



Taking sides:

Should women have combat roles in America's armed forces?



STACY FEDUCIA
Assistant editor

"The things that are important, such as courage, integrity, loyalty, luck and determination, those things are not distributed on chromosomes."
— Lt. Col. Rhonda Cornum

In 1429, as England pummeled French forces during the Hundred Years' War and threatened the French crown, a young woman appeared before the court of King Charles VII and asked him for permission to lead his army. Overcoming thousands of years of skepticism, Joan of Arc led the French forces to a victory over the English at Patay.

In one way or another, women have followed in the footsteps of that woman warrior. Women have served as volunteers, as nurses, as workers. They have served in the military. Now we should let them serve in combat.

The futile whinnings that "women couldn't hack it in a war" buckle under the weight of truth. In an article on women's health, Edward Dolnick asserts that though women have traditionally been unable to compete with men in athletic "battles of the sexes," women display greater stamina in endurance competition. Dolnick cites among others, Ann Trason, the first woman to win a mixed-sex national championship. Trason ran 143 miles in a 24-hour endurance race and outdistanced her nearest competitor, a male, by four miles.

Debunking the myth that a woman's physical shape prevents her from successfully maneuvering a combat plane, medical evidence released this year proves that women can handle combat planes as well as men, if not better.

Though women traditionally have less upper body strength than do their male counterparts, those physical deficiencies could be offset by greater upper body training for women.

The protestations that women are mentally incapable of withstanding the intensity of wartime violence ignore the proof of history. In a study of heavily-bombed areas in London during World War II, men provided 70 percent of the psychiatric casualties. The well-worn argument that women could not stand being captured and taken prisoner withers in the face of Lt. Col. Rhonda Cornum, one of two female prisoners of war from the Gulf War. After being shot down while piloting a helicopter, Cornum survived repeated sexual assaults from her Iraqi captors — she, with two broken arms, a ligament torn in one knee and a bullet in her right shoulder.

Finally, the myth that pregnancy inhibits women's abilities to serve effectively fails to convince in the face of statistics. A 1980 Pentagon study revealed that women's absenteeism even with time lost to pregnancy was one half that of men's absenteeism — which was due to alcoholism, misconduct and minor medical ailments.

As questions of patriotism and personal valor continue to plague both presidential campaigns in the characters of Dan Quayle and Bill Clinton, I would rather have a woman who wants to fight defending our country, than a spineless draft-dodger any day of the year.

Feducia is a senior English and history major



JASON LOUGHMAN
Opinion editor

Rep. Pat Schroeder would have us believe that women can do anything that men can, and therefore should be offered combat positions within the military. It is possible, without disputing the first claim, to say that from it the second claim does not necessarily follow.

In other words, the argument against allowing women to assume combat roles is not a case of lack of capability, but one of both the complications arising from their presence in such roles, and of the costs involved in assimilating them into those roles.

Among the possible complications that females would bring to the combat arms are problems of male psychology and behavior, morale, privacy and pregnancy. Some of the stories reaching us from the Persian Gulf conflict were those of females returning state-side due to pregnancy.

In an infantry platoon, such a loss would mean one less rifle with which to shoot at the enemy; on a tank crew, the result would be a seriously degraded ability to operate the tank's weapons and systems. These types of personnel losses can spell the difference between mission accomplishment and failure — in some cases the difference that determines whether one lives or dies.

Pregnancy is but one of the complications previously listed, but it serves to represent the considerations that the military would have to make in introducing females to combat occupations. Issues of privacy in the spartan conditions of the tactical situation in the field; of the possible discipline problems of males under stress and in proximity to females, and without said privacy; and of lessened morale and esprit de corps are also easy to imagine, and have been cited in the past.

An argument not often cited is the actual monetary cost of assimilating women into combat units. The Canadian government forced its military to open combat positions to women in 1989. The result, according to Congressional Quarterly: "It cost several million dollars to recruit 80 women. Ultimately 40 completed basic training, and only one has entered combat training." U.S. Army cost estimates for a pilot program alone exceed \$10 million dollars — this at a time when defense cuts are growing ever more severe.

We cannot ignore even the problems that seem trivial. Introducing further complexity to the management of violence that we call warfare is a terrible idea if we would believe the words of Carl von Clausewitz in his treatise, "On War." In it, he says, "Theoretically, all sounds very well: the commander of a battalion is responsible for the execution of the order given; and as the battalion by its discipline is glued together into one piece ... the beam turns on an iron pin with little friction. But it is not so in reality, and all that is exaggerated and false in such a conception manifests itself at once in War."

Women in F-16's? Maybe. Opening up combat roles to women across the board? It remains to Rep. Schroeder to prove that the benefits to be derived from such a move outweigh the problems it would undeniably introduce.

Loughman is a senior journalism major

MAIL CALL

Aggies should show restraint in future

This letter is in response to the actions taken at the recent political rally in favor of Dan Quayle.

I do not openly support either party, so please do not think of this as political rhetoric or anything other than simple concern. I was shocked to hear of the actions of the members of the College Republicans who suppressed the free speech of the supporters of the Clinton campaign. Additionally, it concerns me that the supporters of the Bush/Quayle ticket thought it reasonable to run across the street at the rally and attack the Clinton supporters by tearing up their signs, thereby prohibiting the other side's free speech yet again.

I do understand the strong feelings that these opposing sides hold against each other, but I cannot condone nor tolerate such behavior.

What I ask is that in the future, when both Clinton and Bush visit Texas A&M University, nobody on either side of the political spectrum assaults the other side. Your acts reflect upon your party, and you do your party no credit by using violence.

Kenneth Snyder
Computer Operator
Department of Psychology

Alternate views of South African reality

As the only black South African here at Texas A&M University, I feel compelled to respond to the misleading and illogical letter (Battalion, Sept. 22) written by my arrogant and ignorant fellow South African, Joanne Lefson.

To start with, she talks about the media which, in my opinion, always propagates the viewpoint of the South African conservatives who would try anything to hold on to the status quo.

Secondly, she mentioned "the confrontation of the Zulus and the Xhosas in the townships." I would like to remind her about the Boipatong massacre. Is she aware that Boipatong is a predominantly Sotho area? If she were intelligent enough she would have already deduced that these "barbaric deaths" were, and still are, instigated by a third force.

And "for the record" — to use her exact words — Black South Africans pay taxes! I know this from experience as I was taxed 25 percent of my monthly income as a professional actor while my white counterparts were only taxed a maximum of 15 percent.

It is also a blatant lie, based on unfounded facts, to say that over 90 percent of white taxes go towards black schooling and housing. Instead, it is the other way around. I know this is a fact. I am not even going to dignify her comment about university entrance requirements for South African blacks with a response because I feel that what she said is obtrusively silly.

I am convinced that, indeed, Joanne Lefson is not a racist, but just an extension of the uninformed white masses of South Africa. I would suggest that when she returns to South Africa in

Rapulana Seiphemo
Class of '94

the future, she visit any of the numerous black townships that she keeps referring to, mainly to acquire a first-hand experience of what they look like, and, if her heart is willing, establish a one-to-one relationship with a black person in order to enlighten herself.

I am in total agreement with Joanne Lefson's statement that South Africa is one of the most beautiful countries in the world, but it would be much better if it were to rid itself of the legislated racial inequalities that have plagued it for almost three centuries.

I am clearly astounded by the irresponsible statements made by Joanne Lefson in her letter entitled "South Africa doesn't deserve bad press."

Firstly, while it is true that not all whites hate blacks, there is no way we can hide from the fact that some Afrikaner groups who happen to dominate the police and the security forces do not hide their hatred for black people and Jews or anyone who does not share so-called Judeo-Christian values.

Secondly, to assert that violence in the townships is simply "confrontation between Zulus and Xhosas" is not only wrong and naive but an oversimplification of a very complex problem. Several impartial inquiries into township violence have found unequivocal evidence of involvement of the state's security apparatus.

Thirdly, if black South Africans had the same economic, political and social opportunities as their white counterparts, they would gladly pay taxes. Need I remind Lefson that you need to have an income to pay taxes? Sadly, a large majority of black South Africans do not.

Either Lefson hasn't been home for a long time or just doesn't fully comprehend the problem of apartheid very well because some of her statements would surprise even her heroes, Botha and De Klerk.

Yes, some progress has been made but it falls far too short of what needs to be done. The old "blame the media game" will not work this time.

Instead of using this great opportunity she has to learn about how America has and is still dealing with its de-segregation issues, Lefson is still in the "denial" phase of the problem. Most people in South Africa today (both black and white) are a step ahead of Lefson and sooner or later they will find how they, according to Rodney King, "can all get along."

Kennedy Dzama
Doctoral student

Handguns bad idea for personal safety

What does it say for our society when more and more people feel the only way to protect themselves and their possessions is with a gun?

The rationale that we must use guns to protect ourselves from those who have guns only perpetuates the violent use of guns. I hope, Miss Brinkmann (Battalion, Sept. 18), you will not relent to this growing paranoia and will consider alternatives to handgun ownership.

How about enrolling in a self-defense class? Besides personal safety, the other intrinsic benefits of such a course include improved physical fitness, confidence, and discipline. And it is something that can never be taken from you and used against you.

Lynnann Moses
Class of '82

A&M still friendly, full of Aggie spirit

We are writing in response to the letter by Summer Belleperche printed in the Sept. 22 issue of The Battalion. Belleperche is a member of the class of '96 who believes that A&M is not what it used to be. We believe her statement is both false and unfounded. After being here for only one year, we have been thoroughly educated in its traditions and enfolded in the arms of the student body.

Where else can you cross a campus every day and always be greeted by complete strangers? Where else can you look totally lost and have someone approach you, asking if you need any help? Never once have we discovered this feeling of selfishness that Miss Belleperche talks about.

If she doubts our sincerity, or any other Aggie's sincerity, we invite her to come prick our skin ... we ALL bleed maroon.

Melissa Grimm
Brenda Franke
Class of '95

Writer tells it like it is about football

Thank you, Steve O'Brien. I'm glad to see that someone had the audacity to stand up and tell the truth about the A&M football team. I personally am a die-hard Aggie and would defend any aspect of A&M to the very end, but the truth needs to be told. I'm glad the Aggies are 4-0 and would love to see a national championship come home to Aggieland, but with Jeff "Gardere" lining up behind the center this possibility is far below slim. I, along with many others, plead with you, R.C., to make the change at quarterback. Jeff has hit about as many receivers this year as he hit batters last year. Yes, Jeff, you can hit them in football. R.C., make plans for the future and use Pullig and Miller. Granger plays scared, which is understandable for a pitcher, but a quarterback needs to be a leader with fire in his eyes and not — in his drawers.

Glen Portie
Class of '94
accompanied by three signatures

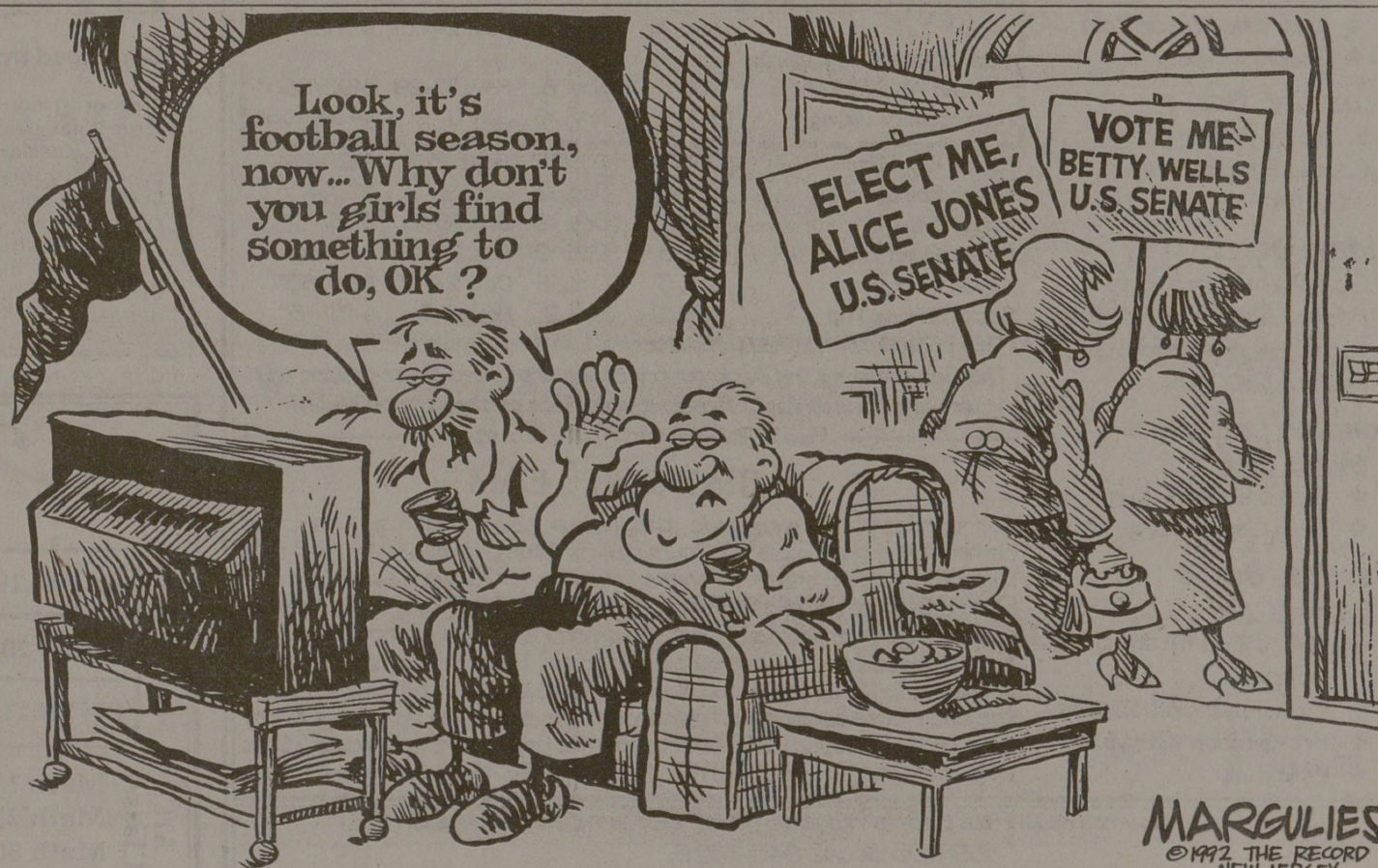
Now, for something completely different

It seems that everywhere you look these days on the A&M campus, there's something concerning our present traditions; people learning them, practicing them, and even complaining about them. What about all those traditions that never quite made it through to become as popular as the ones we have today? So without further delay, here are the Top 10 Rejected A&M Traditions:

- 10) Salmonella Night at Sbsa
- 9) The Not Quite So Big Event
- 8) Corps of Cadets Rush Week
- 7) The Howdy, Dammit Dance
- 6) The Kyle Field 50 Yard Line Dash
- 5) College of Liberal Arts Coop Fair
- 4) Six A.M. Yell Practice
- 3) Red Ass Letterbacks
- 2) PTTS Appreciation Week
- ... and the number one rejected A&M tradition:

1) Crochet the Hell Outta Bonfire (C.T.H.O.B.)

Joe McCormick
Kurt Pifer
Class of '95



Editorials appearing in The Battalion reflect the views of the opinion page staff and editor in chief only, and do not represent, in any way, the opinions of reporters, staff, or editors of other sections of the newspaper. Columns, guest columns, and Mail Call items express the opinions of the authors only.

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows in the Mail Call section. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name.

We reserve the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy.

Letters should be addressed to: The Battalion - Mail Call
013 Reed McDonald / Campus mail stop 1111
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843