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***AIR FORCE FEMALES***  
***IN THE***  
***DESERT WAR***

## **OUTLINE**

### **AIR FORCE FEMALES IN THE DESERT WAR**

#### **I. Introduction**

**A. Purpose:** Women in the midst of war have been a bed of discussion for years and that won't change until society and the military change their view of women's role in combat. The impact of deployed women has changed the paradigms of a nation.

**B. Overview:** This paper will

explore the controversy surrounding women

reveal the real facts and statistics

present the lessons learned that have changed society and the military.

#### **II. The controversy behind and during the war**

**A. Nondeployable status**

**B. Local customs and restrictions**

**C. Press influence**

**D. Political questioning**

#### **III. The real story of the work and support of the female war fighter.**

**A. Jobs**

**B. Statistics**

**C. Interviews**

#### **IV. What was the outcome for the military and society**

**A. Lessons learned**

**B. Regulations change - jobs open up**

**C. The controversy, facts, and lessons learned are the stepping stones to new military support of war.**

**BACKGROUND PAPER**  
**ON**  
**AIR FORCE FEMALES IN THE DESERT WAR**

1. Women in combat--a debate in social, political, and military fields has ensued for years. Alan Gropman in an editorial to the Air Force Times wrote, "Most discouraging to those who see the military as a unique profession are the arguments from those outside the services who use anecdotes and tendentious statistics to advance or to discourage the cause of women...There is no excuse for relying on anecdotes when facts abound." (14:23) Combatant roles for women are opening due to the conflict in the Persian Gulf-Desert War. The impact of deployed women has changed the paradigms of a nation. "The war is likely to permanently change the image of American women in the Armed Forces, married and single. Not only fathers and husbands, but mothers and wives as well, are leaving loved ones at home." (29:2) This paper will explore the controversy, reveal the facts and statistics, and then present the lessons learned that have changed society and the military. The controversy started long before the deployment to the Persian Gulf.

2. The controversy covered a large range of areas, but I will only explore the following: nondeployable status, local customs and the restrictions, press coverage, and political influence. These areas give only a glimpse into the elements that affect the view of war the American public received. The nondeployable status of troops in all the services is researched during and after a conflict by the General Accounting Office (GAO) for the Chairman, Subcommittee on Readiness, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives. The GAO report gave reasons for nondeployable personnel and identified factors that could impair future readiness and deployability. (11:1) "However, data collected in connection with DoD's study of military

women in the Gulf indicated there were over 15,000 nondeployable active Air Force personnel.”

(11:1) The major controversy on nondeployable women was pregnancy. According to newspaper interviews, women were getting pregnant to avoid combat deployment. (20:9A) Elaine Donnelly of the Center for Military Readiness, a Michigan-based conservative research group, said she does not think the personnel chiefs gave Congress honest answers when revealing figures on pregnancy and its impact on readiness. “This is a readiness issue because shorthanded units are not as capable as those without shortages, and pregnancy causes shortages.” (27:0) A final report to Congress in April 1992 stated, “...the nondeployability percentages for female personnel were somewhat higher than the percentage for male personnel. Pregnancy accounted for the largest difference in non-deployable percentages.” (6:R3) Though pregnancy was sighted as the largest difference, only 1720 females were nondeployable due to this cause. There were 4963 females not deployed for medical reasons cataloged into hospital, deferment, humanitarian, drugs, and pregnancy, according to a briefing sent to the Secretary of the Air Force on 28 Sep 92. (9:0) In an AOSD report from the Pentagon, statements that women became pregnant to avoid deployment were not supported by collected Service information. “Reported pregnancy rates for the 3rd quarter of FY90, just prior to the war, were essentially identical to 4th quarter of FY90 and 1st quarter of FY91” (2:6) According to a CRS report to Congress, “In general, given the experiences of the Persian Gulf, many of the arguments against deploying women appear to have been overstated. While problems did arise concerning pregnancy, sanitation, rape, and harassment, these problems did not prove to be extensive nor debilitating.” (5:63) Any misinterpretations on how nondeployable females were calculated were addressed in a Julls Long Report. Their recommendation was, “pregnancy exemptions be standardized across all branches

of service to prevent inconsistency problems.” (20:31) Pregnancy was one debate issue for nondeployment of female troops, but other controversial issues made their mark during the Persian Gulf conflict.

3. Local customs were an issue with deployment of females into the area of conflict. The CRS to Congress dated, May 15, 1991, stated, “The presence of women did have an effect in terms of socio-cultural differences with the host nation.” (5:63) During the deployment, special briefings were given to increase awareness of the unique position of women in Saudi society. The briefings also addressed restrictions on normal dress and behavior by American women that could adversely affect the morale and ability to get the job done in the host country. In a letter written by Lt. Gen. Horner, USCENTAF, to all the Riyadh Area units and staff agencies, he asked that meetings be attended by all females. (16:1) In other memos put out by Headquarters, US Central Command troops were instructed on the restrictions to wearing the uniform and carrying gas masks and weapons any time other than for duty. (13:0) In a policy letter dated 22 Dec 90, females were authorized to operate tactical vehicles in conjunction with their official military duties, but couldn’t operate any civilian type, like rental vehicles, even in conjunction with official military duties in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (18:1) The Pentagon AOSD report states, “...the public was concerned that the Saudi people, because of their customs and traditions, were discriminating against U.S. military women. However, in reality, the Saudi Government ensured U.S. military members, both women and men, were not restricted in the performance of their military duties, even if such duties were counter to normal Saudi culture.” But, outside of military duties, customs and cultural distinctions of the host country were to be followed, if possible. (2:8) Restrictions due to host nation customs and culture are considered normal policy wherever

the military is deployed. The restrictions were more pronounced due to the press, which was involved more during this conflict than any other conflict in the past. (2:7, 3:1)

4. The press had a great influence over the view of the war. According to a DoD report to Congress, "Because media attention was afforded to the relatively few cases in which women faced combat conditions, the public perception of the role of women in the Gulf War has tended to be skewed." (6:R2) In fact, issues drawn from that report state, "The media and public interest was centered on female casualties and Prisoners of War (POW)." (6:R4) One report from the Pentagon, it stated, "A number of issues caught the attention of the public, the press, and Congress regarding the experience of women in the Persian Gulf war." (2:7) Besides the pregnancy issues that related to nondeployment, and cultural restrictions and conditions due to the host nation, the press was concerned about every aspect of the female combatant. (2:8) The press weren't the only ones with an influential hand in the view of females in combatant roles, so were the politicians.

5. Activity in Panama, in 1989, caused Congresswoman Pat Shroeder from Colorado to introduce legislation to allow a test period for women in combat positions. (31:64) In hearings, in 1988, by the Military Personnel and Compensation Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, Representative Byron was told, "There is a problem in the United States that combat exclusion prevents women from attaining experience that often serves as the basis for promotion. (31:67) In section III of the USAFA Journal of Legal Studies, the bottom line was, "Congress has shown great interest in recent years in the topic of the utilization of women in the military, but still has not acted to eliminate the combat exclusion. Congress has made decisions not based upon military necessity but instead upon sexual stereotypes."(31:68) In a letter from

Congressman Lancaster on Feb 4, 1991 to Secretary of the Air Force Donald Rice, Lancaster asked for an inquiry into the role of women as KC-10 pilots and if the combat exclusion rule created problems of over-extended combat missions for males, and the downgrade of missions to accommodate women. (21:0) The response from SAC/DO, discussed both the policy and reality of the situation in Saudi Arabia. (15:0) The study stated that women were not limited from flying any missions and crews were scheduled by first-in-first-out basis. (8:2) During the first 10 days of the conflict, crews averaged 16-18 hours of rest and after additional crews came on-board, crews averaged 22-24 hours between flights. (8:2) As of April 1990, women in the Air Force were restricted from less than one percent of the job opportunities allowed men, due to the combat exclusion law. (28:3, 4:) Public Law 625, The Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 (changed by 10 U.S.C. 8549), was the Congressional mandate that restricted duty to women in the area of combat. The Secretary of the Air Force is responsible for interpreting the mandate, and establishing and implementing policy in this area. (5:2) Gen. McPeak, Air Force Chief of Staff, stated in an *Air Force Times* article, that it would be up to him and Secretary of the Air Force, Donald B. Rice, to determine the service's policy on women in combat if Congress removes the statutory prohibition. (22:3) According to the AOSD report from the Pentagon, "Combat exclusion laws and policies were not designed to shield women from all hostilities, but to reduce the possibility of their becoming involved in direct combat." (2:8) The improvement of women's roles is an important issue and needs to be decided on facts. "Facts are there for those who seek them." according to Alan Gropman in an *Air Force Times* article. (14:23)

6. There are numerous facts available in regards to female service in the Desert War. Areas like jobs, statistics on number deployed and killed, and interviews. Reports to Congress contain

volumes of information collected to show female statistics by rank and even service. On top of the facts, interviews provided some input to the jobs, statistics, and performance of females in the desert. The facts start with the volume of females that served during the war. According to a Demographics Report as of March 1992, over 41,095 females were deployed to the Desert War, approximately 6.8 percent of the total force. (7:5) Of that number only 4,246 were Air Force members. (7:4) So, approximately 10 percent of the female population in the Desert War were Air Force members. Figures filed in a June 1992 GAO report, list Air Force enlisted and officer female population deployed during fiscal year 1990 as: 13,331 for officers and 60,250 for enlisted. (10:31) Of the enlisted population the majority was from the E-3 to E-5 ranks. (10:31) As many reports have found, combat exclusion was not a guarantee that women wouldn't be subjected to hostile fire. "Although women did not serve in units whose mission involved direct combat with the enemy, some women were subjected to combat," according to one Congressional report. (6:R2) In fact, the same report stated five Army women were killed in action, 21 were wounded in action, and two were taken as POWs. (5:63,6:R2, 17:0) Statistically, "Military women were fully integrated into our support forces and played a key role in the successful outcome of Operations." (2:2)

7. "Women served in almost all of the hundreds of occupations open to them: administrators, postal clerks, air traffic controllers, logisticians, engineer equipment mechanics, ammunition technicians, ordnance specialists, communicators, radio operators, drivers, law enforcement specialists, and guards...Many women truck drivers hauled supplies and equipment into Kuwait...Some brought enemy prisoners of war back to holding facilities...Many flew helicopters and reconnaissance aircraft...Others served as public affairs officers and chaplains...The

deployment of women was highly successful.” (6:R1, 26:50, 28:2, 32:40) Air Force women served in support billets as well as in tanker, transport, and medical evacuation aircraft. All USAF C-130 squadrons in theater had women maintenance officers. According to a Tactical Air Command spokesman, “Wherever our bases were, women were there...they couldn’t fly fighters for TAC, but they performed every job but combat.” (2:50, 25:23). No Air Force women saw direct combat.” (6:R-2) “The Persian Gulf war has drawn women closer to the front lines than any other war in America’s history.” (29:2) “The increased number of women in uniform and types of duties have meant that more women will be deployed to areas designated as “hostile fire or imminent danger.” (5:63) In interviews with two Air Force enlisted members stationed in Saudi Arabia during the action, opinions of the female role, restrictions, and press coverage was discussed.

8. MSgt Nancy O’Connell and SMSgt R. Allan Wynne were both stationed in the area during the conflict. MSgt O’Connell was stationed at Khamis Mushait, and SMSgt Wynne was stationed at Doha Qatar. (25:1, 30:1) Both were deployed from August 1990 to April 1991. (25:1, 30:1) According to MSgt O’Connell, who supported a F117A fighter wing, “...the job was good and she would do it again if needed.” (25:1) She provided pre and post weather briefings to the fighter pilots during the conflict. She was restricted to the base and couldn’t drive vehicles, but she felt that didn’t hinder her job performance. (25:1) She said jokingly that the only hardship while there was sharing a three bedroom trailer with 20 other women. (25:1) She had a problem with the press once she returned. She was not prepared to handle all the attention from the press and local communities. She was misquoted by the press but otherwise she was proud to have supported the war effort and didn’t find any problems with the restrictions due to host country

culture or controversy by the press and politicians. (25:1) SMSgt Wynne was an Aircraft Mechanic Flight Chief for F16s. He stated that his location was more remote and only aircraft units were around. There were four compounds in the area: Canadian F18's, French F1's, Qatar Air Force, and United States, 401st Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW). The commander of the 401st TFW, Col Nelson was concerned, as were other commanders for the safety of the females outside the compound. (30:1, 12:5) Col Nelson established a policy allowing no females to be out of the compound without a male escort. According to SMSgt Wynne it was needed because fondling by passerby local residents was not uncommon. All that aside, SMSgt Wynne said he had approximately 29 females working for him. He said they were some of his best workers. They didn't complain and always did a good job. He firmly believes that any qualified female should be allowed the opportunity to do the job they want. (30:2) According to CMSAF Campanale, qualification for a job shouldn't be based on gender nor race, but on performance. (3:1) A 15 May 91 report to Congress stated, "women have generally established their ability to be deployable and to serve well in their assigned duties." (5:64) It also clearly stated in a Pentagon report that, "...military women, like their male counterparts, performed superbly during operations ...and without special consideration." (2:10) The facts about how many women were deployed, the jobs they performed, and interviews from one female and one male that were there, have clarified why significant changes in policy have started. CMSAF Campanale's insight has also lead to a better understanding why combat exclusion policy is changing. (3:1) "Perhaps the most significant outcome of having deployed a large number of women performing varying duties to the Persian Gulf is the role of women in the military is more deeply ensconced and institutionalized." (5:64)

9. Even though the controversy has not stopped, lessons learned have led to changes in regulations and have opened jobs long closed to women. According to one Congressional report, lessons learned during this conflict were: "Women were fully integrated into their assigned units, women performed vital roles under stress and performed well, current laws and policies were followed." (6:R4) Understanding that women were listed in all specialties available to them during the conflict and performed superbly, was the prompting that started the ball rolling on eliminating the barrier to female combatant job opportunities. (1:1095, 22:18) Prior to 1991, women were restricted from less than three percent of the job opportunities allowed men. (4:3, 28:3) On May 8, 1991, The House Armed Services Committee voted to allow women to serve in combat military aircraft. (23:3) According to Congresswoman Pat Schroeder, who introduced an amendment to lift the ban on assigning Air Force women to combat aircraft, "The performance of women during the Persian Gulf War prompted the committee to vote as it did." (22:18) This vote for lifting all legal restrictions on the role of service women would give each service the discretion to further expand the assignment possibilities. (23:3) Gen Merrill A. McPeak stated in an *Air Force Times* issue dated June 17, 1991, "Women should be able to do anything they are capable of doing, like anyone else....I don't believe in artificially barring women from doing any job...But like men, they have to meet whatever standards we set." (22:3) According to defense and service personnel, opening new specialties to women has not hurt military readiness and may have a positive effect on the force by allowing women to share the burden of increasing deployments. (27:1) "US military men and women deployed to Saudi Arabia were selected based on mission need, with no distinction made for gender, other than application of restrictions contained in US combat exclusion laws and policies... As previously mentioned, this meant US

women performed a wide range of critical missions...this fact alone clearly sets a visible example of US principles.” (6:R3) From the Pentagon’s perspective, Frederick Pang, Assistant Defense Secretary for Force Management Policy states, “There have been no readiness impacts tangible or intangible of the expanded opportunities for utilization of women.” (27:1) The affects of the changes, “... enabled the Air Force to draw from the largest available pool of human resources,” according to Lt. Gen. Boles, Deputy Air Force Chief of Staff for Personnel. (27:1) Having a large number of deployed women in the Desert War has led to a clear look at women’s role in the services. Lessons learned stated, “Women have generally established their ability to be deployable and serve well in their assigned duties.” (6:64) The reports have led the House Armed Services Committee to submit a recommendation in the 1992 Defense Bill to eliminate the statute that bans females from jobs on combat aircraft in the Navy and Air Force.

10. About 26,000 women deployed to the desert war. “Women performed in most of the specialties found in the services; some were wounded, some died, some were captured. Women performed in essential tasks, and as it is constituted today, the military couldn’t have performed as well without them.” (14:23) The controversial issues of nondeployable status due to pregnancy, restrictions to women because of cultural differences and media coverage were explored. I’ve uncovered some factual data on demographic statistics, injuries incurred, and positions filled by women. After all was said and done, we learned that women performed vital roles and performed them well. “US women performed a wide range of critical missions. This fact alone clearly sets a visible example of US principles.” (6:R3)

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