P.S. to the NEWS
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DRAFTING WOMEN? WOMEN IN COMBAT?

One of the strangest phenomena taking place today is the orchestrated publicity designed to convey the impression that it is "inevitable" that young American women be drafted and assigned to military combat. The Association of the United States Army recently published a broadside of about a hundred press clippings pushing this message.

Leaping out from the melange is the big black headline "Defense Chief Urges Draft Include Women." The news article reports Defense Secretary Harold Brown's recommendation that young women as well as young men be registered for the draft.

One can hardly pick up a newspaper or magazine without seeing pictures of women in army combat gear, the purpose of which is to get Americans to accept the notion that women take naturally to the army combat environment and that they perform as well as men.

Visits to scores of college campuses during the past year have convinced me that the young women who say they will gladly be drafted and go into combat do so in total ignorance of what military combat is all about. Combat is not a strenuous coed scout outing from which you return to the mess hall and a hot shower. Combat does not mean firing guns on a range where no one fires back. Combat is not isolated heavy tasks with rest periods in between.

Listen to what combat really means from a speech given recently in Washington, D.C., by one of our country's most highly decorated combat officers, who knows combat from first-hand experience in three separate combat tours of duty in Korea and Vietnam. Brig. Gen. Andrew J. Gatsis, U.S.A. (Ret.) tells it like it is.

"Battle is primitive, vicious, brutal, and exhausting," he said. "It is coupled with depression and crippling fatigue, which create terror in the soldier's heart. ... His feelings fluctuate from despair to extreme hate and bitterness, and those emotions tend to bring forth his most animal instincts.

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"If he is fighting in the Mekong Delta, he must endure living in mosquito-infested paddies, immersed in filthy waters up to his waist and armpits, for continuous periods of 24 to 48 hours. ... The skin breaks out with tiny red-scaled vesicles. ... The loss rate for male casualties in this environment averaged 50 percent.

"If he is fighting in the hills of Korea, he is subject to bitter cold, frostbite, and diseases such as the plague which result from living in rat-infested bunkers. In the highlands of Vietnam, he is plagued by bamboo viper snakes, torrential rains, jungle rot, malaria and the like. If his mission turns to the Middle East or Africa, he suffers from filth, relentless heat, and the dryness of the deserts. In Europe it is the deluge of mud, the slime of dripping dugouts, and the weariness of continuous marches along hot dusty roads. These are only some of the ugly living conditions of the ground combat soldier's daily environment, let alone the nightmare of having to face mortal combat."

Of course, no one wants to place anyone in such conditions. But, as General Gatsis asks, "How can we, as a civilized people, even begin to entertain the thought of sending our women into such an environment against their will?"

Even if one argues that chivalry belongs to another century (which I don't concede), where are the humanity and the common sense of those who so blithely say it is "inevitable" that we send young American women into that hell? Even Hitler and the Japanese, when they ran short of manpower, found it more practical and efficient to use underage and overage men in combat than female troops. Of the thousands of books written on World War II, no one ever wrote that Hitler or the Japanese could have won by using significant numbers of women in combat.

Yet it is becoming clear that the strategy of the Pentagon officials is to persuade Congress to repeal the three laws which today exempt women from military combat duty and to institute a stand-by draft which includes women, but have no call-ups before the 1980 election. Or possibly, institute nothing, but talk loudly about its "inevitability." Then, after the 1980 election, begin implementation.

Maybe Harold Brown and the Pentagon officials (who do not have to face the voters) can get by with urging the draft of women and sending them into combat. But it is unlikely that Senators and Congressmen can.

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