

WOMEN IN THE COMBAT ARMS

A NEW DIMENSION TO THE FRATERNIZATION THREAT

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INTRODUCTION

Armed Forces in most countries are generally perceived as conservative if not reactionary components of their societies. Certainly this was the case in Canada until well into the Sixties as typified by the strong resistance of the three Services to integration and unification. The integration of The Royal Canadian Navy, The Canadian Army and The Royal Canadian Air Force into a single Service known as The Canadian Armed Forces (CF) seemingly signalled the rise of a new liberalism in the military. Whether this shift in values was prompted by external or internal pressures, or a combination of both which is more probable, is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that in 1990, the CF are at the forefront of social change on issues ranging from the provision of day care to homosexuality.

On 20 February 1989 a Federal Tribunal ruled that the military's practice of excluding women from combat duty was discriminatory on the grounds of sex under the provisions of The Human Rights Act. (Ref 13, p. 59-60). This decision paved the way for the introduction of women into the combat arms of the army, those arms being infantry, armour, and artillery.

This paper will suggest that the introduction of women into the combat arms adds a new dimension to the threat from fraternization. It will also set forth a number of recommendations as to how this threat may be countered. To meet this aim we will first provide a brief history of the issue and explain the current policy on "mixed gender relationships" - a bureaucratic, but more legally palatable euphemism for fraternization. It will then be argued that there are fundamental weaknesses in current policy and that the combat arms are particularly vulnerable to the threat posed by fraternization. Although the focus will be on the fighting elements of the army, the issues are considered relevant to all components of the CF.

BACKGROUND

Women have served in the army with distinction since 1885. Historically their number were few and invariably they were employed in supporting roles such as nursing and administration. A large number of women joined the army during World War II; however, the significant increase in their number was dictated largely by the requirement to provide men to fight at the front. Following the war most women were demobilized and the few that stayed on continued with their traditional employment usually as clerks, nurses and food services officers. To this day women have never been employed on combat duty. (Ref 13, p. 15).

In 1970 The Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended that all occupations be opened to women. In response to this recommendation a new policy was established which stated that there would be no limitations on the employment of women provided that operational readiness was maintained. The policy also specified that women would not be employed in combat roles. At the same time the controlled ceiling on their number (1,500) was lifted. (Ref 10, p. 3).

The Human Rights Act, enacted in 1978, was an important, far reaching piece of legislation, which prompted a complete review of employment policies. The Act directed immediate implementation of the full employment of servicewomen unless this was precluded by a bona fide occupational requirement. In 1979 in response to this direction, the CF began a five year trial known as SWINTER (Servicewomen in Non Traditional Environments and Roles). The purpose of SWINTER was to determine if additional occupations and units could be opened to women. At this time, there were 4,700 women in the Service serving in 81 of 127 occupations. (Ref 10, p. 3). The army trial was conducted in Canadian Forces Europe Command and was specifically designed to determine the effects of mixed gender service on operational effectiveness in near-combat units. The trial, although inconclusive, was deemed successful. (Ref 12, p. iv - v).

In 1985 the Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights recommended in its report that "all trades and occupations in The

Canadian Armed Forces be open to women". This recommendation was endorsed by the Government. In response, the Chief of Defence Staff established a task force to make recommendations as to how to implement the new governmental policy. In 1986 he approved the recommendations of the task force, which for the army expanded employment opportunities for women to combat service support units, that is, service battalions, field ambulances and military police companies. He also endorsed the recommendation to conduct further trials to determine the impact of mixed gender service in combat units. By this time, there were approximately 7,800 women in the military. (Ref 10, p. 3-4).

The new trials were called CREW (Combat Related Employment of Women). Every effort was made to ensure that the evaluations were conducted as scientifically as possible. The trials' aim was not to test women, but "to evaluate the impact of mixed gender units on operational effectiveness". To ensure the credibility of the trials, it was necessary to have common enrolment standards and common training standards both based on operational requirements. It was also necessary to have a certain minimum number of women available to ensure that the data collected was reliable. This minimum number, or "critical mass", was considered by social scientists and military officers to be somewhere between 20 and 30 per cent. (Ref 10, p. 4). This requirement delayed the implementation of parts of the trial as, not surprisingly, women did not flock to the recruiting centres to join the combat arms.

In any event, this activity came to naught when in February of last year ('89) the CF was found guilty of discrimination on the basis of sex. Today, women have a right, by law, to serve in all branches of the army, although few have chosen to join the combat arms and only a small percentage of those interested have met the common entry standards.

CURRENT SITUATION

English speaking recruits do their basic course at Cornwallis, Nova Scotia. This training is common to all branches of the CF. Following this training those soldiers earmarked for the combat arms proceed to their respective branch or regimental battle school. In the case of Infantry, 42 women have undergone training at the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) Battle School - only one has graduated. The Artillery has been somewhat more successful graduating seven of eleven trainees. The graduates are currently employed as gun numbers in a field artillery regiment. Armour has graduated all three of its female trainees. For officer applicants the number has been even fewer. Three women, one at each of the three combat arms schools, have started training; however, none have graduated.

With such a limited numerical sample it is not possible to draw firm conclusions regarding the cause and incidence of fraternization; however, there is some evidence to suggest that a problem may be looming. At the recruit school in Cornwallis there have been at least 13 cases of fraternization in less than two years.* All incidents resulted in charges, summary trials or court martials, convictions and punishments ranging from a \$250 fine to a fine of \$2,000 with a severe reprimand. In each case the situation involved a male staff member, six of whom were married, and female recruits. At the PPCLI Battle School there have been four cases of reported fraternization; court martials have been held or are pending. At the Artillery Battle School two cases of fraternization have been reported, neither of which resulted in charges being laid, although the augmentee instructors involved were returned to their own units. Moreover, "fraternization, harassment and favouritism were not unknown in many mixed gender units that participated in SWINTER trials...". (Ref 13, p. 53). Given the highly structured environments of training establishments and units undergoing trials, along with the few number of women involved, it is not unreasonable to assume that there is a fairly serious problem with fraternization.**

* Approximately 900 women underwent training during this time.

**Data in this section was gleaned from interviews with commanding officers and is correct as of 24 Nov 89.

POLICY ON MIXED GENDER RELATIONSHIPS

The policy on mixed gender relationships is stated in Canadian Forces Administration Order (CFAO) 19-38. This policy states that:

- "6. In relations between military members, the standards of conduct in public of the CF members involved must:
- a. be consistent with the high levels of discipline, cohesion and morale that are essential to operational effectiveness;
 - b. contribute to a positive public perception of the CF; and
 - c. conform to the general standard required of all members."

The same order gives direction on postings. For example, members who are known to be involved in a personal relationship normally are not to be posted to the same unit, nor are they to be posted to establishment positions in which the higher ranking member would be in the direct chain of command of the other member. However, the order also states that where a unit is of sufficient size, the members may be posted to that unit, but not to the same sub-unit, provided that no personnel difficulties are anticipated. The order goes on to provide general guidance for

conduct. Members are urged to conform to long established customs of the Service and to apply common sense and good judgement in all circumstances, so as not to detract from discipline, cohesion and morale. The order also prohibits one member from interfering with the career of the other. The order concludes by outlining administrative action and, in some cases, disciplinary action which may be taken under The Code of Service Discipline should the policy be contravened.

THE ISSUES

No attempt will be made to define fraternization in this paper as this is an issue in itself which has been treated by a number of authors.* Suffice it to say that we consider the issue to have both legal and moral considerations. Our concern is with the consequences of the activity as it relates to discipline and good order and, its adverse impact on operational effectiveness.

Perhaps the most serious shortcoming in the policy is the failure to recognize that fraternization is an ethical issue and that regardless of what form it takes, it is morally indefensible. The policy specifically refers to the standards of conduct "in public". In public is defined as "those circumstances where military members might reasonably be expected to be within the

* Refs 14 and 16 deal extensively with this issue.

view of or be overheard by a person other than a member of their families...". These statements imply that fraternization in itself is not wrong, but that the relationship is inappropriate only when it occurs in public. This is moral equivocation. If a form of conduct is inappropriate, then whether or not it occurs in public is irrelevant. Admittedly, it could be argued that the definition of the term "in public" is sufficiently all encompassing that it effectively encourages the desired standard of conduct. After all, it is difficult to envisage a situation in which two military members are involved in an improper relationship which is not known by at least one other person. The argument seems decidedly weak, however. Why would the framers of the policy resort to such a subtlety? Indeed, why include the term at all? It adds nothing, creates ambiguity and seriously dilutes the moral principle that misconduct is wrong, regardless of whether or not it is viewed or overheard by a third party.

A similar shortcoming occurs in the section on postings. If personal relationships are such that they must be considered as a factor in postings, does this not suggest that the relationships themselves are inappropriate? Even assuming the relationship is appropriate, why is it necessary to make a distinction between a unit and its sub-units? Such a policy severely limits the ability of a commanding officer to rotate his personnel through the sub-units of his command, which in turn reduces his freedom of

action and hence operational effectiveness.* Furthermore, other disconcerting questions arise. What is a unit of sufficient size? How does one judge if a relationship is likely to create personnel difficulties? If nothing else, the policy is ambiguous. The message in this instance seems to be that fraternization can be accommodated. While it is true that common sense should and does prevail in most cases, the situation is nonetheless disquieting.

The policy goes on to state that members who form a personal relationship while in the same unit or, are in the same chain of command when different ranks are involved, will normally complete their current postings. Although provisions exist for an early posting of one or both members if circumstances warrant it, the policy implies that economic considerations take precedence over the more intangible considerations of morale and unit cohesion. In other words the message seems to be, let us not spend money on moving members involved in inappropriate relationships unless it's absolutely necessary.

One of the key features of the policy is that members in a personal relationship, "shall not attempt, or appear to attempt to affect the other member's career by any means, including involvement in the other member's; personnel evaluation reports, postings, selection for courses, duties or scheduling for duties, or documents or records"... There is a questionable caveat ..."unless required to do so to carry out assigned duties"!

* A case in point is 1 Service Battalion in Calgary Alberta. This unit, with a personnel strength of some 600, has 60 married couples in its complement.

While it is accepted that there are a large number of members who could act fairly and impartially in the situations described above, it is difficult to appreciate how they could carry out their duties without appearing to attempt to affect the other member's career. The policy is mere wishful thinking and again fraternization is seen to be accommodated.

There are other areas as well in which fraternization would seem to be condoned. For example, CFAO 27-1 dealing with messes, stipulates that, "in a marriage between members of different ranks, the spouse holding the higher rank may attend social functions at the mess of the spouse of lower rank, if the spouse holding the higher rank is invited by the president of the mess committee of the other spouse's mess". Bureaucratic obfuscation aside, this policy implicitly accepts fraternization as the couple perforce must have been involved in an improper relationship prior to marriage.* Moreover, the policy permits the higher ranking spouse to fraternize with the peer group of the lower ranking spouse.** The policy also creates a situation in which the mixed rank couple tend to serve as a role model for others. A similar problem occurs in the assignment of married quarters for a mixed rank couple, as at least one member of the pair will have neighbours who are not in their peer group.

* There are exceptions to this generalization; for example, when one non commissioned member of a couple of equal rank is subsequently commissioned.

**The CF, unlike the US Armed Forces, does not have open clubs.

Based on the foregoing evidence we consider the policy to be ineffectual. It is too permissive and too general. More importantly, the policy fails to state explicitly that mixed gender relationships are unethical and, consequently, undesirable. As a result, although legal and administrative sanctions exist in the policy, they are rarely applied.

The combat arms are seen to be particularly vulnerable to the threat posed by fraternization for a number of reasons. The qualifier "are seen to be" is necessary because at this time there is no Canadian or other valid experience with the phenomenon of men and women serving together in the fighting elements of the army in combat.*

Young men and women serving in the combat arms, particularly during training exercises and perhaps more so during war time, will have much greater opportunity to fraternize than in other situations such as an eight to five office environment. Soldiers in the combat arms must live, fight and hopefully survive together, day and night, in a highly unstructured environment called the battlefield. In infantry companies, armour squadrons, and gun batteries, it is impractical if not impossible, to segregate on the basis of rank, much less by sex, for even the most basic activities such as quartering and ablutions.

* Which is not to say that women have never been in combat, only that no documented evidence exists with respect to the issue of fraternization in the situation described.

Although actual fighting is an intense, all consuming activity, for individual units it is normally of short duration and invariably there are long periods of relative inactivity. During these lulls in combat, soldiers of both sexes will undoubtedly pursue the satisfaction of needs other than those of mere survival. Whether it occurs in a trench, a snow cave, or a tank is irrelevant, the fact remains that the creation of mixed gender units presents unprecedented opportunities for fraternization.

But will these opportunities be acted upon? It could be argued that fraternization will not occur on the scale implied in the preceding paragraph. After all, man is a socially responsible being and factors such as good training, military discipline and sound leadership will serve to curtail the incidence of improper relationships. While this is true, it is also the case that combat is an exceptionally stressful situation. Fear of death, fear of mutilation and fear of loss of self respect through cowardice are ever present on the battlefield.* Indeed, many soldiers succumb to these fears even prior to their arrival in the combat zone. Given this high stress environment there is a tendency for social and military values to weaken and for soldiers to act upon more basic instincts. As Desmond Morris would express it, for "the ape-man within us" to emerge. Soldiers who are about to enter battle and, fearing for their lives to varying degrees, are unlikely to be restrained by military mores about fraternization.

* See refs 1 and 2 on this subject, both of which are "classic" refs.

There is a strong need to reach out and touch someone, pun intended, and if that someone is a soldier of the opposite sex, so much the better. Moreover, given the opportunity for brief moments of privacy there is little risk of being caught, which in normal circumstances acts as a restraint. Even if the soldiers are caught or found out and subsequently charged, it is unlikely that any sanctions imposed would be more severe than those associated with their current combat employment. In these circumstances, the "in public" proviso of the CFAO has a somewhat hollow ring. Combat arms soldiers are generally younger than the Service population as a whole. In large measure this is due to the physical and psychological demands of soldiering. Being younger, it also means they have stronger sexual drives, and are arguably more prone to engage in fraternization.

IS THERE A PROBLEM?

We feel that there is a problem. Even the Human Rights Tribunal begrudgingly admitted that "after considering the written evidence and oral testimony, we have concluded that the social factors in operational effectiveness and risk minimization were important, but not sufficient to exclude a class of individuals from employment". (Ref 13, p. 53). Unfortunately, this conclusion was based on the results on the SWINTER trials, the results of similar trials in other countries and the experience of the civilian workforce. It is important to note that the conclusion was not based on actual experience in combat. Soldiers

were not dying or killing during the SWINTER trials, nor were they dying or killing during the trials conducted by other countries. Experience in the civilian workforce can hardly be compared in any meaningful way with the life and death struggles on the battlefield. Yes, social factors and risk minimization are important, but in truth, we do not know to what extent. This is simply no valid experience from which we can draw firm conclusions. Again, to quote the report of The Human Rights Tribunal, "Having considered the evidence at length, we have concluded that there was no, or not sufficient evidence of an indisputable kind, to suggest that a mixed gender unit could not develop that cohesion necessary to put in a better than adequate performance. There have been no studies of units during real combat and perhaps there never can be". (Ref 13, p. 56).

So where does all of this information leave us with respect to the issue of fraternization? We have determined so far that the incidence of fraternization, even in our peace time Force, is sufficiently high to suggest that a significant problem exists. We have also determined that the current policy on mixed gender relationships is weak and ineffectual. We have reason to believe that actual combat, with its associated stresses, will provide unprecedented opportunities for fraternization and that in all likelihood these opportunities will be acted upon.

We also know that, although social factors are an important facet of cohesion in combat units, there is an insufficient weight of evidence to preclude the employment of women in combat. Unfortunately, there is also insufficient evidence to indicate that mixed gender combat units can perform effectively in battle. In this evidential vacuum and, given that the burden of proof was on the CF, The Human Rights Tribunal ruled in favour of the unrestricted employment of women. As this decision was not appealed by the Government, the ruling now has the effect of law. Women can be expected to join the CF in increasing numbers, particularly as this type of employment becomes socially acceptable. Therefore, the notion of men and women serving together in combat units has become a reality and the spectre of mixed gender units in combat is on the horizon at some time in the future, unless war itself becomes obsolete. The problem with this new dimension of fraternization and its potentially deleterious effect on unit combat effectiveness remains.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

We feel that the threat of fraternization must be dealt with vigorously in the three relatively distinct areas of policy, education and training, and discipline.

POLICY The CF must recognize that fraternization is an ethical problem which impacts on operational effectiveness and that; consequently, it must be addressed clearly and with effect. Appeals such as "must conform to the general standard required of

all members" are insufficient if the general standard is not described in some meaningful way. The difficulties of doing this in a comprehensive manner are appreciated, but even a list of examples of inappropriate relationships, such as officers shall not develop personal relationships with non commissioned members would be a step in the right direction.

The phrase "in public" should be deleted from the current policy. It is confusing and ethically unsound. If a personal relationship is deemed inappropriate, then whether or not it occurs in public is irrelevant.

The policy on postings should be reviewed and those aspects which would seem to condone or accommodate fraternization should be expunged. In this regard personal relationships should not be a factor in postings. If an improper personal relationship exists it should be dealt with either administratively or under The Code of Service Discipline as circumstances warrant. Similarly, it should not be necessary to include in the policy the proviso that members in a personal relationship "shall not attempt or appear to attempt to affect the other member's career...". The members perforce should not be in a personal relationship to begin with and therefore the situation should not arise save for those cases in which peers are involved.

Policies in respect of messes and quartering should also be revised. Indeed, in situations in which a mixed rank marriage occurs at least one member of the pair, if not both, should be released thereby negating a requirement for a policy in this area at all.

The policy should also require subordinate commands, formations, units and training establishments to develop amplifying policies, orders and instructions, and procedures dealing with the issue of fraternization. Although this has been done in some instances, notably training establishments, it has been done strictly on the initiative of local commanders, usually in reaction to an increase in the incidence of fraternization. As more and more units and eventually all units, become mixed gender in nature, there will be a requirement for firm direction and guidance.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING A good start has been made in this area already with the issue of the package "Mixed Gender Service in Army Field Units: Leaders' Considerations" (Ref 11); however, much more needs to be done in terms of education and training. Suitable packages of instruction should be developed and included in a systematic fashion in our leadership programmes at our military colleges, staff colleges and during initial and subsequent occupational and career training. As indicated earlier, the CF are at the forefront of social change and a concerted effort is required if we are to be successful in overcoming widespread resistance and reactionary attitudes regarding the employment of women in the CF and, in particular, their employment in the combat arms.

DISCIPLINE The leadership challenge posed by mixed gender units is formidable. Even with policies, orders and instructions; even with good education and training; mixed gender combat units will be found wanting if discipline regarding fraternization is not applied strictly, intelligently and consistently. To use a cliché, it is easy to turn a blind eye to improper relationships. How often have we heard, or will we hear, sentiments such as these: "boys will be boys and girls will be girls"; "the CF can't and shouldn't regulate sex"; "there is nothing wrong with their relationship - they are not in the same chain of command"; "you will never get that (order) by The Human Rights Tribunal"; "what difference does it really make"; and "as long as they are discreet no harm can possibly come of it"? At the risk of indulging in hyperbole, we feel that fraternization does pose a significant threat to combat effectiveness. We feel that it does have the potential to undermine group cohesion and sap combat power. If discipline is not enforced and enforced rigorously then fraternization could indeed become "a corporate incest" (Ref 16, p. 36) in which we sacrifice not only integrity of the military institution, but also place at risk our national security.

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