

Women in the military essay sample

[Government](#), [Military](#)



Introduction

The military referred to the armed forces of a sovereign entity or a nation that is basically designed and authorized to use force, in contrast to diplomacy, to defend or extend the country's integrity and territory. With the existence of different domains and specializations in warfare, the modern military now is generally divided into three branches: the army pertains which to the land forces: the navy that provides the sea power support for defense; and the Air Force which was commissioned for the air, space, and cyberspace. In the past, the military are usually constituted of a group of “armed men” who shares a single identity based on race or tribe (e. g. Spartans for Sparta), However, with the advent of globalization marked by the rapid exchange of people across borders and the liberalization of women's rights, a nation's armed forces is now constituted based on national allegiance and has formally opened its doors to females for membership.

While the participation and contribution of women in the military have been extensively accounted throughout the world in terms of leadership skills, combat skills, tactical skills and military support, their role in the military specifically in combat remains debatable and insufficiently given due credit. Today, many nations are starting to expand the role available for women in the military, which provides greater opportunities for women to dole out their fair share in defending the nation and stand out and be more conspicuous in the military profession.

History of Women in the Military

The involvement of women in the military had its roots since time immemorial. Among the earliest women fighters in ancient history included Ahhotep I in 1600 B. C. (Van Sertima, 1995), Lady Fu Hao, the first female Chinese military strategist during Shang Dynasty in 1200s B. C. (Tao, Zheng and Mow, 2004) and Deborah of Israel, who led military campaign against the Canaanites. (Sharkansky, 1991) While most of the celebrated war heroes in ancient history are men, women had their meager share of war leaders based on legendary accounts like Queen Gwendolen and Queen Cordelia of Great Britain (Kagay and Villalon, 1999) as well as Queens Zabibe and Samsi in the Arab region. (Duri and Conrad, 1987) However, perhaps the most renowned group of military women that until today is popularly portrayed in popular culture and in film is the Amazons. According to Greek historian, Herodotus, the Amazons are a group of fierce warriors that are exclusively female. They were believed to have lived in Pontus, now part of modern Turkey and have appeared in many Greek legends like the Trojan War. In Homer's Iliad, the Amazons were described as ferocious women warriors who fought like men i. e. Antianeira. (Blok, 1995)

France is among the few nations that gave the world with the prominent women in the military such as Genevieve, who forestalled the entry of Attila in Paris in the 5th century and Joan of Arc, who led the French army in several key battles during France's during the Hundred Years' War against England between the 13th and 14th centuries. Both military leaders were eventually canonized as saints by the Catholic Church for their continued and devoted referral to God in their war campaigns. (Duby et al, 1993)

During the First World War, the extent and magnitude of the war that basically covered the whole of Europe entailed mobilizing and summoning more personnel for war purposes. Many women were drafted in the armed forces mainly to serve military support roles particularly as nurses or mending the wounded. Nursing is perhaps the most prevalent and only opportunity for females to be involved or at the fore front of war.

However, there are also a few women who were directly involved in combat. In 1914, Maria Bochkareva, was the first woman to join the 25th Tomsk Reserve Battalion of the Russian Army. After receiving several distinctive awards for her service, she later was commissioned to form the Women's Battalion of Death, an all-female combat unit created by the Russian Provisional Government to promote the people's continued support to fight the war. (De Groot and Bird, 2000)

Issues of Sexual Discrimination and Harassment

The entry of women in the military is often ridiculed and scoffed at. The Walt Disney film, "Mulan", depicted one of the many stories of women disguising themselves as men to join the army. But the plot of the story is not really fictional. Because of the male domination in the military throughout history, there exists an unfounded and groundless traditional belief that the military is reserved exclusively for men; many women in history were forced to disguise themselves as men to join the army. In the First World War for instance, Dorothy Lawrence, an English reporter guised herself as a man named Denis Smith in order to become an English soldier. (Cook, 2006) In the United States, the first ever American woman soldier, Deborah Sampson,

enlisted as “ Robert Shurtliff” in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. During the Civil War on the other hand, Sarah Rosetta Wakeman enlisted under name “ Lyons Wakeman” to serve the 153rd Regiment. Both women are among the many military soldiers in the U. S. Revolutionary and Civil War, who cut their hairs and used male aliases just so that they can join the army and serve their country. (Smith and Greig, 2003)

The exclusion of women from combat roles in the military is just one of the major issues that women face in the military. The challenge of sexual harassment is another important matter that needs to be addressed. Sexual harassment refers to any unwelcome sexually determined behavior relating to or characterized by sexuality; “ sexual orientation”; “ sexual distinctions” whether directly or by implication. Many experts widen the definition of sexuality to include a number of sexual elements in organizations - which do not have to be a question of manifest sexual actions but can also be a question of the undertone in workplace climate, including acting and language (Calas and Smircich, 1991).

The problem of sexual harassment of women in the military is prevalent. According to Dr.. Michael Lawrence of the Defense Manpower Data Center, more than fifty percent of female personnel serving in the military including the Army, Navy, Air force and Marines, have experienced some form of sexual harassment. Moreover, cases of sexual harassment in the military are often unreported because victims are reluctant to report such incidents because of fear being reprimanded considering the highly traditional culture

of the military and because they lacked confidence and faith in the military's grievance protocols and procedures. Moreover, even if a female military personnel wins a sexual harassment case, the obtainable remedies and penalties are inadequate to redress the harm committed. In view of which, the armed forces are currently enhancing their policies, procedures and campaign to address sexual harassment in the military in general. (Sagawa and Campbell, 1992)

Interview with Two Soldiers

It is quite disheartening and odd to discover how women per historical and documented accounts needed to take the arduous and intractable task of guising themselves as men just so that they can serve their country. It is even more demoralizing and poignant to learn how women who have chosen to dedicate themselves in the service of their country as part of the armed forces find enemies among their male comrades who bully and harass them on the basis of their gender. Two soldiers were interviewed by the researcher to obtain the opinion of soldiers about women in the military in general particularly on the issue of sexual discrimination and harassment of military women. One male and one female soldier was selected for the interview to compare the differing views and attitudes of the two sexes. Following are the summary of their opinions.

Sexual Discrimination

Male Soldier. The inclusion of women in the military is a welcomed trend. In as much as a woman and man have equal rights under the law, they should

also have equal responsibilities or duties to defend the law and serve the country. However, because of apparent physical differences, it would be better if women are not included as combatants. They can better serve the military in terms of attending the wounded as nurses or in devising strategies for warfare as military tacticians. The former entails nurturing to which women are naturally good at because of their inherent caring and mother instinct while the latter requires mental abilities, with which women are equally endowed with men. To be a combatant requires physical and brute force which the female body is not naturally designed.

Female Soldier. The greater participation of women in the military should be promoted by extending the available opportunities for women in the ranks. Instead of limiting the role of women in support activities as nurses, mechanics and navy crews, more military women should be encouraged in combat activities as missile gunners and fighter pilots. These combat activities do not necessarily entail brute force but skills in sharp shooting and air maneuvering, which female soldiers can handle.

Sexual Harassment

Male Soldier. Any form of sexual harassment may it be in the military, in the office or in the streets should be stopped. Sexual harassment is ultimately an ethical issue because it involves the distinction between right and wrong or good and evil. In the military, because of the male domination in terms of membership, sexual harassment is rampant and sometimes unavoidable. Men who have been in duty and have not seen a woman for months or even years tend to be earnestly looking for a woman at least talk to them to bring

them back to their senses considering the dehumanizing cruelty and viciousness they witnessed from war. This however does not justify or excuse them from committing any acts of sexual harassment.

The issue of sexual harassment is more often vague and unclear. Acts that constitute sexual harassment are ambiguous and vary between men and women. While “ gross” acts such as unsolicited physical contacts and advances; request for sexual favors, sexually nuanced verbal remarks or actions are apparently distinguishable, certain subtle acts and other harmless social interactions perpetuated by men can be alleged by a woman as an act of sexual harassment, without the man having clear and pure intentions in doing so.

Female Soldier . Because of the minority status of women in the military both in terms of number and in position, sexual harassment against military women is common and widespread. Most if not all military women have experienced at least one instance of harassment while at service. Sexual harassment morally violates a person’s dignity and respect because it places them in awkward and helpless position to perform something they do not want to do. In most instances, they go unreported for the shame, hassle and fear of retaliation by the offender especially if he is a higher ranking officer. The need for an intensive training and education of the military as an organization about the issue of sexual harassment is necessary especially considering that the organization was traditionally a group exclusive for men. Grievance procedures and policies should be further enhanced to protect women from harassment by amplifying the penalties for offenders. Finally,

the participation and designation of women in key positions in the ranks can further help curb the problem of harassment.

Summary. Both the male and female soldier interviewees explicitly conferred on the inclusion of women in the military as a matter of duty to their country. They however differed in terms of what roles women should hold in the military. The male soldier absolutely opposed the inclusion of women in combatant duties. The female soldier on the other hand wanted the participation of women in combatant roles as part of extending and promoting the opportunities available for military women. Roles specifically as gunners and fighter pilots accordingly do not entail physical might or strength but skills and mental aptitudes that women can equally excel at.

Other Issues. While the male soldier interviewee focused on the particular matters the researcher have used during the interview, the female soldier further raised other issues and challenges that military women faces while being at the service. Among the more common issues included are as follows: how military women should wear their hair, being a single mother while in military service, married military couples and the potential conflicts that can occur and pregnancy while at service. These issues that are exclusive for military women often boil down to the clashes and variances with a one's military profession and a woman's traditional domestic or civilian roles.

Theoretical Analysis

In the United States, while women have served in the military in as early as the American Revolution particularly for tending and attending to the ill and wounded and for other critical support services such as cooking food and cleaning uniforms, it was only on 1942 that Congress had approved a bill that created an all female army unit called the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. While this initiated the more active participation of women in the military, the inclusion of women was only deemed to be a matter of emergency because of US entry in the Second World War. It was in 1948 that women have been formally integrated in the US Armed Forces as permanent members of the US Armed forces whether in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps or Air Force. The Women's Armed Services Integration Act allowed women to serve as regular members of the military who are subjected to the same rules, policies and entitlements applied to all military personnel. However, Title 10, U. S. C. 6015 prohibits women to be assigned on duty on Navy vessels and Air Force aircrafts that are engaged in combat missions. In 1970, Congress repealed an act that bars women with dependent children from joining the military and the discharging of service women with children under 18 from the service. (Cook, 2006)

While the congressional acts provided the legal framework and provisions that formally integrated women in the armed forces, other factors led to the expansion and participation of women in military service. First is the liberation of women and equal rights movement for women that gained momentum and peak in the 1960's and 70's. These ideals initiated the gradual elimination of discrimination against women and opens new opportunities for women which is traditionally reserved for men which

included military service. Another major factor that instigated the wider and more intensive participation of women in military service is the All-Volunteer Force in 1973 during which the government had difficulty in recruiting and retaining sufficient qualified male in the military hence it opted to recruit women to address the shortage. (Binkin, 1993)

At the moment, women constitute approximately over 15% of the US Armed Forces evenly spread in its major branches. Moreover, military women are rising to higher levels of position in the organization in lieu of their quality and committed service to the military and to their nation as a whole. While there are statutory restrictions on women in the US military, there is no law that explicitly proscribes women from serving in combat. In fact, with the nature of the modern forms of warfare such as guerrilla warfare and terrorist attacks in Iraq, military women are equally vulnerable and engaged in front line attacks and direct combat mission. (US GAO National Security and International Affairs, 1993) In modern warfare, some terrorists even use women as a tactical front line combatant in carrying out suicide bombing missions. (Zedalis, 2004) These trends only provide evidence that women can serve as effectively as their male counterparts in performing and successfully accomplishing any form of military service including as combatants. Regardless of pursuing the objectives of gender neutrality, the participation of women in the military including the abolishment of pertinent restrictions should therefore be considered for practical and strategic purposes.

Conclusion

Throughout history, women have demonstrated and proven their determination, commitment and capacity to serve the armed forces of their nations. Moved by their unparalleled enthusiasm, some women have in fact opted to disguise their gender so that they can join the military. Because of emergency needs during war time, governments have called and mobilized women for military service for nursing and other support service provisions. In view of the increasing recognition of women for their military achievements as well as the equality of rights, the role and participation of women gradually expanded until they were formally integrated in the military forces.

In the US, there are still restrictions in the involvement of military women particularly in combat activities and missions. However in the age of modern warfare, it is now difficult to draw the line which among the missions assigned to military women is not in the front line. Hence, the equal susceptibility or exposure of military women to danger similar to a male combatant makes these restrictions a futile or ineffectual provision. Instead, there are greater issues that military women face considering their minority status in the military organization in terms of number and position. These issues include sexual harassment which is prevalent, balancing work and familial obligations, and pregnancy among others.

Finally, the US plays a central role in foreign diplomacy to the present global peace that world enjoys. Fundamental to this role of our nation is its military supremacy for the protection of its own interests, containment of foreign influences or intrusion in its governance and sovereignty and protection of

freedom, justice and peace of all nations from the perils of terrorism and other repressive and oppressive ideologies. In light of this vital role, there remains a steady need to recruit American soldiers to preserve and maintain the peace and order of the world. Sexual discrimination and harassment therefore in the military should be immediately addressed so as not to impede to the bigger and nobler mission of the United States.

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