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One Measure of Women in the Army . . . see page 50

Women in the Army:

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not purport to reflect the position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense or any other government office or agency.—Editor.

Do They Measure Up?

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The operational effectiveness of a military force depends upon a complex set of interrelated variables, none of which are more important than its people. Today, there is concern because of widespread perceptions that women represent a liability to the US Army's fighting capability. Specific concerns center on the lack of physical strength, pregnancy and excessive lost-time rates, sexual harassment and single parenthood. The author examines these areas of concern, draws some conclusions and proposes actions he sees necessary.

INTRODUCTION

SINCE 1970, when Congress ordered an end to the conscription of males, the US Army has faced serious recruiting problems.¹ Caught between conflicting requirements to maintain a credible global military deterrence, accept significant reductions and major demographic changes in its available manpower pool, and increase the service opportunities for its female members, the Army was forced to open many of its positions to women soldiers.²

The rapid introduction of females into what had traditionally been a predominantly male institution prompted intense debate on a wide range of issues related to the effect that women might have on operational readiness.³ On the one hand are those who contend, for socioeconomic reasons, that women have a right to the same employment opportunities and benefits as men.⁴ On the other hand are those who assert that, since the Army is principally an instrument of war, it must not be used for social experimentation to the degradation of its war-fighting capability.

As a result of the protracted debate, the lack of conclusive empirical data to support the differing views⁵ and the negative perceptions of women among the Army's

leadership,⁶ the Army imposed temporary numerical ceilings on the recruitment of females. Implicit in its action to study this issue, the Army is really asking a very fundamental question: Do women measure up?

Evaluating the impact of women on operational readiness is a difficult task which must be approached with care to avoid myriad pitfalls. Operational readiness is a complex equation consisting of numerous interacting variables in which women represent but one component of the "people" variable. Other variables include, but are not limited to, leadership, training, discipline, morale, esprit de corps, logistics and public support! Also compounding analytical difficulties, operational readiness must be viewed in the broader context of warfare, the conduct of which is both an art and a science and is thus given to subjective analysis.

Therefore, it is impossible to treat the title question, within the scope of this article, without major compromise. Consequently, the focus of this article will be limited to only those factors which have led to the Army's decision to study the impact of women on operational readiness. The most common perceptions of women will be reviewed and analyzed for validity, and those factors which continue to impede their integration into the force will be identified.

PERCEPTIONS: FACT AND FICTION

The most commonly held perceptions of women and those causing the greatest concern among the Army's leaders (because of the impact on operational readiness) relate to physical strength, pregnancy and lost-time rates, sexual harassment and single parenthood.⁷ Let us consider each of these perceptions and, where possible, separate fact from fiction.

Physical Strength and Stamina

General Lewis B. Hershey, former director of the Selective Service System, when asked about the possible use of women in the Armed Forces, remarked:

*There is no question but that women could do a lot of things in the military services. So could men in wheelchairs. But you couldn't expect the services to want a whole company of people in wheelchairs.*⁸

This statement perhaps says more about Hershey's preconceived bias as to the quality of women soldiers than it does about their actual physical characteristics. Nevertheless, it is instructive because it highlights a major problem which occurs whenever we deal with the issue of women in the military—that of sex-role stereotyping. We have been so culturally conditioned as to what constitutes proper vocational roles for men and women that it is difficult to be totally objective when we are asked to evaluate one another in nontraditional roles.⁹ We are often unaware that the operating bias in our value systems tend to make us disregard facts with which we disagree or to draw nonsupportable inferences from others with which we do.

In the instance cited, Hershey acknowledges the potential of women for effective military service in selected areas. How-

ever, he goes on to denigrate that potential by equating it to the expected performance level of severely handicapped men.

The truth, however, derived from numerous studies, confirms that men do possess greater physical capacity than women (see Table 1). Although the reasons for the dissimilarities are debatable as to whether they are genetically or culturally derived, fundamental structural and physiological differences exist in anthropometric, body composition and cardiorespiratory factors. Martin Binken and Shirley J. Bach in their book, *Women and the Military*, summarize these differences:

*Anthropometric and body composition differences—in size, muscle mass, bone mass, fat distribution, and the structure of elbow joints—favor men in strength, explosive power, speed, and throwing and jumping abilities. Cardiorespiratory difference in size of heart and lungs, oxygen content, oxygen uptake (volume of oxygen that can be extracted from inspired air), average hemoglobin content, body temperature, and sweat gland function—give men an advantage in physical endurance and heat tolerance.*¹⁰

Studies such as this sex-stereotyping bias to which I have previously alluded, together with observations from the field, have led many to conclude that women physically are incapable of performing in a military environment. I disagree with this assertion because it regards physical considerations as absolutes rather than but one of many factors which go to make up an effective, combat-ready soldier.

Size and Strength Are Relative

Assertions such as the one cited fail to recognize that, although our women are smaller than American males (see Table 2), they are, on the average, larger than

Physical Characteristics By Sex

Comparison of Physical Stature of 18-Year-Old Men and Women

Percent at or Exceeding the Measurement	Height (Feet and Inches)		Weight (Pounds)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
5	6 2	5 8	212	183
10	6 1	5 7	196	160
25	6	5 6	168	140
50	5 10	5 4	152	126
75	5 8	5 2	139	115
90	5 6	5 1	128	105
95	5 5	5	119	100

Source: *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, Health Resources Administration 76-1120, Supplement, National Center for Health Statistics, US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C., 22 June 1976.

Table 1

the men from many other countries—for example, Vietnam, India and Kampucha—which have fielded capable armies for many centuries. Secondly, it fails to account for the effect which proper training can have on reducing the strength differential between men and women. For example, during the 1976 Olympic Games at Montreal, American women recorded elapsed times in several events such as swimming (requiring speed, stamina and strength) which exceed the men's world record established in 1932. Kenneth A. Siegel, in *Army* magazine, said:

*Proper physical training can make a woman capable of doing physical labor required of any occupation. Women will react to danger as individuals: some will react well and others will not, and a lot of it will depend on what is expected of them by those around them and attitudes of their peers in their units.*¹¹

Analogies such as I have drawn here are risky because they oversimplify very complex situations which have many interdependent factors—any one of which might be decisive in influencing the outcome. However, my point is simply that size and strength considerations, although important, must be viewed in a larger context.

Women should not be compared physically to their male counterparts but, rather, to the task which they have been asked to perform. If they can physically accomplish the desired task to required standards, male-female comparisons are irrelevant.

Technological Considerations

If war were reduced to its most primitive form—hand-to-hand combat—then any commander with a preponderance of women in his force would probably be at a major disadvantage. However, in modern warfare, although hand-to-hand combat will still occur, it is much more likely that battlefield casualties will result from the use of weapons systems which do not necessarily presuppose the need for great strength or stamina.¹²

Years ago, the huge trucks that are now so much a part of today's highway scene were difficult to operate because they lacked power steering, power brakes and other mechanical assist conveniences. In those days, a woman would have found driving such a vehicle especially difficult. With the evolutionary redesign of these trucks to incorporate power steering and other technological innovations, women

Male-Female Size Comparison

Characteristic	Male	Advantage	Female	Advantage
Height	Taller	Greater lung volume, speed, power	Shorter	Quick rotary
Weight	Heavier	Throwing power	—	—
Muscle mass of total weight (percent)	Greater	Power, speed, strength	—	—
Body fat of total body weight (percent)	—	—	Greater	Buoyancy
Center of gravity	Higher	Rotary movement	Lower	Balance
Pelvis	Shallower, narrower	Running speed	—	—
Bi-iliac diameter (hips)	Narrower	Power production	Wider	Stability, childbirth
Bi-acromial diameter (shoulders)	Wider	Weight support production	Narrower	Flexibility
Chest girth	Greater	Thoracic cavity ventilation capacity	—	—
Trunk length	—	—	Relatively	Lower center of gravity
Leg length	Relatively longer	Acceleration, speed, power, greater kicking velocity	Relatively	Agility
Elbow joint	Arms parallel from shoulders	Leverage in throwing, supporting weight	—	—

Source: James A. Peterson, et al., *Summary Report on Project 60: A Comparison of Two Types of Physical Training Programs in the Performance of 16- to 18-Year Old Women*, US Military Academy, West Point, N.Y., 3 May 1976, Table I, pp 119-20.

Table 2

with less strength than men can now operate them equally as well.

Expanding this example to the military, I believe that women would make very capable tank crewmen if they were not restricted from such assignments by current Army policy.¹³ Although there are some components of the armor crewman's military occupational specialty (MOS), such as ammunition loading, which still require considerable strength to accomplish, future tank designs might be adopted with these factors in mind that would compensate accordingly.

I am not suggesting that we redesign all of the Army's weapons systems to accommodate our women soldiers. What I am saying is that machines, just as proper training, can negate the importance which some attach to great physical strength on the battlefield. Again, it is not a question of who has more strength, men or women, but, rather, do women have enough strength to do their jobs?

Lack of Physical Standards

Despite the strong feelings of many that women do not meet physical strength standards, the truth is that there are no such standards. Again, Binken and Bach say:

Obviously physical strength and endurance are required for effective performance in a variety of military jobs; yet physical standards have been neither well defined nor rigorously applied. The prevailing doctrine has assumed, based on several decades of experience, that individuals meeting minimum medical standards would also be able to acquire a level of physical fitness during basic military training that would qualify them for any job specialty. While physical fitness is not precisely defined, it is usually considered to encompass some combination of strength, endurance,

*balance, speed, agility, and power.*¹⁴

I believe that before one can say whether women measure up or not, the standard against which they are to be compared must be precisely defined. We must ensure that every MOS is analyzed to determine minimum acceptable physical criteria just as is currently the case for mental aptitude criteria. Once the most demanding physical component within an MOS has been identified, then both sexes desiring entry into the field would have to demonstrate that they are capable of achieving it. In this manner, groups would not be excluded by sex. Only those soldiers who were incapable of performing that particular job would be excluded.

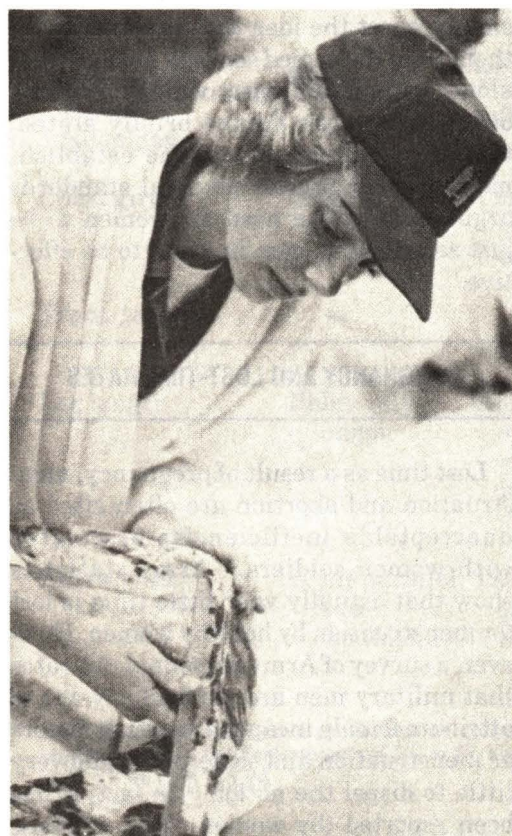
I do not dispute the evidence that men do possess significantly greater physical strength and stamina than do women. I simply reject the idea that would exclude them from the armed services on this basis alone, without an objective look at many other factors. As I have briefly stated, training, equipment and the establishment of more precise physical standards argue against the need for women to be just as strong as men in order to be effective.

PREGNANCY AND LOST-TIME RATES

Lost time as a result of pregnancy, menstruation and abortion are often cited as unacceptable inefficiencies associated with women soldiers.¹⁵ Army statistics show that actually very little time is lost for menstruation by healthy women. However, a survey of Army personnel indicates that military men are particularly apt to attribute female incapacity to such factors as menstruation and some women do very little to dispel the notion.¹⁶ In fact, it has been reported (by women) that, in some



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instances, females tend to exploit the exaggerated importance attached to it by their male supervisors and manage to avoid some duties on the basis of menstrual discomfort.¹⁷

Based on data collected in a 1974 National Health Interview Survey, civilian women lost an average of one-tenth of one day per year for menstrual reasons. There is little reason to feel that this rate would change dramatically for women soldiers.

Pregnancy, on the other hand, does account for a significant amount of lost time and does pose adverse implications for unit readiness.¹⁸ In a 1979 letter to the field, the Army summarized the extent and impact of pregnancy among its soldiers for that year as follows:

—Lost time for pregnancies which ended in abortion approximates that of a minor illness, and averages 10 to 12 days.

—Approximately 8% of all women soldiers become pregnant each year and 5.4% go to term and deliver a child.

—The average pregnancy carried to term results in 105 days of lost time or 29% of a man year.

—At any given time, 3.8% of women sol-



Soldiers



Soldiers

dieters can be expected to be pregnant or on postnatal convalescent leave.

—Forty percent of women giving birth on active duty request release from active duty after postnatal leave.¹⁹

As sobering as these statistics prove to be, they must be viewed in the overall context of all lost time for women. According to a Department of Defense study on the use of women in the military, women, despite pregnancy, lose only about half as much time as men. Furthermore, time lost by men because of desertion, alcoholism, disciplinary action and drug abuse tend to result in the periods of absenteeism similar to that incurred with female pregnancy.²⁰

Although I have provided rationale for the absence of women soldiers because of pregnancy, my remarks should not be construed as being supportive of their retention on active duty during this condition. At best, although it varies with each woman, one can assume that she will be incapable of performing the full range of duties expected. Also, extended absences place an additional burden on other members of the unit. Such absences contribute to widely held misperceptions that wom-



US Air Force

en do not pull their own weight.

In an equally disturbing tangential issue, approximately 2.4 percent (10,000 women and 8,000 men) of the Army's force were classified as single parents in Fiscal Year 1979.²¹ There is little room for debate on this issue. Army units which must absorb extended absences of its soldiers without replacement cannot perform their missions to peak efficiency.

I believe that pregnant women soldiers should be administratively discharged from the Army. Further, I believe single parents should be considered for similar action unless they can prove on a case-by-case basis that they pose no impairment to the unit's deployability.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is a relatively new term given for some not so new behavior. For some, it means verbal harassment with sexual overtones; to others, minor physical assault; to still others, the use of one's superior military position to coerce sexual favors from a subordinate. Whatever its individual interpretation, it generally involves behavior which often is considered criminal under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

The problem, in my opinion, to the extent it exists, is not a new one. It is one which has simply grown proportionately with the increased use of women in the force. Some have argued that this problem did not exist before the widespread introduction of women—implying that they are somehow responsible for it. I disagree. If this were so, it would be the same as holding the victim of a crime responsible for the immoral or illicit actions of his assailant. While the widespread introduction of women into previously all-male career

fields has increased the opportunity for male and female interaction, it in no way justifies sexual harassment by either party.

Further, considering the number of family members who accompany military sponsors to all parts of the globe, the problem will not go away simply because we remove the woman soldier. Rather, the focus of this aberrant social behavior would simply shift from one innocent victim to another, and so it must be stamped out. Considering the adverse impact which misconduct of any kind has on unit discipline, morale and overall efficiency, leaders must be sensitive to sexual harassment as a serious breach of acceptable conduct and be prepared to move decisively to punish confirmed abuses.

FACTORS AFFECTING FULL INTEGRATION

Women have fought with distinction in various countries of the world during periods of intense national crisis. Notable examples are the Israeli women during the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, Soviet women during World War II and Chinese women in numerous campaigns from the Taiping Rebellion in 1851 to the clash with the nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek.²²

In our own country, women have served no less commendably in those areas in which they have been afforded the opportunity. In fact, despite many pervasive negative perceptions which have worked against them, I could not find a single unit readiness report in the last nine years in which a commander had down-graded his readiness category because of the number of females assigned to the unit. It must be assumed that these units operated successfully and that their women soldiers

were contributing members.

With this background, why have women been excluded from certain military jobs for which they may have been mentally or physically qualified? I believe that cultural bias in all of its manifestations is the single most important factor. Some of its manifestations are sex stereotyping, paternalism, gender identification and the role of women in perpetuating the species.

Sex Stereotyping

As I mentioned earlier, it is most difficult to discount years of cultural conditioning to accept a radically new idea. For example, one author, who devoted 18 chapters of his book to recounting favorably the feats of martial women, gave a decidedly different view of his feelings in the epilogue. He said:

But I deplore all the variety of circumstances which take women into war. A women's place should be in bed and not the battlefield.

*It should be the natural function of women to stop men from fighting rather than aiding and abetting them in pursuing it.*²³

The ideas which our parents, teachers and authority figures impart to us as children regarding our role in life, and the tens of thousands of cultural phenomena which reinforce these basic concepts, make it difficult for males to accept females in such a nontraditional role as the military. It violates the gut-level feeling we have that somehow it just is not right. Combat has been viewed for centuries as essentially the province of men, and there is evidence to show that men form a more cohesive group when women are excluded.²⁴ This concept of male bonding has nothing whatever to do with a female's ability to participate successfully in the group's activities. It simply means that

her very presence tends to disrupt this commitment of the other males to that activity, leading to a less than optimum overall effort.

Paternalism

Paternalism, just as sex stereotyping, is a culturally derived behavior. It tends to influence male commanders to demand a lower level of performance from the female, as well as to worry inordinately about her being tortured, ravished or killed in combat. One author expressed it this way:

The idea of a woman being tortured as a prisoner of war is unbearable for many men because it somehow implies that they have failed in their role as protector.

*Women have not been kept out of combat because they are unqualified but because their presence makes men uncomfortable.*²⁵

This urge to protect the female results in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Little work is expected, so little work is delivered. Unfortunately, women soldiers are then made the scapegoat for failing to carry their fair share of the unit's load when, in fact, they delivered exactly what was demanded.

Gender Identification

Another major factor impeding the integration of women into the Army involves a concept which I shall refer to as gender identification. In our society, a women's gender identity is very stable and relatively easy to achieve. Her unique identity lies in her capacity to bear children, an accomplishment which defines, for all time and all audiences, the proof of her femininity.²⁶ For the male, however, gender identification, or the proof of masculinity, is much more difficult. The most observable, unique and honored role

which men have played in society has traditionally been that of a warrior.

However, during peacetime, it is difficult to carry out this gender-identifying role. During warfare, pursuing this objective can be considered hazardous at best. In more primitive cultures, males often acquire the status of manhood by the successful completion of some dangerous ritual or initiation rite such as killing a lion. However, there are few such analogous opportunities in our infinitely more complex society. Therefore, men resent the incursion of women into military roles because it destroys to some extent the single-gender uniqueness from which men derive their self-identification and feelings of masculinity.

Women Too Important

Unless the point is lost in these more abstract arguments, many people feel that women are simply too valuable a resource to be consumed in combat. In order for a society to survive, especially during the nuclear era, it requires at least one female to produce a single child per year. However, males are more expendable because a single male can father any number of children within that same year. Testifying before Congress on this issue, General Jacqueline Cochran said:

*If for no other reason than because women are the bearers of children, they should not be in combat. Imagine your daughter as a ground soldier sleeping in the fields and expected to do all the things that soldiers do! It represents to me an absolute horror!*²⁷

In summary, regardless of the capabilities which females bring to the military, they will always be rejected to some extent unless a way is found to eliminate years of culturally conditioned thinking on the part of both sexes.

CONCLUSIONS

As I have stated previously, operational readiness is a complex equation composed of many interdependent variables. It is simply not possible for one to assess the impact of women on operational readiness without conducting a comprehensive study as to the contribution and extent of interdependency of the other variables as well.

In this regard, if the Army's leadership chooses to ignore the mountain of evidence accumulated during the last nine years documenting the satisfactory performance of women soldiers, it must conduct a study of the entire readiness problem and not just use women as a convenient scapegoat for other shortcomings. I would also caution that, during any subsequent evaluation, the Army must objectively analyze female capabilities within the larger context of what the military task actually requires and avoid irrelevant comparisons with male soldiers. In doing so, every attempt should be made to understand and minimize the degree to which cultural conditioning affects the objectivity of analysis and the conclusions which ensue.

If the study determines that women are qualified mentally and physically to perform in combat positions, then they should be so assigned. Further, the negative perceptions which evolve in the Army at large should be dispelled via education. I strongly believe that healthy women, properly led, trained, equipped and motivated, are capable of filling any Army position, including those from which they are currently excluded. Finally, it must be noted that, in spite of all the negative perceptions to the contrary, the US Army is still one of the most powerful and lethal military forces ever fielded—and the

world's best hope for maintaining the blessings and prosperity of global peace. Women have helped make this achievement possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

My recommendations are that the Army should:

- Develop physical performance criteria for each MOS based upon the most demanding component tasks of each field.
- Establish a policy that would administratively eliminate from active duty

pregnant women soldiers who planned to carry the child to term and deliver.

- Establish a policy that would require single parents, officer and enlisted, to prove that they pose no problem to unit deployability and should not be administratively eliminated from active duty.
- Develop educational programs to sensitize the Army's leadership regarding sexual harassment and encourage decisive action in dealing with abuse.
- Develop educational programs to sensitize the Army's leadership that culturally produced attitude barriers prevent them from maximizing the potential use of women soldiers.

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