
Defense Report

AUSA



Women In Combat?

Although military men are almost unanimously against it and current laws, regulations, and policies forbid it, there is considerable drive underway to permit women to fill combat jobs. Several bills before the Congress are so designed and passage of the Equal Rights Amendment would open the door.

Men who have experienced heavy combat are against it. They cite two main reasons, one psychological, and one physical.

The psychological reason could be summed up in the phrase, "Chivalry is not dead." "Women and children first" is still the order of the day during disasters, fires, and other emergencies. Many men still give their seats to women during rush hours. Chivalry carries over to the military as demonstrated during the Tet Offensive in Vietnam when women soldiers in non-combat jobs were suddenly in the front-lines. Commanders paid special attention to their security, involving time and resources which otherwise could have been devoted to fighting the enemy.

The physical reason is exemplified by a U.S. commander in Germany who recently complained that the Army has already gone too far in opening jobs to women. He cited the inability of most women truck drivers to change tires on heavy trucks, forcing men who had other jobs to take time off to fix the tires. His inference—if they can't do heavy work, how could they perform effectively on the battlefield?

Hanson Baldwin, the highly respected former military correspondent of the *New York Times*, writing in a Connecticut newspaper, carried this argument one step further. He pointed out that the credibility of deterrence of U.S. combat forces would be weakened. On reading this article, a senior Army general agreed, pointing out that, despite much publicity to the contrary, neither the Soviet or Israeli Armies use women in combat jobs.

However, as stated in a recent feature in the *Washington Post*, all of this discussion is premature. The answers to certain basic questions should be determined first.

Three of these questions seem obvious: (1) Do a sufficient number of physically qualified women want combat assignments? (2) If so, would it be cost-effective? (3) If so, would a combat unit composed of men and women be as combat-effective as present units?

Given today's excellent capacity to conduct the necessary research, the DOD or an equally qualified organization should be directed to conduct the necessary analyses, studies, and experiments. The results should point the way to the proper solution.