

Women In Combat

The idea of women in combat is not unusual anymore. They should be able to hold combat positions because although physical strength matters, the military still needs the intelligence that women can bring. Also, banning women from the combat hurts their military careers. Although women account for only ten percent of the enlisted personnel they are still a major part in the armed forces. Their performance recently has generated support from Congress and the public for enhancing the role of females in the military.

During the Persian Gulf War, women were sent to the Middle East to fly helicopters, service combat jets, refuel tankers, and load laser-guided bombs. Their performance has led the world to realize that women are extremely useful in combat. Defense secretary Dick Cheney said "Women have made a major contribution to this war effort. We could not have won without them." Leaders in the field agreed. The Gulf War had the largest deployment of women in the armed forces in history. These women encountered the same risks as the men they served with.

In the Persian Gulf, there were no exact positions and all areas were equally vulnerable, so the idea of safe havens for women was not really applicable. By many armed forces policies, females are banned from combat jobs and units, but in the Persian Gulf War females were assigned to battleships, aircraft carriers, and marine support groups dug into the desert. From their experience in the Persian Gulf, military women have earned the right to be treated as equals with men and not as protected individuals.

In spite of their record as able combat personnel, there are laws and policies that restrict women in the United States Military from serving in positions that require them to engage in direct combat. Women in the Air Force and Navy are barred from aircraft and vessels that have a chance to be exposed to combat. The official, established policies of the Army and Marine Corps exclude women from combat. These policies prohibit women, on the basis of gender only, from over twelve percent of the skill positions and thirty-nine percent of the total positions offered by the Department of Defense. Such policies excluding women from combat need to be repealed by Congress. The Fourteenth Amendment's "Equal Protection Clause" insures every citizen "the equal protection of the laws." Although the clause is not applicable to Federal government, the Supreme Court said the Due Process Clause in the Fifth Amendment prohibits the federal government from making unreasonable classifications. Therefore the set laws and policies that exclude women from combat not only violate the Fifth Amendment, but also deny women their fundamental right to engage and excel in their chosen occupation.

There have been many court cases involving women in combat over the years, although there has never been a case directly challenging the constitutionality laws and regulations banning women from combat. In the case of *Frontiero vs. Richardson*, the court rejected the idea that "man is, or should be, woman's protector or defender," which in actuality, put women not on a pedestal, but in a cage. In *Satty vs. Nashville Gas Co.*, the decision stated that gender does not determine who is able to perform capably as a soldier. In the case of *Schlesinger vs. Ballard*, it was realized by the Supreme Court that the combat exclusion hinders the abilities of women to gain the experience needed for promotion within the military. The combat exclusion puts women wishing to obtain qualification for high-level positions at a disadvantage, because leadership training is usually acquired in combat-type positions.

Although many females are not eager to go into combat, there are women who can and want to do the job. In a time where technology takes over battle lines and brains might be more important than brawn, a reason to exclude women is non-existent.