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More U.S. women prepare for war

By Siobhan McDonough
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Two months after settling into her dream job at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, Nina Augustine got her gun and shipped out.

She had thought she would be around awhile with her husband and 2-year-old son, guarding the general's office. Then the call came last month asking if her bags were packed.

"I'm conflicted," Augustine said. "When you have a family, everything is conflicted." Yet she also thought, "Any woman who feels she can go out there with a big, heavy gun, the more power to her."

And off she went as part of the U.S. deployment against Iraq — the new face of the female American soldier, this one carrying an M-16 rifle.

Launching Tomahawk missiles, piloting F-18 fighter jets, returning fire if ambushed — all are possible in a day's work for American servicewomen nudging their way to the front lines if the United States invades Iraq.

The war could expose many more women to combat than previous conflicts, despite restrictions on what they can do.

Women now can command combat military police companies, fly jets and Apache helicopters, work as tactical intelligence analysts and more. If called, female chemical specialists will go to contaminated areas and female helicopter pilots will land infantry in combat areas, or evacuate them, during assaults.

After the Gulf War, Congress eased rules excluding women from combat, opening thousands of new opportunities. Still, they are not allowed into positions where they are most likely to see ground combat — infantry, armor, artillery and Special Forces formations.

As women flowed into the civilian work force and overcame other limits through the generations, the arguments for holding them

back in the armed forces have largely endured: They are physically weaker, they might ruin the cohesion of an all-male unit, Americans just could not bear to see women killed.

"In the Gulf War, they thought if a woman came back in a body bag, everyone would freak out," said Linda Grant DePauw, president of the Minerva Center in Maryland that studies women and war.

"But women are embedded in the functioning of the entire military. You can't just pull people out on the basis of gender anymore. It's a different way of thinking about war."

More than 200,000 women serve in the active-duty forces, about 15 percent of the total.

Despite combat limits, American women have found themselves in plenty of firefights and danger.

More than 400 died in World War II, most of them nurses; in the 1989 invasion of Panama, women flying choppers landed infantry under heavy fire and women in military police units conducted infantry-style missions to search neighborhoods for guerrillas.

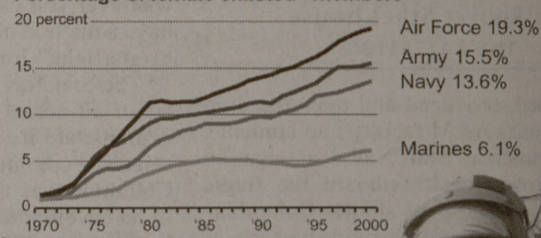
The question of how Americans would react to large-scale deaths of women has not been tested since the ban was loosened. In the Gulf War, 13 U.S. servicewomen died in the theater, from causes including Scud attack, mines and crashes and two were taken prisoners of war.

In recent years, the Navy and Air Force have begun allowing women to fly fighters and bombers.

Except for submarines, Navy women can be assigned to all combat vessels, including aircraft carriers, destroyers and frigates.

Women at war

After the Gulf War, restrictions were loosened on women's role in combat. While still excluded from ground combat positions, women can assume many other duties, including piloting jets and helicopters.

Percentage of female enlisted members

SOURCE: Department of Defense

They can fly all aircraft.

"It's a level playing field because now any service officer can do the same job, can compete," Storum said. "Whoever is best will rise to the top, be promoted and do well."

"There are not many fields that women can't be in," says Augustine, a senior airman who guards military bases and planes.

"It's kind of exciting and a little scary being my first time," said Air Force Capt. Kimberly Purdon, 26, a weapons system officer based at Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota. She has trained aboard the supersonic B-1 bomber for two years. By first time, she meant being prepared for going to war. She was preparing for deployment.

"A lot of us are in the same boat," she said. "There is no distinction between men and women. We feel the same way about wanting to go over there and serve."

Muslim

Continued from page 1

The national security alert level has been raised to orange, the second highest level. An orange security level requires the coordination of necessary security efforts at all levels and additional precautions at public events, along with other security measures.

The University's security level has not changed with the orange status, but officers have been alerted, said Bob Wiatt, Texas A&M University Police Department director.

Wiatt said UPD has maintained a higher alert status since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11.

"We have not reduced service to the University since 9/11," Wiatt said.

The local Bryan-College Station Islamic community will celebrate Eid-UI-Adha at 8 a.m. Feb. 11 with prayers at the Islamic Center, Chaudhry said.

Eid-UI-Adha marks the end of the Hajj religious period, which is the pilgrimage to holy sites in and around Mecca, Chaudhry said.

The Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, and every Muslim is required to make a Hajj if he is able to financially and physically, Latheef said.

Latheef said Eid-UI-Adha commemorates the prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his sons to obey God's commands.

"The Hajj is designed to develop nearness to God and (improve) spiritual uplift-

ment," he said.

Latheef said people who make a Hajj to Saudi Arabia wear simple seamless white garments that symbolize equality and unity before God. For many, Latheef said, the Hajj is a life-changing experience. He said it eliminates social and economic barriers that people put amongst themselves, and creates a world where people are all equal before God.

"Malcolm X was a part of a racist (sect of Islam) until he made his Hajj and saw people with blond hair and blue eyes praying next to dark-skinned and red-skinned people," he said. "When he came back (to the U.S.), he had converted to mainstream Islam."

The Islamic community in Bryan-College Station, made up of about 500 people, will meet Tuesday morning with prayers and spend the remainder of the day visiting friends and relatives, Chaudhry said. More than 300 people are expected to attend morning prayers, he said.

UPD has been going out on more patrols since Sept. 11 and will continue to do so, Wiatt said. It is in constant communication with local police departments, he said, and is on teletype alert with officials throughout the country.

"We will know if something is going on that could affect Texas A&M," Wiatt said.

"The main thing is if students see anything suspicious or unusual, they need to let someone know," he said.

Wiatt said the UPD or local police departments will investigate student reports to determine their validity.

Bonfire

Continued from page 1

last week.

"I can't comment on whether it is supposed to replace Bonfire — I don't know," Reynolds said.

Faculty and student leaders will meet again at the end of this week to evaluate the TABS proposal.

Tim Dosch, student senator and chairman of the TABS Student Senate committee, said Bonfire was not a part of the TABS proposal they will submit at the next meeting.

"We will not submit anything that has to do with Bonfire," Dosch said.

Dosch discussed the TABS proposal on Jan. 31 with Gates, who said the proposal merited attention.

"This is the kind of student input I've been hoping for," Gates said, "and I will certainly be looking into it."

Marc Barringer, chairman of the Bonfire Coalition committee, said the Coalition will present the results of a research project on Tuesday, Feb. 11. The committee, which is not an official University-sponsored organization, has conducted a study on bonfires throughout Texas and other military schools.

"We want to present Dr. Gates with options for a bonfire that could become uniquely Aggie," Barringer said, "even if it doesn't start out that way."

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