



WOMEN IN LAND COMBAT

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Selected Findings - 1992 Presidential Commission

Women in Land Combat

Following the first Persian Gulf War in 1990-91, Congress considered legislation that would permit women in the military to serve in combat units, starting with combatant aircraft. Following a Senate hearing in July 1991, Congress repealed women's exemptions from combat aviation, and established a \$4 million commission to conduct a study of what that would mean.

Then-President George H. W. Bush appointed fifteen members to serve on the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, which was charged to study all aspects of the issue of women in combat from March through November 1992. The panel gathered and published a wealth of information on all aspects of the issue by receiving testimony and detailed documents from representatives of the Department of Defense, all service communities, officers and enlisted men and women, family support professionals, combat veterans, religious and cultural leaders, training instructors, physiologists, military historians, and active duty men and women who spoke to commissioners during numerous field trips.

At the conclusion of the commission's fact finding process commissioners approved findings for publication with its official report, which was published on November 15, 1992. (ISBN0-02-881091-0) Among other things, a majority of commissioners voted against the assignment of women to combatant aircraft, land combat and special forces units, and most combatant ships. Congress did not have hearings to receive the commission's findings, and the incoming Clinton administration began assigning women to combat aircraft in April 1993.

The law exempting women from combatant ships was repealed in 1993. There is no statute specifically exempting women from land combat, but there are Department of Defense (DoD) regulations that have that effect, and a law requiring prior notice to Congress if the DoD wishes to change those rules.

The selected commission findings (CFs) below primarily focus on the issue of land combat units. Although they were adopted in 1992, most are still relevant to the issue of whether female soldiers should be assigned to land combat units today. Members of the commission also published an "Alternative Views" section in the Commission Report, which presented a consistent case against the assignment of women to combat units. The [Executive Summary](#) of that section is posted [here](#). For more background on current regulations regarding women in land combat, [please see the April 2003 edition of CMR Report](#).

Selected Findings of the 1992 Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces

COMBAT, COHESION, AND INVOLUNTARY SERVICE

The definition of combat is key to an understanding of the issue of women in combat.

1. Official definitions of combat for all the services make it clear that direct combat is more than the experience of being shot at or being in danger. All of the definitions stress physical proximity to and violent conflict with the enemy, combined with an inherent risk of capture in contested territory, waters, or airspace.

? The Department of Defense currently defines "combat mission" as "A task, together with the purpose, which clearly requires an individual unit, naval vessel or aircraft to individually or collectively seek out, reconnoiter and engage the enemy with the intent to suppress, neutralize, destroy or repeal that enemy." (CF 1.5)

? The Army definition adds: "Direct combat takes place while closing with enemy by fire, maneuver, or shock effect in order to destroy or capture, or while repelling assault by fire, close combat, or counterattack. " (CF 1.6)

? The Navy definition adds: "The normal defensive posture of all operating units is not included in this definition." (CF 1.7)

? The Air Force definition of aerial combat adds: "Delivery of munitions or other destructive material against an enemy, or aerial activity over hostile territory where enemy fire is expected and where risk of capture is substantial." (CF 1.8)

CMR Note: The element of "substantial risk of capture" was eliminated from the definition of close combat when revised regulations were set forth by then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin in 1994. For more details, [please see the April 2003 edition of CMR Report.](#)

2. In military history, personal accounts, and testimony before the Commission, repeated emphasis was on the extreme physical demands and violent nature of combat.

? "Closing" with the enemy often means traveling over difficult ground, under debilitating loads, while exposed to the harshest climatic and environmental conditions, with little or no personal privacy, under the duress of mortal danger. (CF 1.11)

? Physical contact with the enemy is a probable condition of combat and risk of capture is inherent at all times when in proximity to the enemy or conducting air or sea operations in contested airspace or waters. (CF 1.11)

? Modern weapons technology has made combat more lethal, not less so. War continues day and night, environmental hardships remain unchanged, and close coordination between cohesive units is essential for victory. (CF 1.12, 1.14)

3. Currently, women are barred by law from serving on combatant ships, except for temporary duty. Until recently, they were also barred from Air Force and Navy combatant aircraft. (CF 1.18)

? In 1991, the Air Force restriction (Title 10, USC 8549) was repealed. The Navy restriction (Title 10, USC 6015) was amended at the same time, removing the restriction on female aviation officers and authorizing their assignments to combatant ships as part of the air wing or other air element. (CF 1.18)

? The intent of Congress that women not be used in land combat has been implemented by various systems to determine which Army MOS's are most likely to involve direct combat with the enemy: (CF 1.18)

-- The Army uses a Direct Combat Position Coding (DCPC) System to determine the probability of engaging in direct combat for every position. According to AR 600-13, P1 indicates those positions to which women may not be assigned and P2 is used for all other positions. (CF 1.20)

-- The DOD Risk Rule, developed in 1988, is designed to reduce risk to women serving in non-combat units. (CF 1.16, 1.17)

The Army also cites Title 10, U.S.C. 3012 with regard to making assignment policies which exempt women from direct combat. (CF 1.19)

CMR Note: The DoD Risk Rule was repealed by then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin in 1994. For more details, [please see the April 2003 edition of CMR Report.](#)

4. Military service is substantially different than civilian employment, including police forces that preserve order close to home. (CF 1.31)

? Civilian society forbids employment discrimination, but because lives and combat missions might be put at risk by service members who cannot meet the demands of the battlefield, the military must be able to choose those most able to survive, fight and win. (Alt. Views, p. 44)

? The military service is not a corporation, and being a soldier, sailor or airman is more than just a job. While civilian workers operate on a "9 to 5" schedule, units in combat operate 24 hours-a-

day, seven-days-a-week.

? For the deployed American fighting man, there is no home and family waiting at the end of the day. The home is where the soldier stands to face the enemy. Good order and discipline are crucial for morale, survival and victory in battle.

? Demands upon service members include the surrendering of a great deal of personal freedom and identity, the obligation in many cases to deploy worldwide on short notice, and the ultimate risk of injury, capture or death in the line of duty.

? Civil society protects individual rights, but the military, which protects civil society, must be governed by different rules.

? Congress and the courts, in no less than seven major Supreme Court decisions, have held that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does not apply to the military profession. (*Alt. Views*, pp. 44-45)

5. Cohesion is the relationship that develops in a unit or group where

- a. members share common values and experiences
- b. individuals in the group conform to group norms and behavior in order to ensure group survival and goals
- c. members lose their personal identity in favor of a group identity
- d. members focus on group activities and goals
- e. unit members become totally dependent on each other for the completion of their mission or survival, and
- f. group members must meet all standards of performance and behavior in order not to threaten group survival. (*CF 2.5.1*)

? Cohesion can be negatively affected by the introduction of any element that detracts from the need for such key ingredients as mutual confidence, commonality of experience, and equitable treatment. (*CF 2.5.4*)

? There are no military studies concerning mixed-gender combat unit cohesion. However, some research indicates that unit cohesion could be affected by the introduction of women. (*CF 2.5.4*)

? Factors affecting cohesion would include: real or perceived inability of women to carry their weight without male assistance, a "zero privacy" environment on the battlefield, interference with male bonding, cultural values and the desire of men to protect women, inappropriate male/female relationships, and pregnancy--particularly when perceived as a way to escape from combat duty. (*CF 2.5.4*)

6. In combat training or in war, it is a mistake to focus on individual rights alone, for the basic military reason that each person's desires, interests or career aspirations are totally subordinated to the accomplishment of the military mission.

? The key question is not what is best for the individual, but what is best for the unit and the military as a whole.

? All units in a capable fighting force must operate cohesively and in harmony with other units. (*Alt, Views p. 44*)

7. There is no practical way that women could be assigned to combat units only on a voluntary basis. (*CF 4.13*)

? Under current policy, all men are subject to involuntary assignment, subject to the needs of the Army, in any position for which they are qualified. Repeal of combat rules would impose identical obligations on women. (*CF 4.7, 4.10, 4.13*)

? Once an individual signs an enlistment contract, laws governing military personnel apply to that individual. The document clearly informs an enlistee that changed laws will apply regardless of contract provisions. (*Navy Response, Q. 33*)

? Repeal of combat exemptions would also undermine any legal case that women should not be subjected to Selective Service registration based on the argument that men and women are not similarly situated. (*CF 4.3, 4.7*)

8. The primary standard to be used in reviewing military personnel policies should be military necessity, not equal opportunity.

? In testimony before the Commission, the case for repeal of the combat rules was most often framed as the "right" or "equal opportunity" of individuals to serve in all positions they desire regardless of military need. (*CF 1.68*)

? Career considerations, although important, should not take precedence over military necessity as the primary consideration in formulating personnel policies. (*Alt. Views, p. 45-46*)

GROUND COMBAT - SPECIAL FORCES

The Commission recommended that women be excluded from direct land combat units and positions, and that the existing service policies concerning direct land combat exclusions be codified. In a separate action, the Commission also recommended that Special Operations Forces remain closed to women, and that the DoD Risk Rule be retained.

Commissioners signing the Alternative Views section recommended that the Risk Rule be maintained for all the services, including the Navy, and that Army exclusion policies should continue to apply to multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) and field artillery units.

1. All branches of the Armed Forces play an important role in determining the outcome of ground combat, but the ground combat soldier faces unique challenges and demands normally not imposed on the soldier in combat support and combat service support roles.

? As defined by Title 10 U.S. Code Sec. 3062, the "Army shall be organized, trained and equipped primarily for prompt and sustained combat incident to operations on land."

? The Commission heard considerable testimony that despite technological advances, ground combat is no more refined, no less barbaric and no less physically demanding than it has been throughout history. (*Testimony of LTG Binford Peay, Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, 6 April. See Alt. Views, p. 62*)

? Combat veterans testified that the responsibility to actually engage the enemy in a life-and-death struggle is considerably different than the experience of being fired upon or in danger. (*Testimony of Sgt. Maj. Harold Overstreet, USMC, 26 June. See Alt. Views, p. 62*)

? A number of Army and Marine Desert Storm combat veterans said women should not be assigned to ground combat because the physiological requirements over time are extreme, and the group is only as good as its weakest member.

? VIII Airborne Corps infantry soldiers demonstrated the necessity of evacuating one another with a single-man "fireman's carry" if a fully-loaded fellow soldier is wounded while under fire. They said that other soldiers are needed to provide protective cover. (*Fort Bragg Trip Report, 16 June*)

2. The ground combatant relies heavily on his physical strength and stamina to survive, fight, and win. The Commission heard an abundance of expert testimony about the physical differences between men and women that can be summarized as follows:

? Women are shorter, have less muscle mass and weigh less than men, placing them at a distinct disadvantage when performing tasks requiring a high level of muscular strength and aerobic capacity, like ground combat. Female dynamic upper torso muscular strength is approximately 50-

60 percent that of males. (CF 2.1.1, 2.1.2)

? Female aerobic capacity is approximately 70-75 percent that of males. In terms of military significance, at the same marching velocity and carrying the same load, the average woman works at a higher percentage of her aerobic capacity. This means that women cannot carry as much as far as fast as men, and they are more susceptible to fatigue. (CF 2.1.3)

? In a 1988 study of Army recruits, women were found to be more vulnerable to exercise-induced injuries than men, with 2.13 times greater risk for lower extremity injuries, and 4.71 times greater risk for stress fractures. Men sustained 99 days of limited duty due to injury, while women incurred 481 days of limited duty. (CF 2.1.5)

? The experience of other countries shows little evidence that women are suited for ground combat. For example, of 103 women recruited for infantry training after Canada repealed its combat rules in 1989, only one woman succeeded in meeting the physical requirements necessary to complete the training. (CF 2.5.4B, 1.79; *International Trip Report, 16-25 September*)

3. In a test of ROTC cadets using the standard Army physical fitness test, it was found that the upper quintile of women achieved scores equivalent of the bottom quintile of men. (*Testimony of Lt. Col. William J. Gregor, USA Ret., Military Science Chair, University of Michigan; CF 1.39a*)

? Only 3.4% achieved a score equal to the male mean score. On the push-up test, only 7 percent of women could meet a score that was exceeded by 78 percent of the men. (CF 1.39c,d)

? Few women can meet the male mean standard. Men below the standard can improve their scores, whereas the women who have met the standard have already achieved a maximum level beyond which they cannot improve. (CF 1.39f)

? Age also makes a difference: A 20 to 30 year old woman has about the same aerobic capacity as a 50 year old man. Because women begin losing bone mass at an earlier age than men, and are more susceptible to orthopedic injuries, those initially selected for the combat arms would probably not survive to career-end. (CF 1.39h)

4. In the likely situation that women were unable to carry their full load without male assistance, unit morale and cohesion would suffer. (*Testimony of Staff Sgt. Barry Bell, USMC 7 August. See Alt. Views, p. 64*)

? Direct combat units have few, if any, personal comforts comparable to those available in support units. Lack of privacy in combat units could result in morale and cohesion problems when normal and widely accepted standards of personal modesty must routinely be sacrificed in wartime or peacetime training environments. (*Numerous witnesses*)

? Research shows that units lacking discipline and cohesion are more likely to suffer excess casualties and perhaps even defeat. (*Testimony of Dr. William Darryl Henderson, 26 June*)

5. Because of close quarters and related factors, the effect of inappropriate sexual relationships would be more serious in combat units.

? Even if some women are strong enough to handle the physical demands of combat, the introduction of factors such as sexual entanglements and jealousies--even if the women don't invite such attention-- would make the forward commander's job more difficult. (*Testimony of RADM Raymond C. Smith, Jr. USN, Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, 27 August*)

? As one soldier put it, "This is not Olympic diving. We do not get extra credit for adding an extra degree of difficulty." (*Testimony of Lt Col Stephen Smith, 7 August*)

? Sixty-four percent of military respondents who served in mixed gender units during Desert Shield/Storm indicated that there were incidents of sexual activity between men and women in their units. (CF 1. 69c, *Roper Military Poll, Q. 27*)

? Sixty-one percent of military respondents who served in Desert Shield/Storm indicated that there were incidents of sexual activity between men and women in their own unit and members of other units. (CF 169d *Roper Military Poll, Q. 29*)

6. A number of public and military surveys have found strong evidence that deployment of mothers in land combat units, implying a national acceptance of deliberate violence and brutality against women, is contrary to American cultural values, particularly when there is no military necessity to use women--much less mothers-in direct combat units. (CF 3.22, 3.23, 3.24, 3.25, 10. See *Alt. Views*, pp. 59-61)

? As with combat aviation, the risk of capture is a serious cultural and military issue. David Horowitz testified that future American presidents "will be under pressure to win a war in four days or lose the war at home." (*Testimony*, 6 August. See *Alt. Views*, pp. 59-60)

7. Indications are that deployability would be a major problem if women are subjected to ground combat.

? According to a 1992 GAO study, in some Army units 18 to 20 percent of female soldiers were non-deployable during Desert Shield/Storm. (CF 16)

? Pre-screening of reservists to avoid calling up those who could not deploy helped to minimize and mask the potential for non-deployability problems. (CF 17)

? Pregnant soldiers may separate voluntarily or be separated involuntarily whenever a pregnancy or parenthood interferes with military responsibilities. Pregnant soldiers are ineligible for deployment overseas. (CF 2.3.1, 2.3. JA, 2.3.1 B)

? In comparison with previous years, the Army reported significant increases in the numbers of voluntary and involuntary discharges during FY 90-91 (Desert Shield/Storm) for reasons of parenthood or pregnancy. (CF 1, 6)

? Because discharged soldiers are not counted among those called up for deployment, losses in the ranks do not show up in non-deployability figures, which were approximately 3 times as great for Army women (9.0) as for men (2.7) during Desert Shield/Storm. (*Army Non-Deployability Briefing*, Col. Terry Hulin, USA)

? Fifty-six percent of those who were deployed in Desert Shield/Desert Storm with mixed gender units reported that women in their unit became pregnant just prior to, or while deployed in the Gulf. Forty-one percent reported no women became pregnant. (CF 1.69b)

? Absences due to pregnancy would have a more negative effect on deployed combat units, particularly if the women are in leadership positions.

8. Several witnesses before the Commission testified that because armor, field artillery, multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) and combat engineer units are deployed and coordinated in close proximity to the infantry and other direct combat forces, it would be unwise to include women in those units unless all land forces were open to them. (*Testimony of Officers and Enlisted in Field Artillery*, 28 August)

? MAJ Ann F. Jameson, USA, who has been assigned to Pershing and Lance field artillery units, testified that she supports the current exclusion policy for MLRS units: "We have a system with the combat arms that is currently working, with male soldiers only in direct combat I personally don't feel that for the few that can and have proven themselves and that want to, the very few that want to, that we need to accommodate in the combat arms those few females and completely change our way of operation." (28 August)

? The overwhelming consensus of officers and enlisted men and women serving in field artillery units was that if the Commission advised against the use of women in ground combat, it should also recommend that the current exclusion governing MLRS units be continued. SFC Janice F. Murrell, USA, said that she didn't believe women belong in MLRS units, "...due to the fact that it is direct combat, as far as I am concerned, and I don't believe a large majority of the women want to be in those type of jobs."

9. Commanders of Special Operations Forces testified that because of unparalleled physical demands and forced intimacy, even in training, women would degrade the readiness, cohesion and effectiveness of their units. (*Special Operations Forces Panel*, 27 August)

10. Even though the Risk Rule is an imperfect standard, it served reasonably well during Desert Shield/Storm

in reflecting the intent of Congress that women not be involved in close combat. In the view of some witnesses, the Risk Rule should be more strictly enforced, not less so. (*Testimony of SFC Everett L. Baumgaertel, USA, Platoon Sergeant 6/27 Field Artillery (MLRS) 28 August*)

11. The placement of women in land combat units would undermine the principle on which women's exemption from Selective Service registration is based.

? In *Rostker v. Goldberg*, the Supreme Court determined that the purpose of the draft was to induct combat soldiers. Because women could not serve in those units, the government could exempt them from registering from the draft. (*CF 4.3*)

? Subjecting women to any kind of combat, particularly on land, invites predictable legal challenges with unforeseen and perhaps irreversible legal consequences. (*CF 4.7, 4.8 4.9*)

12. In the Commission's Roper poll of the military subgroup comprised of combat specialties from all services, 67% believe women should not be assigned to ground combat. (*CF 3.29*)

? The Marines are most strongly opposed to assigning women in ground combat (75 %); in the Army, 56 % were opposed. (*CF 3.17, Roper Question 16*)

? According to the Commission's survey of all known retired Flag Officers, 76 percent (attack helicopters) to 90 percent (infantry) opposed the assignment of women to the different ground combat specialties.

? Within the two Services with ground combat specialties, the figures were higher: between 74 percent and 92 percent of Army Generals surveyed opposed such assignments as did 90 percent to 99 percent of Marine Generals. (*Appendix D*)

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY VS. MILITARY NECESSITY

If the military were substantially the same as a civilian employer, a decision to promote equal opportunity as the primary goal would have been easy to make. Service members are encouraged to pursue opportunities and career enhancements in the Armed Forces, limited only by the needs and good of the Service. But when it comes to combat assignments, the needs of the military must take precedence over all other considerations, including the career prospects of individual members.

The military service is not a corporation, and being a soldier, sailor, airman or Marine is not just a job. Civil society protects individual rights, but the military which protects civil society, must be governed by different rules. The concept that "military necessity" takes precedence over "equal opportunity" has been upheld by the Supreme Court in no less than seven major decisions. (*See Alternative Views, p. 45*) Nothing learned about the experience of other countries makes a compelling argument that this primary concept should be reversed.

1. The Commission found that there is no current shortfall in military manpower, and no compelling legal reason to enact quotas and recruiting goals for women. (*CF 1.38*)

? Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which governs civilian employment rights, does not apply to the military. (*CF 1.32*)

? The Commission heard no evidence of serious or systematic discrimination against women serving in non-combat positions in the military.

? To the contrary, DOD figures show that the Armed Forces are promoting women officers and enlisted at similar or faster rates than men based on time in service at the time of promotion. (See tables indicating Time in Service (TIS) at Promotion during FY 1989, for both Officers and Enlisted Women in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force, pp. 30 and 73, "Military Women in the Department of Defense, Volume VIII, July 1990)

? In general, women are harder to recruit and leave the service at faster rates than men. (*CF 2.6.3C*)

? In answer to a question, an Army Recruiting Commander testified that the absence of quotas would not affect the readiness of the Army. (*Testimony of MGen Jack Wheeler, 14 July*)

2. Countries that have decided in recent years to integrate women into combat positions in the ground, naval and air forces have done so primarily for reasons of "equal opportunity," rather than "military necessity." (CF 1.71)

? In establishing equal opportunity as the primary consideration in formulating military personnel policies, countries such as Canada and Denmark have willingly accepted a significant tradeoff in terms of reduced combat effectiveness. (CF 1.104, 1.105, 1.106, 1.125, 1.129; *Canadian Trip Report, 28-31 July and International Trip Report, 16-25 September*)

3. Historically, those nations that have experienced or actually placed women in close combat situations; such as the Soviet Union, Germany and Israel, did so due during times of grave national emergency, when their very survival was at stake.

? After their national crises passed, these nations enacted policies barring women from combat positions. (CF 1.111 through 1.123, 1.98 through 1.103, and 1.80 through 1.91)

? Other than in mythology or in historically questionable accounts of lost civilizations, there is no credible evidence that any civilization has successfully deployed women in combat on an equal basis with men.

? Dr. Allan Carlson told the Commission:

"No significant human society since the dawn of historical record has ever, with any degree of success, intentionally used organized female soldiers in real extended combat, let alone forcibly conscripted its young women and young mothers and pressed them into combat positions.

"The possible few exceptions have been among peoples under great military or political stress, and they either disappeared from the stage of history or they quickly abandoned the approach. Viewed in historical terms, it would be an act of reckless hubris for this country now to go down that path." (13 July)

4. Commissioners who signed the Alternative Views section of the Commission Report noted that advocates of women in combat are asking the military to conduct an experiment meaningful only perilous wartime conditions. They also rejected the unstated but very real argument of some Commission witnesses that the military must pay any price and bear any burden to promote career opportunities for an ambitious few.

In concluding the Alternative Views Executive Summary, (p. 48) those who took a consistent stand against women in combat maintained that:

"Military policies must be based on actual experience and sound judgment, not doctrinaire notions of sexual equality unsupported by human experience and history. By necessity, the military must be free to pursue policies aimed at maximizing combat readiness, unit cohesion and military effectiveness.

"The Commission learned that assigning women to combat would adversely affect these critical components of a successful military. It would leave women exposed to the possibility of involuntary assignment to combat and conscription. Most importantly, it would overturn two centuries of settled law and military policy based on deeply held and commonly shared cultural assumptions defining how men should treat women. Lastly, the Commission learned the military does not need women in combat units.

"The Armed Forces should not assign women to combat."