

CC Pm Am

FILE

USA Today

Thursday, March 10, 1994

Pentagon smoking ban: Misplaced priorities

We ask people to risk their lives for their country, then tell them they can't smoke?

The smoking lamp is going out.

With the Pentagon banning smoking in the workplace, soldiers will now be deployed to godforsaken corners of the globe to be shot at, gassed, bombed, sprayed with herbicide, kidnapped, tortured and incinerated — but at least they won't have to worry about the guy sitting next to them in a tank lighting up a cigarette.

That secondhand smoke is a killer.

This latest move is another step in the march toward a smoke-free military. The Navy's assistant surgeon general even suggested that in the future only non-smokers should be recruited.

I'm no fan of smoking, but come on. Soldiers are risk-takers. They go into the military to risk their lives for their country. Then their country tells them they can't risk their health for a cigarette?

Smoke-free work zones are fine for dandified environments like law firms, insurance offices and newsrooms. But we ex-

pect military personnel to kill for their paycheck. It is head-thumpingly absurd, then, to turn around and forbid them from killing a few of their own lung cells when they get the urge.

"We have worked hard ... to balance the rights of all workers," said Sherri Wasserman Goodman, the Pentagon's head of environmental security.

But I wonder what the Pentagon will say when some poor sailor who's been walking the deck of an aircraft carrier, fleeing incoming traffic, ducking backdrafts, breathing jet fumes and carting around deadly explosives in an ear-splitting din all day gets thrown in the brig for lighting up a cigarette when he goes below into some no-smoking zone.

This is yet another example of a gentrified class trying to legislate the world into the perfect place it would like it to be.

It is fine and wonderful to allow women into the military and into combat roles if



By Joe
Urschel, USA
TODAY col-
umnist

that's where they prefer to be — and we can all applaud the equanimity of those policies. But only a fool would believe such changes wouldn't affect the interpersonal relationships in those units.

Just two days before the Pentagon launched into its brave new smoking regulations, 500 female soldiers shipped off for combat duty aboard the U.S. aircraft carrier Eisenhower. They join thousands of others already at sea in non-combat roles.

Obviously, you can make all the rules about fraternization you want, but if you put female sailors on ships with male sailors, sooner or later they are going to get around to having sex with each other. It is one of those irrepressible natural instincts that has kept the human race procreating for the last 2 million years.

Just because the Pentagon decrees that sex is against the rules doesn't mean it will stop. And the number of pregnant sailors returning from sea bears this out.

But the arrogance of these rule-makers really knows no bounds. They not only think they can outlaw the sex drive, but now they even believe they can prevent you from having a cigarette after you've given in to it.

2070109235