

# WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

AMERICAN WOMEN HAVE GONE TO WAR IN VARIOUS ROLES THROUGHOUT U.S. HISTORY. ONLY SINCE 1948, HOWEVER, HAVE WOMEN BEEN SLOWLY INTEGRATED INTO THE ARMED SERVICES. TODAY, A DEBATE CENTERS ON WHETHER WOMEN SHOULD BE IN DIRECT GROUND COMBAT.

From the American Revolution to the Spanish-American War, women served as nurses, laundry workers, cooks, couriers, spies, and saboteurs. A few actually fought in hand-to-hand combat, usually disguised as male soldiers. But nearly all women who participated in the nation's early wars served as civilians who were “with” but not “in” the military.

In the early 1900s, Congress established Army and Navy nurse corps. Although these were permanent organizations, they were only “attached” to the armed services, not a part of them.

During World War I, the Navy and Marine Corps recruited women to serve as uniformed clerks, radio operators, translators, and in other jobs with a military rank. The Army and Navy also made use of their female nurse corps, but still did not recognize them as part of the military.

Due to serious shortages of personnel in many non-combat jobs during World War II, Congress created the Women's Army Corps (WAC) whose members held full military status, but in an organization separate from the Army. Congress also authorized separate women's reserve units for the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.

More than 350,000 women volunteered to serve with the regular armed services in World War II. They held such jobs as nurses, clerks, truck drivers, mechanics, electricians, and auxiliary pilots. Their main job was to “Free a Man to



An engraving showing a woman loading a cannon during the American Revolution.

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Fight,” which was the slogan of many World War II recruitment posters.

America's World War II allies used women in combat roles. Britain drafted women and trained some to operate anti-aircraft guns. They were not, however, allowed to “pull the trigger.” In the Soviet Union, women took a direct part in fighting as snipers, machine-gunners, tank crew members, combat pilots, and anti-aircraft gunners who did pull the trigger.

## Integration of Women

After the war, Congress debated whether to make women a permanent part of the regular military. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, who had led the allied forces in Europe, favored this. “The women of America,” he said, “must share the responsibility for the security of this country in a future emergency as the women of England did in World War II.”

President Harry Truman signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in June 1948. This authorized the enlistment of women and commissioning of female officers in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and newly formed Air Force. The separate Women's Army Corps and female reserves of the other armed services continued for a while, but eventually were phased out.

The integration of women finally put them fully “in” the regular armed

forces — but with restrictions. Women could make up no more than 2 percent of the total military force. The number of female officers and the rank they could achieve were capped. Woman officers could hold no command authority over men. Nor could women be assigned to military aircraft and most Navy ships. Finally, women were prohibited from serving in combat.

During the Korean War, only female nurses and other medical personnel went to Korea itself. The rest of the women in the military served outside Korea, such as in Japan and the U.S.

As the draft became more unpopular during the Vietnam War, the armed forces stepped up their recruitment of women, who were excluded from conscription. The 2 percent cap was lifted, and female volunteers filled more military jobs than ever before, easing the need to draft more men.

In 1973, after the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam, Congress ended the draft and replaced it with an all-volunteer military. Immediately, the armed services saw the need to recruit more women to fill the jobs no longer being filled by drafted men. This proved to be a big turning point for women in the military.

In the early years of the all-volunteer military, the armed forces no longer kept females in segregated

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units, but females were far from equal to their male peers. Most of the restrictions of the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act still applied.

Women quickly proved they could do many military jobs previously held only by men. Outside the military, a growing women's movement in American society demanded more equal opportunity for women in the armed services.

During the 1970s, barriers to women within the military began to fall. Women were assigned to non-combat Navy ships and military aircraft. The armed services opened their advanced officer training schools to women. In 1976, West Point and the other service academies began admitting women. Women officers started to command both women and men.

The exclusion of women from combat experience, however, slowed their promotion to higher ranks.

### **'Direct Ground Combat'**

Since 1973, all males at age 18 must register with the Selective Service for a possible future draft. In 1981, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Rostker v. Goldberg* ruled that the law making women ineligible for the draft was constitutional. The court reasoned that a draft is designed to produce combat troops, and the law excluded women from combat.

In 1988, the Department of Defense announced the Risk Rule. This rule barred women from *non-combat* jobs that put them at risk of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire, or capture.

After Iraq's Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, the U.S. and a coalition of allies attacked his forces. During the Persian Gulf War, nearly 40,000 female military personnel were deployed to the area.

Women were still barred from combat and at-risk non-combat duty, but in this war everyone was at risk. All people in the wide area of military operations were constantly under the threat of ground-to-ground missiles fired by Iraqi forces. In fact, 13 American women in the U.S. armed forces were killed in the war.

After the Persian Gulf War, Congress repealed laws prohibiting women from serving on combat aircraft and combat Navy ships except submarines. Since 1993, all military assignments have been left to the discretion of the Department of Defense (DOD).

In 1994, the DOD canceled the Risk Rule and replaced it with the Ground Combat Exclusion Policy. This policy declared that qualified service members were eligible for all jobs "except that women shall be excluded from assignments to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground. . . ."

*Instead of 'frontlines' or attacks by large enemy armies, these wars had ambushes, roadside bombs, rocket grenade attacks, snipers, guerilla raids, and suicide bombers.*

The policy defined "direct ground combat" as "engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with hostile force's personnel." In effect, this barred women from "tip of the spear" military units, which includes the Army and Marine infantry, paratroopers, armor (tanks), most artillery, and special forces such as Navy SEALs and Army Rangers. In addition, the new policy stated that women could not be assigned to support jobs or units located close to direct combat units.

The 1994 Ground Combat Exclusion Policy reflected long-held American beliefs about women in the military. These beliefs included that female soldiers should be protected from battlefield dangers and capture by the enemy. Also, that as life-givers, women should not be trained to kill; combat was a man's job. Another

long-held belief was that women generally lacked the physical strength and stamina for combat.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq put into question all the female combat exclusions. Instead of "frontlines" or attacks by large enemy armies, these wars had ambushes, roadside bombs, rocket grenade attacks, snipers, guerilla raids, and suicide bombers.

Under the exclusion rules, women took such "non-combat" jobs as truck drivers, truck convoy guards, military police, base guards, medics, communications specialists, and intelligence officers. But female soldiers often found themselves in the middle of direct ground combat because the battlefield had changed so drastically.

Commanders often faced the dilemma of removing women soldiers from their needed positions in combat zones or violating the exclusion rules by keeping them there. For example, Army Rangers found that during village search operations, female soldiers were much more effective in searching Muslim women and their homes than male soldiers.

Women also flew helicopters and other aircraft in rescue and combat missions. Thus, in this new kind of warfare, women found themselves in all kinds of combat situations. As a reflection of the reality of combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, more than 150 military women had died along with many hundreds more wounded by 2013.

### **Sexual Assault**

As the integration of more women into previously all-male jobs and units increased, sexual assault cases within the military soared. Sexual assault includes rape and other forms of unwanted sexual contact.

Between October 2012 and June 2013, more than 3,500 sexual assault cases were officially reported in the armed services. This was a 50 percent increase over the same period the previous year. Only about 300 cases, however, went to a court-martial trial.

A separate Department of Defense report estimated that 26,000 members of the armed services, both men and

## Women in the U.S. Armed Forces

### Firsts for Women:

- Admitted to West Point and the other service academies in 1976.
- Fly combat aircraft in 1993.
- Serve aboard Navy combat ships in 1993.
- Assigned to Navy submarines in 2012.

Women Deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq (since Sept. 2001): 250,000+

Total Female Veterans (2013): 1,853,690

Women on Active Duty (Dec. 2013): 214,098 (14.6% of total in armed services)

### Percent of Female Active Duty Members by Service (2012):

Air Force:	19.0%
Navy:	16.7%
Army:	13.5%
Marine Corps:	7.0 %

*Do you think the percentage of women in the U.S. armed forces is too little, too much, or about right? Why?*

Sources: U.S. Department of Defense, World Almanac and Book of Facts 2014

women, were victims of sexual assault in 2012. Another DOD report released in 2013 revealed that 20 percent of all women in the military experienced unwanted sexual contact. Victims said they often did not report a sexual assault, fearing retaliation by their attacker or believing their commanding officer would do nothing.

In 2013, Congress passed legislation that attempted to address the sexual assault problem. Among other things, the law requires commanders to send all complaints of sexual assault to military criminal investigators and makes it a crime to retaliate against anyone reporting such a complaint.

A controversial measure to take the decision to prosecute sexual assault cases away from commanders and hand it over to military prosecutors failed to pass Congress. Opponents argued that removing such a decision from the military chain of command would weaken the authority of commanders over their troops.

## Women in Ground Combat

On January 24, 2013, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, acting on the unanimous recommendation of the chiefs of the armed services, announced the end of the Ground Combat Exclusion Policy. “Female service members,” Panetta said, “have faced the reality of combat, proven their willingness to fight, and, yes, to die to defend their fellow Americans.”

The new policy gave the military until January 2016 to integrate women into the direct ground combat jobs and “tip of the spear” units. It will still be possible to exclude women from certain jobs, but this will require the approval of the secretary of defense.

The decision to integrate women into direct ground combat jobs and units drew much criticism. Elaine Donnelly, president of the Center for Military Readiness, remarked that Congress should pass new legislation and “assign highest priority to military necessity” and not to “ideology that denies differences between men and women.”

### The Case For

1. Women have already been in direct ground combat in Afghanistan and Iraq. They have proven their ability to kill the enemy in such jobs as truck convoy machine gunners, base guards, and military police.
2. Women who physically qualify should not be denied ground combat service. In 2013, the first three women completed the Marine infantry training course. This included a 12-mile hike, carrying 85 pounds of gear. Besides, in a ground combat zone there are skills other than strength that females tend to be better at than males such as handling civilians.
3. Promotion in the military has always been facilitated by having

combat experience. Officers in the Army, Marines, and Special Forces today are overwhelmingly males largely due to the long exclusion of women from ground combat assignments. Even female West Point graduates have been slow to reach the top ranks of the Army due to this exclusion.

4. One cause of the sexual assault problem in the military is that some servicemen view service-women as inferior sex objects rather than warriors. When women achieve real equality by being integrated into ground combat units, they will gain more respect from their male peers and sexual assaults will decline.
5. Barring women from ground combat violates their constitutional right of “equal protection of the law.” Both men and women have a citizenship duty to defend their country.
6. Some countries such as Canada and Israel have opened more combat jobs to women than the U.S. Israel drafts women who make up half the lieutenants in its military forces. A law in 2000 granted equal opportunities in the military to women who qualify for the job.

### The Case Against

1. While female soldiers have defended themselves and others in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is a big difference between *defensive* and *offensive* combat. Offensive ground combat involves “tip of the spear” units like the Marine infantry that seeks and attacks the enemy under fire, sometimes in hand-to-hand combat. Our enemies do not intentionally weaken their forces under misguided policies of “gender equality” in the military.
2. Studies, comparing men and women in the military, show that most women possess less muscle strength, less lifting ability, lighter bones, slower marching speed, and are more prone to injuries. Few women will be able to complete the rigorous training courses for “tip of the spear” combat

units. Politicians and feminists will then pressure the military to lower the training standards for women, which will weaken our ground combat forces. Another problem is female soldiers who are pregnant when their units are called up for deployment will leave gaps in the ranks.

3. Within the military today, the main push for women in combat comes from female officers who want combat experience to get faster promotions to advance their careers. Among enlisted women in the military, surveys show that few of them want to become combat fighters like men.
4. The military should have expected sexual conflicts when mixing women into units dominated by men. The competition for the attention of women among males is only natural. But it is also a distraction from the military mission and causes a breakdown of unit trust. Moving women into direct ground combat units will make the sexual assault problem worse.
5. Integrating women into ground combat roles will result in the courts finding the registration and drafting of only men to be an unconstitutional violation of “equal protection of the law.” If women are drafted in the future, some will involuntarily be assigned to direct ground combat units.
6. No other country today has found it necessary to put women into di-



United States Air Force

Master Sgt. LaTanya Dinkins (foreground) commands the troops during the Air Force Basic Training graduation parade in 2010.

rect ground combat units like the U.S. Marine infantry and Navy SEALs. Even Israel limits women in combat to mainly border defense.

### DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. Do you think women should be in the military at all? Why or why not?
2. What do you think should be done to stop the soaring rise of sexual assault cases in the armed forces? Explain.
3. Under the current Department of Defense policy announced in 2013, direct ground combat jobs are open to women, although certain positions may still be closed to them by the secretary of defense. In the following list of jobs,

which do you think should be open and which closed to women today? Explain your choice in each case.

- a. Tank Crew Member
- b. Paratrooper
- c. Infantry Rifleman
- d. Explosive Ordinance Disposal Technician

### Further Reading

Biank, Tanya. *Undaunted: The Real Story of America's Servicewomen in Today's Military*. New York: NAL Caliber, 2013.

Henningfeld, Diane Andrews, ed. *Should Women Be Allowed in Combat in the U.S. Armed Forces?* Detroit, Mich.: Greenhaven Press, 2008.

## ACTIVITY

### Should Women Be in Direct Ground Combat?

Divide students into three groups to debate the question above.

1. Group 1 will take the affirmative and prepare arguments and evidence from the article to support women in direct ground combat.
2. Group 2 will take the negative and prepare arguments and evidence from the article to oppose women in ground combat.
3. Members on each side will have a chance to question the assertions made by their opponents after their presentation.
4. Group 3 will be the judges of the debate. They should review the 1994 Ground Combat Exclusion Policy and be prepared to ask both sides questions after their presentations.
5. After the debate, the judges will discuss the choices below and decide on one by majority vote. The judges must then explain the reasons for their decision.
  - A. Women should be in direct ground combat.
  - B. Women should not be in direct ground combat.
  - C. Women should be in direct ground combat but should be excluded from certain kinds of jobs named by the judges.

## Standards

### Chinese Civil War

**Common Core Standard RH.9-10.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

**Common Core Standard WHST.9-10.9:** Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**Common Core Standard SL.9-10.1:** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (a.) Come to discussions prepared having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

**National High School World History Standard 38:** Understands reform, revolution, and social change in the world economy of the early 20th century. (7) Understands events and ideas that led to China's revolutionary movements in the early 20th century (e.g., social and cultural conditions in China that led to the New Culture, or May Fourth movement; the four points of Sun Yat-sen's Manifesto for the Revolutionary Alliance [Tong Meng Hui] and to whom these revolutionary goals appealed).

**National High School World History Standard 40:** Understands the search for peace and stability throughout the world in the 1920s and 1930s. (9) Understands elements of social and political change in China in the early 20th century (e.g., which populations supported the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party, and how the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s changed viewpoints regarding these two parties; how Mao Zedong adapted Marxism to Chinese needs and how he viewed the peasantry as a revolutionary force; the goals and outcomes of the three major revolutions in China in the first half of the century).

**National High School World History Standard 43:** Understands how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up. (6) Understands factors that influenced political conditions in China after World War II (e.g., how much of the Communist success in the Chinese civil war was the result of Mao Zedong's leadership or Jiang Jieshi's lack of leadership, why rifts developed in the relationships between the U.S.S.R. and China in spite of the common bond of Communist-led government).

**California History-Social Science Standard 10.4:** Students analyze patterns of global change in the era of New Imperialism in at least two of the following regions or countries: Africa, Southeast Asia, China, India, Latin America, and the Philippines. (4) Describe the independence struggles of the colonized regions of the world, including the roles of leaders, such as Sun Yat-sen in China, and the roles of ideology and religion.

**California History-Social Science Standard 10.9:** Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world. (4) Analyze the Chinese Civil War, the rise of Mao Zedong, and the subsequent political and economic upheavals in China . . . .

### Cold War

**Common Core Standard RH.11-12.1:** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

**Common Core Standard RH.11-12.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text . . . .

**Common Core Standard RH.11-12.3:** Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

**National High School U.S. History Standard 27:** Understands how the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics. (1) Understands U. S. foreign policy from the Truman administration to the Johnson administration (e.g., . . . Kennedy's response to the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis; how the Korean War affected the premises of U. S. foreign policy; . . . . (4) Understands factors that contributed to the development of the Cold War . . . .

**National High School U.S. History Standard 30:** Understands developments in foreign policy and domestic politics between the Nixon and Clinton presidencies. (3) Understands the impact of the Reagan presidency on relations with other countries (e.g., . . . Reagan's view of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" and how that shaped defense policy). . . . (5) Understands the influence of U.S. foreign policy on international events from Nixon to Clinton . . . .)

**California History-Social Science Standard 10.9:** Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world. (1) Compare the economic and military power shifts caused by the war, including the Yalta Pact, the development of nuclear weapons, Soviet control over Eastern European nations . . . (2) Analyze the causes of the Cold War, with the free world on one side and Soviet client states on the other . . . (3) Understand the importance of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which established the pattern for America's postwar policy of supplying economic and military aid to prevent the spread of Communism and the resulting economic and political competition in arenas such as Southeast Asia (i.e., the Korean War, Vietnam War), Cuba, and Africa. (7) Analyze the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union . . . .

**California History-Social Science Standard 11.9:** Students analyze U. S. foreign policy since World War II. (2) Understand the role of military alliances, including NATO . . . , in deterring communist aggression and maintaining security during the Cold War. (3) Trace the origins and geopolitical consequences . . . of the Cold War and containment policy, including the following: . . . The Truman Doctrine, The Berlin Blockade, The Korean War, The Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis, . . . The Vietnam War. . . . (5) Analyze the role of the Reagan administration and other factors in the victory of the West in the Cold War.

### Women in the Military

**Common Core Standard RH.11-12.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

**Common Core Standard SL.11-12.4:** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning . . . .

**Common Core Standard RH.11-12.3:** Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

**Common Core Standard W.11-12.9:** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**National High School U.S. History Standard 29:** Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties. (2) Understands conflicting perspectives on different issues addressed by the women's rights movement. . . .

**National High School U.S. History Standard 31:** Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States. (5) Understands major contemporary social issues and the groups involved. . . .

**National High School Civics Standard 21:** Understands the formation and implementation of public policy. (4) Understands why agreement may be difficult or impossible on issues . . . because of conflicts about values, principles, and interests.

**California History-Social Science Standard 11.10:** Students Analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights. (7) Analyze . . . differing perspectives on the roles of women.

**California History-Social Science Standard 11.11:** Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

**California History-Social Science Standard 12.2:** Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured.

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