

DACOWITS Members:

Thank you for all your efforts with integrating women into all occupations across all branches of the Armed Forces. It is a special moment in this nation's history, indeed. I served in the US Army (1976 to 2016) first in the Field Artillery and later as a logistician. Based upon those experiences, I offer some comments to offer insights and comments for your agency's consideration regarding mid career retention, gender integration and women's overall propensity to serve.

**Career Retention:** Without a definitive career path, women will find other pursuits and employment. Without properly fitting gear, we are telling women recruits that we don't care about you (in actions, not words). And not laying out possible career pathing (or hiding what possible jobs exist) is also a turn off. Serving in the Field Artillery (FA) taught me that when the FA Branch told women we want you to go away as we have no career path for you. Talk about taking the wind out of someone's sails! Fellow officer, Rita Cordell, stayed 20 years and retired in the branch. She did so to challenge the FA Branch and to be able to contribute her gifts (and they were many). She ended up repairing and accounting for FA land based missile systems with the 59th FA Brigade - quite highly regarded, I might add - for much of her military service. She mentored others in the FA. On the other hand, in 1985, I was midway into my Battery Command. I opted to branch transfer although I loved and performed well (top of my FA Officer Basic and Lance Missile Courses).

Career pathing could also consider component switches from Active Duty, to Reserve/National Guard and back to Active Duty (AD) when/if children come along to add to the family. This may help with Mid Career Retention strategies for the family. It's extremely difficult, time consuming and administratively burdensome to do this component morphing (USAR, AGR or AD). Speaking from my own personal experiences, I had to fight a stack of papers to do so. All in all, my 20 plus years of military service entailed serving first on Active Duty, then USAR and then back to Active Duty (AGR) all to make the contribution I could make - including wartime supply chain efforts. Essentially, we are all one force to defend the nation; so facilitate this or put online links to enable service members and their families to make these career selections seamlessly.

Physical aptitude and stamina should include recovery from any temporary profile (or injury) and this should include child birthing. Have each of the services lay out a progressive recovery plan for mothers who have delivered/post partum exercise plan. A colleague who went to war with our unit was an amazing gal who delivered her daughter and three months later scored a perfect 300 on her PT Test then deployed to Kuwait/Iraq. It can be done; and it has.

**Equipment:** While the first concerns are to equip and outfit all soldiers with proper fitting gear (helmets, weapons, ponchos that don't drag on the ground), having upward mobility in every career endeavor is also key to their retention. And they are connected, interrelated and make a statement.

Equip all (men and women) by shifting the sizing of all gear to encompass all fits, sizes of soldiers. Every soldier, sailor, marine, etc. has their physical height, weight, sizing online. Why can't they also put their boot size, and hat size online as they are recruited? These accession details could feed the equipment needs. It's the demand (recruited person) forecasting the need (supply of the equipment piece). I trust DACOWITS has the combat gear and equipment as continued concern, so - add for all branches of services what the Air Force women pilots have as single "pee bags" in their supply chain. My experiences in Iraq in 2004, were that these were needed, but not supplied for women. We have different plumbing, so avail the essentials to all branches. (Why the women Air Force pilots could acquire these in the cockpits, but women truckers could not was beyond my understanding). My combat experiences from 2004 saw the resulting women drivers or transporters suffering from dehydration because of not drinking, so as not to have to urinate. In 140 degree heat, that is not a wise choice.

We had 300 women transporters in a Battalion of 1200 and these gals ran convoys lasting 4 to 21 days in non air conditioned tractor trailers. During refueling stops, the men could relieve themselves. It's all about equipment and plumbing.

Driving an M60A3 tank (when one is short in stature), required me to elevate the drivers seat up higher than most. In doing so, I hit my head from the driver's seat on the lower steel tube - of the tank's main gun (good thing there was a helmet on my head). Suggest in equipping the force, take the steps, the upward and lower limits of a gun tube into account. While both the M60A3 Tank and a Lance Missile Launcher are fairly simplistic to drive - and traversing field terrain, trenches, hills, highways and such take a bit of finesse (slow on the downward approach thru a trench and gun the gas to get up the side of a trench), women at the controls can do just as well as any. Similar to piloting a helicopter, there are sticks (laterals) to do the work. The mechanics when equipment fails takes both finesse and brute strength. Test abilities based upon what can happen (throwing a track, replacing track pads, for example). Any task that is at the organizational level, be sure prior to assigning any person to the job, that they can maneuver and execute this task.

**Integration:** This is all about the leadership and what is acceptable (as well as not acceptable) behaviors and practices. Units that are engaged in integrating women need to have a staff of accomplished men and women role models/leaders at the ready. Those who can mentor all toward the future opportunity. Put integration support as a topic on each leader's evaluation - how do they demonstrate their support for integration? It's not until we make this a "report card" mandatory comment that we will uphold the standard. We should also learn from the lessons of Post 1948 integration of how NOT to do this. Set every recruit up for success by giving them the training, education and hands on experience to do well. It's not about gender; it's about ability. Who demonstrates the most

accomplished ability should be considered and not shunned. There are plenty of examples whereby today's service women (over the past 20 to 50 years) have proven their contribution is worth the opportunity. Naysayers do not have a place (and they can be evaluated as failing to support integration). Remodeling of the facilities, ships, barracks - sure there is a cost. But, look at the Coast Guard and Merchant Marines who already have women skippers at the helm. Women have skipper rotations because they possess those skills sets. Someone permitted and supported their education and experience to do so. Engage them in conversations on what worked; what did not.

Lastly, all women who served or are serving now are instruments and benefactors of your work. Feel free to extract or compile our experiences - so as to provide you with a wide array of lessons learned (what was tried and failed; what worked). We are here as a tool for YOU!

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