



**THE GULF CRISIS**  
**Time Out for Diplomacy**



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# Women Warriors

**Sharing the Danger**



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# Our Women in the Desert

Sharing the duty—and danger—in a ‘mom’s war’

**T**he troops in Saudi Arabia have given this crisis a nickname: the “mom’s war.” The evidence is everywhere in the heat and dust. Maj. Kathy Higgins pinned up a crayon drawing by her 5-year-old son in her medical evacuation office. A few U.S. servicewomen have torn up photos of their children; looking at them was just too hard. Sitting in a field hospital on the edge of a bustling airstrip, Lt. Col. Carolyn Roaf, a medical officer, said that saying goodbye to her 6-year-old daughter was the toughest thing she had ever done—especially after the little girl told her, “Mom, if you die over there, I’m coming to rescue you.” Capt. Ginny Thomas left the Air Force three years ago because she wanted more of a home life. Last week she was back as a reservist, piloting a giant C-141 transport around the Middle East. “I’ll be glad when it’s over,” she said. “But I would be disappointed if I was not over here doing something for my country.”

Women have taken part in every American military crisis since the Revolutionary War. But never before have they served on such a large scale or in such a wide variety of jobs. As the massive deployment in the Persian Gulf continues, women pilots from the 101st Airborne Division are ferrying supplies and personnel in Huey helicopters. Female mechanics from the 24th Mechanized Division are maintaining tanks, handling petroleum and coordinating water supply. Throughout the region, women are working as truck drivers, cargo handlers, intelligence specialists, paratroopers, flight controllers, shipboard navigators, communications experts and ground-crew chiefs. Their precise number in Operation Desert Shield is classified, but one Army personnel expert says women will soon match their overall proportion in the services: roughly 11 percent of the 2 million-member armed forces.

Women are still not permitted to serve in combat positions—by law in the Navy, Air

**CRISIS  
IN THE  
GULF**

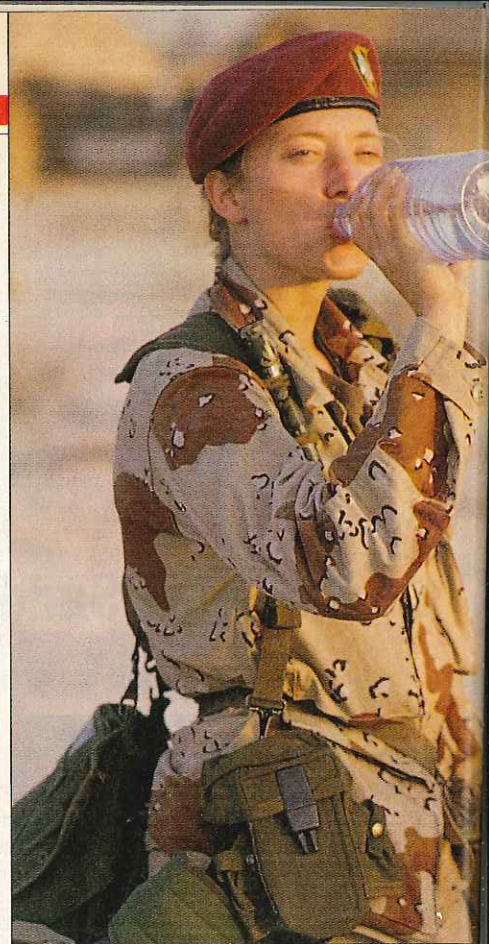
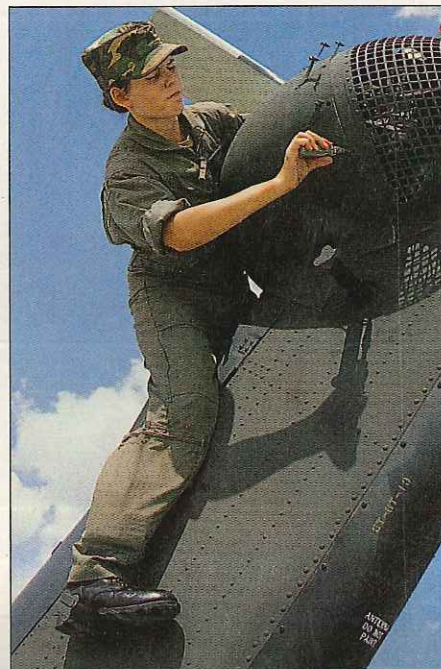
Force and Marines and by policy in the Army. But ever since the Pentagon began recruiting women in large numbers in the 1970s (chart), the services have defined “combat” ever more narrowly, giving women increasingly critical roles. That has caused some confusion in past deployments.

In the invasion of Grenada, four female MPs were stopped at the loading ramp and sent back to their barracks three times while the brass hashed out its policy. This time there was no holding back, the Pentagon said: if women were part of a unit stateside, they shipped out when it was deployed. Only the Marine Corps showed some hesitancy, deliberately delaying a few support units that contained women in the early days of the mobilization. But a Camp Pendleton spokeswoman denied reports that men had actually been substituted for women, and since then, the Marines, too, have sent women to the gulf.

For now, the U.S. servicewomen in Saudi Arabia are doing just what the men are

## Working on a helicopter at Fort Hood

BOB DAEMMIRCH



Members of the 108th Military Police Company

doing: setting up vast military installations in the desert, fortifying supply lines and waiting. If the shooting begins, there are no plans to withdraw the women from the theater—and few illusions that they might not be among the casualties. “Just because you’re not in a combat unit doesn’t mean you won’t be in combat,” says Lawrence Korb, former assistant secretary of Defense for manpower. “When they start lobbing SCUDS with chemical weapons, they’ll be aiming at everybody.” To that end, female troops in Saudi Arabia have been issued protective gear, and are required to carry it at all times, just like the men. They also carry arms and are trained to use them should they come under attack.

**Harm’s way:** Some military experts say the gulf call-up underscores the hypocrisy of Pentagon policies toward women: though they can’t serve on the fighting lines, they are in harm’s way—particularly in a conflict where the “front line” could be everywhere. “Every military manual instructs you to hit the back supply line first and try to isolate the front line,” says Rep. Patricia Schroeder, who chairs the House subcommittee on military installations. “Where are all the women? In the back lines with the supply details, communications equipment and refueling planes.”

Given the desert realities, some servicewomen are lobbying the military to lift the combat restrictions. “I can fly that F-15 just as well as a man,” insists 25-year old Lt.



BILL GENTILE FOR NEWSWEEK

ny deployed from Fort Bragg, N.C., try to stay cool at a U.S. base in Saudi Arabia

Stephanie Shaw, who controls flight missions for a tactical air wing in the gulf. "I volunteered for the Army, not the Girl Scouts," echoes Capt. Leola Davis, commander of a heavy-maintenance company that fixes everything from tanks to HUMV jeeps at the Army's First Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas. But the objections to women on the front lines are deeply en-

trenched, as Schroeder found this year when she proposed legislation calling for a four-year Army test of women in combat posts. The Army rejected the idea, and it stands little chance of passage.

One of the chief arguments against women on the fighting lines is sheer physical strength. Within the tough, tattooed all-male tanker brigades at Fort Hood, for ex-

ample, it's an article of faith that women don't have the upper-body strength needed to load 60-pound shells into guns. But brute force is irrelevant in many of the combat jobs from which women are excluded. "On a ship, war is high tech," says one former Navy submariner. "Men aren't any better at video games than women."

**Male bonding:** Many military men firmly believe the presence of women on the front lines would disrupt what they call "unit cohesion"—the male bonding that theoretically allows warriors to perform acts of heroism under fire. "I want people on my right and on my left who will take the pressure when the shooting starts," says Brig. Gen. Ed Scholes, who commands the 18th Airborne Corps in Saudi Arabia. "Men simply cannot treat women like other men. And it's silly to think that a few months' training can make them into some kind of sexless soldiers," says Brian Mitchell, a former Army captain and author of a 1989 book, "Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military." But historian Linda Grant De Pauw, founder of the Minerva Center, which studies women in the military, counters that such objections are mired in old stereotypes of women as victims. "It's like the image they used to have of blacks before they served with them—that they were too cowardly, too stupid or would break their weapons," she argues.

Justified or not, the restrictions have created a military rife with anomalies. Women can train men for missions they can't carry out themselves. In some cases, they can command units in which they can't serve. Air Force women can ferry troops and supplies over hostile areas, and refuel jet fighters, but they can't fly the fighters. In the Navy, they are barred from

## The Total Numbers: A Strong Beachhead in the Armed Forces

The U.S. military began recruiting women in large numbers when it abolished the draft in 1973. Since then, the percentage

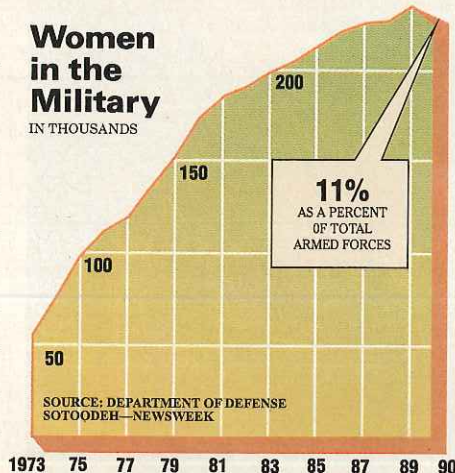
of women has grown steadily—particularly in key support, medical, engineering and intelligence specialties.

### Enlisted Women

OCCUPATION	PERCENT
Infantry, Gun Crew, Seaman	6.5%
Electronic	6.2%
Communications, Intelligence	10.8%
Medical, Dental	13.4%
Technical Specialties	2.3%
Support, Administration	35.2%
Mechanical Repair	8.4%
Service, Supply	9.8%
Other	7.4%

### Women in the Military

IN THOUSANDS



### Officers

OCCUPATION	PERCENT
General and Executive	1.2%
Tactical Operations	7.0%
Intelligence	5.9%
Engineering, Maintenance	10.8%
Science, Professional	5.7%
Medical	39.6%
Administration	14.6%
Supplies, Logistics	8.3%
Other	6.9%



PHOTOS BY BILL GENTILE FOR NEWSWEEK

**Pilot Ginny Thomas checking the controls of her transport plane in Saudi Arabia**

permanent assignment on combat ships such as carriers, destroyers and submarines. But they can serve on repair and supply ships in the same waters. In 1987, 248 women were aboard the destroyer tender *Acadia*, which came to the aid of the USS *Stark* after it was hit by an Iraqi Exocet missile. Women also make up a quarter of the firefighters on the sub tender USS *Dixon*. "If you have women fighting a fire in an enclosed area, that's just as dangerous as a combat zone," says reservist Teresa Smith, a first-class petty officer who would report to the *Dixon* if called to active duty.

**'Glass ceiling':** What's more, servicewomen say the restrictions hamper their career opportunities. Army officials boast that 285 of the 331 "military occupational specialties" are open to enlisted women. But in fact, only half the jobs in noncombat specialties are available to women, since some are in tank, infantry or other units that are off-limits. Women officers also bitterly complain that the rules have created a "glass ceiling," since advancement to top ranks often depends on leading combat units. "A number of women say, 'Hey, don't protect me from combat' because the price is too high," says Navy Capt. Susan Canfield, who oversees nine ships mapping the Pacific for antisubmarine warfare.

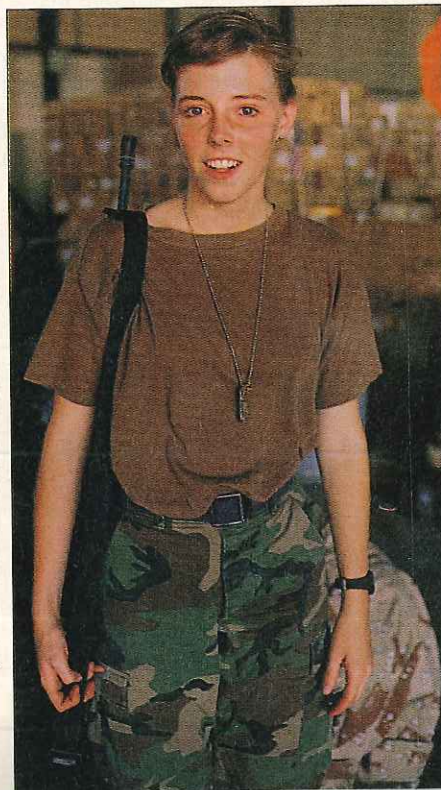
The lust for more action is not universally shared among U.S. servicewomen, however. At Fort Hood, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Portia Dublar, a crack maintenance technician for the Second Armored Division's aviation brigade, says she has no burning desire to fly helicopters—"I'm perfectly content to fix them." Sgt. Elizabeth Hope, one of the few women deployed in Saudi Arabia who has seen combat before as an MP in Panama, thinks women should not serve in the trenches: "It would simply complicate everything if women were fighting alongside men."

Ultimately, the decision to allow more

women in combat, at least in the Navy, Marines and Air Force, rests with Congress, where opposition is most deeply entrenched of all. Much of that stems from the perception that the U.S. public won't stomach its daughters coming home in body bags. Yet historian D'Ann Campbell, teaching at West Point, notes that "women have *always* come back in body bags. The question is, are we going to train them for defense? It will depend on how essential it is for the military to be all it can be."

The U.S. women in Saudi Arabia face a more immediate problem—the clash of cultures with their Muslim hosts. In a country where women can't drive, show their faces or venture out alone, Saudi troops don't know what to make of female GIs wearing

**Armed and ready at a U.S. desert base**



fatigues and issuing orders. American women are similarly stunned by the Saudis. Two female paratroopers, interviewed in Dhahran last week, couldn't help but stare as a Muslim woman in a black veil walked by. "Tragic," said First Lt. Jennifer Ann Wood, who quoted a maxim from her West Point days: "That's a tradition unhampered by progress."

The Saudis have made some cultural concessions. U.S. servicewomen can now discreetly drive vehicles while on duty, and at one air base, they can use a gym during limited hours, though they must enter through the back door. Still, they are not permitted to wear shorts, jog or even shop on military bases unless accompanied by a man. Some American women take the restrictions in stride: "This is their culture. We shouldn't impose our ways on them," said Capt. Susan Beausoleil, a paratrooper with the 18th Airborne Corps. Others aren't so complacent. The Saudis "look at you like a dog—they don't want American women here," griped one Army staff sergeant. That kind of treatment incenses Schroeder, as does the U.S. military's tolerance. "Can you imagine if we sent black soldiers to South Africa and told them to go along with the apartheid rules?" she asks.

**Limited comforts:** Conditions could be worse for the U.S. women. Many are quartered in air-conditioned barracks, mobile homes and schools built by the Saudis. All-male Marine combat units deployed further forward live in sweltering tents without cold drinks or hot meals. Even in rear areas, though, comforts are limited. Women often sleep 24 to a room, on cots only three inches apart. There are occasional shortages of such essentials as sanitary napkins. With nowhere to go after hours, no movies or recreational facilities, boredom sets in quickly. Many women just work, sleep and do laundry. Deprived of TV, some have rediscovered the pleasures of reading and the art of conversation.

Much of the talk is of spouses and children. Military rules specify that single parents and two-career service couples must designate short- and long-term guardians for their dependents. But most servicewomen never thought such arrangements would actually be used, and the reality is heart wrenching. Sgt. Mary Payette, an antitank weapons specialist, left her 8-month-old son with her sister in St. Paul and can't help but think what would happen if she didn't return. She shudders: "I don't want him calling anybody else Mom."

Some U.S. military women are also married to military men, and fear for their safety. Army ordnance specialist Karen Norrington arrived in Saudi Arabia to discover that her husband had been shipped over, too, in a different unit. "I've stayed out here looking for him," she said, as she scanned the ranks of arriving soldiers at a

Saudi receiving point. Kim and Robert Williams of Flint, Mich., were luckier. They were stationed together on the Persian Gulf. "We're having fun," said Kim, though she added that the worst part is not knowing how long they will be away. "We could be here for a few weeks or a year. Maybe our children won't remember us."

The U.S. women in Saudi Arabia joined the armed forces for much the same reasons men have long flocked to the colors—excitement, travel, patriotism and a chance for skills they couldn't get else-

where. But many didn't plan on this kind of adventure. Just like the men, they are scared—of the strange, forbidding desert, of an unpredictable enemy and especially the threat of a poison-gas attack. "Anyone who says he or she is not scared is lying to themselves," says Lt. Stephanie Shaw. "I wake up each morning hoping my arrival in Saudi Arabia was just a dream," admits Army specialist Sandra Chisholm. "But we have a job to do here and we will do it."

No one can predict what that job will ultimately entail for the American troops.

But the women, more than the men, believe their future in the armed forces is on the line that George Bush has drawn in the sand. If a major war erupts, spreading unisex casualties throughout the theater, it could finally bring down the combat exclusions—or it could so outrage the American public, and its leaders, that women are never again placed so close to the action in so many critical roles.

MELINDA BECK with RAY WILKINSON in Saudi Arabia, BILL TURQUE in Washington, CLARA BINGHAM at Fort Hood and bureau reports

## 'Stormin' Norman' Takes Command

At West Point in the 1950s they called him "Schwarzkie." In his two tours of Vietnam, the gung-ho soldier picked up the nickname "Stormin' Norman." But last spring, H. Norman Schwarzkopf III might have been called "Cassandra." Schwarzkopf, head of America's operations in the Middle East, told lawmakers that as the Soviet menace wanes, "the most probable near-term threat to the uninterrupted flow of oil would likely originate from a regional conflict." The likely trigger: Iraq. "The cease-fire with Iran has allowed Iraq to resume its bid for leadership and influence within the Arab world." But instead of calling for beefed-up desert preparedness, Sen. Sam Nunn, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, used the testimony as evidence that the United States should *cut back* in the Mideast.

Congress might not have listened, but Schwarzkopf stormed ahead anyway. Just five days before the invasion he put 350 officers through a drill based on one Middle Eastern nation invading another and threatening U.S. economic interests. Still, he's no psychic. According to the Washington Post, only hours before the invasion he briefed the Joint Chiefs of Staff but did not predict it was imminent.

Now the general is spending a lot of time jetting between Tampa's MacDill Air Force Base, Washington and Central Command's new



PAT BENIC—DOD POOL

The general inspecting U.S. forces at a Saudi base

headquarters in Saudi Arabia, where he saw the troops last week. With his usual bravado, he said, "If the Iraqis are dumb enough to attack, they are going to pay a terrible price for it."

Colleagues call Schwarzkopf a good soldier—someone who will leave the mental gymnastics to the Joint Chiefs and simply get the job done. "He's not going to rewrite land-war tactics," says one. "But when you tell him what to do, he salutes and he does it." In a military that is becoming ever more populated with uniformed politicians, his chestful of medals shows real soldiering. It includes two Purple Hearts

from wounds received in Vietnam (not including the spinal surgery he needed to repair the damage done by parachuting), three Silver Stars and the Distinguished Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster.

Schwarzkopf came into the spotlight twice before the gulf crisis. He was a battalion commander at the time of the accidental deaths of American soldiers in Vietnam described in the book and television film "Friendly Fire." Though a victim's family blamed Schwarzkopf, the author largely exonerated him. The general also headed U.S. ground forces during the problem-plagued 1983 invasion of Grenada—though most of the

blame came to rest with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who insisted on bringing every service into the fight, multiplying confusion. Some who have watched Schwarzkopf question his military judgment: one analyst says Schwarzkopf, who is most comfortable with conventional "heavy" forces loaded with artillery and armor, personally called for Sheridan tanks to be airlifted to Saudi Arabia, even though they were not included in the original deployment plan. The analyst describes the tanks as poorly armored and outdated, and calls their use "confusing things for show with things for real."

The general knows that there's more than one war taking place in the desert. Besides Iraq, there's the old struggle between the Army and the Marines. The service that shines stands to get the edge on appropriations and staffing into the next century. With a smaller Soviet threat, the Army's "heavy" strengths lose their allure. Boosters like Schwarzkopf have been eying new roles, such as a shift toward swift "expeditionary" forces—the Marines' traditional bailiwick. Yet so far in Saudi Arabia, the Marines have looked more battle ready—with more equipment set up in the region, including tanks and water-producing systems. Schwarzkopf has been forced to give them the primary role in a buildup he wanted to make a showcase for the Army. Taking command, he knows, means going with the folks who get the job done.