



# Center for Military Readiness — Policy Analysis —

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## USMC Implementation of Obama Administration Orders to Gender-Integrate Infantry Battalions: What Could Go Wrong?

*Marine Corps Times*: [Male & Female Infantry Marines Will Share Tents in the Field](#), Jan. 25, 2017, and AP: [Female Marines to Sleep Next to Male Marines in the Field](#), Jan. 27, 2017

In February 2017, the U.S. Marine Corps announced that three women with different military occupational specialties (MOSs) would be assigned to a previously all-male infantry battalion, and will share tents with men in the field. All military women who have attempted training for previously all-male positions in the combat arms deserve respect, but it is likely that the challenges they and other women will face will be greater than the men's, harmful for everyone concerned, and detrimental to national security.

The speculative scenarios listed below are not intended to refer to specific individuals in the Army or the Marine Corps, but they do reflect experiences with gender integration in the combat arms and empirical data produced in comprehensive research since 2012. During a process of objective review, likely consequences such as these should be re-evaluated and measured against what should be the primary goal: mission readiness and lethality on the battlefield.

1. *Marine Corps Times* has reported that there will be three women in an infantry battalion of about 750 male Marines. Three female NCOs preceded them, with an unclear (sounding board?) mission. The NCOs will see the three women only if commanders request meetings, which will surely happen when problems occur. The perception of a dual (male/female) chain of command will persist and demoralize all who are aware of it.
2. In the Marine infantry unit, gender-integration has already reduced the men's barracks bathroom facilities by 50%, to accommodate three females. The women will feel undeserved resentment for this and other accommodations that were not necessary before.
3. Despite ridiculous predictions from RAND and highly-publicized invitations for women to transfer into the combat arms, very few have expressed interest or qualified. The Marines won't have anything close to a critical mass of female volunteers for the combat arms, so officials may feel compelled to issue involuntary assignment orders. (During his December 3, 2015, news conference, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter confirmed that minimally-qualified women would be assigned on the same involuntary basis as men.)
4. Such an action would create new problems. A major Center for Naval Analysis [survey](#) asked thousands of Marines how rule changes making women eligible for the combat arms would affect their decisions to join or stay in the Corps. Five percent of female Marine respondents said they would *not* have joined the Corps under such rules. When women were asked about orders to serve in the combat arms on an *involuntary* basis, negative responses jumped to 23%, almost one in four. Twenty-two percent of male

Marines expressed the same opinion.

5. Even with precautions as the women go through tough training and deployments, injuries will occur at rates much higher than men's. Some women will leave for lengthy rehabilitation and some will have to end their careers.
6. Even if the women avoid debilitating injuries, they will be at a clear disadvantage in promotions and assignments because performance ratings will be low in comparison with male peers in, for example, physical fitness exercises, marksmanship, ability to lift heavy objects (including casualties), and endurance when marching long distances under heavy loads. (Serious difficulties were presaged in USMC scientific research finding that all-male units outperformed gender-mixed ones on 69% of typical combat tasks.)
7. Due to women's higher risks of injury, traditional adversative exercises that have always challenged men will be revised or dropped without notice. Since standards will be "gender-neutral," officials will insist and media will report that women are doing the same things as men, even though some exercises are missing and standards are lower than before. In areas where there were no qualifying standards, other than being male, nothing will be done to introduce them now.
8. In training and on deployments, men will step up to carry women's loads or perform single-man casualty evacuations (Compensations such as this occurred during USMC Ground Combat Element Integration Task Force (GCEITF) field tests in 2015. See pages 22-24 of [CMR Statement for the Record](#), Feb. 2, 2016)
9. The first three women to enter the infantry have different MOSs and will serve separately -- isolated within units of men. Small teams on deployment traditionally sleep together in tents, but opposite-gender pairs will not be the same. Policy-makers should be held accountable for creating conditions that will encourage indiscipline rather than discipline.
10. There will be enormous pressure on the women to perform, as is true of all new infantry Marines, but they will impose additional pressures on themselves. Men are not expected to sacrifice their male identities, but the women will and it won't be easy. Every mistake and problem will be known, but uneasy men will pull for the struggling women and protest (perhaps too much) that they are doing well.
11. According to the *Washington Times*, officials are concerned about [increased personnel losses](#) in infantry fighting teams. As the economy strengthens, generous bonuses may not remedy this negative spiral, which would reduce combat lethality, not improve it.
12. Advocates will cite the lack of a female "critical mass" (10% to 25%) as a reason to attack the Marine policies as "unfair." When things go wrong, men will be blamed for treating women like men, or failing to treat women like men. It is a no-win situation.
13. Because people are human, some men will attempt to establish sexual relationships, even if the women are not interested. Rumors of favoritism or suspicions of special treatment will erode both horizontal and vertical cohesion - meaning bonds of mutual trust for survival in combat - particularly if the inappropriate conduct involves senior officers.
14. In cases of voluntary sexual liaisons that violate military law, investigations will distract and divide units, especially when punishments apply to men only.

15. Consensual relationships will exclude others and further weaken horizontal cohesion, especially if pregnancies occurring at the same rates experienced in other military communities leave small units short-handed during lengthy maternity leaves.
16. Infantrymen are not saints, and some will behave badly – Cue the waiting army of SAPRO counsellors, anti-sexual assault warriors, and legions of reporters eager for stories about abusive men victimizing women. Based on previous [annual SAPRO reports](#), actual cases of sexual assaults will increase, and unfounded accusations will occur approximately 17% of the time.
17. Mandatory training programs to reduce men’s “hyper-masculinity” or “unconscious bias” will divert time from infantry combat training, while creating more undeserved resentment against women.
18. If pioneering women fail for any reason, the usual feminist advocates will jump to say that “sexist men” with “masculinist attitudes” treated the women unfairly and set them up for failure. (Gender-mixing DGC battalions would indeed set women up for failure.) Enter the academics and consultants (such as RAND) who will expect large DoD contracts to write substandard polemic reports on ways to solve problems that their own previous recommendations helped to create.

In his Senate confirmation testimony, General Mattis said he would not look for problems, but if someone comes to him with concerns, he will consider them. This is a significant shift from the atmosphere under President Obama, which did not invite or tolerate discussion of the negative consequences of social experiments imposed since 2010.

Many [official surveys](#) and focus groups with military personnel registered strong opposition to gender-integration in the combat arms, among both men and women, especially if assignments are involuntary. The administration ignored all expressions of concern, and Secretary Ashton Carter brushed aside the best professional advice of then-Commandant General Joseph Dunford.

In the Trump administration, officials at all levels should be encouraged to be candid about the consequences of gender integration in the combat arms, as long as they have a rationale. Civilian and military leaders who continue policies known to detract from mission readiness, or encourage indiscipline rather than discipline.

Any or all of the consequences listed above would not advance Defense Secretary Mattis’ paramount goal: combat readiness and lethality in battle. When problems and lack of tangible benefits from questionable policies are measured against paramount objectives, the way ahead will be clear.

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