



## **Alliance for National Defense**

### **ISSUE**

#### **Women in Combat**

#### **AND POSITIONS**

Women should be considered for military assignments and duties based on the training, experience, leadership potential and characteristics required to accomplish the mission and the specific tasks of the job.

DoD should open all military units and platforms to women, eliminating the need for a collocation policy.

DoD should open all military occupations, designators, ratings, Navy Enlisted Classification (NEC) codes, Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) and, Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) that are closed to women unless there are irrefutable performance based standards that cannot be met. Performance based standards for military jobs should be derived from the scientifically developed and empirically verified elements of the job's tasks.

The Department of Defense (DoD) should eliminate Direct Ground Combat as a limitation on the assignment of women.

DoD should direct the Navy to provide an implementation plan to integrate women into submarine service.

### **BACKGROUND**

Throughout most of recorded history, war fighting has been officially considered a "males only" activity with laws and policy established to reflect and maintain that exclusivity. Yet, women have always served "unofficially." During the last fifty years significant changes have occurred both in the nature of war and in determining who is eligible to "officially" participate in those wars. Technological advances in weaponry and the diminished desire of men to serve in military coupled with the evolution of the societal roles of women emerge as pivotal components driving that change. For example, the launching of an all-volunteer military force relied heavily upon women to provide the "manpower" for meeting the personnel requirements essential to maintain military readiness and end strength. Today, women comprise about 14% of the active force and roughly 17% of the Reserve Components.

In recent decades, changes in both law and policy have altered women's roles and the military jobs they are allowed to perform. Evolutionary rather than revolutionary, several of the most dramatic changes occurred following the first Gulf War with the repeal of both the ban on women serving aboard combat aircraft (Title 10 USC 8549) and combat ships (Title 10 USC 6015).

Policy changes followed these legislative actions. In 1994, DoD rescinded the "Risk Rule," which had included a matrix assessing the threat of combat exposure on a linear battlefield. This action was followed by another directive from the new Secretary of Defense. He directed the Army and the Marine Corps to study opening more specialties and assignments to women and to submit their expansion plans for his approval. The outcome of this action effectively opened tens of thousands of previously closed military positions to the assignment of women. However, the Secretary permitted significant policy restrictions to remain that we will highlight later in this paper. Nevertheless, there are no **laws** restricting women from serving as combatants or that attempt to *protect* women from risk or danger.

### **What is Combat?**

There is no one operational definition for combat because when each of the military Services engages the enemy, combat takes a different form. While there are certainly overlaps, the overall Navy mission and subsequent definition of combat differs significantly from that of the Air Force and the Army. Certainly similarities exist between the Navy and the Coast Guard (marine Services), the Marines and Army (ground Services), and aviators (regardless of Service), but the point that must be made is that combat is more than "boots on the ground."

It was during Vietnam that women were first trained as naval aviators and after Vietnam that women were first permitted on naval vessels and the Women's Army Corps disbanded to allow the integration of women into the line Army. After the first Gulf War, combat aviation was opened to women and the combat ship exclusion was repealed.

Since the early 1990s, women have been eligible for combat duty and to serve as combatants in the Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and in the Navy, Marine and Army aviation specialties. With women already officially serving as combatants, what is the restriction that limits military women's roles?

### **What is Direct Ground Combat (DGC)?**

Women are "in combat" and have been for over a decade. However, the topic that receives the most attention concerning women and their combat participation involves "direct ground combat" (DGC). Since 1994, DoD has defined DGC as:

"...engaging the enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force's personnel. [It] takes place well forward on the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect." [Emphasis added]

Regrettably, DoD's definition of DGC does not describe the asymmetric battlefield of today. The phrase "well forward on the battlefield" implies a linear array of military forces that were envisioned during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Cold War and are not descriptive of today's conflicts in the middle-east and other hot spots. In short, the DGC waged

in Iraq and Afghanistan bear no resemblance to this definition – does that mean they are not DGC?

## The Key Issues

### **1. Combat Exclusion Rule**

Flawed as it is, there are two policy matters that emanate from DGC that have an impact on military women and where (and how) they may be assigned. The first, the ground combat exclusion rule, dictates that women may not occupy any assignment (in any capacity) to a unit below brigade level which has the primary mission of engaging in DGC. This restriction allows the Army and the Marine Corps to retain their existing policies excluding women from serving in Infantry and Armor, with the Marines also excluding women totally from Field Artillery. The Army excluded women from serving in Special Forces (including aviation) and women may not serve as Navy Seals. Interestingly, the Army did not exclude women from Field Artillery using this rule as did the Marine Corps. Another anomaly is that women are not serving on submarines but that exclusion is not based on either combat or collocation. Elimination of the ground combat exclusion rule would automatically eliminate the collocation policy.

### **2. Collocation Policy**

The second policy restriction adopted by the Army and the Marine Corps, referred to as the collocation policy, is not clearly understood and is frequently the subject of debate and review. This policy primarily refers to the placement of combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) positions relative to DGC. However, the term collocation seems to mean different things to different officials and/or commanders. The 2007 RAND Monograph Report, *Assessing the Assignment Policy for Army Women*, documented two definitions operating for collocation: one that uses proximity exclusively as a determiner and another that uses both proximity and interdependence to be considered and defined as collocation. The Army policy prohibits the *routine* collocation with a unit whose *primary* mission is to engage in DGC. Introducing the term, routine without a common definition makes the situation needlessly more complicated. NOTE: The Army also specifies that the collocation policy prevents women from serving in the Army Combat Engineers and portions of the Field Artillery.

In short, the Army and Marine Corps policies remain more restrictive than DoD policy. In 2005, it was the Army collocation policy and how the policy was implemented that precipitated the then Chairman, Duncan Hunter (R, CA), of the House Armed Services Committee to seek broad legislative restrictions on how Army women were assigned and deployed. His proposed legislation was later expanded to restrict all military women, but failed to gain support outside of the House Armed Services Committee. While the restrictive legislation was unsuccessful, it served to resurrect the issue about how and where military women would serve.

## In Closing

Women are in combat – this is nothing new. They serve in Afghanistan and Iraq with pride and honor. In both war zones, many of the distinctions regarding combat have constantly blurred because there are no front lines, and DGC is not isolated to being well forward on the battlefield – it is asymmetrical.

Current doctrine and policy concerning the assignment of military women have outlived past usefulness, and it is time for their revision, if not elimination, to reflect actual practices that are essential to wage this type of war. Restated: while useful 15 years ago, the laws, policies and practices that made sense then, changed in wartime as military exigencies developed -- this was true during WWI, WWII, Vietnam and other conflicts. "Lessons Learned" are available today and we do not have to wait simply because asymmetric warfare is a different kind of war. The military, as an essentially pragmatic organization, has recognized that most barriers are artificial and has adjusted women's roles when necessary to facilitate mission accomplishment whether it followed current policy or not.

While the intent of the 2007 RAND Study, regarding the assignment of Army women in Iraq, was to answer inquiries generated by Chairman Hunter, it does more. It significantly provided the empirical information for an informed debate rather than one of uninformed personal opinion. The monograph coolly dissects DoD and Army policy exposing inconsistencies and operational shortcomings that women have consistently performed to "fill in the policy gaps".

The Alliance embraces this debate and strongly supports the continued evolution of women's military roles and service in a professional and rational way that best serves our nation.

The Alliance for National Defense provides educational material on the contributions of women in the military and related national security issues to legislators, decision makers, educators, and military members on this and other issues.