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The Kinder, Gentler Military: Can America's Gender-Neutral Fighting Force Still Win Wars?

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Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. It does not completely exonerate Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, but it does bring out critical failures in the timely distribution of intelligence. Moreover, it makes the case that the poor material readiness of the Pacific Fleet on 7 December 1941 had more to do with inadequate congressional funding than with negligent naval leadership.

While all of the essays do admirable jobs of conveying the critical details of engagement, some provide greater insight into strategic settings and effects than others. John Hattendorf's essay on the battle of Manila Bay does a particularly good job of setting the strategic stage and drawing out the strategic consequences. On the other hand, a few essays go so deep into tactical maneuver that readers sometimes struggle to keep their focus on the big picture. I am thinking here of Mark L. Hayes and his account of the Civil War battle of New Orleans. While this piece is clear, I found myself getting lost in the overabundance of detail. This brings to mind my only serious reservation with this book: essays of such detail and depth warrant greater support by illustrations and maps. While some excellent choices have been made in this area, I think the reader could have been better served with even greater use of charts and pictures, especially in essays like Hayes's, where so much "fine grain" is provided.

Other naval battle essays included in this anthology are Hampton Roads, Santiago, the Coral Sea, Guadalcanal, the Philippine Sea, Leyte Gulf, and Okinawa. The book concludes with the only essay that deals with a naval battle after the Second World War; it is about Operation PRAYING MANTIS, which took place in 1988, during the tanker war in the Persian Gulf. That essay looks to the future

of naval battles, noting both the increased capabilities of naval forces and the persistent influence of political authority on the waging of limited conflict.

Like any good anthology, this book provides a solid collection of sophisticated, well researched, and well written essays that encourage the reader to wander through its contents to focus on new thoughts and insights in areas of greatest interest. After reading each essay, I had a strong inclination to read just one more before putting the book down. It would be perfect for the new student of naval history, after core texts by the likes of E. B. Potter, S. E. Morison, or Sweetman himself. For the more widely read naval historian, it is like a bottle of fine brandy that can be sipped and enjoyed in small doses but provides lasting pleasure.

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Gutmann, Stephanie. *The Kinder, Gentler Military: Can America's Gender-Neutral Fighting Force Still Win Wars?* New York: Scribner, 2000. 300pp. \$25

This new book, which could aptly be called the latest salvo in the culture war to shape the future of the U.S. military, holds no surprises. As might be inferred from the title, the author believes that the armed forces have made far too many concessions to political correctness in order to attract and retain women in uniform. In her view, the concessions have resulted in lowered standards that have inevitably reduced the combat effectiveness of the military.

Readers who agree will find the book well written, easy to read, and full of numerous examples illustrating the degree to which political correctness has been

carried within the armed forces. The only complaints that such readers might have are that it really covers no new ground and that the lack of footnotes makes it difficult to follow up on the material. The book advances the cause of those resisting what they call the “feminization” of the military in one way only: because it is written by a woman, critics cannot simply dismiss her ideas—as they would if the author were a man—by saying she doesn’t “get it” with respect to the problems women face in society.

Readers who believe that the armed forces should not allow discrimination against women can expect to be upset by Gutmann’s analysis. I suspect that her critics will use several lines of attack. One is that much of her evidence is anecdotal. That criticism may be valid, but the author obtained the “anecdotes” through a large number of interviews and personal visits to military units. Next, she will undoubtedly be accused of blaming the victim. In my view, however, the author’s beef is not with women in the service but with the high-level politicians—both in and out of uniform—who would rather compromise the combat readiness of the armed forces than deal with the inconvenient truth that men and women are not equally suited to all roles in the military.

In the absence of incontrovertible evidence to support limiting the role of women to some degree—evidence that may be impossible to obtain in peacetime—most individuals on both sides will remain locked in their positions. As a result, *The Kinder, Gentler Military* is not likely to change many minds. Before such change becomes possible, both sides will have to reach some type of consensus regarding the role of the military and what types of missions it will be called upon to carry out in the future. That could allow

more reasoned discussion about whether or not men and women are equally qualified to execute those missions.

Proponents of reducing or eliminating restrictions on women in the military emphasize the military’s role as a vehicle for driving social change. Advocates of this point of view also tend to view future war as a high-tech affair in which such qualities as aggressiveness, bravery, physical strength and endurance, and readiness to take risks will no longer have the importance they had in the past.

As Gutmann discovered in the course of her research, this shift in values is already being reflected in much of the initial training for members of today’s military. *The Kinder, Gentler Military* points out numerous examples of how such training is being made less stressful, how competition is downplayed, and how effort is valued as much as results. How far these changes reflect the integration of women into formerly all-male training, as opposed to overall changes in our society that affect both sexes, is difficult to tell. Do not look to the military for an unequivocal answer. The author illustrates how sensitive the military is to these issues; two examples suffice.

Gutmann quotes an Army training regulation declaring, “All soldiers, regardless of gender, train to a single standard.” In spite of that assertion, all the services, including the Army, have lower physical performance standards for women. The result is aircraft mechanics who cannot carry their toolboxes to the flight line, truck drivers who cannot change a tire, and sailors who cannot carry an end of a litter with a wounded person on it. The services have found ways to work around those difficulties, but they all require additional people to do jobs that were formerly done by one man.

Another controversial issue that Gutmann deals with is pregnancy. The services have adopted the position that pregnancy presents no greater problem than do other temporary disabilities, even though it makes women four times less deployable than men. To counter the deployability problem, feminists point out that women become *more* deployable than men if losses from pregnancy are not counted. That may be true, but it is meaningless to the units who have to deploy shorthanded.

That argument also assumes that both pregnancy and the injuries that cause most young men to become temporarily

disabled are neutral with respect to soldierly virtues. If pregnancy has no adverse impact on being a soldier, neither does it have any advantage. People who occasionally injure themselves by getting into fights, driving motorcycles too fast, or playing sports with excessive aggressiveness are a different story. Those are exactly the kinds of individuals who win battles.

If you agree with that point of view, you will almost certainly find this book to your liking. If not, reading it will probably just elevate your blood pressure.

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