Defense Department Deceives Congress on Co-ed Tents

February 2, 1995 *by: Phyllis Schalfly*

Congress should deal with the problem that the U.S. Armed Services are encouraging sexual misconduct and other social problems that result from immoral behavior. In our present mission in **Haiti,** some male and female soldiers of all four services are now required to sleep side by side together in small tents without any separation between the cots.

When women began to advance closer to the front lines last year, the advocates of a gender-neutral military stoutly maintained that such extreme social experimentation would never take place. Defense Secretary **William J.** Perry wrote Senator Strom Thurmond last Sept. 28: "Under no circumstances will male and female service members be berthed in the same compartment. Field operations will apply this same guidance, tailored with common sense to meet the specific situation."

Was Perry misleading Congress then, or has Pentagon policy dramatically changed? Maj. Cindy Sito, a U.S. Army spokeswoman in Port-au-Prince, says the coed sleeping arrangement is used "because we like to maintain unit integrity."

She added, "In my opinion, it's easier to run a unit if you're able to reach out and touch everybody." Isn't that chummy? Boys and girls are reaching out and touching everybody!

Some enjoy the new close quarters. Army Spc. Christopher Moran blurted out, "Some of the women are a little uptight about it, but it really doesn't bother us."

Other Army spokesmen who commented on this new policy tried to shift responsibility to commanders in the field or onto servicemen and women themselves. Lt. Col. Charlotte Kimbal, who runs the division's supply center, commented, "Some choose to segregate; some do not."

But it's not that simple. What if those who "choose to segregate" are stuck in the same coed tent with fellow soldiers who do not choose to segregate?

The men and women in the Army are in their years of peak sexual interest and desires. Some are married, some not. The Haiti assignment includes periods of unpleasantness, loneliness, and boredom. It is wrong from every point of view to expose these soldiers to maximum temptation in close quarters during long hours of darkness.

The Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces heard testimony on the sexual problems that resulted from the assignment of men and women to Saudi Arabia. Sgt. Mary Rader testified that "it was very heavy."

Pentagon officials argue that the coed tents in Haiti do not represent a big

change from past practices, but that's not true. As recently as the Gulf War, for the most part men and women in the field were housed in sleeping quarters that afforded minimal privacy.

The U.S. Navy is going to enormous expense to reconfigure berthing areas on ships so male and female sailors can be separated. If it is not OK for males and females to sleep together at sea, why is it OK on land?

In addition to the obvious possibility of something less than "good order and discipline" under the sheets, there are also problems of sexual harassment and (the reverse side of the coin) false claims of sexual harassment. Coed tents afford opportunities for both.

Servicemen and women probably run the gamut of different standards of behavior from those who feel the lack of privacy acutely, to those who are trying to remain faithful to their spouses despite temptation, to those who think casual sex is run-of-the-mill behavior, to those who would use the opportunities afforded for free sex, preferential treatment, or malice.

Of course, the servicemen and women can't complain. This is the Army, remember? You do what you are told and don't complain (or file a lawsuit) about conditions. Furthermore, any complaint that has anything to do with gender is sure to result in demerits on your conduct record, especially if you are a man.

The new policy is hardly a winner with the wives of the men assigned to Haiti. One, whose letter has been made public, said bluntly: "Our military spouses give our country sacrificial gifts by willingly being separated from their mate and actively supporting their mission. In return, we must honor this gift by not unnecessarily tempting their spouse or ordering them to live in a manner that they cannot morally approve of."

The Army shocked the American people during the Gulf War by deploying to Saudi Arabia mothers of six-, eight-, and ten-week-old nursing babies. That nonsense was the direct result of the feminist ideology of gender equality which teaches that there isn't any difference between the mother and the father of a six-week-old-baby.

In Haiti, the U.S. Armed Forces have advanced to the next stage of gender neutral nuttiness. A war or an international police action that requires sending mothers out to fight, or requires male and female soldiers to sleep together, isn't worth fighting.

Congress should terminate this social experimentation and investigate the Pentagon's dishonest answers about women in the U.S. Armed Services.