of Women in the Brigade of Midshipmen,” United States Naval Academy, April 1991.

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*