



## MORE WOMEN SOLDIERS DYING IN IRAQ

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*As the number of American service members killed in Iraq approaches 3,000, Americans are coming to terms with the increased role of women in combat which has resulted in more deaths of women in combat.*

More than 155,000 women have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002, according to the Pentagon.

Of the 2,940 U.S. service members to die in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion, 64 were women. Four military women have been killed in Afghanistan.

And while this is a small percentage of the total, these deaths exceed the number of military women killed in Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf war combined, the Associated Press reported.

"The American public is beginning to realize that women are playing an equal part in this war and that they are facing the same risks," Tammy Duckworth, a Black Hawk helicopter pilot who lost both legs in a 2004 attack, told the AP.

"This is the first time in our nation's history ... when it's normal to see female names as part of the war wounded or those killed in action."

### **Changing roles for women soldiers in Iraq**

Women have participated in every military conflict in U.S. history but the changing nature of the conflict in Iraq means that more of them are facing dangerous and life-threatening situations. Even though women are still not part of direct combat in Iraq, front lines don't exist and bombs can strike anywhere.

Checkpoints, where women are essential to search Iraqi women due to cultural traditions, can be especially dangerous. And women can serve in the military police, where they face combat situations.

"You get up in the morning, you say your prayers and you hope to God that you come back that night," Spc. Ashley Pullen, a 22-year-old member of the Kentucky National Guard's 617<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company in Iraq who earned a Bronze Star for valor, told the AP.

Historians believe these new circumstances will change Americans' viewpoints on women in the military.

"My guess is that one of the results of this conflict is that there will be a redefinition of women's

roles," David Segal, director of the Center for Research on Military Organizations at the University of Maryland, told the Christian Science Monitor.

### **Women are perceived differently**

For some women veterans these changes cannot come soon enough. They still believe that when Americans think of veterans they think of men.

"People tell me, 'You're not a veteran. You're young, you're a girl,'" Spc. Jenet Posey, who served in Iraq for nine months as a mechanic, told the Christian Science Monitor.

"We're out there too, and we're risking our lives, but people don't see it. Women veterans do not get the recognition they deserve."

Women also feel like they have to work harder because they are representing all womankind, not just their own actions.

"When it's 100 guys and you're the only girl, it's like proving yourself every day," Marine policewoman Aneta Urban told the AP. "When you're doing rifle training, close combat training, they're looking at you a lot more closely. They're wondering: Can she do it? Can she handle it? You don't want to be laughed at."

### **Critics**

But there are still critics who believe these changes are not good for society.

"Engaging the enemy in this uncivilized thing we call war is a job for men, not women," Kate O'Beirne, a conservative opinion writer and editor, said in a radio interview last spring.

The president of the Center for Military Readiness, Elaine Donnelly, contends forcing men and woman to live together in combat situations creates the potential for romantic involvement, sexual harassment and morale problems.

And others think the media is exaggerating the importance of female fighters in Iraq.

"They're not occupying any particularly important positions or fighting in the front. ... If there were not a single woman (deployed), the war would be the same," Martin van Creveld, a military historian and Iraq war critic, told the AP.

But that might not be the opinion of the men who are returning from Iraq after fighting side-by-side with women. Capt. Tara Stiles who lead a platoon of military police backing up the First Marine Expeditionary Force said that at first the male Marines were "kind of leery" of a woman commander, but after a few weeks, "they'd rather have my platoon vs. one of the others led by males. ... They needed their backs covered and we were there."

-- *Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra*

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