

WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

Brîndușa Maria POPA

Regional Department of Defense Resources Management, Brasov, Romania

Abstract: *Women in the military are no longer a novelty still; they are not a common image yet. Their role, especially as fighters, is a controversial one and only recently women have been offered the possibility to train in the same place and for the same purpose as men. Traditionally, men are the ones who join and have a career in the armed forces since being a military is an exclusively masculine occupation. Apparently this idea originates at the beginning of human king when men hunted and waged wars while women took care of the household and the children. This perception had been modified very little until the 20th century when most of the mentality and social changes occurred, especially in the last three decades of that century, thus allowing women to have a more active role in this organization.*

Keywords: *female militaries, combat role, war, controversies.*

1. INTRODUCTION

We have long been accustomed to the claim that women just aren't suited for life in the military, that they should only stay at home and take care of their families, that this is no life for them because violence and hard physical training are more than a woman can take. But is this really true? Women have been present in the military for quite a long time and they have played many roles, from ancient warrior woman to present day combatants; still, women in the military, though not a new image, are not common and despite their long time presence in the armed forces, their role as combatants still creates controversies. Women have only recently been offered the possibility to train in the same place and for the same purpose as men but, this is only the beginning and it can be said that by all accounts, women in the military have come a long way although it's been a slow, much contested fight to gain the right to go into combat.

2. TRADITION VS. MODERN TRENDS

Traditionally, working in the military was seen as an occupation for men, this idea has its roots at the beginning of humanity when men

hunted and waged wars while women stayed at home doing the housework and raising their children. Along the ages there have been times when women took part in the battle, for instance 1429 Joan d'Arc led the French troops into battle against the English, the American women who fought the U.S. Independence War or Ecaterina Teodoroiu, but every time this was possible due to a trick, these women being disguised as men. Military culture is a masculine culture and the women who worked in the armed forces were usually nurses, secretaries, telephone operators, cooks or, on some occasions, they took care of the logistical elements but they were never combatants and they could not even train for such a role. In "The Feminine Mythique" (*Gazette on the Net*, 15th May 2002), Col William T. Hewes, US Marine Corps (Ret) stated that a country's military is not an "equal opportunity employer" and that it must be looked at in a different manner than the civil society (which meant that it must be exempt from civil rights legislation an idea that is inherently incorrect because we pride ourselves on the fact that we live in democratic societies where women are equal to men. This conservative position is based on an old but still strong philosophy and set of values: that

the military has its own separate rules and that women do not pertain to this world.

Along the years women's military roles have expanded. Until the early 1990s, women could not fly combat aircraft or serve on combatant ships and they are still not allowed to serve in ground combat roles, technically speaking; however they do take part in dangerous missions in Iraq and Afghanistan because of the nature of combat in an insurgency in which there are no distinct front lines. Lawmakers' efforts made in recent years to limit women's roles were rebuffed by the U.S. Army, which told the Congress it cannot afford to exclude women from serving in various capacities. This new situation means either that mentality has changed or that the driving force for women's full integration into the armed forces has been manpower shortage.

World War I was the event that posed the greatest challenge to the military male bastion. With the war moving from the battlefields into the civilian zones, women gradually worked their way into medical units and by World War II, their position in the military was enhanced. Although women in the United States' armed services did not serve in direct combat, if we take a look at the American armed forces we can notice that only recently, after 1990s, they started to be more open towards the idea of having servicewomen. Looking back into their history we see that the first time women were accepted in the military was during the WW II, when in 1942 auxiliary military troops for women were created in the United States of America. A step further on this road was taken in 1948 when President Truman signed Women's Armed Services Integration Act which allowed for women to be part of the armed forces; still, this act limited the number of women to 2% of the total number of militaries. According to the traditional military culture model women are allowed to occupy only non-combat positions, mainly in logistics, administration and nursing because their participation in battle was considered to be disturbing and would have diminished the readiness of the troops.

During Desert Shield (1990) and Desert Storm (1991) campaigns, more than 40.000 women participated in the Gulf War. After the

conflict, the U.S. Defense Secretary Richard B. Cheney stated that women had a major contribution in that war, that they were very professional and that the victory would not have been possible without them. Women performed various combat roles in the Gulf war - they flew refueling planes, flew troop transport aircrafts and helicopters, fired Patriots that destroyed Scud missiles, supplied mechanized brigades with fuel and ammunition, loaded bombs, operated radios, radar, and military vehicles. They marched through mine fields, maintained aircraft, guarded perimeters, accepted the surrender of Iraqi soldiers and subsequently pulled guard duty. Women were taken prisoner and some lost their lives in the Gulf. As an appreciation of their distinguished service in the 1991 Gulf War, it was decided to expand combat assignments for women in uniform. In 1994, an order signed by then-President Bill Clinton allowed women on combat ships and fighter planes.

During Desert Storm the first woman pilot gave her life while flying in a combat zone. Major Marie T. Rossi died at age 32 on March 1st, 1991, when the Chinook helicopter she was piloting crashed near her base in northern Saudia Arabia. She was the commander of a unit which was among the very first American units to cross into enemy held territory flying fuel and ammunition to the rapidly advancing 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions. Lt. Kara Hultgreen, the Navy's first fully qualified female fleet fighter pilot, was only 29 when her Tomcat slammed into the Pacific Ocean in 1994 - making her the first woman combat pilot to die in service.

3. THE WAY TOWARDS THE BATTLEFIELD

Many arguments, for and against women becoming combatants, have been brought up along the years; most cons used by the conservatories started from the physical differences and old fashioned mentality, women being perceived as weak, and also from the possible negative effects mixed troops could have upon the training and war activity because women in combat units

endanger male morale and military performance as Elaine Donnelly said, 2003 CMR (Center for Military Readiness) president. On the other hand we have the evolutionists who support the idea of allowing women in the military; they admit that women can take part in battle that they can kill or they can march and accepting them would enlarge the selection pool since the number of men who want to become soldiers is decreasing.

A big debate started in the American society and in Congress about women's participation in battle after the Gulf War. This debate had as a result the Defense Authorization Act or the Public Law 102-190 from 1991 which legitimizes a commission to analyze the laws and policies which limited women access as combatants in the armed forces and to study both points of view, that of the liberals and of the conservatives. The issue and the debate on whether to let women perform combat roles have been even more contentious. Although the Air Force and the Navy have opened up virtually all combat jobs to women, servicewomen are still officially forbidden from serving in combat on the ground. The United States Air Forces became quite open towards women when a law from 1989 forbade establishing a certain percentage of seats for the women who wanted to enlist. The interdiction which said that women could not serve in combat was annulled in December 1991 and finally women could start training on fighter planes. Lt. Jeannie Flynn graduated on February 15th, she was the first woman pilot on fighter planes.

Since 1994 the Army has increased the number of servicewomen accepted, they were even accepted as pilots on combat helicopters or fighter planes still, there are some special units, like the special forces, where they are not accepted. Even the Navy made some modifications and in 1994 the law which forbade women to work on combat ships was abolished. In March 1994 they passed a law which allowed women for the first time, to work on the USS Eisenhower carrier. The number of women on that carrier and on other combat ships was between 400 and 600; the Navy also accepted women pilots on fighter planes. In February 2010 U.S. Defense

Secretary Robert Gates sent a letter to lawmakers notifying them of the decision reached by the Navy, which allowed the first women on nuclear submarines the next year (2011). The Marines have the smallest number of women but they say they will increase it in the future years.

Another example of women in the militaries is the Australian Armed Forces which has a very long tradition in this area. Even here, the beginning was made with women working in the auxiliary troops when the Nursing Service for Women was established in 1899. Then, on 1st July 1903, the Australian Army Nursing Service, which was actually a reserve troop, was created. The Service was made up of volunteer civilian nurses who would be available for duty during times of national emergency. Members of the Service participated in both the World Wars, providing medical personnel for medical facilities in Australia and overseas. In 1949 the Service became part of the Australian Regular Army and it is now known as the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC). In 1941 due to the shortage of servicemen there were established troops staffed with women: Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF) which was disbanded in 1947, Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) which was disbanded at the end of WWII and a medical service for the Army, Australian Army Medical Women's Service (AAMWS). Later, between the 1950s and 60s, the Government setting up again troops made up of women who could join the Armed Forces provided that their number did not exceed 4%. These troops were instructed and commanded by women.

In 1969 women were allowed to remain on active duty even after marriage, and starting with 1974 servicewomen who were pregnant stopped their service, being automatically excluded from it. Since 1975 women have been allowed on active duty still without being permitted to take part in direct combat. 1985 was the year when women were given permission to serve at sea and in 1987 the first two female pilots graduated. Starting with 1990 women could serve in combat missions.

Women have played an important role in the British Armed Forces for many years, too. During the Second World War, for example, women were employed in a wide variety of roles, mainly nursing and other administrative jobs, behind the front lines. 7,000 women joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) (1917-1918), later Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (1918-1920). The WAAC was formed of four sections: Cookery; Mechanical; Clerical and Miscellaneous. Most women stayed on the Home Front but around 9,000 accomplished their duty in France. The women in the WAAC were not considered real militaries and did not enjoy such a status. They could enroll but, they were not enlisted militaries, and discipline problems were dealt with by civil, not military, courts. The ranks were divided into Controllers and Administrators (the officers) and Members (the other ranks). The Members were: forewomen (sergeants), assistant forewomen (corporals) and workers (privates). WAAC was renamed the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) in April 1918. And when the Royal Air Force (RAF) was created in 1918 a number of WAAC volunteers entered the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF). The Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps disbanded in September 1921. In 1949 a new law was passed and it allowed women to have a military career within Army, Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) which, in 1992, was integrated in the Royal Army Corps. Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) is an auxiliary organization of the Royal Air Force founded in 1918 and it provided female mechanics. WRAF was disbanded in 1920 and revived in 1949. WRAF and Royal Air Force merged in 1994. Since the beginning of the 1990 women have been fully integrated into the military, still there are some special units, like direct combat units, submarine or engineer teams or where they are not accepted.

The IDF (Israel Defense Forces) is another example of a military where women became more and more involved in combat action. Though women could serve in support and combat support roles in the IDF, they have, until recently, not been allowed to engage in actual combat. This situation has changed after

a Supreme Court ruling which upheld the petition of a servicewoman (Alice Miller) to be allowed to apply for Flight School. The Defense Service Law was made in 1995 to let servicewomen attend Flight School, and woman recruits serve in units outside the IDF ORBAT (order of battle); women may thus serve in the police force and in the border police in such roles as paramilitary border police in combat positions, border post inspectors, etc. Along the years, the number of military occupational specialties open to women in the IDF has increased and today most military professions are open to women. Women have long served in technological and administrative positions, intelligence, operations and training. At the same time women can be found servicing IDF computerized systems, working as computer programmers, smart weapons systems operators, electronics technicians, etc. In February 1998 for the first time in its history, the IDF allowed women to cross into enemy territory while they were on military missions. The decision was reached by the Air Force and the IDF human resources branch and it involved only airborne female physicians.

Romanian women have been part of the military for more than 30 years. Similarly to the examples presented above, in the beginning the women who worked in the military took care of the medical, administrative or secretarial matters. From 1973 to 1990 women were accepted in the military service on active duty but they were not allowed to attend higher military education institutions thus the impossibility to attain promotion to higher ranks. After 1990 the situation changed and in 2001 the Ministry of National Defense started a recruitment and selection program for women. In 2004 the schools for NCOs offered for women 11 seats out of 58, meaning 19% of the total number of seats. Also, 30 women were accepted in the school for officers where 159 seats were offered, again 19%. The Military Academy had 171 seats occupied by women out of 307, this time there was not fixed number or seats per gender. All the entrance examinations (except for the sports exam) took place under the same conditions for both genders.

Nowadays the percentage of women in the military is of 5%, and 71% of them have a higher education. 36,1% of the female officers have administrative jobs and 31,3% are combatants. 19,3% work in the medical field, 10,74% are specialist officers, 0,86% are engineers and 1,4% are commanding officers. It is true that the percentage of women on positions of command is small and this is due to the male military culture which does not consider a woman to have the skills to command troops or to plan the activity of the units; but in time, along with the acceptance of women as combatants and with their participation in international missions their numbers as commandants will increase. During Enduring Freedom, KFOR and Iraqi Freedom women started to take part in international operations as volunteers; they were 10 officers and 27 NCOs who proved that they can be as a military as a man can be. In 2009 another premier took place in the Romanian Armed Forces, on the 13th of March Lt. Simona Măierean flew M.I.G.-21 LanceR. This young woman is the first female pilot to fly a supersonic plane.

3. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude I can say that yes, it is true that in most militaries, training accentuates essentially male characteristics; it is true that the recruit is encouraged to develop strength and aggression, while the stereotypical female attributes like sensitivity and compassion are considered to be a sign of weakness; the well-trained soldier wants to fight because it is in battle that he asserts his dominance. Yet the women have taken a step further and have made their presence felt even in the U.N. peacekeeping missions and they have had quite a positive impact. The peacekeeper is supposed to keep aggression in check and to take the path of conciliation and communication. In peacekeeping, violence signifies failure that is why the evidence suggests that women might indeed make a difference. In recent operations, just 1.7% of military peacekeepers deployed by the UN were female. Yet, in almost any conflict 80 % of the refugees are women and children. In

addition to the problems of rape and prostitution, the preponderance of males causes difficulties. In many cultures, women are forbidden by social convention to talk directly to male strangers. Yet communication is essential to effective peacekeeping. Women seem to be better at controlling violent tendencies and they are also perceived as less of a threat by the local population and therefore less likely to provoke violence. So, the recent integration of women into combat in many Western militaries has proved that stereotypes have no validity and that women can be good even at this difficult job.

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