



WOMEN IN COMBAT — TIME FOR A REVIEW

Social engineering can't trump the basic truths of human nature and necessities of realistic national defense.

Female Marines train for combat at Camp Lejeune in 1999 under simulated machine-gun fire.

By Elaine Donnelly

IN 1991, TWO EVENTS involving women in uniform changed the armed forces forever. One was Desert Storm, which deployed unprecedented numbers of women to the Persian Gulf under the watchful cameras of CNN. The other was the Tailhook scandal, involving besotted male aviators who allegedly abused female officers in a Las Vegas hotel corridor.

Female officers also engaged in "conduct unbecoming," but only the men were punished. Scores of careers were ruined, but critics demanded more. High-ranking admirals felt obligated to yield on matters of policy.

Schroeder's Harassment Cure. One of the most vocal feminists in Congress,

Rep. Patricia Schroeder, D-Colo., took advantage of Tailhook to push a paradoxical idea. Sexual harassment was a problem, she said, and putting women in combat was the solution.

Like most feminist theories, it made no sense. It suggested that abuse of women in a hotel corridor was wrong, but abuse of women at the hands of the enemy would be acceptable.

Many in Congress were reluctant to vote for a repeal of women's combat exemptions. So they voted to repeal the law exempting women from combat aviation and established a presidential commission to

find out what that would mean.

Following months of hearings, base visits and consultation with combat veterans and civilian experts, they recommended that women should continue to be exempt from most combat assignments. The commission based its decision on physical differences, but also expressed concern for American cultural values. Putting women in combat would signal acceptance, and even encouragement, of deliberate violence against women.

The commission adopted its recommendations the same day



Former prisoner of war Maj. Rhonda Lee Cornum after her release by the Iraqi government during Operation Desert Storm in 1991.



President Bush lost the election to Bill Clinton. The new administration ignored the recommendations and quickly began overturning established policy. Then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin

announced a new definition of "direct ground combat," which eliminated "risk of capture" as a factor limiting women's assignments. The Pentagon also dropped longstanding "risk rules" that exempted noncombatant women from assignments close to a battle zone.

Follow-up directives soon authorized the placement of women in hundreds of occupations in or near previously closed combat units. In the same year, with the encouragement of Tailhook-chastened admirals, Congress voted to repeal the law exempting women from long-term

deployments on most combat ships.

Military Panders to Radical Feminists. At that point, all lights were green for Pentagon feminists to impose their will on the military, even though their views had little in common with the majority of women serving. None of that mattered to Pentagon feminists, who promoted an even more far-reaching goal: changing the culture of the male-dominated military. One of the most prominent advocates of this idea was Duke

Law Professor Madeline Morris, who became a paid advisor to then-Secretary of the Army Togo D. West Jr.

Dr. Morris advocated treating male and female soldiers as wholly interchangeable beings. She called for the eradication of "masculinist" influences she considered conducive to rape and came up with a novel idea to reduce sexual tensions.

Morris suggested that sensitivity trainers could instill an "incest taboo," so that men and women would "bond" as brothers and sisters rather than sexual partners. The Pentagon's Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, or DACOWITS, a mostly civilian

"There is no gender-norming on the battlefield. No one would consider adopting the concept in nonlethal combat, such as the Army-Navy football game."

feminist advocacy group, continues to push for the same goals and more.

Assistant Army Secretary Sara Lister, who was later forced to resign because she called the Marines "extremists," did get the Army to take significant incremental steps in the wrong direction.

The current assignment of women to air cavalry helicopters, which routinely deploy with artillery and armored units, virtually guarantees that women will be shot down, killed or captured as prisoners of war. The policy was promoted as an equal rights triumph even though female casualties and prisoners would not have an equal opportunity to survive.

Coed Training II. West and Lister also reinstated co-ed basic training, which had been tried during the Carter administration. It failed because women suffered excessive injuries and men were not being challenged enough. Many tests have shown that even with extensive physical conditioning, women are 50-percent to 60-percent less strong and have about 25-percent to 30-percent less aerobic capacity for endurance than men.

To avoid another failure for co-ed basic training, civilian Army officials changed the regimen and redefined "success" in terms of women's morale. Early focus groups found that women's self-esteem improved by 14 points, while the men's morale sank by 17.

Co-ed basic training incorporated gender-normed tests, adjusted for physical differences and less-demanding requirements, such as map reading or first aid, and were assigned greater importance. Focus groups evaluated "cohesion," but only in terms of feelings and emotion, not combat readiness.

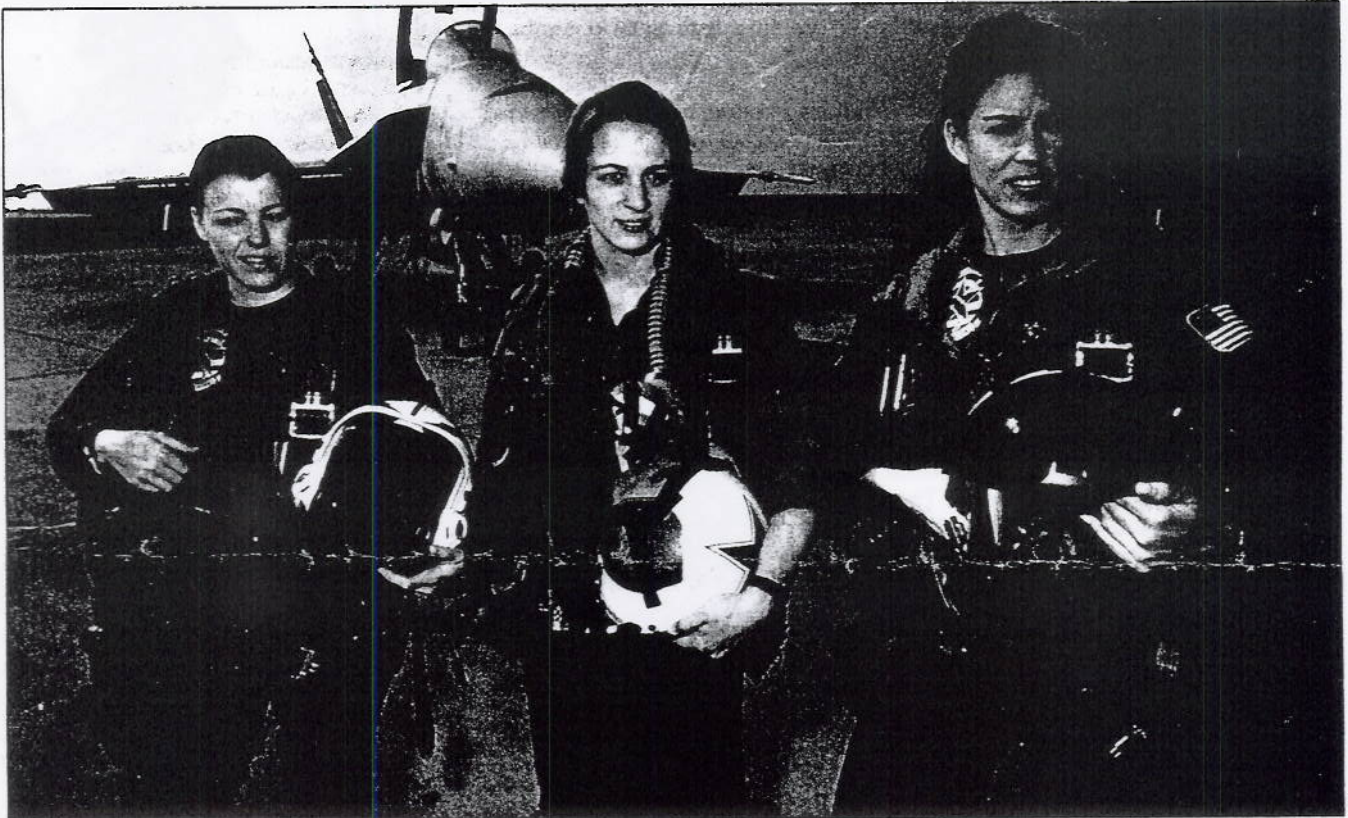
Gender-adjusted scores are considered more "fair" because they measure "equal effort," not results. There is no gender-norming on the battlefield. No one would consider adopting the concept in nonlethal combat, such as the Army-Navy football game.

A recent study on the culture of the military done by the Center for Strategic and International Studies found that only one-third of junior enlisted men believed women would pull their load in combat and 44 percent of junior enlisted women agreed. This is not a reflection of sexism, but honest concern about mission accomplishment and survival.

The 1990s version of gender-mixed training also introduced co-ed barracks,



Instructor PH1 Phil Goodrich stands by as Yeoman 3rd Class Aida Cabrera prepares to fire an M-14 rifle during a practice session aboard a U.S. Navy ship. The vessel is en route to the Middle East during Operation Desert Shield in 1991.



While the Navy has had female pilots since 1974, they have been assigned combat roles only since the repeal of the Combat Exclusion law in 1993. Today there are 246 female pilots in the Navy, 14 of whom fly FA-18 fighters like the pilots shown here.

but sexual tension undermined discipline. Instructors-turned-chaperones found it more difficult to instill skills and values necessary to prepare recruits for advanced training and adaptation to the military lifestyle.

In 1996, sex scandals involving drill sergeants and female trainees surfaced at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. Lurid reports emerged from all the services, except the Marine Corps, which continued to train genders separately. In many cases the sexual misconduct was consensual but exploitative, and always corrosive to good order and discipline.

Congress considered repealing co-ed basic training, but service chiefs already committed to the program testified that they did not want to reverse it. Official claims of "success," however, were contradicted by evidence of continuing misconduct and personnel loss.

Attrition Rates. According to a General Accounting Office report, 1998 rates for first-term (four-year) attrition escalated to 36 percent, with the Army's attrition rate highest at 39 percent. Losses among women averaged 45 percent, including 26 percent who separated due to pregnancy. By contrast, attrition in the Ma-

rine Corps continued a downward trend.

These problems have occurred not because of women, but because of Pentagon social engineers who ignore the power of sexuality. Collateral policies, such as rules to accommodate pregnant sailors on combatant ships, make military life more difficult or dangerous for everyone.

Women make good sailors, but the

"No one should have to die in pursuit of feminist fantasies."

evacuation rate for women serving on ships is about two-and-half times that of men — most often due to medical problems including pregnancy. During a recent deployment of the carrier Theodore Roosevelt, 45 of 300 women did not deploy or complete the cruise due to impending childbirth. Eleven of the 45 were flown off the ship while underway.

The unplanned loss of any sailor from a combat ship imposes considerable strain on crewmembers, especially in technical areas. Properly trained re-

placements are usually not available. The imposition of similar problems on submarines would be far worse.

Nevertheless, in a 1999 speech, Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig called the submarine force a "white, male bastion," and suggested that the silent service should plan for the assignment of women to submarines. The tax-funded DACOWITS, which disregards the views of civilian and military women who do not support the feminist agenda, endorsed the idea with a unanimous vote.

DACOWITS members showed little interest in a definitive report, kept under wraps since 1995, which should have torpedoed the idea for good. The report, issued by the Science Applications International Corporation, described the reality of life inside the cramped quarters of submarines.

On an attack submarine, it is standard operating procedure to "hot bunk" 40 percent of the crew. That means that three men must share two bunks in rotating 6-hour shifts. Desirable bunks (away from passageways) are strictly assigned by rank and/or seniority. Setting aside preferred accommodations for the exclusive use of women would be a serious blow to morale.

A drawing displayed in the SAIC report superimposed the living spaces of an attack sub on an area slightly wider but much shorter than the cabin of a civilian 747 aircraft. The report explained that the living area for more than 130 people is equivalent to a medium-size house, and human living space is about one-half to one-third of that available on a small surface ship. Piping and electrical modifications for gender-mixed crews may not be possible without lengthening the ship or removing combat equipment.

The SAIC report also raised serious concerns about the toxic effects of carbon monoxide and other atmospheric elements on a developing fetus. These elements, which are not harmful to adult sailors, cannot be eliminated from the closed environment of a submarine. Mandatory predeployment pregnancy tests would make sense, but feminists reject them as an infringement on women's rights.

Unplanned surfacings and hazardous helicopter evacuations, made necessary by more frequent medical and disciplinary problems, would endanger crewmembers and compromise the stealth mission of the submarine. If confronted by a pregnant submariner who is worried about birth defects in the middle of a 75-day deployment, what is a captain to do?

In the gender-integrated military, scenarios such as this are far more complicated than questions about what it would take to win the Cold War. Field commanders must deal with such issues every day, even as they struggle to accomplish missions that have increased 300 percent, with forces reduced by one-third to one-half.

Placating DACOWITS Will Cost Lives. The DACOWITS agenda is not to strengthen national defense, or even to protect the interests of the majority of military women who deserve the nation's support. The underlying goal is to satisfy feminist critics, put their theories to the ultimate test and try to elevate a few women to four-star rank, eligible to become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Never mind that lives might be needlessly lost and national security compromised in pursuit of careerist goals.

Denmark, Canada and the Netherlands have consciously chosen to advance careers at the expense of combat readiness, but these are not world



Marine Pvt. Claudia Schmitt enjoys a brief moment of relaxation during combat training at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

powers. They depend on the United States for military defense in a still-dangerous world.

Some Pentagon leaders have tried to stifle comments about what is going on. The Navy's policy on pregnancy forbids negative comments about unplanned losses, even if female crewmembers become nondeployable for months at a time. The policy offers medical, housing and educational benefits, regardless of marital status or number of pregnancies. As in the civilian world, if you accommodate and subsidize single parenthood, you get more of it.

Truth, it seems, is the first casualty of social engineering. Dissembling is demoralizing because it erodes the confidence service members must have in their leaders.

The February 2000 CSIS study found that only 35 percent of service men surveyed agreed with the statement: "When my service's senior leaders say something, you can believe it's true." Only 44 percent of junior officers expressed confidence that their superiors "have the will to make the tough, sometimes unpopular decisions that are in the best long-term interest of the service."

Congress must give permission to military leaders to make tough, some-

times controversial decisions. The next commander in chief must demand complete candor about what has happened in recent years and take immediate steps to end ill-advised social engineering.

In her new book "The Kinder, Gentler Military," Stephanie Gutmann sheds light on the consequences of "ungendered visions" in actual practice. The book describes scenes of women struggling to compete in a world of false equality. No one should have to die in pursuit of feminist fantasies.

The volunteer force is losing experienced people and recruiters are hard-pressed to meet their goals. This is the only military we have, and our national security depends on it. Some other institution can deal with gender wars, but the military must be prepared for real war.



Elaine Donnelly is president of the Center for Military Readiness and a former member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services.

Article design: Doug Rollison