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The decision to allow military women into combat positions: A study in policy and politics.

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Abstract : Until 1991, combat aviation exclusion laws barred women in the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force from being assigned to aviation squadrons that flew or trained for

combat missions. The Congressional decision to rescind such laws and, subsequently, the laws banning women from combat ships in the Navy was of great significance in the history of the United States military and the nation as a whole. Studying the Congressional proceedings that allowed military women to assume such roles leads to a more in-depth understanding of how difficult or sensitive decisions have been made in the past and will likely be made in the future. The focus of this thesis is two-fold. First, the thesis reviews the history of women in combat and the major issues involved. Second, through research and interviews with key individuals, it examines the Congressional decision and resulting actions. Interviews with a former member of Congress, legislative aides, high-ranking Navy and Army leaders, Department of Defense officials, and women's rights activists revealed certain consistencies in perceptions concerning the circumstances and events that led to removal of the laws excluding military women from combat. Interviewees generally agreed that exclusionary laws were lifted in 1991 due to political and societal influences, the experiences of women in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, successful lobbying by activists, and legislative procedure. Recommendations are offered for future research.

Descriptors : *MILITARY FORCES(UNITED STATES) , *WOMEN , *COMBAT FORCES , MILITARY PERSONNEL , WARFARE , POLICIES , DECISION MAKING , THESES , MISSIONS , MILITARY TRAINING , LEGISLATION

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