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WOMEN IN ARMY COMBAT(?) JOBS

"We are becoming the men we once wanted to marry," proclaimed feminist theorist Robin Morgan on the Phil Donahue Show in January. Neither Donahue nor any of the women in the audience challenged or objected to that amazing statement. Is it true that today's woman would rather become a man than marry a man?

A reading of a volume called "Women in the Army: Policy Review," recently published by the U.S. Army, would seem to indicate that the Army thinks that today's woman really does want to become a man, and that the Army is trying its very best to help her to achieve that goal. The Army report appears to be regretful, even apologetic, that it hasn't yet quite achieved that goal.

Federal law specifically excludes women from combat jobs, and Congress stoutly resisted a determined effort by the feminists in 1979 to repeal this prohibition. Former Army Secretary Clifford Alexander, during the Carter Administration, played games with the law and redefined "combat" so narrowly that many Army women were assigned to positions formerly considered combat jobs.

The Alexander policy wasn't successful because (a) pregnancy is (in the Army's own bureaucratise) "female-specific," and (b) women were discovered to have only 58% of the upper-body strength of men.

The new Army report is full of case studies of women not physically able to do the tasks to which they were assigned, but paid as though they were doing them. Even so, the female dropout rates increased rapidly. Self-report questionnaire data indicate that 54% of the women sustained some sort of injury requiring medical attention over their eight weeks of training.

If the Army report had been honest and straight-forward, it would have explained bluntly why women are unsuitable for most (not all) Army jobs. The Army's mission is to build a tough, combat-effective fighting force capable of winning battles against our nation's enemies. The majority of Army jobs require heavy work.

In the heavy work category, Army experience shows that 83% of male recruits, but only 8% of female recruits, can do the work. Of the 572,000 enlisted-duty positions in the Active Army, 302,000 have the highest probability of "routinely engaging in direct combat," and most of the rest have the probability of engaging in non-routine combat.

But the Army report couldn't bring itself to state the obvious. The authors must have thought it would be unchivalrous to the feminists to base conclusions on the obvious male-female differences. Instead, the report said we must "validate a selection strategy for the allocation of human resources by physical demands requirements," and must implement the selection strategy on a "gender-free approach."

Then, the Army developed a "statistical technique to analyze the results of a criterion-related study design" called "multiple regressional analysis." From there, the Army moved to a "criterion-related validity coefficient," a "selection ratio," "cross-validation to insure that the selection algorithm remains valid," and "discriminant analysis" to assure equal opportunity in testing and personnel selection.

Many equations, formula, and bureaucratic words later, the report comes to the conclusion that, while "currently, women are assigned to duty positions that require them to engage routinely in direct combat," now, as a result of "direct combat probability coding" (which we are repeatedly assured is a "gender-free action"), Army women will no longer be assigned to engage "routinely in direct combat." Hereafter, the job classifications open to women will be reduced so that women are assigned only to "direct combat" which is <u>not</u> routine.

In the reality of the battlefield, when those assigned to "routine direct combat" are killed or wounded, the field commanders grab "combat-support" soldiers from their "nonroutine" stations to fill the empty posts. Although the Army report has neat little drawings of battlefield assignments, soldiers don't remain stationary on a real battle field like chessmen on the board.

I wonder if the Army recruitment officers adequately explain to female recruits that, as "combat support" soldiers, they will "have virtually the same risk of engaging in direct combat as infantry." Female recruits should be asked, do you really want to become a man instead of to marry a man?