The Military's War Over Marriage

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The media have been in a feeding frenzy again. It's so much more exciting to cover the military's sex scandals than tedious news such as the budget or Clinton's attempt to expand NATO.

Historians may look back and record that Air Force General Joseph Ralston made the right choice to withdraw his nomination for chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Our nation can now continue to believe that adultery is shameful and reject the strident voices demanding that we make it acceptable socially.

Public opinion surveys of the media elite over the past decade have consistently shown that those top opinion makers do not believe that adultery is wrong. The New York Times ridiculed the military's "antiquated adultery rules."

Most, however, are still reluctant to state this view so boldly, choosing instead to hide behind popular personalities who had extramarital relationships. Every discussion of the Ralston case referenced General Dwight Eisenhower and his wartime girl friend.

In fact, that romance was carefully concealed and Ike couldn't have been elected President if it had been known. Franklin D. Roosevelt's extra-marital dalliance was one of history's most closely guarded secrets, and the press was a co-conspirator in covering up John F. Kennedy's flagrant adultery.

Most of what was said about the Ralston affair missed the point. For example, Ann Landers' verdict was: "I don't think it should be branded on your forehead and you suffer all your life with that kind of stigma."

Nobody suggested that General Joseph Ralston replace his medals with a Scarlet Letter, or that he be court-martialed, locked up, or dishonorably discharged. The issue was whether he should be promoted to chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the top military post.

There must be a hundred flag officers among the four services who are qualified and capable of serving with distinction as chairman. Surely there are some among them who've been faithful to their marriage

vows.

That is important. It's more important in a leader than in subordinates, and it's more important at this particular time than ever before. The commanding officer sets the standard of behavior.

The Gallup Poll reports that 94 percent of Americans say adultery is wrong. The advocates of unfettered sexual activity are trying to paint those who affirm the standard of marital fidelity as hypocrites because the evidence shows "Americans do it anyway."

But that doesn't mean they are hypocrites; it just means that they have sinned. Christians believe that man has a fallen nature and is prone to sin, and forgiveness starts with admitting you've done something wrong.

Secretary William Cohen apparently had learned nothing from the feminists' campaign against the military when he decided to defend the Ralston nomination by distinguishing Ralston's offense from Kelly Flinn's and by sanctimoniously "drawing a line" against witchhunts. The feminists wouldn't let him get by with that.

Rep. Nita Lowey's and Rep. Charles Schumer's tantrums on television were not to end double standards about sexual behavior. They have their own double standards; i.e., adultery and sexual harassment by politically correct politicians are OK, but they will string up to the nearest tree any man who can be used to advance feminist goals.

The feminists were not trying to disqualify Ralston; they were trying to use Ralston to get Kelly Flinn's discharge upgraded to honorable. Of course, the cases are very different (Flinn was guilty of fraternization, disobedience and perjury), but the difference was lost under the feminists' tirades.

Their goal was significantly helped by the case of Major General John Longhauser, who sought early retirement after it was revealed that he, too, had committed adultery. The important fact about Longhauser is not that his adultery was years ago, or that his paramour was a civilian, or that he was separated from his wife, but that he was the commanding officer at Aberdeen where so many sex scandals have taken place.

Longhauser didn't seduce a subordinate. But it's not hard to see why those under his command thought that sexual misbehavior was no big deal.

The sexual revolution that started in the sixties hasn't lived up to its promise of freedom and fun forever. It has produced record rates of divorce, illegitimacy, social diseases, and messed-up lives.

Taking a position of leadership means that your private morals are open to public scrutiny. A man who will lie to his wife cannot be trusted to be honorable and honest with others.

The mission of the military is to win our nation's wars. Happily, there isn't a bloody war to fight right now.

But there is a culture war going on inside America. It has caused a great many casualties and will cause many more. Setting up a commission to write new rules will only prolong the agony; the old rules are still valid. In the long run, there will be fewer casualties if the military leads the way to a restoration of duty, honor, and the sanctity of marriage.