

# At Issue:

## Should women serve in combat?



**RAY MABUS**  
**SECRETARY OF THE NAVY**

EXCERPTED FROM WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO THE  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE, FEB. 2, 2016

**W**omen have been serving in combat, serving with distinction, and they've been recognized for it. Four hundred and twenty-two female Marines have earned Combat Action Ribbons for their service in Iraq and Afghanistan for various roles they've played, to include the Lioness Program and Female Engagement Teams. Female Marines have enhanced combat effectiveness by running convoys and security patrols, flying close air support missions and leading engineering platoons. They have performed exceptionally on the front lines in places like Fallujah [Iraq], Ramadi [Iraq] and Sangin [Afghanistan] — upholding the Marines' incredible combat proficiency and impeccable traditions. . . .

[Recently] I was at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia to have a frank discussion with Marines and see them train. What the visit reinforced in me is just how exceptional these young men and women are. They are mission-focused and thoughtful, they are respectful and proud, and they are intent on doing what Marines do best: developing the world's finest warfighters, irrespective of gender, color, religion or background because those things are irrelevant when it comes to meeting the standards required in combat. . . .

The Marines of history — those that fought at Belleau Wood [in World War I], at Iwo Jima [in World War II], at Hue City [in the Vietnam War], at Fallujah [in the Iraq War] and at Mousa Kala [in Afghanistan] — have always represented the best our country has to offer, have always adapted and overcome whatever threat has faced our country. My visit showed me that is absolutely still the case today. . . .

The Secretary of Defense's decision to open all previously closed Military Occupational Specialties (MOSSs) [jobs], including all Marine MOSSs, to women is therefore an important step for our military and our country. This isn't about quotas, and this doesn't mean every, or even most, Marines will make it, but it does mean every Marine who wants to will have the chance to compete. And that is the American promise, which does not guarantee an outcome to anyone, but does guarantee opportunity for everyone.

Americans have always worked to fulfill that exceptional promise made at our founding. We have continually broken down artificial barriers to equal opportunity based on race, religion or gender. Our military forces have followed that same history and made themselves stronger and better and more effective because of it. Implementing this policy breaks down a last barrier.



**ELAINE DONNELLY**  
**PRESIDENT, CENTER FOR MILITARY  
READINESS**

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**T**he armed forces are conducting an unprecedented social experiment that will put lives at greater risk. Military women have served with courage "in harm's way" in war zones, but direct ground combat units, such as Army and Marine infantry, armor, artillery and Special Operations Forces, seek out and attack the enemy with deliberate offensive action.

In 2012, the Marine Corps initiated extensive research and field tests to prove a simple hypothesis: "Gender-integrated units selected under gender-neutral standards would perform equally as well as all-male units." But in 69 percent of simulated ground combat tasks that the task forces performed (93 of 134), all-male teams significantly outperformed mixed-gender units.

University of Pittsburgh scientists reported superior performance when all-male teams carried heavy weapons, ammunition, communications equipment and survival gear over long distances. Speed, endurance and marksmanship accuracy while participants were fatigued were better, and men suffered half as many injuries as women. As in professional football and Olympic competitions, physiological differences justify different treatment for men and women.

To maintain "survivability and lethality" in battle, the Marines asked that some ground combat units remain all-male. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter nevertheless ordered all services to assign minimally qualified women to direct ground combat units on the same involuntary basis as men. To meet Pentagon-endorsed demographic "gender diversity metrics" — Navy Secretary Ray Mabus has repeatedly called for 25 percent women — training standards will be "validated" at "gender-neutral" levels that are lower than before.

Costs for training and counseling programs to mitigate expected injuries and disciplinary problems are beyond calculation. A small army of "gender advisers" and "gender integration oversight boards," for example, will oversee dubious mitigation strategies.

Surveys predict more difficulty in recruiting women, especially when they realize that combat assignments will be involuntary. In an official Army survey, more than 90 percent of women said they did not want combat arms assignments. Women who want to serve their country should not have to accept double or higher injury rates and other career disadvantages when competing with stronger men.

Policies that increase the number of disabled female veterans, while reducing combat effectiveness in elite fighting teams, will not benefit women or strengthen military readiness. The next president should reassess this dangerous experiment.