



Center for Military Readiness



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Promoting high standards and sound priorities for our military men and women.

For Immediate Release

January 7, 2014

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## **Boot Camp Realities Show Need for Common Sense About Infantry Combat**

*The Associated Press recently [reported](#) that the U.S. Marine Corps has suspended a new boot camp physical fitness strength test for female trainees because 55 percent of the women could not do the required 3 pull-up exercises. The following comments on this issue may be attributed to **Elaine Donnelly**, President of the **Center for Military Readiness**. Mrs. Donnelly served as a member of the 1992 **Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces**, which studied women in combat and related issues for a full year.*

"The Marines made the right decision in suspending the mandatory 3 pull-up requirement for female trainees, which was supposed to go into effect this month. Due to physiological differences that are not going to change, only **45 percent** of the women passed the new pull-up test, compared to **99 percent** of the men.

"This issue is bigger than boot camp. If it is too much to require female recruits to do three pull-ups, it is a thousand times worse to expect women to serve in direct ground combat units such as the **infantry, armor, artillery, and Special Operations Forces**. These are the small "tip of the spear" teams that seek out and destroy the enemy with deliberate offensive action.

"As long as Pentagon officials keep pretending that women can take the places of men in the infantry, female trainees will suffer more injuries and resentment they don't deserve, and men will be less prepared for close combat missions that have not changed. What we need is a logical policy that reflects reality, not feminist theories of gender equality.

"The 1992 *Presidential Commission* on which I served thought about this long and hard. We approved of gender-normed scores in basic, pre-commissioning, and entry-level training, but the recommendation was contingent on women's exemption from direct ground combat.

"The Obama Administration's incremental policies toward co-ed infantry combat make sensible gender-specific training practices untenable. There can be no gender-norming in

fighting teams that seek out and attack the enemy with deliberate offensive action.

"The only way that the Marines can solve their dilemma is for Congress to [codify](#) women's exemption from direct ground combat, with the stipulation that the policy not be changed without an affirmative vote of Congress. That way, both men and women would receive the best training possible, without the consequences and dangers of pretending that they are interchangeable in all roles.

"Since all men and women in uniform recognize equivocation, military officials should stop suggesting that gender-specific (normed) standards are "the same" or "gender-neutral." Last June the Marine Corps [reported to Congress](#) that their plans for women in land combat fighting teams would have "gender-neutral" standards. The "catch" was in the fine print.

"Footnotes explained that physical fitness tests (PFT), combat fitness tests (CFT), and obstacle courses would use "gender-normed" scores "to account for physiological differences between genders." (See p. 2, footnotes #3 - #6, and these photos of a typical [obstacle course](#) with different challenges for men and women)

"Under the [physical fitness test](#) (PFT) that the Marines just suspended, both men and women would have the same minimum standard (3 pull-ups). To earn a perfect score, men would have to do [20 pull-ups](#), but women only 8. It is unfair to both women and men to redefine "equality" with gender-normed scores in key elements of combat arms training. In that environment, life, death, and mission accomplishment often depend on upper-body strength and endurance.

Due to well-documented physical differences between the genders, briefly explained in medical terms [here](#), there is no reason to believe that women can be trained to take the place of men in the infantry. More information on this issue is available in this CMR Policy Analysis:

[Double-Think About Double Standards](#)

To schedule an interview with Elaine Donnelly, call 734/464-9430 or send an email to [elaine@cmrlink.org](mailto:elaine@cmrlink.org).

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*The Center for Military Readiness is a non-partisan, independent public policy organization that specializes in military/social issues.*

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