



ARMY POLICY ON WOMEN IN LAND COMBAT: *Disrespecting Regulations, Congress, and Military Women*

For several years the Department of Army has been ordering female soldiers to serve in or near direct ground combat (DGC) battalions, despite Department of Defense regulations requiring these units to be all-male. Without authorization by the Secretary of Defense, and without advance notice to Congress, as required by law, the Army has been disrespecting military women by circumventing current regulations that affect them.

Following months of controversy in 2004 and early 2005, the House Armed Services Committee approved legislation to codify Department of Defense regulations set forth in 1994, which are still in effect. That legislation, co-sponsored by then-HASC Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-CA) and Personnel Subcommittee Chairman John McHugh (R-NY), would not have removed female soldiers from any position for which they were eligible.

The effort was cut short, however, when Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld met privately with Chairman Hunter, and reportedly promised to produce a full report on the subject by March 2006. Legislation mandating such a report was included in the FY 2006 National Defense Authorization Act. The DoD ignored that deadline and diverted the task to an outside contractor, the RAND Corporation, which produced a substandard report titled “Assessing the Assignment Policy for Army Women,” seventeen months beyond the deadline set by Congress.¹

The Department of the Army continues to recklessly disregard policy and law on women in land combat. Problematic precedents will increase pressures to eliminate women’s exemption from involuntary service in or near all direct ground combat units, such as the infantry, armor, artillery, Special Operations Forces and, eventually, Marine infantry. The following are examples of major decisions being made without authorization, in defiance of policy and law:

- **Indiana National Guard, 1st Battalion, 293rd Infantry**

The Fort Wayne Indiana *Journal Gazette* reported on February 25, 2008, that 3,400 members of the Indiana National Guard were deploying to Afghanistan with 170 female soldiers. In an effort by the Army “to expand women’s roles,” the Guard’s 1st Battalion, 293rd Infantry now includes 39 women, despite regulations that exempt female soldiers from assignment to infantry battalions.

The article featured a photo of a 19 year-old female private who stands 5 feet tall and weighs 105 pounds. She is shown holding a 4 foot-long machine gun that weighs 27 pounds, not counting ammunition. An Army spokeswoman quoted in the article said, “*The Army says they will allow soldiers from any specialty to be placed in a position that fits the mission*”—in this case, convoy security.

During its first deployment to Kuwait in 2003, the 1-293rd infantry unit was all-male. But under a “deployment manning document” (DMD), which does not replace the unit’s “modified table of organization and equipment” (MTOE), support soldiers including women are now being “cross-leveled” into the infantry battalion.

The Defense Department has not authorized a temporary or permanent suspension of regulations affecting women. Nor has the secretary provided the legally-required prior notice to Congress. What will happen when this and other infantry battalions are needed to perform their primary direct ground combat mission; i.e., deliberate offensive action against the enemy? No one seems to know. Pentagon officials should be held accountable for this operational mess-in-the-making.

The article reported that before 9/11, 2001, 12% of National Guard soldiers were female. The percentage now is 18%, many of them single mothers with one or more dependent children. It makes no sense to needlessly increase, by 50%, the number of soldiers who are not eligible for combat battalions required to be all-male.

- **2nd Lt. Tracy Lynn Alger**

On November 1, 2007, 2nd Lt. Tracy Lynn Alger, 30, was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) in Iraq. She was in a direct ground combat-located forward support company—a battalion level unit that is required by current DoD regulations to be all-male.

The original Defense Department notice of the death of 2nd Lt. Tracy Lynn Alger, which has since been deleted from the DoD website but is still visible on the Patriot Guard Riders website, erroneously placed her in the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team of the 101st Airborne (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell, KY. Under current regulations, “tip of the spear” Direct Ground Battalions such as this are open to male soldiers only.

When CMR questioned that information in calls to Public Affairs officials in the Pentagon and at Fort Campbell, a corrected notice was issued. The revised notice, which was not identified as a correction, indicated that Lt. Alger was serving in “F Company,” which was “assigned” at the brigade level but “attached” to the previously identified infantry battalion. Fort Campbell officials confirmed that F Company was a forward support company (FSC), which was attached to the 3rd battalion, 187th infantry regiment. The same description was used in a *Nashville Tennessean* article published on November 5.

Lt. Alger, the 91st of 93 courageous military women killed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait since 9/11, could have been attacked while serving in a unit legally open to women. Still, her placement in the collocated forward support company, bureaucratically disguised with an “assignment” to the brigade level (on paper only), constituted a violation of current DoD policy and the congressional notification law. This may be the first time that the Defense Department released evidence of this increasingly common bureaucratic ploy, which the Army once admitted could be seen as “subterfuge” to circumvent current policy and law.

- **Army Spec. Jessica E. True**

In 2005 32 year-old Spec. Jessica E. True was ordered to serve in an all-male artillery unit, which is required by regulation to be all-male. In June 2007 she sent to CMR a copy of a photo of herself in the 2005 yearbook of the 1st Battalion, 15th Field Artillery, a direct ground combat battalion with the slogan “First to Fire.” Her assignment to that direct ground combat unit also was confirmed by a Certificate of Achievement she was awarded by the commander of the battalion, which was stationed at Camp Casey, Korea, at the time.

In the group photo Spec. True, the only woman, appears to be strong and as tall as her male counterparts. Previously, she had been consistently praised for meeting female standards in training, but when she was placed in the all-male unit, the men harassed her for being the “weakest link.” Gender-

normed scoring systems, which resulted in higher PT ratings than the men's, heightened the resentment. "They treated me like I was a slow male," wrote True. "I wasn't a female to them. I was a weak male."

In e-mail and telephone conversations, she described the relentless harassment she received from fellow soldiers who resented her presence. Tensions worsened when the name of the platoon she was in was administratively changed to the 302nd Transportation. (The men believed this happened because the unit was "caught" with a woman in the ranks.)

Spec. True described several incidents, one of them with a sergeant who had been taught that women should be treated like men. The sergeant tried his "combat moves" on Spec. True, using his full weight to injure her twisted arm while she was on the exercise mat, not relenting until she managed to punch him with her free arm. Fellow soldiers stood by, saying nothing while she screamed in pain. On other occasions some of the male soldiers allegedly forced her to do suggestive "sexual punishment exercises" while she was lying on her back.

Spec. True, a truck driver, also served in Germany and Iraq. She suffered neck and back injuries due to heavy weights, which she had to wear on her hips rather than her shoulders. She and other women who were harassed or worse had to limit their complaints, lest they be treated with more abuse.

- **Military Transition (Training) Teams (MTTs)**

A soldier recently returned from Iraq has informed CMR that female soldiers were ordered into a Military Transition Team (MTT) in Iraq, creating cultural tensions contrary to the mission of MTTs. These 11-15 man teams are composed of commissioned and non-commissioned officers and Marines with ground combat leadership experience. MTT trainers are embedded with Iraqi units for a year, to teach combat tactics and skills so that Iraqis can assume responsibility for defending their own country.² This mission is critically important in short- and long-term plans to bring our troops home from Iraq.

Given the closeness of the MTT relationship, and the fact that Iraqi units are usually poorly equipped and threatened constantly, MTT personnel who teach direct ground combat skills are required to be all male. (*Army Times*, Feb. 6, 2006) Nevertheless, conditions for an international incident comparable to Abu Ghraib are being created in co-ed MTTs.

It is difficult enough to train new Iraqi combat troops, without forcing men of that culture to accept and embed with female soldiers in a combat environment. Iraqi trainees respect all Americans, including our female soldiers. The soldier describing conditions in the co-ed MTT, however, said that American interpreters heard derogatory remarks from the Iraqi men, showing contempt for our women. He also reported an incident involving a "spat" between one of the MTT female soldiers and an Iraqi trainee, which took place in front of his colleagues. Escalating tensions became so serious that the entire unit had to be removed and reassigned.

The soldier expressing concern about this to CMR explained a predictable threat. Resentful Iraqis sharing information with anarchists could use cultural prejudice against women and the West to alienate male trainees who abjure obedience to women.³ Because enemy forces will do anything to exploit sexual misconduct by American soldiers for propaganda purposes, the U.S. Army is only a photograph away from an explosive scandal far worse than Abu Ghraib.

MTT combat soldiers should not be assigned the additional, potentially explosive burden of having to teach more "enlightened" western attitudes to Iraqi men, whose culture will not permit forced intimacy with women in combat training teams. MTTs are *combat* schools, not charm schools.

Additional Examples:

A number of news reports have mentioned the presence of female soldiers in battalion-level direct ground combat units, including the infantry—sometimes as combat medics, female security searchers, or soldiers who accompany the infantry on raids to interact with civilian women. Some of these assignments are authorized by current regulations, while others are questionable or clearly over the line.

It is difficult to determine facts because many news reports fail to recognize that being “in combat” involves more than the experience of being in danger. All deployed soldiers are “In Harm’s Way,” but direct ground combat battalions are trained to engage in deliberate *offensive* action, attacking the enemy under fire. With or without a “front line,” the mission of infantry soldiers remains the same. Regulations exempting women from these units should be respected and enforced, not circumvented or ignored. If there is a need to create new designations, they should be considered carefully, authorized, and reported to Congress in advance, as required by law.

In previous CMR Policy Analyses, the Center for Military Readiness described violations of DoD regulations and the congressional notification law, as follows:

- **3rd Battalion of the 8th Cavalry Regiment**

In a combined arms battalion (CAB) that was deployed in Iraq in 2007, at least one female soldier, a mechanic, was illegally placed in a short-handed infantry company. The soldier was one of several women “employed” in forward support companies (FSCs) embedded or “collocated” with the direct ground combat (DGC) battalion. The uncontested order was given in clear violation of current Defense Department regulations, set forth in 1994 and still in effect.

There was no question that these unambiguous rules apply to the 3rd Battalion of the 8th Cavalry Regiment, known as the 3-8, which is based at Fort Hood TX and historically was part of the 1st Cavalry prior to modular re-organization. Nevertheless, with the knowledge of battalion commanders and all of the CAB’s 770 soldiers, a female mechanic was ordered into an infantry company, which was short-handed due to combat and non-combat injuries, unplanned evacuations and previously scheduled leaves.

This “employment” of the female soldier also put the Army in violation of a law mandating congressional oversight. The female soldier eventually was evacuated for health reasons, but the unchallenged precedent could result in more women being involuntarily placed in “tip of the spear” maneuver battalions, in blatant violation of policy and law.

- **Third Infantry Division**

Sources have informed the Center for Military Readiness that predictable sexual misconduct has occurred in land combat-collocated support units that used to be all-male. In the spring of 2004 the 3rd Infantry Division, based at Fort Stewart, GA and reorganized into modular Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs), began the notorious practice of administratively “assigning” female support troops in legally open units while physically placing them in support forward support companies (FSCs) embedded with infantry/armor maneuver battalions.

At least one of the combat-collocated companies in question is dealing with a problem unprecedented in its history: the need to evacuate pregnant soldiers. The impact on unit cohesion and combat readiness is greater in smaller “tip of the spear” units than larger ones. Elsewhere in Iraq, an experienced combat soldier observed and reported similar demoralizing problems:

“The line between the FSC [forward support company] and our infantry battalion has completely broken down. Females from the FSCs are being attached to all male infantry and armor companies with no regard whatsoever. Interestingly, this same FSC is now having its first sergeant and one of its senior NCOs fired over sexual misconduct. This is a pretty tremendous shock for a company and it will definitely shake, if not ruin, the confidence in the company’s chain of command for the foreseeable future...Those of us who are combat arms officers are not envious of the FSC commander’s job, who has to hold his company together after his first sergeant has been taken down. We are very glad that we do not have to weather such a command environment.”

- **First Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX**

For several years, female soldiers have been “assigned” to Brigade Support Battalions (BSBs) in the First Cavalry Division, *on paper* only. In reality, they have been “attached” or “opconned” to land combat maneuver battalions. This arrangement apparently was designed to circumvent the DoD collocation rule, adopted on January 13, 1994, which is still in effect.

A 2006 diagram of the 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, also known as the 3rd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), demonstrated the unauthorized plan. The diagram, obtained by CMR, indicated that in the 215th BSB, gender-integrated companies labeled D, E, F, and G were “opconned” to combat maneuver battalions (MBs). The FSCs were composed of 15% - 20% women. On paper, these op-conned FSCs were part of the brigade-level BSB organization, and manned by it. But in actual operation, they were collocated or embedded with the combat maneuver battalions at all times. Despite the notification law, the DoD has not given notice to Congress that the Army desires or has implemented this change in the collocation policy.

- **Reconnaissance, Surveillance, Target Acquisition (RSTA) Squadron, Fort Riley, KS**

At Fort Riley, KS, female soldiers have been trained to serve in forward support companies that will collocate with Reconnaissance, Surveillance, Target Acquisition (RSTA) Squadrons. RSTA squadrons were classified as direct ground combat in 2002.⁴ Because their mission is to fight for intelligence on the ground, they were officially coded “P-1” under the Direct Combat Probability Code (DCPC) system, meaning all-male. The Secretary of Defense has not notified Congress that the Army desires change in the RSTA gender codes.

A female soldier informed CMR that she had been assured it was legal to position women with the RSTA because, according to Pentagon authorities, when the time comes to deploy they would be placed back to the brigade level, which is open to women. She questioned the logic of training female soldiers for important combat-collocated RSTA duties, only to pull them out when collocated support soldiers are needed most. Given the need for combat intelligence in the field and the difficulty of accomplishing evacuations, it is not likely that responsible field commanders will implement this unworkable plan.

- **The 101st Airborne – Fort Campbell, KY**

In 2004, the Army began training female soldiers for assignment to forward support companies (FSCs), which are collocated with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (BCT) that was formed in the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell. Female soldiers were told that they would be “assigned” to the 526th Brigade Support Battalion (BSB), but would be “attached” to a maneuver battalion. Most did not react in a negative way because local commanders assured them that their mission would be no different

than a legal brigade-level assignment to the BSB.

Spec. Stephanie Filus, who was trained as a light-wheeled vehicle mechanic and was assured by her recruiter that she would see no close combat, was very aware of what the new assignments would mean. She was treated for anxiety and depression, but was sent for training at Fort Polk in May, 2005. When her request to leave the Army was denied, she attempted suicide with an overdose of sleeping pills and was immediately hospitalized. Her request for honorable discharge was approved shortly thereafter. Female soldiers have a right to trust that their commanders will comply with policy and law, instead of misleading them with semantics.

- **Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS), Baumholder, Germany, 2001**

In 2001 the 1st Armored commanding general placed at least three female Chemical Corps Officers in MLRS units due to an unspecified shortage of male Chemical Corps officers. The women were told it was a “pilot program,” but in-processing people said that it was a violation of rules to place them in MLRS units. One of the three women tried many times to be assigned to an available Chemical Recon or Smoke Platoon position, for which she was qualified and eligible, but to no avail.

This soldier wrote to CMR, describing the harassment and abuse she suffered from male colleagues who knew she did not belong in that unit. Her husband, also a soldier stationed 50 miles away, was unable to do anything to help her. Shortly after their return from Germany, he committed suicide, due to PTSD that Army officials failed to treat in time.

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The Center for Military Readiness is an independent public policy organization that specializes in military personnel issues. More information on this and related topics is available on www.cmrlink.org.

Endnotes

1. An analysis, titled “Rubber Stamp Report RAND Report Promotes Women in Land Combat,” is available at www.cmrlink.org. RAND produced a similar report in 1997, titled “New Opportunities for Women: Effects Upon Readiness, Cohesion and Morale.” Unlike the original draft, the published version of RAND’s 1997 report omitted or downplayed negative comments from interviewees in the field, raising issues such as injuries, absences due to pregnancy, and disciplinary problems.
2. There are several types of these units. Some female soldiers have been trained and located at the Forward Operating Base (FOB) level, in support roles only. It would make sense for American women to train Iraqi women to perform security searches of female civilians, but it is difficult to determine if this is being done.
3. The size of this cultural divide was visible in ceremonies to hand over security responsibilities to Iraqi police and soldiers in Najaf province in December 2006. There were warriors on horseback, martial arts demonstrations and, at one point, the tearing apart and eating of a live rabbit by Iraqi soldiers. “*The leader bit out the heart with a yell, and passed the blood-soaked remains to comrades, each of whom took a bite.*” (*Air Force Times*, Jan. 1, 2007)
4. Memorandum, Army Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff (G-1) to Commander, US Army Training & Doctrine Command, April 26, 2002.