



## Author questions role of women in military, combat

BY RACHEL LANDRY  
The Battalion

There was a time when women were viewed as capable only of domestic jobs. Lindsay McKenna, who served in the Navy from 1964 to 1967, has written a book that is expected to spark the debate of the next issue of women's civil rights — whether women should be allowed to fight in ground combat.

Dr. Sara Alpern, associate professor of history, said that, as far back as the American Revolution, when women disguised themselves as men, women have been taking up arms in war.

McKenna said there are still glass ceilings for women, and it is up to today's generation to push past them. She said women need to ask themselves, "Why shouldn't I be fighting in ground combat?"

James Bradford, associate professor of history at A&M, said some women view discrimination

in any form due to their gender as an infringement of their civil rights. He said the view that women need to be protected is rooted in gender roles.

McKenna said allowing only men to fight is clear discrimination. "I absolutely believe it's a civil rights question," said McKenna. "The decision is based on gender, not on fact."

McKenna said the idea that women cannot handle combat is a patriarchal stigma that has been around for at least 1,000 years. She said that, by not allowing women in combat, the military loses 50 percent of its intelligence, strategy and creativity. She called women an untapped resource.

"Women look at details," McKenna said. "When you are in combat, details are important. Paying attention to details keeps you and your squad safe. Men have the ability to look at details. They just do not go with it."

McKenna said, in today's military, women are not allowed to serve in about 15 percent of the positions. Women can serve almost anywhere, as long as they are not in combat, including serving on submarines and as Army Rangers and Green Berets.

McKenna said women can also serve as Navy and Air Force pilots — as long as they are in the air, and not on the ground.

Bradford the restriction on women being in combat is due to gender roles. However, he said that if an individual crosses those as gender lines, he or she needs to accept the consequences of that action.

For example, he said, if women were allowed to fight in ground combat, they would need to accept the fact that they could be drafted.

McKenna said that there are several militarily mandated requirements that a woman would have to meet to go into ground combat. Some of the physical requirements would be height, strong bone structure and good upper-body strength. A few of the other requirements would be patriotism, passing certain tests, intelligence and love for the work.

McKenna said that when people enter the military, they are tested for their strengths. When McKenna was tested, she was called into her commanding officer's office and told that she had the highest mechanical score of a woman to date. She was told that if she were a man, she would fix jet engines. However, because she was a woman, McKenna said, there were only two jobs open to her — non-combatant jobs.

McKenna recalled an instance in which she was denied going on a mission that offered higher pay because she was a woman.

"They told me that it was not a question that I could do my job," McKenna said. "They said it was the fact that I was a woman [that kept me from getting the mission]."

Bradford said that a popular question is whether a female captain should get paid the same amount as a man who faces ground combat. He said that people get paid to put their lives on the line, and the case of the USS Cole made it obvious that there is a risk, even for those in noncombatant roles.

Bradford said that the USS Cole is the first instance in which a woman was killed on a U.S. ship.

The Department of Defense has been reluctant to allow women into combat for a variety of reasons. One popular theory put forth by the Defense Department is that women lower the morale of male soldiers and decrease combat readiness. Often cited is the example of one warship that returned from a tour of duty with 15 percent of its female sailors pregnant.

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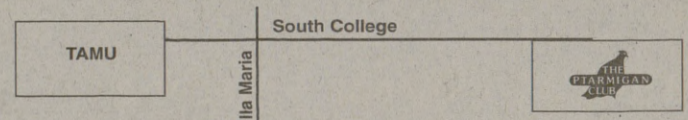
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