

A Future for Women in the Military?

With the Global War on Terrorism, numerous low intensity conflicts and the increasing reliance on military response to natural disasters, the Canadian and American militaries consistently answer the call to serve their nation and others. Today every troop is asked to work harder and smarter. In a climate where the operational tempo is extremely high, imagine if our governments were to suddenly direct all women in the military to stand down from service and resign from the military.

In the United States, that would mean the loss of approximately 215,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, or 15% of our active duty service members. The Canadian forces would be cut by approximately 12%. In an era where troop commitments are at an all time high, this hypothetical clearing of women from the ranks seems absurd, right? Or does it?

Throughout history, many have argued that women should not serve in the military. Many claim that women should not serve in combat, especially not on the front lines. Yet when you examine history, women have played an integral role in all of America's military conflicts and have contributed to Canadian military efforts for more than 100 years. While their service historically has centered around more traditional roles such as nursing or administrative support, those past accomplishments set a prece-

dent that has allowed access to more diverse occupations today.

In today's operational environment, it is almost impossible to distinguish where the front lines end and rear area support begins. We live in a time of asymmetrical warfare where weapons of choice include improvised explosive devices, suicide bombers and other acts of terrorism.

In Canada, women have the opportunity to serve in any military occupation and in any environment. In the U.S., however, laws preventing full gender integration have restricted women from select combat arms positions. Women are able to be fighter pilots, ship captains and military police officers, but they cannot serve in ground combat units. Without debating America's military exclusion of women from ground combat roles, one can still conclude that women make our militaries stronger and better.



PHOTO: SGT ROXANNE CLOWE, CANADIAN FORCES COMBAT CAMERA

27 Feb 2006 – Gunners Aaron McPherson (back) and Maricel Mercado set the azimuth on the 81mm Mortar at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. The gunners are from "A" Battery 1 Royal Canadian Horse Artillery (1 RCHA) 15 Bravo, part of Task Force Orion. The Task Force mission is to assist the Afghan government authorities in creating a secure environment and aid in reconstruction and governance.

If the United States and Canada are to maintain capable and powerful militaries, women's roles within the services must continue to expand. Having women contribute to our armed forces is not an issue of equal rights; it's an issue of effectiveness – in today's ever-evolving world, where international conflicts stretch militaries thin, women are needed more than ever. Diversity of thought and inclusive environments create highly competitive, capable teams.



PHOTO: MCPL CHARLES BARBER, SNMGT (NATO)

03 March 2006 – Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMGT) Exercise Scenario: A number of small boats are closing on HMCS Athabaskan, their intent is hostile. HMCS ATHABASKAN has gone to Action Stations, to prepare for the arrival of the attacking force and will use deadly force to protect the ship. The Ship's 76 mm gun is ready. Crews man the .50 cal. machine guns, and the Ship's Naval Boarding Party has readied their small arms.

On the Bridge of HMCS ATHABASKAN, SLt Kim Dunn (left), Weapons Directing Officer, will engage the attacking boats with the Port .50 cal. machine gun. She will direct which targets the crew of the machinegun will engage.

During OP ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR, HMCS ATHABASKAN, along with the rest of the SNMGT squadron will patrol the Mediterranean. Their mission is to help prevent terrorist activity in the area.

It is important to note that women can greatly influence the strength of the military beyond their actual service. In the past year, the US military has faced recruiting shortages. Many recruiters feel these shortages can be attributed in part to the lack of parental support (especially by mothers) for a military career. Our countries need women who understand the importance of a strong defense and appreciate the honor and duty of military service.

Future debates concerning the role of women in the Canadian and U.S. militaries should not revolve around exchanges over strength differences between genders, how a unit's cohesiveness is impacted by the presence of women, or whether or not women can withstand the harsh living conditions of an overseas deployment. Instead, the focus on the future of women in the military should be on improving the combat capabilities of the total force. Modern technology heavily influences the way war is waged and technological advances need to be operated and implemented by the most capable, talented people – men or women.

The Canadian military has done an excellent job of implementing consistent eligibility requirements for each military occupational specialty, resulting in a military where one's performance and preference determine what role they fill.

The future for women in the military will continue to progress if our nations' leaders value the contribution of women service members, past and present, and continuously integrate women within the total forces structure in ways that capitalize on individual talents and capabilities.

Ultimately, our respective militaries will be at their strongest, and most prepared for the numerous missions they are called upon to accomplish, when the most capable person, regardless of gender, fills each and every diverse occupational specialty our militaries require. Our societies will also be stronger when all citizens support our young men and women who choose to serve honorably in the armed forces.

Angie Morgan and Courtney Lynch, former US Marine Officers, have authored a new book on leadership tactics for women.



In *Leading from the Front*, Captains Angie Morgan and Courtney Lynch, U.S. Marine Corps, provide step-by-step instruction for women in search of professional success and personal fulfillment. Applying lessons learned during their combined 18 years in the Marine Corps, the authors show women how to achieve their goals, regain control of their days, and obtain a healthy balance between career and personal life – by being leaders.

Leading from the Front focuses on the development of key leadership skills such as the ability to make timely decisions, the importance of seeking responsibility before placing blame, and the significance of controlling your emotions in times of crisis and stress. They dispel myths about what it means to be a leader and explain in an engaging, honest, easy-to-follow style how women can harness their innate leadership talents.

Compelling personal stories of success and failure provide practical leadership wisdom to help women lead their lives, rather than letting day-to-day chaos determine their course. *Leading from the Front* encourages women to "lead as they are," and resist the urge to become carbon copies of their male counterparts. Marines Morgan and Lynch realized that leaders are not born, they are made. Anyone can become a stronger leader – and *Leading from the Front* shows you how!

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