

Interim CMR Special Report – October, 2014

US Marine Corps Research Findings: Where is the Case for Co-Ed Ground Combat?

Executive Summary

In February 2012, then-Secretary of Defense **Leon Panetta** set in motion incremental policy changes intended to result in the assignment of women to **direct ground combat (DGC)** units that attack the enemy with deliberate offensive action. These include **Marine and Army infantry, armor, artillery, and Special Operations Forces**. The deadline for this unprecedented policy change, which was not mandated by Congress or needed to advance women's career opportunities, is **January 2016**.

Physical strength is not the only issue of concern, but it is the primary focus of USMC research programs that Marine Corps Commandant **General James Amos** initiated in April 2012. The goal is to find ways that women can be integrated into the combat arms without lowering standards. Researchers are finding this difficult (actually, impossible) to do, owing to naturally-occurring physical differences that make men significantly stronger. Androgenic hormones that are not going to change account for greater muscle power and aerobic capacity for endurance.

This is an Interim Summary of significant data and findings produced so far:

1. Gender-Related Differences in Physical Strength – In 2013, the **USMC Training and Education Command (TECOM)** collected data from **409** male and **379** female volunteers performing five "**proxy**" tests simulating **ground combat element (GCE)** tasks. Data produced in Physical and Combat Fitness Tests (PFT and CFT), together with proxy test battery results, confirm that gender-related disparities are most significant in events measuring upper-body strength and endurance. These capabilities are *essential* for survival and mission success in direct ground combat.

- In a **Pull-up** test of upper-body strength used in the PFT, women averaged **3.59** pull-ups, compared to **15.69** for the men – more than four times as many.
- The **Clean & Press** event involves single lifts of progressively heavier weights from the ground to above the head (**70, 80, 95, 115 lbs.**), plus **6 reps** with a **65 lb.** weight. In this event **80%** of the men passed the **115 lb.** test, but only **8.7%** of the women passed.
- In the **120 mm Tank Loading Simulation**, a gunnery skills test, participants were asked to lift a simulated round weighing **55 lb.**, **5 times**, in **35 seconds** or less. Quoting the report, "*Less than 1% of men . . . [compared to] 18.68% of the women . . . could not complete the tank loading drill in the allotted time.*" The report added, "*It would be very likely that failure rates would increase in a more confined space [such as a tank].*"

- In the **155 mm Artillery Lift-and-Carry**, a test simulating ordnance stowing, volunteers had to pick up a **95 lb.** artillery round and carry it **50 meters** in **under 2 minutes**. Noted the report, "*Less than 1% of men, compared to 28.2% of women, could not complete the 155 mm artillery round lift-and-carry in the allotted time.*" If trainees had to "*shoulder the round and/or carry multiple rounds, the 28.2% failure rate would increase.*"
- On the **Obstacle Course Wall-with-Assist-Box** test, a **20"** high box, (used to simulate a helping-hand) essentially reduced the height of the **7 ft. wall** to approximately **5'4."** Quoting the report, "*Less than 1.2 % of the men could not get over the obstacle course wall using an assist box, while wearing [protective equipment] . . . [compared to] 21.32% of women who could not get over the obstacle course wall . . .*"

Recent TECOM proxy tests cannot replicate the demands of actual direct ground combat, but they do constitute empirical data based on reality, not theories about gender equality. Some physically-demanding artillery and armor MOSs already have been gender-integrated even though significant percentages of women volunteering for proxy tests were not able to perform tasks simulating physical requirements of the recently-opened MOSs.

2. "Gender-Norming" Contradicts "Gender-Neutral" – Pentagon leaders insist that women eligible for combat arms units will be required to meet "**gender-neutral standards.**" Research data compiled so far indicates that this expectation cannot be met.

- In a June 2013 report to Congress, the Marines indicated that "*gender-neutral*" events in **Physical Fitness** and **Combat Fitness Tests (PFT and CFT)** and obstacle courses would be "*gender-normed for score . . . in order to account for physiological differences.*"
- Researchers have described the USMC project as a way to determine whether the PFT and CFT can serve as "*valid predictors*" of success in "*combat-related tasks.*" The gender-normed PFT and CFT, however, were designed to reduce injuries and encourage overall physical fitness – not to train personnel for the infantry and other combat arms.
- Gender-norming for fitness is appropriate in basic, pre-commissioning, and entry-level training, but it is not acceptable when determining qualifications for combat arms units such as the infantry, armor, artillery, and Special Operations Forces.

3. Will "Gender Diversity Dividends" Be Used to Qualify for the Combat Arms? – In a March 2014 briefing on the Combat Fitness Test presented to the Pentagon's **Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)**, Marine officials again stated that "*Gender-neutral events [would include] gender- and age-normed scoring.*"

- Gender-normed scoring tables allow women to accumulate more "points" or "gender diversity dividends" adding up to **3rd, 2nd, or 1st Class** status.

- It is not clear whether *extra* points for women only will become the key to achieving supposedly "gender-neutral standards." If this happens, promises of gender-neutrality will be perceived as statistical deception.

4. "Lower but Equal" Minimum Standards – Some researchers analyzing the new data have suggested acceptance of **lower-but-equal** performance standards, with *"the worst performing decile"* to calculate minimum qualifications.

- Pressures to accept "lower but equal" standards would be accelerated by political and ideological demands for "**gender-diversity metrics**" (read, quotas) recommended by the Pentagon-endorsed **Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC)**.
- Joint Chiefs Chairman **Gen. Martin Dempsey** has suggested that if a particular standard was found to be *"so high that a woman couldn't make it,"* officials would ask the services, *"Does it really have to be that high?"*
- Acceptance of lower-but-equal minimum standards would erode fundamental principles of excellence in elite fighting units. This would leave men less prepared for ground combat and women exposed to disproportionate injuries and undeserved resentment.

5. "Training to Task" and Other "Amazon Warrior" Myths – Some researchers have claimed that more *"training to task"* would help women to significantly improve in pre-screening and other upper-body strength tests. No specific study is cited in support of this assertion; there are none that withstand scrutiny.

- In 1997 the **US Army Medical Research and Materiel Command** found that specialized, more intense training could strengthen some women on a temporary basis, but the same intense training, if offered to men, would strengthen them even more.
- According to retired **RADM Hugh Scott**, an expert in military medicine, *"Androgenic hormones that are not going to change account for greater muscle power among men and aerobic capacity for endurance. . . That also is the reason why women develop less muscle in weight training and exercise."*
- Women have served bravely "in harm's way," at risk of incident-related combat, but not in direct ground combat units that *attack* the enemy with deliberate offensive action.

6. Contrary to Popular Beliefs – Eligibility for the combat arms would harm women, not help them. There is a need to be honest about sound policy for women, men, and the combat arms.

- Defense Department data have shown for decades that military women are promoted at rates equal to or faster than men.

- A 2013 survey of **Army** women found that **92.5%** of **30,000** respondents would reject combat arms assignments if they were offered.
- As stated in 2013 congressional testimony confirming involuntary assignments should women become eligible for the combat arms, *"That's why we call them orders."*
- The theoretical **3%** who might qualify under minimal male standards would move from rising career levels to lower status in ground combat units where they are physically disadvantaged and subject to disproportionate stress and risks of debilitating injury.

7. Future Experiments & Unresolved Issues – Marines will soon stand up "**Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Forces**" (**GCEITF**), to include **25%** women, which will engage in simulated combat experiments in groups.

- These bear watching, since task-shifting that disguises individual weaknesses would be unworkable in small units actually engaged in direct ground combat.
- Some of the organizations involved in the design of **Marine Corps Force Integration Plan** projects and subsequent studies, such as **RAND**, are not independent, objective, or likely to challenge the administration's monolithic group-think on military/social issues.

8. Need for Diligent Oversight – Congress should review all research closely, and consider the many unresolved controversies that are barely mentioned in current research. For example:

- Military women's opposition to being treated like men in the combat arms
- Disproportionate risk of debilitating injuries among female personnel
- Readiness implications of non-deployability and health-related personnel losses
- Impact on unit cohesion, properly defined as mutual trust for *survival* in battle
- Dynamics of male and female relationships in the military "workplace"
- Distractions and tensions leading to sexual misconduct, both voluntary and involuntary
- Consequences for recruiting, retention, and reassignment costs
- Cultural ambivalence about combat violence against women
- Eligibility for Selective Service obligations, tied to direct ground combat assignments

None of the USMC research results produced so far support activists' theories that women can be physical equals and interchangeable with men in the combat arms. Reliance on unrealistic "best case" scenarios would impose heavy burdens on women and put all troops at greater risk. Congress should exercise diligent oversight, challenging all assumptions and theories, political mandates, media bias, public misperceptions, and misguided group-think in academia and the administration. Respect for military women, which is greater than ever, demands nothing less.

*Prepared by the **Center for Military Readiness (CMR)**, an independent, non-partisan, public policy organization that specializes in military/social issues. More information at: www.cmrlink.org.*