Women Should Not Serve in Military Combat

Testimony by Phyllis Schlafly to the House Armed Services Committee,
Military Personnel Subcommittee, November 16, 1979

My name is Phyllis Schlafly, the mother of four sons and two daughters who are all of military age or close to it. I am the volunteer leader of STOP ERA, the most successful women's organization in the country today.

The push to repeal the laws which exempt women from military combat duty must be the strangest of all aberrations indulged in by what has become known as the women's liberation, or feminist, movement. The very idea of women serving in military combat is so unnatural, so ugly, that it almost sounds like a death wish for our species.

Last Sunday's newspapers carried a front-page picture of a man expressing the disgust of the average American with the humiliation of our nation by the radicals in Iran. The man held up a large sign which said, "Kick me, I'm an American." Yet, here we are at a House Committee hearing at which representatives of the women's liberation movement are, in essence, saying, "Kick me, I'm a woman. I want to be sent into war where I can be shot at and captured just like a man." And some men seem willing to let that happen.

Has our nation sunk so low that we are willing to send our daughters into battle? Is chivalry completely dead? Breathes there a man with soul so dead that he will not rise up and defend his wife, his sweetheart, his mother and his daughter, against those who want to wound or capture them, whoever they may be?

There is no evidence in all history for the proposition that the assignment of women to military combat jobs is the way to promote national security, improve combat readiness, or win wars. Indeed, the entire experience of recorded history teaches us that battles are not won by coed armies or coed navies. Even Hitler and the Japanese, when they ran short of manpower, found it more efficient to use underage and overage men in combat than female troops. Of the thousands of books written about World War II, no one ever wrote that Hitler or the Japanese should have solved their manpower shortage problem by using women in combat.

Every country which has experimented with women in combat has abandoned the idea. Israel used women in combat for a few weeks in the war of 1948, but never did so in later military operations. Women are now treated very differently from men in the Israeli armed forces. They serve only about half as long; they are housed in separate barracks; they have automatic exemption if they marry or have a baby. Israel has a smaller percentage of women in its armed forces than the United States.

The Soviet Union used some female troops in World War II, but has since abandoned this altogether. Women make up less than one percent of Soviet troops today. There must be a reason for the unanimous verdict of history that the armed forces demand different roles for men and women. There are, indeed, many reasons.

The first reason is that women, on the average, have only 60 percent of the physical strength of men. This truism, so self-evident to those with eyes to see, has been confirmed by many studies. However, under pressure from the feminist movement, much of this evidence is not allowed to see the light of day or, if it does, is couched in apologetic terms. For example, a report by the Comptroller General of the United States called "Job Opportunities for Women in the Military: Progress and Problems" (published by the Defense Department, Feb. 21, 1976), surveyed the actual experience of enlisted women placed on military jobs formerly reserved for men. The Comptroller General concluded that, "If as the Air Force Surgeon General has concluded, females are only 60 percent as strong as males, on the average, can do better than females." Thus, the feminists have so intimidated military officers that they...
are afraid to speak the truth that there are many jobs that males, on the average, can do better than females, and that the armed services have many such jobs.

As I travel around the country, I do many radio call-in programs. Everywhere I go, I hear the same complaint from men in the U.S. armed services: the women are getting the same pay and have the same rank as the men, but they are not doing the equal work; the male soldiers must do part of the women’s jobs for them. This situation is not just, and is destructive of morale and good personnel relations.

Sex-neutral treatment of men and women in the military is just as unfair to women as it is to men. If you interview the women who are army privates or navy sailors, you get a different story from that of the officers who must toe the Administration line. Two newspaper interviews which present the issue from the point of view of the enlisted army and navy women are attached to my testimony.

The second reason for the unanimous verdict of history that the armed forces demand different roles for men and women is that women get pregnant and men do not. That particular “sex-role stereotype” has become a tremendous problem in the military today. Why should anyone be surprised? When young men and women in the age group of 18 to 25 are required to live in close proximity, often doing unpleasant tasks and suffering from loneliness because they are away from home, the inevitable happens. News stories report that the pregnancy rate is about 15 percent among servicewomen. Another five percent have had their babies and brought them back to the post. The rape rate is also said to be about twice what it is in civilian life. How could anyone be surprised?

Yet, we are told that the armed services cannot discharge a woman who becomes pregnant because that would be “sex discrimination” unless the services also discharge the father of the baby! And it would be obviously impossible for the armed services to discharge every man who fathers a baby. The services are required to ignore the obvious fact that pregnancy hampers a woman from doing her full job in a way that fatherhood does not interfere with a man’s performance on the job.

How did we get into our present situation, in which our military officers are issuing maternity uniforms, opening nurseries on army posts, and pretending that women can do anything that men can do? For the answer to that, we must look at two of the false dogmas of the women’s liberation movement.

The first false dogma is that there really is no difference between the sexes (except those obvious ones we need not discuss) and that all those other differences you think you see are not inherent, but are due merely to sex-role stereotyping which can and must be erased by sex-neutral education, laws, and changed attitudes. The sex-neutral dogma is variously called gender-free, unisex, or the elimination of sexism from our society and attitudes.

Neither Congress nor the military will ever be able to cope with the problems and demands raised by the feminists until you realize that the feminists look upon the military as a vehicle to achieve the gender-free goals of the women’s liberation movement — not as an instrument to defend the United States of America. Since the armed services are an institution where people must obey orders, it is the perfect vehicle to enforce the sex-neutral goals of the feminist movement. The feminists also look upon the armed services as a

giant social welfare program, designed to provide “social mobility upwards” for minorities which, according to their peculiar definitions, include women.

The national security of the United States, justice to the majority of young men and women, respect for the wishes of the big majority of the American people, and rational behavior, all demand that we continue to structure the armed services of our nation on the common-sense premise that there must be different roles for men and women in the military. We cannot allow all those values to be upset and disoriented by the strident demands of a few feminists who have high affluence and protection jobs in the Pentagon, by feminists who are over draft age, and by the handful of high-ranking women officers who seek greater recognition at the expense of their sisters who will have to march in the combat infantry. It is interesting that the desire of women for sex-neutral treatment in the military is usually in inverse proportion to their rank. A few of them have delusions of grandeur that women must be accepted as armchair generals and admirals, but the price that our own daughters will have to pay in the ranks, in case of another war or a reinstated draft, is far too high. The price in terms of reduced combat-readiness is also far too high.

The second false dogma of the women’s liberation movement is that we must be neutral as between morality and immorality, and as between the institution of the family and alternate lifestyles. As the national conference on International Women’s Year at Houston in 1977 proved, the feminists are demanding that government policy accord the same dignity to lesbians and prostitutes as to wives and illegitimate births as to legitimate, and to abortions as to live births, and that we support immoral and anti-family practices with public funds. It is in deference to feminist demands and litigation that the armed services are now supporting, maintaining, and giving preferential treatment to servicewomen who engage in immoral practices and bring their babies back to the posts. We must stop this public funding of immorality.

What a way to run the armed services! We must be the laughing stock of the world! The purpose of the armed services is to defend the United States of America — it is not to create a tax-funded haven for sexually-active young men and women, nor is it to serve as a giant social welfare institution. The need for combat-ready troops and a stronger national defense has never been greater in our country’s history. The very idea of ordering women into combat jobs would send a message to the world that we have reduced the strength of our troops to the physical strength of the average female. It would be a sign of weakness because it would tell the world we do not have enough men willing to defend America.

I urge Congress to reject all demands to repeal the laws which exempt servicewomen from combat jobs. I urge Congress to maintain and reinforce the time-tested rule that there must be different roles for men and women in the United States Armed Services. Anything less than that will waste the valuable energies of our military officers on the exhausting task of coping with the escalating demands of a few feminist spokesmen who do not speak for anyone but their own narrow group. The first priority of the armed services should be to rebuild the military strength and the combat-effectiveness of the United States.
Testimony by
General W.C. Westmoreland, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Commander of U.S. Forces in Vietnam
and Former Army Chief of Staff

I appear before this Committee at my request as a private citizen. I do so with the hope that my many years in uniform during which I fought in three wars and participated in 17 battle campaigns might qualify me to pass judgment on the issue of women in the military, particularly the Army, and hence be helpful to you in discharging your responsibilities to protect the national interest.

You are keenly aware of the political pressures to open up any and all positions, jobs and specialties to women in our society — the gambit of assignments in the military is no exception. You are also aware that the Administration has progressively increased the projected percentage of women in the Military Services and assigned recruiting quotas accordingly. I am told that the Military Services have been directed to recruit to a level of 12% of their total strength by 1983. The problem is not whether there will be women in the Military Services, but rather the occupation specialties to which they can be assigned and the percentage of total strength that women will comprise.

It is only logical that these two issues be addressed on the basis of what course of action will enhance the national security interest — not on a basis of furthering a domestic political program or giving a boost to an alleged popular social trend.

The purpose of a military force — an Army, a Navy, an Air Force, and a Marine Corps — is to prepare themselves to defend our national interest and that means they must be prepared to fight and win wars. Any policy that distracts from the prospect of that end-result is unworthy; any that impedes progress toward that end is wasteful and detrimental to the morale of the military force.

Let me first give my analysis of the current and proposed practice of assigning women to military jobs. The current practice of assigning women to jobs in the battle area, and by that I mean to units assigned to a Division or in the Division area (excepting assignments to hospitals protected by the Geneva Convention) is counterproductive. Further, to extend assignments to the brigade or battalion levels would entail substantial risks to military effectiveness.

Combat is a physical and psychological challenge of the most extreme sort. It is beyond the comprehension of one who has never been exposed to such an experience. It is rough, sometimes brutal. Life on the battlefield is primitive and dirty. There are hours and moments that extend to the utmost one’s physical endurance, fortitude and emotional resistance. Few women have had to endure that sort of experience and in my opinion they never should except in case of dire emergency. On the battlefield, the full capacity of every person can be measured, and one must not be expected to participate exclusive specialization. One moment a soldier may be performing his primary specialty but the next he may be engaged in exhausting hard labor by digging a trench, felling a tree, pushing a truck or carrying a stretcher. Few women have the physical capacity to perform such tasks on a sustained basis. Hence, to have a number of women in the battle area results in reducing the flexibility and capability of the total force.

A senior officer with U.S. Army Europe recently told me that it is not unusual in the field to see the men soldiers doing the hard work while the female soldiers sit around and watch. Morale thereby suffers, but it suffers far more seriously when a soldier in combat does not have confidence in the capability of the person on his right and left. Pride and high morale are essential to the effectiveness of a fighting unit. These qualities are not forthcoming if there is a lack of confidence in leaders and among comrade-in-arms, and when there are distractions created by the inevitable sex urge. I commend to the Committee an exceptional article by James Webb, a former Marine Captain, a Vietnam veteran, and an Annapolis graduate, in The Washingtonian Magazine.

Now, as to the number of women in the military forces. First, I believe that this should be a function of the jobs that can be performed most effectively by women in areas other than combat. This would exclude the combat division area. Any number arrived at should be correlated with costs in terms of lost time, readiness to deploy overseas at a moment’s notice, the ability of employment and retraining as the situation dictates, and the special needs of women. In my opinion, the 12% goal of women in the total force goes beyond the point of force deterioration — in other words such a percentage will measurably influence the effectiveness of the fighting force.

Another matter is disturbing to me. I am reliably informed that at any one time, 10% of the female soldiers in U.S. Army Europe are pregnant. Hence for several months they are either ineffective or partially so. Someone has to perform the assigned job of the female soldier during that period. Many of the babies are born out of wedlock. But that makes no difference with the current Administration. The mother continues as a soldier in good standing. She is not discharged as was the previous practice. I believe this is the first time that our nation has by its official policy sanctioned an immoral practice. The care of those single-parent babies of full-time soldiers has created a substantial problem in the Army and no doubt in the other services.

In summary, the political administration is trying to use the military as a vehicle to further social change in our society, with respect to the indiscriminate role of women, in utter disregard for potential fighting effectiveness.

No man with gumption wants a woman to fight his nation’s battles. I do not believe the American public will tolerate numbers of women killed in battle; they do not want to see women drafted to do a man’s job — that is to fight.

Public Law 94-106, a rider on the FY 1975 Defense Appropriation Bill, which put women into the service academies and which shd by without serious debate, was the beginning of a nearsighted and unwise trend for which we are paying a price, the cost of which will not be fully known until war occurs. Let us hope that the appropriation rider practice, an insidious way to make law, will not be repeated with reference to the Administration’s position that no restriction be placed on assigning women to jobs in the military.

We are the only nation that has political elements pushing women into the battle zone. The Congress owes it to the military to provide laws that protect the military services from political whims and pressures that encourage the services to take actions that weaken their fighting effectiveness.

Having said all that, let me say that I do not oppose women serving in appropriate positions in the uniform of our nation. I have admiration of their service in three wars. I would remind the Committee that it was upon my initiative as Chief of Staff to double the size of the Women’s Army Corps, and to promote the first two women General Officers in the history of our country: the Army’s Chief Nurse, Anna Mae Hayes, and the Chief of the Women’s Army Corps, Elizabeth Hoisington.
I asked to make a statement today because, as a former Director of the Women's Army Corps, I want my name on record as having stood up to oppose women being trained or assigned to combat units. By that I mean their being assigned duties such as a rifleman, driving a tank, firing an artillery piece, piloting a fighter plane or serving aboard a naval warship. If we assign women to combat units, we must accept the inevitability of their going into battle.

I have had no personal experience in a combat unit but my male colleagues tell me — and I believe — "War is hell." Heads are blown off; arms and legs are maimed; suffering is so intolerable it affects men for years. It is bad enough that our men have to endure this. But do we want our young women to suffer it too?

Women cannot match men in aggressiveness, physical stamina, endurance and muscular strength in long-term situations. In a protracted engagement against an enemy, soldiers with these deficiencies would be weak links in our armor. We cannot build a winning Army if the soldiers in it have no confidence in the long-term mental and physical stamina of their comrades.

Also, we must consider the consequences of mixing men and women in units in close situations like combat. Man-woman relationships become a problem and in combat they could cause costly distractions.

I do not doubt the Army has women who can complete a combat course, endure three days or three weeks under field conditions and shoot as straight as any man. But in my whole lifetime, I have never known 10 women whom I thought could endure three months under actual combat conditions in an Army unit.

If women knew or could even imagine the physical, mental and emotional demands of serving in combat, they would not blithely or bravely volunteer to serve in combat. The peripheral dangers of serving in combat units — being raped by stronger or temporarily crazed comrades; being taken prisoner of war and being abused, beaten and starved; being mentally and physically incapable of performing one's assigned duties in combat and being responsible for others being killed or wounded — these are some of the other harmful situations women would experience in combat. There is more to fear in combat than being killed and not returning to your loved ones at home.

The decision about whether or not women should serve in combat is not a matter of equal rights; it is not a matter of equal opportunity — as much as some might have us think it is. It is not a matter of justice that can be decided in a court by lawyers and judges. It is a matter, ladies and gentlemen, of whether we are going to preserve the things our nation stands for. I think it stands for preserving the things we have treasured for 200 years: our Constitution, our flag, our family life. All of these things have been threatened in our lifetime, but none more than family life.

There are plenty of career opportunities for women in the services — without including them in combat training and combat duties. The administrative and technical services always make up 90 percent of the Service's activities — combat takes only 10 percent of them.

I am tired of all the studies we make about whether — or how many — women should be assigned to combat units. Studies cannot duplicate the realism of a battle in a Vietnam jungle, in the cold Korean hills, the trauma from killing or witnessing death and terrible wounds.

We should not let people who have no knowledge of war or duty make the decision. We should listen to men with knowledge and experience in such matters. They alone know the endurance and stamina required. They alone know the reaction to hand-to-hand combat, to bodies and minds being blown apart or crippled forever. Ask any combat-experienced officer or NCO (non-commissioned officer) if he wants his daughter assigned to a combat unit.

I think we should continue to have a legal bar against women in combat units — not because they are women but because the average woman is simply not physically, mentally and emotionally qualified to perform well in a combat situation for extended periods. Nor should our country allow women to subject themselves to this experience that is so devastating and leaves such dreadful wounds — mentally and physically.

Congress should not change the law. The Army should not change its regulations. They must continue to look at the big picture.

We know some women have the brains, ability and courage to be infantrymen, fighter pilots and part of a missile or ship's crew. But how are the mothers, fathers, husbands and brothers of these women going to feel when the planes and ships go down, when the women are killed or taken prisoner? Who then will want to admit it was their idea to change the policy and put women in combat units?