



DACOWITS: Articles of Interest

WELLNESS

[Navy charges petty officer at center of sub video ring](#)

(29 Mar.) *Navy Times*, By Meghann Myers

The Navy released charges for a seventh sailor in the ring that allegedly swapped nude videos of their female shipmates, putting him at the center of the investigation, for filming and spreading the illicit recordings aboard the ballistic missile submarine Wyoming. But his lawyer claimed the petty officer's actions have been unfairly characterized.

[Eliminate Sexual Assault. Know Your Part. Do Your Part.](#)

(31 Mar.) *Navy Live Blog*, Rear Adm. Rick Snyder

We all have a role in prevention of sexual assault and other behaviors that negatively impact our shipmates and our Navy.

[Lawsuit revives controversy on explicit songbook](#)

(31 Mar.) *Air Force Times*, By Stephen Losey

A new lawsuit that seeks to stop the Defense Department from putting commanders in charge of sexual assault cases in their units has revived a 2012 controversy over a sexually explicit songbook allegedly used by some fighter pilots.

[Lawsuit seeks to remove commanders from rape cases](#)

(31 Mar.) *Military Times*, By Patricia Kime

Four active-duty and former service women filed a lawsuit Tuesday in federal court to stop the Defense Department from putting commanders in charge of cases involving sexual assault in their units.

[SMA seeks squad leaders to fight sex assault](#)

(31 Mar.) *Army Times*, By Michelle Tan

The Army is bringing together 32 squad leaders from across the service to solicit their ideas and recommendations on how to fight sexual assault in the ranks.

[Marines take symbolic stand against sexual assault](#)

(1 Apr.) *Marine Corps Times*, By Derrick Perkins

Donning their dress blue-whites, about 100 Marines formed a human ribbon on the parade deck of the service's oldest active post in a symbolic strike at sexual assault.

ASSIGNMENTS

[General Officer Assignment](#): Brig. Gen. Nina M. Armagno, who has been selected for the grade of major general, commander, 45th Space Wing, and director, Eastern Range, Air Force Space Command, Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, to director, requirements, Headquarters Air Force Space Command, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado.

[General Officer Assignment](#): Maj. Gen. Theresa C. Carter, commander, Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center (Provisional), Air Force Materiel Command, Joint Base Andrews-Naval Air Facility Washington, Maryland, to commander, Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, Air Force Materiel Command, Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas.

[Marine women face combat test](#)

(28 Mar.) *San Diego Union Tribune*, By Gretel C. Kovach

Twentynine Palms experiment to inform decision on ground combat jobs.

[Pentagon chief considers easing of enlistment standards](#)

(30 Mar.) *Associated Press*, By Lolita C. Baldor

Saying the military needs to do more to compete with corporate America for quality recruits, Defense Secretary Ash Carter opened the door Monday to relaxing some enlistment standards — particularly for high-tech or cyber security jobs.

[Master recruiters share their secrets of success](#)

(30 Mar.) *Air Force Times*, By Stephen Losey

For most of the 24,000 young people who enlist each year, their Air Force careers begin with a tentative conversation with a recruiter.

[Why one lawmaker keeps pushing for a new military draft](#)

(30 Mar.) Military Times, Leo Shane III

Rep. Charlie Rangel has no doubt that bringing back the military draft will make America safer. He just hasn't had any success convincing other lawmakers that he's right.

[Carter: Change promotion and retention rules](#)

(30 Mar.) Military Times, By Andrew Tilghman

The demands of the 21st century may require the military to fundamentally change the way it evaluates, promotes and retains service members, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Monday.

[Six more women qualify to attend Ranger School](#)

(1 Apr.) Army Times, By Michelle Tan

Six more female soldiers have qualified to attend Ranger School this spring, bringing to 12 the number of women who have so far qualified for the grueling two-month course, officials announced.

[West Point adds female cadets as gender barriers fall](#)

(2 Apr.) Army Times, By Kevin Lilley

As the Army makes plans to open more of its career paths to women, the U.S. Military Academy expects a record number of female members in its next class of plebes.

[#ForceoftheFuture targets younger audiences](#)

(2 Apr.) Military Times, By Oriana Pawlyk

The message Defense Secretary Ash Carter has been heralding all week is his vision for younger generations to get in line for military duty.

[More Women Qualify For Ranger School](#)

(2 Apr.) San Diego Union Tribune, By Gretel C. Kovach

First Gender-Integrated Class For Elite Army Program Begins This Month

EXTRA

[New British Report Shreds Case for Women in Direct Ground Combat](#)

(20 Feb.) Center for Military Readiness

The British Ministry of Defence (MoD) has released a new report on the issue of women in land combat titled: Women in Ground Close Combat (GCC) Review Paper – 01 December 2014.

[Senate bill would help victims of sexual assault get VA benefits](#)

(27 Mar.) The Hill, By Jordain Carney

Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) has introduced legislation to make it easier for veterans who suffered sexual abuse in the military to get help from the Veterans Affairs Department.

[Oldest known veteran, 110, blazed path for blacks, women](#)

(27 Mar.) San Antonio News, By Sig Christenson

Emma Didlake likes to say she always was one for getting into something, but she had no idea of what a big deal it was when she joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1943.

[Female veterans press VA hospitals to meet their needs](#)

(31 Mar.) MPR News, By Trisha Volpe

Trista Matascastillo remembers arriving at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center in 2010 for an exam and thinking the hospital didn't quite get the needs of female veterans.

[Women soldiers get a gutsy TV heroine](#)

(31 Mar.) My San Antonio, By Jeanne Jakle

Anna Friel portrays soldier Odelle Ballard is captured and beaten by terrorist groups, but realizes her worst enemy is a U.S. assassin in 'American Odyssey' on NBC.

Navy charges petty officer at center of sub video ring

(29 Mar.) *Navy Times*, By Meghann Myers

The Navy released charges for a seventh sailor in the ring that allegedly swapped nude videos of their female shipmates, putting him at the center of the investigation, for filming and spreading the illicit recordings aboard the ballistic missile submarine Wyoming. But his lawyer claimed the petty officer's actions have been unfairly characterized.

He faces a litany of charges — 11 in all — for his alleged role in recording and distributing videos of women on the Kings Bay, Georgia-based boat, a revelation that rocked the newly integrated submarine service late last year.

The missile technician second class is one of three sailors charged with recording so far. His charge sheet describes him as referring to the videos as collectible "Pokemon" cards and trading them with another sailor for a couple of energy drinks.

He was scheduled for an Article 32 hearing on Friday but waived his rights, attorney Jim Stein confirmed to *Navy Times* Thursday.

His attorney said the picture painted of him as the kingpin is unfair.

"He did not play the role that they've got him characterized in," Stein said.

In a January interview, Stein blamed the boat's lax personal electronic device policy as a catalyst for the crime.

"My information is that the use of the devices was widespread among most of the crew, officers included," he said.

The sailor, whose name is redacted from his charge sheet, faces:

- Two counts of conspiracy. In one case, he sent the videos to another MT2 in exchange for two energy drinks.
- One count of disrespecting a commissioned officer, when he told the officer that collecting the videos was like playing "Pokemon" — "Gotta catch 'em all."

- One count of disobeying an order by using his cellphone camera on board Wyoming.
- Four counts of viewing women's private areas and four counts of recording a private area.
- Three counts of distributing videos.

The videos were recorded between August 2013 to June 2014, according to charge sheets obtained by *Navy Times* through a Freedom of Information Act request.

Potentially dozens of women were filmed, a Navy official familiar with the investigation confirmed. In addition to the female officers, a number of midshipmen spent time aboard Wyoming in that 10-month period.

Though the Navy has declined to release the names of sailors who haven't been referred to court-martial, the TTF sailor's charges describe him as a main agent in sharing the videos. He is the only sailor charged so far with taking videos of his female officers, four in all.

The sailor's alleged "Pokemon" comments were invoked by a prosecutor in a March 12 Article 32 hearing against two other sailors charged in the case.

Lt. Cmdr. Lee Marsh told the court that the sailor made the videos on his smartphone and then "bumped" them to other sailors, saying only that had a "gift for them."

Charges have included using smartphone cameras underway, conspiracy, and recording, distributing and viewing the videos without reporting them.

According to a retired submarine supply officer who spoke to *Navy Times* in December, the videos were first reported when an officer on another boat received them.

One sailor of the original 12 suspects will not face charges, Submarine Force Atlantic spokesman Cmdr. Tommy Crosby said.

<http://www.navytimes.com/story/military/2015/03/27/submarine-wyoming-women-shower-videos-court-charges/70480502/>

Eliminate Sexual Assault. Know Your Part. Do Your Part.

(31 Mar.) *Navy Live Blog*, Rear Adm. Rick Snyder

We all have a role in prevention of sexual assault and other behaviors that negatively impact our shipmates and our Navy. Each of you can make a difference by the example you set through your words and your actions.

The Navy is making progress towards eliminating sexual assault – thank you.

But we still have much work to do, and I'm confident we'll get it done.

Frequently, we see that sexual assault victims were previously sexually harassed – often by the same alleged offender. No one wants to be part of a culture that harasses our shipmates. Through our awareness and diligence, we can stop it. We must be supportive of all victims of sexual assault. Surveys indicate victims of sexual assault are about evenly split between men and women and all of our shipmates must feel comfortable coming forward and reporting.

We must be sensitive in our response to victims of sexual assault. They need our support, not our exclusion. Actions done to them in retaliation for coming forward discourages them and others, and it's against the UCMJ.

Treating each other with dignity and respect is core to our Navy.

As I said, we are making progress. Together we can and must, keep that momentum going. Thanks for your support and

Lawsuit revives controversy on explicit songbook

(31 Mar.) Air Force Times, By Stephen Losey

A new lawsuit that seeks to stop the Defense Department from putting commanders in charge of sexual assault cases in their units has revived a 2012 controversy over a sexually explicit songbook allegedly used by some fighter pilots.

The songbook — containing songs such as "Bye Bye Cherry" and "The S&M Man," which graphically describes sexually mutilating women and dragging AIDS victims behind a bus — was uncovered by one of the four plaintiffs in the case.

Former Tech. Sgt. Jennifer Smith found the songbook on a computer at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina, where she worked. As reported by Air Force Times in 2012, Smith complained to her chain of command about the material — without result — before filing a formal complaint with the Inspector General and Air Force leadership.

The case was one of a few that appear to have led Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh in December 2012 to order a servicewide sweep of all work spaces and public areas to remove images, calendars and other materials objectifying women.

In a press conference Tuesday on the lawsuit, Smith said she was mocked and harassed by her co-workers after complaining she worked in a sexually hostile work environment.

"I filed a formal complaint," Smith said. "Six officers were punished in my case. All the officers received nothing more than a piece of paper reprimanding them for their behavior.

Lawsuit seeks to remove commanders from rape cases

(31 Mar.) Military Times, By Patricia Kime

Four active-duty and former service women filed a lawsuit Tuesday in federal court to stop the Defense Department from putting commanders in charge of cases involving sexual assault in their units.

Charging that commanders cannot be fair and impartial in such cases because they often know the alleged perpetrators or victims, the plaintiffs — an Army first lieutenant stationed in Kuwait, a former Air Force technical sergeant, a former airman and veteran soldier — have asked the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia for an injunction to halt such appointments.

Instead, the plaintiffs say, legal officers outside the unit chain of command should adjudicate the cases.

The case represents a legal maneuver to institute what has long been proposed by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., and is opposed by many within the Defense Department — to strip some commanders of the authority to decide whether and how to prosecute a sexual assault case.

participation in upcoming Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month activities and events.

Important resources to use during SAAPM can be found here at www.navy.mil/sapr and

www.navy.mil/docs/SAAPM_2015_Toolkit.pdf.

Rear Adm. Rick Snyder is Director, 21st Century Sailor Office.

<http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2015/03/31/eliminate-sexual-assault-know-your-part-do-your-part/>

All will still lead. All will oversee airmen and sexual assault claims."

In her original complaint, Smith also said she was sexually assaulted by her master sergeant in Germany. Smith escaped that assault when several other airmen intervened.

Retired Col. Don Christensen, a former chief prosecutor for the Air Force and president of the military sexual assault victims advocacy group Protect Our Defenders, compared the songbook -- and the lack of consequences for officers involved with it — to the video of a racist chant that recently shut down the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity at the University of Oklahoma.

"We all just a few weeks ago saw this ugly scandal at the University of Oklahoma where there were kids straight out of high school singing a song — an inappropriate song, a horrible song," Christensen said. "A nine-second video shut down the school. If you look at this book, it has the most misogynistic trash you can imagine. This is something that is used by Air Force officers today. These are the commanders who sing songs about raping women as fun. These are the people Sgt. Smith has to look to get relief, to get justice. The time has come for fundamental military reform."

<http://www.airforcetimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2015/03/31/lawsuit-revives-controversy-on-explicit-songbook-air-force-fighter-pilots/70729976/>

Representing the plaintiffs, Baltimore attorney Susan Burke said the court can order DoD to use its power under the Uniform Code of Military Justice to appoint unbiased adjudicators.

"We hope we can get the federal court to help make sure the department doesn't continue to let people who have known misogynistic and sexist tendencies to be the judges," Burke said during a news conference in Washington, D.C.

The case's sole active-duty plaintiff, Army 1st Lt. Celina Baldwin, was the alleged victim of sexual assault and harassment in a high-profile case involving the U.S. Military Academy rugby team in 2013.

Baldwin discovered a cache of sexually explicit emails circulating among team members that discussed female cadets and other women. The emails eventually were turned over to West Point officials.

The team was temporarily disbanded in mid-2013 as a result of the revelations and reorganized under a new coach.

Disciplinary investigations were recommended but no further punishment for those involved was discussed, according to a report released Friday by the Army to Military Times.

The report noted that the Army recommended reviewing the chain of command for the rugby team and improved training for team members on hazing and sexual harassment awareness.

But according to Burke, those involved remain in the Army and eventually may be in a position to oversee sexual assault cases.

"This same pattern of investigating and then whitewashing the results are what ... the plaintiffs have endured," Burke said.

Plaintiff Jennifer Smith said she was sexually assaulted and later harassed by co-workers after complaining that she worked in a sexually hostile work environment.

The 18-year Air Force veteran said pornography on government computers, as well as a fighter pilot songbook that includes offensive songs, including an expletive-laced, sexually explicit shanty about sado-masochism, violate Air Force policy and U.S. law and should be removed from offices.

For her complaints, she was mocked, she said.

"I filed a formal complaint. ... Six officers were punished in my case. All the officers received nothing more than a piece of paper reprimanding them for their behavior. All will still lead.

All will oversee airmen and sexual assault claims," Smith said.

Burke has represented military personnel in several sexual assault lawsuits, including plaintiffs in two separate class action suits against secretaries of defense and a female midshipman in a case involving three Naval Academy football players.

SMA seeks squad leaders to fight sex assault

(31 Mar.) Army Times, By Michelle Tan

The Army is bringing together 32 squad leaders from across the service to solicit their ideas and recommendations on how to fight sexual assault in the ranks.

The working group is part of a sweeping campaign called "Not in my squad. Not in our Army. We are trusted professionals."

The campaign, which was officially unveiled Tuesday during a ceremony at the Pentagon, is the brainchild of the Army's new senior enlisted soldier.

Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey, a career infantryman who has been on the job since Jan. 30, came up with the "Not in my squad" concept. The idea is to put first-line leaders directly into the fight against sexual assault and sexual harassment, issues that are among the top priorities for senior Army leaders.

"Every leader at every level has an obligation to safeguard America's sons and daughters," Dailey said during the ceremony Tuesday, which also marked the beginning of Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month. "Not in my squad" is a grass-roots approach. Our first-line leaders are charged with the care of our soldiers both on and off duty."

The campaign highlights the critical role of noncommissioned officers in fighting sexual assault and harassment, "but the success of this initiative relies on the ownership of all Army professionals," Dailey said.

"Not in my squad" is not a bumper sticker," he said. "It's an anthem, a call of duty."

Charges against two defendants were dropped in the Naval Academy case and the third defendant was found not guilty. The class action lawsuits against the Defense Department were dismissed.

Burke said she is taking a different legal tack on the current case and believes she has a strong argument for the injunction. The plaintiffs are not seeking damages, she added.

"The best justice is a blind justice. We know if you are asked to sit on a jury, you get excused if you know anybody. ... They are assigning someone who has an inherent bias," Burke said.

The Defense Department likely will ask the court to abstain from exercising jurisdiction in the case — as has happened in Burke's previous cases, she said.

If they pass that hurdle, however, a hearing could be held as early as within six months, she added.

As a matter of policy, the Defense Department does not comment on ongoing litigation, a Pentagon spokeswoman said.

A report released in late 2014 found that the number of sexual assaults reported in the military has risen, from 3,604 in 2012 to 5,983 in 2014. But the number of estimated assaults is believed to be much higher, since rape and sexual assault are underreported crimes.

According to a 2014 survey, about 20,000 service members of 170,000 polled said they had experienced at least one incident of unwanted sexual contact in the past year, representing nearly 5 percent of all active-duty women and 1 percent of active-duty men.

<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2015/03/31/us-military-sexual-assault-cases/70720580/>

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno, who also spoke at Tuesday's ceremony, agreed.

"This is really about the core of who we are," he said. "I ask all of us to lead. I ask all of us to take this on. This is about changing our culture."

Fighting sexual assault and harassment is a "zero tolerance proposition," Army Secretary John McHugh said.

"If we can't protect one soldier from another soldier, how can we protect our nation?" he said. "We came together as an Army to battle the scourge that is sexual assault and sexual harassment, and if we keep together, we will prevail."

To form the 32-member working group, Dailey is calling on the sergeants major at the divisions and corps to find their best and brightest.

Once the NCOs are identified, plans call for them to be brought to the Washington, D.C.-area to meet, brainstorm ideas and come up with recommendations, Dailey said. This likely will take place in the summer during a two- or three-day workshop, he said.

The squad leaders will hear from key leaders and then spend time in small group discussions. They also will meet with members and staff on Capitol Hill, and their recommendations will be briefed to senior Army leaders, Dailey said.

"We're looking for ideas and solutions," he said. "We want this to be their program, and based on what we learn, we may continue to do this."

And while the focus of the working group will be sexual assault and harassment prevention, the squad leaders will be called upon to look at other issues as well, Dailey said. This could include ways to prevent bullying or discrimination, he said.

"A soldier says, 'These are my soldiers. Nobody messes with my soldiers.' I take that personally. It's my responsibility to ensure every facet of their lives is taken care of," Dailey said in early March while first discussing the "Not in my squad"

Marines take symbolic stand against sexual assault

(1 Apr.) Marine Corps Times, By Derrick Perkins

Donning their dress blue-whites, about 100 Marines formed a human ribbon on the parade deck of the service's oldest active post in a symbolic strike at sexual assault.

The display, made at the Marine Barracks at 8th and I streets in Washington on Monday, marked the beginning of the Corps' month-long recognition of April as sexual assault awareness and prevention month. A teal ribbon is the symbol for sexual violence prevention.

Col. Scott Jensen, sexual assault prevention and response branch head for Headquarters Marine Corps, said the act drove home the service's commitment to ending sexual violence. Doing so is the responsibility of all Marines, he said.

"Every single Marine has a part to play," Jensen said in a statement, "and this human ribbon illustrates that Marines are

Marine women face combat test

(28 Mar.) San Diego Union Tribune, By Gretel C. Kovach
Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms — An assault force that charged up the hill shooting enemy targets in mock battle this month included personnel the Marine Corps has never sent into real combat — infantrywomen.

Mixed-gender rifle squads are just one of many unusual sights these days at Twentynine Palms, where an unprecedented experiment is underway to help the Corps decide whether it should open all-male ground combat units to women. Last year, the service sent more than 400 enlisted women to school to qualify as infantry riflemen, tankers, artillery cannoners and other occupations that were off-limits to them under the Pentagon's now-defunct ground combat ban. Some of the graduates started training in October with a new ground combat task force at Camp Lejeune, N.C. The experimental unit initially included roughly 100 women and 250 men serving as research volunteers, plus experienced squad leaders and other staff.

Four months later, the task force deployed to California, trading frost-covered loblolly pine forests for the heat and elevation of the Mojave desert. A three-month assessment will end for the infantrymen and women at the mountain warfare center at Bridgeport, and for amphibious assault vehicle crews on the beaches of Camp Pendleton.

campaign during a visit to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington.

It was his first troop visit since becoming the sergeant major of the Army.

"We've got to empower young NCOs," he said at the time.

"We rely on them in combat ... [and] we've got to trust them with this. Our NCOs can do this. We just need to empower them."

<http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2015/03/31/army-launches-new-sex-assault-campaign/70729672/>

willing to step up and act in accordance with our traditional values of honor, courage and commitment."

The Corps has seen its share of struggles with sexual assault. Nearly 8 percent of women in the Corps reported being sexually assaulted in 2014, the highest rate among the armed services, according to data collected by Rand Corp and released late last year. The Corps spent more than \$16 million the two years prior on efforts to curb sexual assault.

The Marines' display kicks off a month of activities centered around this year's Defense Department theme of "Eliminate sexual assault: Know your part. Do your part." Events include lectures, road races and nationwide activities like Denim Day USA and The Clothesline Project, which both discourage violence against women.

<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/story/military/2015/04/01/marine-display-opposes-sexual-assault/70737662/>

The Marines are being tracked with GPS units, heart rate monitors and ballistic sensors. Data collectors weigh the sand they dig from fighting holes and time them loading tank rounds. Researchers survey the Marines about camaraderie and fatigue, while others measure physiological signs of stress.

A final report analyzing the data will be submitted to senior Marine officials in mid-August. It will help the Corps develop more quantitative and gender-neutral performance standards. It also might lead to a physical screening test for the toughest jobs, similar to entry assessments used now for special operations forces.

Most importantly, the research is meant to inform the commandant on whether the service should request an exception to the Pentagon order to integrate women into all military jobs — from the infantry to Army Rangers and Navy SEALs — by the first of 2016.

Results

At the Twentynine Palms base in the Mojave, a computer program rolls the digital dice before each skills test to assign varying concentrations of women. Most of the units are all-male, because men comprise 93 percent of the Corps. The others include one woman or sometimes a couple more — to

model what gender integration would actually look like in the early stages.

The random shuffle aims to cancel out personality differences, leadership effects and affinity for particular positions.

Researchers refer to the all-male units as the “control group,” but the experiment does not isolate the impact of gender on combat performance since women who checked into the task force straight from the schoolhouse are pitted against men with years of experience.

“There’s a trade-off between operational realism and experimental control,” Johnson said.

Military brass and a host of bystanders have been pumping for information, but Marine officials are withholding preliminary results so people will not rush to judgment. The Marines involved in the experiment don’t know exactly how well they are doing, and Johnson does not, either.

“I don’t open my Christmas presents before Christmas,” he said. When it comes to women in combat, “there are plenty of opinions all over the place in the general populace about whether this is a good idea, a bad idea, etcetera. We are here to generate facts ...”

However, a few things are clear one month into the testing at Twentynine Palms. The women newly assigned to these physically demanding jobs as well as less experienced men are growing stronger and more efficient. Camaraderie is high.

And so is the injury rate for women.

The infantry company, for example, had a peak of about 170 Marines, including some two dozen women. As the task force prepared to deploy for combat testing in late January, more than a third of the women had dropped out — a much higher rate than the men.

Those nine women were pulled from infantry training largely because of medical reasons such as hip, leg and foot injuries like stress fractures. Of the 13 infantrymen who dropped by that time, all but one asked to leave because of personal reasons.

Performance varies widely among remaining members of the task force. Some women struggle while others easily keep pace with the men. Factors as diverse as nutrition to gear packing technique to physical stature make the difference. In the artillery battery, Sgt. Mindy Vuong and her team finish their daily regimen on the M-777 howitzer one day at 1 p.m. When they started combat testing a few weeks earlier, it took them five hours longer. “As you can see, we have cut off quite a bit of time,” she said.

In the armored vehicle camp, 1st Sgt. Doug Hester, a Marine with 16 years experience on light armored vehicles, said the Marines are continuing to refine techniques. For instance, when disengaging the 50-pound gun feeder, “The ladies and smaller men put their shoulder into it and guide it down. They use their body as a fulcrum,” he said. “They are spun-up on the gun now. It is second nature to them.”

Rigors

Much of the debate about women in combat has focused on whether the generally smaller, weaker female frame can withstand the rigors of grunt life or tank battle.

Johnson pointed to a chart illustrating the typical weight of a Marine casualty — 174 pounds, plus 47 pounds of body armor

and other equipment. That is why “Cpl. Carl,” the dummy that task force Marines carry in teams during casualty evacuation testing, weighs 221 pounds. Among female Marines, 97 percent weigh less than Carl.

“We know that size differences exist on average between men and women. So what? Does it actually have a downstream effect or is it so minimal it could likely go unnoticed?”

Johnson asked.

Women may contribute in ways that cancel out physical deficiencies or even improve overall performance of combat units they join, he said. For instance, some say female troops tend to be more detail-oriented. And Marine marksmanship instructors note that women are often easier to train as shooters.

The task force’s senior enlisted adviser, Sgt. Maj. Robin Fortner, graduated number one from primary marksmanship instructor school at Parris Island, S.C., in 1999. She was the only woman in her class of about 15. The key to success is ignoring stereotypes and natural human biases, said Fortner, 42, of Queens, N.Y.

“Male or female, you couldn’t say nothing to me if I’m always hitting those wickets. I break that wall down without you even knowing I’m breaking that wall down,” she said.

Johnson holds up dice — some small, some large — to illustrate another complication. “Don’t fall in love with the average because they actually come in all shapes and sizes,” he said.

An infantry squad that set out on the offensive as the sun beamed high overhead included a woman about six feet tall. The corporal with a lean athletic build moved seamlessly in the lead. The small bun under her helmet was the only clue differentiating her from the men rushing the enemy, flopping belly-down to shoot green “Ivan targets” popping up before them.

Another woman of average female size kept up as she scrambled with the others over a shipping container and into battle. But she appeared woozy afterward from the heat. Lance Cpl. Callahan Brown, 20, of Springfield, Va., stopped at the base of the range to sit in the shade. “I’m fine!” she insisted to several combat veterans who gathered around, noticing her beet red face and mascara melting down her cheeks.

Sgt. Jeremy Bradshaw, 24, of Woodbridge, Va., stuffed a protein bar in her hand. “Make sure you eat that,” he said. When Brown fumbled listlessly with the wrapper, he knelt down and opened it for her.

A bowl of cereal was all she had eaten for breakfast. “I’m really not hungry,” she said.

“That’s your problem. Eat it,” ordered the squad leader, Cpl. Jess Detata, 22, of Port St. Lucie, Fla.

University of Pittsburgh researchers studying the physiology of top performers estimate that each task force Marine burns 5,000 to 6,000 calories a day at Twentynine Palms.

“Nobody’s going to get fat out here,” the infantry company commander, Capt. Ray Kaster, told Brown.

Strength

Sgt. Michelle Svec, a tanker, said it took time for her body to adjust to the back-to-back schedule of combat trials at

Twentynine Palms. "I'm pretty sure I'm going to be ripped when I leave here," she joked.

"The first two, three-day cycles I was so sore. Like completely sore. I was like, 'Oh my God, why am I here?!'" she laughingly groaned. "Everybody is getting more proficient, more fluid."

Sgt. Kelly Brown is a bulk fuel specialist by training, serving in the provisional platoon of infantrymen and women who were not sent to infantry school before joining the task force. Their two-day test, repeated twice a week, includes a five-mile hike carrying 114 pounds of gear, two-hour digs and the uphill assault in soft sand.

Brown said she realizes now how bold it is to declare "every Marine a rifleman," as the slogan goes. She has nursed blisters, bruises and sore muscles — but none of the hip strain that is the Achilles heel for many women carrying heavy loads over long distances.

Male squad leaders suggested that she adjust the frame and straps of her pack to shift the weight to her shoulders. "It's worked out well. I take the advice from the pros who have done this a lot longer than I have," Brown said.

Even so, she added, "it's a constant challenge every single day, mentally and physically. If not more mentally."

The Marines fight against exhaustion and monotony, trying to stay focused and make quick, sound decisions under pressure. For instance, if infantry squads don't conserve ammunition during the initial assault, they will be decimated during the enemy counter-attack.

The physical demands are especially rigorous for those lugging heavy weapons.

"The machine gun doesn't care who's carrying it, and neither do the people you're going to shoot on the other end. It favors someone bigger, stronger and more durable," said the Weapons Company commander, Capt. Mark Lenzi, 32, of Hudson, Ohio.

Yet Lenzi, standing 5 foot 6 inches, has excelled in the field. "You can train to mental toughness," he said. "The key is never allowing them to feel sorry for themselves."

Scrutiny

The task force experiment has been the focus of intense interest, because it could trigger the biggest change for the Marine Corps in its nearly 240-year history. At Twentynine Palms, scheduled visitors include Australian and British military officials, U.S. Senate and House representatives, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services and high-ranking Marines.

Sgt. Maj. Michael Jones, senior enlisted leader of Marine Corps Forces Command, queried a howitzer team comprised of seven women and two men during his recent visit.

He asked them if it is feasible for women to keep serving in the artillery after the experiment ends.

"If I was fresh out of boot camp, 18, 19, I'd jump on it," said Cpl. Myha Shipp, 26, of Savanna, Ga.

"Does that change priorities like childbearing?" Jones asked the women, one after another.

Parents make sacrifices balancing family life with career, several said. "It's the same in every (military job). You're going to have to give somewhere and take somewhere else and make it up on the back," one young Marine told Jones, saying she wanted to finish military service before having children. "We have a lot of fathers out here, too," added Shipp, the mother of a 10-year-old daughter. "It's the same thing for them, too. That's why I say being a parent in general, not just being a mother ... is going to put a different stance on your priorities. But it's definitely doable."

Addressing the men, Jones asked: "What do you think, having your sisters here on the gun line?"

"It's a new experience," one said. "I don't think it's affected it. The gun still moves fast."

Compared to the all-male teams, "we might be a little bit slower. But that's because they've been doing it for longer, where we just started this (past) year," Vuong, the female sergeant, said later. "We all work well together."

Cohesion

Fitting in, or what the military calls unit cohesion, is a life-or-death matter in combat.

Close-knit quarters, rough conditions and a demanding schedule bonded the task force across the usual range of personalities.

Some of the task force women are quiet professionals. Others curse and brag through big plugs of chewing tobacco, including one woman whose helmet reads "snappin' necks and cashing checks."

One evening in the infantry camp, country music from tinny cell phone speakers and the strumming of acoustic guitar drifts over the mushroom patch of khaki two-person tents. One woman airs out her boots, exposing brightly painted toenails. Other Marines pass Advil or dig trenches to channel rain from a thunderstorm threatening in the distance.

Each day the artillerymen dig skirmisher pits, and each day bulldozers fill them in. "It can be demoralizing," Vuong said, so the shovel brigade sings a chorus of "Lean on Me" or a hit by the Irish singer Hozier to keep going.

At night the armor crews roll out mats and sleep next to their vehicles under the stars. "It's not very comfortable, but we're tired by the end of the day anyway so it's not bad," said Lance Cpl. Ashleigh Howell, one of the best gunners among men and women in the light armored vehicle platoon.

Hester, the armored vehicle company first sergeant, said crew cohesion is vital to the mechanized world. Tanks and tracks can't run without it. Over time, "You know their weaknesses, their strengths ... whose feet smell, who snores at night."

The sisters-in-arms stuck together and proved themselves, he said.

"They are tough as nails. They fit right in amongst the males," he said.

"At first everyone was apprehensive, unsure of the unknown. They waited to see how they performed. Then it was 'OK, you're in the club.'"

<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2015/mar/28/marine-combat-test-twentynine-palms/5/?#article-copy>

Pentagon chief considers easing of enlistment standards

(30 Mar.) Associated Press, By Lolita C. Baldor

ABINGTON, Pa. (AP) — Saying the military needs to do more to compete with corporate America for quality recruits, Defense Secretary Ash Carter opened the door Monday to relaxing some enlistment standards — particularly for high-tech or cyber security jobs.

Speaking to students at his former suburban Philadelphia high school, Carter said the military could ease age requirements and bring in older people who are mid-career, or provide student loan repayments to attract students who have finished college.

There are few details so far, but Carter said the military needs to be more flexible in order to recruit and retain quality people.

The idea, largely in line with the civilian approach to recruitment, upends the military's more rigid mindset, which puts a high value on certain standards. It reignites a persistent debate about how the services approve waivers for recruits who have committed lesser crimes, behaved badly, are older than current regulations allow or have other physical issues that prevent them from joining the military.

According to Pentagon documents and officials, Carter sees recruitment and retention as major challenges to a military coming out of two wars and facing turmoil around the world. Specifically, the Pentagon pointed to cyber jobs as an area where standards — such as age or minor drug offenses — could be relaxed. Military leaders have long complained that it is difficult to attract and keep cyber professionals in the services because they can make far more money in private industry.

This is not the first time, however, that the services have looked to reduced restrictions as a way to entice more recruits. During 2006-2007, the military steadily increased the number of bad behavior waivers as the services — particularly the Army and Marine Corps — struggled to meet deployment demands in Iraq and Afghanistan. The services let in more recruits with criminal records, including some with felony convictions, in order to meet recruiting quotas.

And in some cases, the services relaxed age restrictions, allowing older people to enlist or rejoin the military. But as the wars dragged on and suicides, sexual assaults and other bad behavior by service members spiked, military leaders began to question whether there was a link to the relaxed enlistment standards.

Carter also is considering other changes to help ensure the military attracts the best and brightest, including programs to

pay off student debt, improvements to the retirement, promotion and evaluation systems and doing more to allow sabbaticals for service members.

There has been much discussion lately about allowing service members to participate in 401(k)-type programs, because as much as 80 percent of the people who enlist don't stay in service long enough to earn retirement benefits.

Carter talked about some of his ideas during his stop at Abington Senior High outside Philadelphia.

In a speech to more than 1,000 students, Carter said the military is going to have to work harder to compete with corporate America for highly-skilled graduates.

"Because we too often talk about sacrifice alone, which is no small thing, we probably don't spend enough time highlighting the opportunities that exist and the fulfillment one has from achieving excellence and doing it in service to your country," said Carter, a member of Abington's class of 1972. "No one should gloss over the hardships or the dangers of military life, but I do want you to understand how fulfilling and rewarding military life can be also."

Carter also alluded to his lack of military service, telling students that, "you don't have to join the military service to serve your country, I didn't."

But he said "the military, and public service as a whole is worthy of your respect, worthy of your support and worth of your consideration."

After visiting his former high school, Carter will travel to Fort Drum, New York, home of the Army's storied 10th Mountain Division, where he will meet with troops.

Brigades from the 10th Mountain Division served as anchor units in eastern Afghanistan for much of the war, particularly during the early years when the U.S. had only a smaller force there. For many years they rotated with brigades from the 82nd Airborne Division.

And on Tuesday, he will visit Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families.

The Defense Department has launched a partnership with the institute and the Schultz Family Foundation for a program called Onward to Opportunity, which will provide industry-specific training and job placement assistance for service members and their spouses as the troops leave the military.

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/48643bf7477d44fe833286c057bae99a/pentagon-chief-may-ease-military-enlistment-standards>

Master recruiters share their secrets of success

(30 Mar.) Air Force Times, By Stephen Losey

For most of the 24,000 young people who enlist each year, their Air Force careers begin with a tentative conversation with a recruiter.

And that recruiter — welcoming, looking sharp in Air Force blues — can change the course of someone's life.

But the job takes more than making a good first impression. Getting teenagers to sign on the dotted line — so to speak, it's all done electronically with biometric fingerprints these days — requires finesse, strategy and a little bit of psychology, recruiters said in interviews with Air Force Times.

"We have a marketing plan," said Chief Master Sgt. Wade Trahan of the Air Force Recruiting Service at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph in Texas, who has been in recruiting for 18 years. "Everything from telephone prospecting to lead generation to school presentations, so [recruiters are] consistently engaging their audience on a daily basis. We know exactly what's going on in these areas, the demographics that we have, some of the local events. All this funnels to getting a qualified applicant pool that they can sit down with and be that mentor to that person, and that counselor, and direct them in the right direction — whether or not it's to the Air Force."

In many ways, the job today is unchanged from the traditional in-person recruiting of old. But a new generation of recruits and technology presents both challenges and opportunities. Here are 10 tactics that recruiters said help them succeed.

1. Know your community. In interviews with seven recruiters, many stressed the importance of learning the ins and outs of his target community. Not only will it help a recruiter discover which are the most fertile grounds for finding the best recruiting candidates, they said, it will help them tailor their strategies to their town.

"What works out here in Dallas may not work out there in Duluth," said Technical Sgt. Andria McGuire, a recruiter with the 344th Recruiting Squadron in Dallas. "Being able to adapt to your environment ... is important."

Part of that means figuring out which events young people go to. Tech Sgt. Michael Bach, a flight chief at the 337th Recruiting Squadron who is in Charlotte, North Carolina, said recruiters there target professional sporting events, such as Charlotte Hornets or Carolina Hurricanes games or NASCAR races.

But Tech Sgt. Travis Layman, a recruiter with the 343rd Recruiting Squadron who works in Duluth, Minnesota, said he focuses his recruiting efforts on his community's outdoors interests. In the frigid Duluth winters, he shows up at frozen lakes to talk to people practicing hockey or ice fishing, and in the summer, he may reach out to backpackers or bicyclists.

"We try to get out, as much as we can, onto the ice," Layman said.

McGuire said her squadron holds annual swearing-in ceremonies at Texas Rangers games. For example, on the Fourth of July in 2013, 168 new recruits lined up in jeans and Air Force t-shirts on the first and third baselines at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington, Texas, and took their oath of enlistment in front of thousands of spectators. Not only do such public events give the recruits a moment in the spotlight, but they also make the Air Force visible to some people in the audience who may start thinking about enlisting.

And learning about the trends in college attendance in an area can help a recruiter figure out where he or she is most likely to find a potential applicant.

For example, Layman said, many high school students in Duluth already have scholarships or plans to attend one of the four major colleges in the immediate area, he said. So in addition to going to high schools, he talks to students attending the dozen or so two-year community colleges or vocational schools around Duluth.

Those students have matured a little bit, he said, and realized that college can be expensive and difficult. As a result, they're often interested to hear more about how the Air Force can help them continue their education.

"They're more apt to be receptive to what I have to say, as far as, 'Hey, you can get experience to go with that degree,'" Layman said. "They realize now that experience is key, so if they can get college and experience, then it's going to make them a more valuable asset going into the job market. And we can provide that to them."

2. Become part of the community. Bach said visiting high schools is a must, so recruiters can talk to soon-to-graduate seniors as well as juniors about to become seniors.

But building strong relationships with teachers, guidance counselors and other school officials is the key to getting into classrooms, he said.

Another recruiter — a tech sergeant who asked that his name not be printed — said helping teachers and other school staff goes a long way to opening doors.

"I'd bring teachers doughnuts sometimes, and set them up in the conference room," he said. "I wouldn't even be [recruiting] at the school that day. I'd drop it off, and go next time and they're all more accepting of you."

The tech sergeant also said he would help school staff decorate and set up for parades, dances or other events, serve as a chaperone, or be a proctor during standardized tests — all of which overworked teachers and administrators need help with.

That involvement shows school staff that a recruiter wants to be a member of the community, and breaks down the suspicion some may feel about the military.

"Because you have the uniform, people think you're a robot or something, and they're afraid to talk to you," the tech sergeant said. "But if you show them you're a regular person ... they know you're not just there to make numbers. You want to help students, or help them help students. Then, they'll send kids your way."

The tech sergeant also gets to know the local DJs and radio station managers and does on-air interviews about what an Air Force career can mean for young people. And while he's there, he goes into their recording booth and cuts a public service announcement they can play during commercial breaks.

3. Listen to their needs. Sometimes the most important thing a recruiter can do is simply start a conversation and then actively listen to what students want out of life.

But it's important not to hound potential applicants, Layman said, or as it is sometimes called, not to be "recruiting hungry." Instead, he said, allow teens to open up on their own.

"If you just sit back and let them do the talking, they tell you everything that they want [and] need," Layman said. "And eventually, you lead them down the path to realize themselves, 'Hey, this is the best thing for me.' Active listening is the key."

Bach said the conversation could push some potential applicants to realize for the first time that something is missing. For example, Bach said, a 25-year-old still living at home could find a conversation with a recruiter is the nudge he needs to make an overdue change in his life.

"Every applicant joins for their own set of reasons," Bach said. "It's the recruiter that starts the conversation and guides the conversation to uncover those interests of these applicants, and then they can tailor that conversation to what's going to benefit that applicant the best."

Some may say they're hoping to go to college, but aren't sure how they can afford it, Bach said. Other potential recruits could talk about their dreams of traveling around the world.

"And the conversation could steer toward, 'Hey, did you know the Air Force can pay for your college,'" Bach said.

4. Listen to their fears. Potential applicants sometimes have picked up misconceptions about military life that leave them reluctant to consider signing up. Recruiters must identify mistaken impressions and then dispel them.

For example, recruiters said, sometimes potential recruits think they'll have to jump out of airplanes if they join. And if that idea terrifies them, it can be a deal-breaker. But sometimes, they don't speak up, so the recruiter has to keep them talking and draw such worries out of them.

"I'm scared of flying' — I've heard that a couple of different times," Layman said. "A lot of people don't realize that it's like 10 percent can even qualify for flight that are active-duty Air Force. So it's not a very big percentage that actually do stuff, as far as air crews."

McGuire said she's even heard recruits say they can't join the Air Force because they're afraid of heights, not realizing that

there are thousands of other jobs they can do that leave them safe on the ground.

5. Keep recruits motivated. After recruits decide to join the Air Force, they enter the Delayed Entry Program and sometimes have to wait a few months before shipping out for basic training. Until that day, they can back out. So recruiters try to find ways to keep so-called DEPers engaged and motivated.

A retired master sergeant recruiter, who asked that his name not be used, said he used to set up bowling parties, pizza parties, cookouts and trips to the local Air Force base for his DEPers.

And those social events helped him find more potential recruits. He would encourage DEPers to spread the word and invite their friends — and sometimes, those friends would start to think about signing up.

"It's showing them the fun side of being in the Air Force, the family side," he said. "If they're in high school, they can talk to their friends. 'Hey, I'm joining the Air Force.' 'Hey, that sounds cool.' Or, 'We're having a bowling party, bring a friend.'"

6. Use social media. The explosion of social media over the past decade hasn't meant the end of traditional in-person recruiting — but it has opened up new avenues for Air Force recruiters to get their message out.

The Air Force Recruiting Service has a Facebook page with nearly 570,000 followers, as well as Facebook pages for recruiters at the grassroots level, to teach people more about the Air Force and the opportunities it provides.

The Facebook pages for local recruiters are a good way to keep recruits inspired and committed as they go through the Delayed Entry Program and await their departure for basic training, spokeswoman Christa D'Andrea said. The pages are also a good way to connect potential applicants with recruiters, she said.

The Air Force also holds monthly chats on Twitter and Facebook to answer questions about career fields or recruiters, she said.

McGuire said she watches the Facebook pages of local high schools and colleges for discussions about things like career options, and will post there about what benefits and opportunities the Air Force can provide.

"A lot of times, these individuals don't realize the specifics of what the Air Force has to offer, and a lot of the time they see my post and contact me," McGuire said.

Layman said he usually posts pictures of his new recruits swearing in on his Facebook page, and asks them to share the

photos with their friends. This can help encourage their friends to consider joining the Air Force, he said.

"So all of their friends are now congratulating them, and asking them what branch, and getting information from the actual recruits," Layman said. "So that's worked well for me."

7. Manage expectations. Recruiters said it's crucial to be totally transparent with potential applicants about what they should and should not expect from their Air Force careers.

"We're not going to lie to any applicants," McGuire said. "The most important thing is to always be truthful at all times. That's what we're built on, integrity first. So that's why I make sure I'm up front and I'm honest with every single applicant."

That means not filling their heads with visions of "Top Gun" derring-do.

"When the individual tells you, 'I want to be a pilot,' we don't fill false dreams or false hopes," McGuire said. "I let them know the truth and the reality. In order to actually be a pilot, you need a degree. But if that is something you have a passion for, there are avenues to possibly get you in that direction, as far as ... taking advantage of our educational opportunities."

A staff sergeant recruiter, who asked not to be named, said that recruiters who try to fudge some of the less glamorous parts of military life will get caught quickly, and lose credibility.

"My success comes from people telling friends, 'Talk to this guy because he's the most honest,'" he said. "They'll know if you're BSing. Everybody has the Internet. Sometimes, they know more than the recruiter does."

8. Look off the beaten path. Most people, when imagining the next generation of airmen, wouldn't picture the kid hanging out at the comic store, study hall or hobby store. But the staff sergeant said he's had success finding recruits at those kind of places.

"The places I recruit out of, they like to hang out at Magic: The Gathering game card sites," he said. "They're usually more open-minded and like getting information. Look for the smarter, introverted kid. They might be more interested in a military career."

The staff sergeant said he found the best way to build rapport with such introverted kids is to take an interest in what they're

interested in. Sometimes that can be history, sometimes it's science, sometimes it's old-school Nintendo games.

"I don't know anything about Magic, but kids that like to learn also like to teach," he said. "When they say, 'Do you know about this?' I say, 'No, but I'd love to learn.'"

And that can have other benefits for the recruiter besides finding a new airman, he said.

"You may even learn a new hobby or two," he said.

9. Keep parents in the loop. It's often not enough to talk to just the potential recruits, recruiters said. An important part of the process can be putting their parents' minds at ease.

"One of the things that I like to do is from Day One, the first appointment, I like to get the parents in here with the applicant," McGuire said. "I want to make sure that they're both on the same page and they both understand the things the Air Force has to offer. And to also answer any questions or concerns that the parents might have. I find that once you talk to that parent starting off, versus later in the process, things tend to go a lot more smoothly."

McGuire recalled one recruit was a few weeks into the process when his parents had some questions, and the recruit wasn't sure how to answer them.

"We know the process ... better than anybody else because we've been through the process," McGuire said. "I immediately set up an appointment to have the parents come in to my office, answered all their questions and concerns, and I basically just reiterated everything I told the applicant from Day One. After talking to the parent, they were good to go."

10. Be friendly. One of the simplest yet most important parts of the job, recruiters said, is to remain friendly and approachable – even if you're having a rough day.

It's simple marketing. And recruiters need to remember that when they're on the job, they're the face of the Air Force, Layman said.

"No one wants to come talk to the grumpy guy," Layman said.

<http://www.airforcetimes.com/story/military/careers/air-force/2015/03/30/master-recruiters-share-their-secrets-of-success/70548726/>

Why one lawmaker keeps pushing for a new military draft

(30 Mar.) *Military Times*, Leo Shane III

Rep. Charlie Rangel has no doubt that bringing back the military draft will make America safer.

He just hasn't had any success convincing other lawmakers that he's right.

"It would take a lot of courage for people to vote on this," the 84-year-old New York Democrat said in an interview with Military Times last week. "We wouldn't be in the mess we're in if [Congress] knew their kids might be drafted.

"I know this is the right thing to do."

Earlier this month, Rangel reintroduced legislation that would reinstate the military draft for all men and women ages 18 to 25, arguing that "if war is truly necessary, we must all come together to support and defend our nation."

It's an argument he has made year after year, with little progress. Since 2003, Rangel has introduced similar legislation seven times. The closest the idea came to a full chamber vote was nearly 12 years ago, when the measure failed a procedural vote on the House floor.

But Rangel — a Korean War veteran who volunteered to serve in the Army — keeps bringing it back.

"If we're going to get into wars, we have to be prepared to make sacrifices," he said. "It shouldn't just be poor-ass kids volunteering to do the work."

In past years, when the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were at their peak, his pitch was fueled by the carnage and casualties of those conflicts. Now it's the possibility of extended military action in Iraq against Islamic State fighters.

He's also pushing for a new War Tax Act, mandating that current and future war spending be paid for with new taxes on all income brackets.

Carter: Change promotion and retention rules

(30 Mar.) Military Times, By Andrew Tilghman

The demands of the 21st century may require the military to fundamentally change the way it evaluates, promotes and retains service members, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Monday.

In describing the "force of the future," Carter suggested breaking with key traditions that define military careers and culture. For example, he suggested promotion boards should give less weight to seniority and place more emphasis on merit by allowing the most talented young people to move up in rank more quickly.

"[We] have to look at ways to promote people based not just on when they joined, and even more on their performance and talent," Carter told an auditorium of high school students at his alma mater, Abington High School, in suburban Philadelphia.

Carter also questioned the custom of making all service members start at the bottom ranks. Instead, he said the military should allow well-trained people to begin military service in

Every few years, the revived legislation grabs a few Capitol Hill headlines but little serious scrutiny. But there's little hope for either proposal in the Republican-controlled House, and Rangel's draft bills aren't expected to get a significant conversation at the committee level this year.

And military leaders repeatedly have shot down the idea, saying they now boast a much smaller but more highly trained and highly disciplined fighting force than they did before the draft was abolished in 1973.

But Rangel insists that the public is interested in a broader debate on the draft's merits — and the added pressure it would put on government bureaucrats contemplating military action anywhere in the world.

"I've been surprised the religious community hasn't called for it," he said. "The number of dead and wounded we've had in the recent wars ... that's a hell of a thing to happen to our young people. It would seem to me religious leaders would see this as a way to keep us out of those fights."

Until he gets that kind of groundswell, Rangel said he's content to be the lonely Hill voice pushing the issue.

"You know I'm right. I know I'm right," he said. "We're getting somewhere on this issue, but Congress is not." <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2015/03/30/charlie-rangel-draft-fight/70373594/>

the middle of their career and grant them an automatic midcareer rank to reflect their civilian experience and skills.

"The military's rank structure still dates back to when Napoleon was invading Europe 200 years ago. There are some good reasons for that, but for certain specialty jobs, like cybersecurity, we need to be looking at ways to bring in more qualified people, even if they're already in the middle of their career, rather than just starting out," Carter said.

Carter also suggested the military consider a sort of reverse GI Bill that would promise to pay off student loans for recruits. "As college loans get bigger and bigger, for people with certain skills, we need to look at ways to help pay off student loans for people who've already gone to college," Carter said.

The secretary cast the proposed changes as a collective effort to recruit and retain the best and brightest people at a time when the military requires more high-skilled people and will face stiff competition from high-paying private-sector

companies. Carter often cites cyberwarfare skills as a prime example.

Carter made his comments just a few weeks after taking office and suggest he will make reforming military personnel policies a key part of his tenure.

Carter also said retaining the best troops will require more flexible career paths. The military services should expand their small-scale pilot programs that allow some career troops to take a "sabbatical," or leave the active-duty force for a few years and use that time for "getting a degree, learning a new skill, or starting a family," Carter said.

"Right now these programs are very small. These programs are good for us and our people, because they help people bring new skills and talents from outside back into the military. So we need to look not only at ways we can improve and expand those programs, but also think about completely new ideas to help our people gain new skills and experiences.

Today's technology may spur changes to the performance evaluation system. "We need to be on the cutting edge of evaluating performance. Your generation's command of technology is beyond what we've ever seen, and we need to take advantage of the kinds of data-intensive technologies that you use every day ... and apply them to help measure and chart how a person is doing in all aspects of their job, and on a day-to-day basis," Carter said.

And social media could "give our people even more flexibility and choice in deciding their next job in the military."

Six more women qualify to attend Ranger School

(1 Apr.) Army Times, By Michelle Tan

Six more female soldiers have qualified to attend Ranger School this spring, bringing to 12 the number of women who have so far qualified for the grueling two-month course, officials announced Wednesday.

The six additional women, all of them officers, successfully completed the March rotation of the Ranger Training Assessment Course at Fort Benning, Georgia.

A total of 119 soldiers — 34 of them women — started the course, which ended March 19. In all, 31 soldiers (25 men, six women) successfully completed the course.

The Army announced in January that it plans to conduct a one-time, integrated assessment at its storied Ranger School in April.

The assessment is part of a wider effort to determine whether and how to open combat arms jobs to women. This assessment will be a first for Ranger School, which until now has been open only to men.

Women who successfully complete Ranger School will receive a certificate and be awarded the coveted Ranger tab.

Carter offered few specifics about how these policies might look in practice. Some of them, like changes to promotion boards, would probably require Congress to change current laws. Others, for example, offering career troops the option of taking sabbaticals, can be pursued by individual services.

Carter warned against the insular mindset that can make the military resistant to change. "The Pentagon can be a pretty closed five-sided box, so we need to think outside of it, and we know that," Carter said.

Studies show only about one-third of today's young people are eligible and qualified for military service. Yet today's military needs to bring in about 250,000 people each year to fill its ranks.

Military recruiting benefited from the surge of patriotism following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. But that was temporary.

"As the so-called 9/11 generation begins to leave our ranks, the Defense Department must continue to bring in talented Americans, from your generation and others," he told the high school students.

"To meet all these challenges, the Defense Department has to think hard about how to attract, inspire and excite people like you."

<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2015/03/30/secdef-promotion/70667178/>

They will not, however, be assigned to the 75th Ranger Regiment, which is separate from Ranger School.

To prepare for the assessment in April, the Army is requiring female candidates to attend the two-week Army National Guard Ranger Training and Assessment Course. There will be up to 40 seats for female candidates in each iteration of the course between January and April. The course has historically been a strong indicator of whether a candidate will be successful at Ranger School, officials said. Data have shown that more than half of the soldiers who complete RTAC will successfully complete Ranger School.

The next iteration of RTAC with male and female students begins April 3. The integrated Ranger School assessment is scheduled to begin April 20.

During the first integrated cycle of RTAC in January, 122 soldiers started the course; 26 of them were women.

A total of 58 soldiers — 53 men and five women — successfully completed the course Jan. 30.

One woman and 35 men successfully completed the February rotation of RTAC. A total of 100 soldiers, including 17 women, started the course.

RTAC is two weeks long and consists of two phases, according to information from Fort Benning.

The first phase of RTAC mirrors the assessment phase at Ranger School and is designed to assess a soldier's physical and mental abilities. During this phase, a student conducts a PT test, a swim test, land navigation, and a 6-mile foot march. The second phase of RTAC, the field training exercise, is designed to assess and train soldiers on troop leading procedures and patrolling, skills that are used extensively during the Ranger School.

On average, about 45 percent of Ranger School students will graduate. As many as 60 percent of all Ranger School failures will occur in the first four days. Many get disqualified during the physical fitness test on the first day. The test gives candidates two minutes to do 49 pushups and two minutes to do 59 situps, and they also must run five miles in 40 minutes and do six chinups.

West Point adds female cadets as gender barriers fall

(2 Apr.) Army Times, By Kevin Lilley

As the Army makes plans to open more of its career paths to women, the U.S. Military Academy expects a record number of female members in its next class of plebes.

It's not a coincidence.

"We anticipate with the removal of the combat exclusion law, they'll be a lot more opportunities for female soldiers and for female officers to be able to serve," Lt. Gen. Robert Caslen, West Point's superintendent, told the school's Board of Visitors during their Monday meeting on campus.

The oversight board, made up of members of Congress and presidential appointees, received a demographic breakdown of the Class of 2019 from admissions director Col. Deborah McDonald. She told the group that preliminary figures for the class show 303 female members, more than last year's record-setting 264 and roughly 23 percent of the incoming group.

She pointed to two key drivers for that figure: A shift to gender-specific marketing two years ago that allowed West Point to better target its message to potential female cadets, and the expansion of varsity-sport offerings to include women's lacrosse and women's rugby, which have helped entice high-performing female student-athletes.

"It really is a huge step forward," she said.

West Point doesn't have quotas, but it does have diversity goals for gender, race and other demographic categories, designed to match the ideal breakdown of the future officer corps. The school wants at least 20 percent of its cadets to be

In fiscal 2014, PT test failures made up the largest number of Ranger School failures.

The pushup portion of the PT test has been difficult for male and female candidates at RTAC, officials said.

Some don't have the right form, while others couldn't do the 49 required of them within the allotted time.

Both RTAC and Ranger School are "physically and mentally demanding" courses, Maj. Gen. Scott Miller, commanding general of the Maneuver Center of Excellence and Fort Benning, has previously said.

"Not every soldier is going to make it through this course," he said. "The standards are demanding, and the standards are not changing. They're not changing in the pre-Ranger course, and they're not going to change for the Ranger Course."

<http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/careers/army/2015/04/01/6-women-qualify-attend-ranger-school-assessment-march-update/70487230/>

female, for example, a figure that rose last year from a targeted range of between 14 percent and 20 percent.

One area where the Army seeks improvement, Caslen said, is in the number of black officers, which stands at 13.2 percent — about even with the 13.1 percent African-American population in the U.S., but "woefully behind" the 22.5 percent of enlisted troops who are black.

"The Army recognizes that, and the Army would like, ideally, to get to that 22.5 percent [among officers], as well," the superintendent said.

Another segment of the West Point population saw its diversity goal drop for the incoming class: The school expects 6.5 percent of the Class of 2019 to be prior-enlisted soldiers, enough to clear the new 5 percent goal, down from 7 percent for at least the previous five years.

School officials chalked the move up to the drawdown — fewer soldiers in uniform led West Point to lower its targets.

The demographic breakdown came shortly after the board elected Brenda Sue Fulton, West Point Class of 1980, as its 2015 chairperson. Fulton, a longtime advocate for diversity in the ranks, replaces Rep. John Shimkus, R-III.

"It is an honor to serve as the board's leader as we advise the superintendent on a variety of issues facing the academy," Fulton said in a release announcing the election. "I'm particularly proud of the efforts made by the leadership to address and improve inclusivity opportunities for both women

and minorities at West Point because those efforts make West Point and the Army stronger."

Fulton, who had served as vice chairwoman, became the first female West Point graduate to hold the post. After graduating with the first class to include women, she served for five years before being honorably discharged as a captain.

President Obama appointed her to the board in 2011, making her its first openly gay member. Fulton co-founded Knights Out, a group of openly gay USMA graduates, and now heads up SPARTA, an advocacy group supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender service members and veterans.

Other business heard by the board:

- Caslen and other school officials briefed board members on the recent Defense Department report on sexual assaults at service academies, which showed a drop in reports of unwanted sexual contact by female West Point cadets: 6.5 percent reported it in 2014, down from 10.6 percent in 2012.

"You would be encouraged" by the figures, Caslen said, "but you're never encouraged until that number reaches zero."

The report also offered some less-encouraging figures: 55 percent of female cadets reported perceived sexual harassment, up from 49 percent in 2012, and 92 percent reported experiencing sexist behavior, up from 91 percent in 2012.

Caslen also shared data on official reports of sexual assaults, which offer far lower numbers than those in the anonymous DoD survey. There have been 17 such reports so far this

#ForceoftheFuture targets younger audiences

(2 Apr.) *Military Times*, By Oriana Pawlyk

The message Defense Secretary Ash Carter has been heralding all week is his vision for younger generations to get in line for military duty.

Carter said during his visit to Fort Drum, New York, that the U.S. has "the finest fighting force the world has ever known, and that's you. But I must think ahead by one or two generations to make sure our country has what you represent: the best of the best in every generation."

Enter #ForceoftheFuture.

And MTV News — once popular for Music Television news about artists, bands and albums — was quick to examine how this could apply to younger generations contemplating their future prospects.

MTV, whether beaming through your cable provider or bringing you clickable links on a computer screen, has for the past few years been shifting its target audience from the 18- to

academic year, Caslen said, up from nine at this point last year. More than half of those are either under investigation or have been ruled as unsubstantiated.

Caslen said the increase could show more faith in the reporting process instead of an increase in assaults.

"If you feel compelled to report, then you have confidence in the system," he said.

- A new curriculum that will emphasize critical thinking and offer more student choice will be phased in beginning with the Class of 2019.

Plans also call for a greater focus on cyber skills as part of the core curriculum, and more opportunities for students to link their classroom learning both to other classes and to other problem-solving projects — what one presentation slide termed "integrative experiences."

- The academy has pressed for legislation allowing the creation of a tax-exempt nonprofit organization that would run the school's intercollegiate athletic program, a setup already in place at the Naval Academy and Air Force Academy. Among other changes, the rule would turn the school's athletic director job into a contracted position, meaning ADs could participate in fundraising (a no-go for federal employees) and be paid commensurate with others in charge of top-tier college sports programs.
<http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/careers/army/officer/2015/04/02/us-military-academy-diversity-west-point-army-robert-caslen/70701978/>

25-year-old to the 14- to 17-year-old crowd — the exact audience #ForceoftheFuture wants to appeal to.

"Think about it — The United States Military has to be a leader in research, science and cutting edge technology, which means they need to recruit people who are at the top of those fields, be it engineering, biology, computer science, coding, nursing or education," writes Caitlin Abber, an editor at MTV News. "They're looking for people who are not only crazy smart, but have that special something that drives them to serve their country."

A list of jobs in these specialties and a short list of benefits — such as the GI Bill, sabbaticals to start families or go to school — follows.

Unlike major military advertising or local recruitment centers, the Force of the Future initiative brings together casual conversation about military service.

For example, when describing DARPA's Legged Squad Support System, or LS3, robot, which carries supplies for troops on the ground, Abber effervescently conveys: "This dog-like robot is playing the ultimate game of fetch by bringing troops supplies in combat areas and rough terrain. Imagine if you were in charge of designing man's ultimate best friend?"

The MTV piece "fairly reflects what Secretary Carter said and it accurately captures the spirit of his #ForceOfTheFuture vision," Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren told Military Times.

More Women Qualify For Ranger School

(2 Apr.) San Diego Union Tribune, By Gretel C. Kovach

Six more women qualified to attend Army Ranger School this spring, Army officials announced today. The female soldiers are among 12 so far who could join the first gender-integrated class for the special operations course beginning April 20.

"This is a onetime assessment to determine if future classes are feasible," said Nathan Snook, an Army spokesman.

The Army is allowing women into its elite Ranger training program at Fort Benning, Ga., for research purposes. Any female soldiers who pass the course will be able to wear the coveted Ranger tab but will not be able to serve as Rangers.

The Rangers' primary mission is to engage in close combat and direct-fire battles. Most senior infantry officers in the Army are Ranger-qualified, but the occupation is currently closed to women along with all primary warfighting jobs in U.S. military special operations, infantry, artillery and mechanized vehicle fields.

That could soon change now that the ban on women serving in direct ground combat has been eliminated. After scrapping the policy in 2013, the Pentagon gave each branch of the armed forces and special operations command until the first of 2016 to open all occupations to women, or prove why an exemption should be granted reserving any for men.

The 12 women who passed the Ranger Training Assessment Course completed a 16-day regimen that includes fitness tests, combat water survival drills, land navigation, a ruck march, and patrolling evaluations.

Historically, more than half of soldiers who complete the preliminary assessment will pass Ranger School, the Army said.

When the Army asked for female Ranger School volunteers last year, so many women were interested that commanders

"It makes sense that MTV would report on this. MTV can be edgy and they speak to youth with a social media and tech-centric voice. If Secretary Carter's #ForceOfTheFuture is anything it is an edgy, tech-centric program delivered to youth," Warren said in an email.

Warren said audiences "can expect a robust social media discussion around it."

The bigger question that remains is, can the youth be swayed? <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2015/04/02/forceofthefuture-is-getting-social-targeting-younger-audiences/70780764/>

capped the group at 160 -- because of capacity at Ranger School. All of the women were required to pass the pre-qualification course, which is a requirement for some categories of male soldiers but not all. The last of four rounds of the Ranger Training Assessment Course open to women begins Friday.

The female graduates earned a spot in one of the toughest training programs in the Army. The 61-day Ranger School course begins at Fort Benning with advanced infantry skills, then moves to the mountains and finishes in Florida with waterborne combat training.

Most of those who wash out of Ranger School fail in the first four days, including many who are disqualified during the initial physical fitness test. On day one, candidates must perform 49 push-ups in two minutes, 59 sit-ups in two minutes, run five miles in 40 minutes and complete six dead-hang chin-ups.

In the latest pre-qualification course, six female officers out of 34 women passed. Among men, 25 finished out of 85, or less than 30 percent.

"This class reaffirmed that RTAC (the Ranger Training Assessment Course), just like Ranger School, is very tough," Maj. William Woodard Jr., commander of A Company at the Army National Guard Warrior Training Center that runs the course, said in a statement.

"The standards are the same during the gender-integrated RTAC iterations, and they won't change."

<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2015/apr/01/women-qualify-army-ranger-school/?st>

New British Report Shreds Case for Women in Direct Ground Combat

(20 Feb.) Center for Military Readiness

The British Ministry of Defence (MoD) has released a new report on the issue of women in land combat titled: Women in Ground Close Combat (GCC) Review Paper – 01 December 2014. Even though the 29-page document appears to have

been written by one faction and edited by another, the report includes specific, highly-relevant information that should be reviewed by Congress, policy makers, and everyone who supports our military nationwide.

Unlike previous MoD reports on the same subject, issued in [2002](#) and [2010](#), this one includes conflicting views that provide even more perspective when analyzed separately.

For purposes of comparison and clarity, the Center for Military Readiness (CMR) has prepared a two-part analysis of the 29-page British report. Both are linked here:

- Section A: Higher Risks and Costs Do Not Justify Assignments of Women to Ground Close Combat

This section sets forth multiple findings and data from the British report, which clearly defines close combat, its physical requirements, and gender-specific physiological differences that would have an effect on combat effectiveness (CE). Citations refer to empirical evidence based on actual experience, not theory.

- Section B: "Claims that Problems Cited in New British Co-Ed Combat Report Can Be Mitigated Are Not Credible

Suggestions on how to "mitigate" problems lace the document throughout, reflecting social theories and unrealistic

expectations that are contradicted by science and data presented in the same British report. Many of these incongruous statements, which appear to have been inserted to soften the impact of facts in the report, beg the question by assuming truth without evidence other than the statement itself.

The word "mitigate" is usually paired with words like "damage" or "harm." Frequent use of the word throughout the British report suggests consequences that are negative, not positive. Logic would argue that major problems affecting combat effectiveness could and should be avoided by retaining current policies that exempt women from direct ground combat units such as the infantry, armor, artillery, and Special Operations Forces.

Speculative claims and beliefs cannot compare with documented data and findings in the new British report. The burden of proof is on advocates of unprecedented changes affecting military effectiveness. The case for women in direct ground combat still has not been made.

http://www.cmrlink.org/content/home/37629/new_british_report_shreds_case_for_women_in_direct_ground_combat

Senate bill would help victims of sexual assault get VA benefits

(27 Mar.) *The Hill*, By Jordain Carney

Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) has introduced legislation to make it easier for veterans who suffered sexual abuse in the military to get help from the Veterans Affairs Department.

The Ruth Moore Act aims to make it easier for veterans to get VA benefits by easing the department's "burden of proof" standards. As part of the VA's process to get disability benefits, a veteran must be able to show that their condition is connected to their time in the military.

"Congress and the Pentagon must continue working together to address the prevalence of sexual violence in our armed services," Tester said in a statement. "And as we seek to bring justice to survivors of military sexual trauma, we must also make sure they are treated fairly in accessing the benefits they need. That's what this bill does."

According to the legislation, if a veteran says a mental health condition is connected to military sexual trauma, the VA will generally consider a diagnosis from a mental health professional to be "satisfactory" evidence for considering the condition to be related to military service.

The legislation goes a step further, adding that, if there isn't evidence to the contrary, a veteran's testimony could be enough to "establish" that "the claimed military sexual trauma" happened.

Tester's legislation comes as senators approved a handful of veteran-related amendments to the budget, which passed early Friday morning.

Senators passed amendments on improving VA healthcare for rural veterans, allowing the agency to hire more mental healthcare workers, bolstering a program that gives veterans access to non-VA care, expanding the VA's research on issues related to female veterans and giving legally married same-sex couples access to VA benefits.

Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) has introduced a companion bill to Tester's legislation in the House.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/senate/237239-senate-bill-would-help-victims-of-sexual-assault-get-va-benefits>

Oldest known veteran, 110, blazed path for blacks, women

(27 Mar.) *San Antonio News*, By Sig Christenson

Emma Didlake likes to say she always was one for getting into something, but she had no idea of what a big deal it was when she joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1943.

A lot of Americans didn't like the idea of women stepping into roles that had been reserved for men, especially if those jobs took them to war. But then there was the fact that she was black in a segregated society.

"I didn't know I was breaking barriers," said Didlake, who turned 110 on March 13, receiving more than 250 birthday cards. "But I enjoyed doing what I was doing because I had committed myself to do just this."

Now she's breaking one last barrier. Didlake, the nation's oldest known veteran, is headed to Washington, D.C., for a tour of the monuments and, perhaps, a visit with President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden.

Nothing has been scheduled by the White House or Talons Out Honor Flight, which has taken 179 veterans to Washington, but Bobbie Bradley, president and co-founder of the group based in Kalamazoo, Michigan, said a trip is likely soon.

"Am I going?" Didlake asked, when told of a flight to Washington.

"You should see her face," said granddaughter Marilyn Horne, 62, of Farmington Hills, a Detroit suburb. "She is smiling from one ear to the other."

Biden and Obama were on hand at the White House to meet with Lucy Coffey, who everyone had believed was the nation's second-oldest veteran behind a fellow Texan, Richard Overton, and the oldest woman.

Coffey, 108, died last week in San Antonio and was given a fond farewell here with military honors. Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff was on hand. Biden and his wife, Jill, sent a flower arrangement with a handwritten note. And Rep. Joaquin Castro, D-San Antonio, entered a tribute into the congressional record.

"It was a beautiful service," Bexar County Veterans Service Officer Queta Marquez said.

Didlake was surprised to learn she might be the nation's oldest veteran, just ahead of Phyllis Josephine Thompson, an Army nurse who the Buffalo News said turned 109 on Wednesday. Overton, a Bastrop County native, was born three days before Coffey in May 1906 and until now had been credited with being the oldest veteran in the nation.

Female veterans press VA hospitals to meet their needs

(31 Mar.) MPR News, By Trisha Volpe

Trista Matascastillo remembers arriving at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center in 2010 for an exam and thinking the hospital didn't quite get the needs of female veterans. The exam room, for instance, opened onto the patient waiting area, she said. She had to ask that the door be closed. It was a tiny detail, one Matascastillo said staff fixed quickly. But the 16-year veteran keeps the story close by now that she is part of an effort to help the center improve care for women. "Our biological needs are different. Our health care needs are different. Our mental health care needs are different and so

Didlake, a native of Greene County, Alabama, and her family moved to Kentucky. She met her husband, Oscar, and they had five children. They lived in Lynch, where he worked in coal mines and she decided to join the WACs — without asking for her husband's opinion or permission, not that it mattered.

"There wasn't no argument or anything like that, it was no trouble. I just did it," she said, adding that she joined because "I wanted to do different things."

Unlike Coffey, who traveled to the Pacific and spent a decade in Japan, Didlake stuck close to home, working as a driver, often carrying a Bible with her. Records show that she served about seven months and received an honorable discharge.

After the war, she joined the Detroit chapter of the NAACP, selling dinner tickets for the group's annual fundraising event. She was later honored by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi for her role with the Detroit chapter, where she is the longest-serving member.

These days, Didlake lives alone in an apartment. She uses a walker to get around and a magnifying glass to read. There is mail to keep track of, including statements from a checking account she still uses.

Though hard of hearing, Didlake is healthy, taking one pill a day for diabetes and eye drops for glaucoma. She tires easily but has a good memory and can hold a conversation.

Didlake credits her good health to living in moderation and not smoking, but there's also a ritual. Each evening, the lady who eight grandchildren and six great-great grandchildren call "Big Mama" soaks nine golden raisins in a pint of vodka and lets them sit overnight.

She eats them the next afternoon.

<http://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Oldest-known-veteran-110-blazed-path-for-6164200.php?t=e9eb603fae9582d581&cmpid=twitter-premium%20via%20@mySA#photo-7737127>

systems designed for men, we don't fit into," said Matascastillo, head of the Minneapolis VA Women's Initiative. While improved, the system still falls short, she added.

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It was a tiny detail, one Matascastillo said staff fixed quickly. But the 16-year veteran keeps the story close by now that she is part of an effort to help the center improve care for women. "Our biological needs are different. Our health care needs are different. Our mental health care needs are different and so systems designed for men, we don't fit into," said Matascastillo, head of the Minneapolis VA Women's Initiative. While improved, the system still falls short, she added.

Three VA Health Care Systems serve veterans in Minnesota, with hospital facilities in Minneapolis, St. Cloud and Fargo. The VA also has 14 community-based outpatient clinics across Minnesota. Along with resources at the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs, each Minnesota county has a veteran's service officer who helps connect veterans with their benefits.

"Our idea of what a veteran is hasn't progressed to what we really look like nowadays," said Morgan Hennessy, who served two years in Iraq with the Minnesota Red Bulls. While Morgan said her physical needs were met by the VA when she returned, the Minneapolis woman recalled a visit to a VA Hospital accompanied by her sister's boyfriend. Morgan said people around her assumed he was the veteran, not her. Hennessy, who is studying to become a clinical psychologist, has a passion for mental health services. She once wrote to former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, asking for more psychologists working in the field with soldiers while they are deployed to help curb growing suicide rates among soldiers. While mental health care is readily available through the VA, Hennessy said it can be hard to wait for an appointment to see someone.

"I know when I was going through a hard time, I really wanted to be seen once a week and the most that they could see me was every three weeks. So that was kind of difficult," Morgan said.

Those who work to connect female veterans to services say it can be a challenge to get them to accept the help they've earned serving their country.

"I think that it's typical for women veterans at times not to necessarily wear their service on their sleeve," said Ashley Laganieri, the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs' coordinator for women veterans.

Women soldiers get a gutsy TV heroine

(31 Mar.) *My San Antonio*, By Jeanne Jakle

It's about time our women soldiers got a bona-fide heroine on prime-time television. Meet Sgt. Odelle Ballard, the central character in the new NBC thriller "American Odyssey," and one gutsy and compelling protagonist.

Ballard is put through more hell than I can recall any female character ever enduring on broadcast TV. During the first three episodes of "American Odyssey," she is almost blown to bits by a drone strike. She's beaten and cut by refugees, captured and recaptured, thrown into an underground cage, tied with ropes and pelted with rocks.

Yet Anna Friel ("Pushing Daisies") plays the battered special forces soldier with such moxie that, even enduring the most harrowing abuse, she manages to inspire more admiration than pity.

"American Odyssey" debuts at 9 p.m. Sunday on NBC.

Laganieri, 30, a veteran from Farmington who earned her VA medical benefits serving with the Minnesota National Guard, comes from a proud family line of veterans, though she is the first veteran in her family to ask a doctor at the VA for fertility advice.

The VA can't provide Laganieri with fertility treatments, but her VA doctor has referred her to an outside clinic. VA benefits pay for the appointments and a large portion of the cost of fertility medications.

Twenty years ago, the Minneapolis VA Hospital became among the first VA Health Care Systems in the country to open a women's clinic.

Erin Krebs, who is the Women's Health Medical Director at the Minneapolis VA, said a big part of her job is to plan for continued growth in the number of women veterans seeking treatment at the VA and its outlying clinics. Krebs said the number of women users has nearly doubled in the last decade alone and veterans coming home from current conflicts are younger with different needs.

"In terms of women's health, having younger women in their 20s and 30s who are thinking about child-bearing and family planning and all these things, really changes the kind of services that we're giving," Krebs said.

But the issue of providing unique services for women veterans can be a numbers game.

With fewer female veterans than male veterans overall, Krebs said it takes time to convince decision-makers to spend money on more female-specific services.

But change is happening.

Last summer the Minneapolis VA opened a mammography imaging suite and continues to grow its medical staff treating women, including a gynecologist and maternity care advisor. Krebs said she also works to improve women's health services across the VA system.

"It's a big system and it's a big ship to turn around. That's something that we need to do," Krebs said. "It's not just women's health care. It's all of the changes that have come as a result of these most recent conflicts and all of these new veterans."

<http://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/03/31/women-veterans-minnesota>

The story: When battling jihadists in North Africa, Odelle and her team of soldiers are surprised to find they've killed al-Qaida's top commander, Abdul Abbas.

Odelle, who's fluent in Arabic, then comes across another shocking discovery amid the rubble: computer files showing a major U.S. corporation is in bed with the jihadists.

Transferring the information to a flash drive, she waits for her team's rescue.

It never comes. Instead, the real horror in the desert begins.

The team of soldiers may be lauded as heroes on the news back home, but for their trouble they're attacked and murdered, not by enemy militants, but by their own countrymen.

Worse, the U.S. colonel (Treat Williams) pulling these military strings is a man Odelle once trusted. He lies to the

world — and her husband and daughter — insisting her entire unit was wiped out by terrorists.

The truth, however, is quite different. Odelle, answering nature's call, was away from her team when the drone hit and the assassins came, and she managed to survive.

However, as the only witness to the cover-up, and with the incriminating flash drive still on her person, she continues to fear for her life, both at the hands of the Americans hunting her and terrorist groups who cross her path.

She knows she must keep a cool head and does her best to befriend her teenage guard, the Harry Potter-loving Aslam (engaging actor Omar Ghazaoui), who helps give both her and her cause a fighting chance.

Back in New York, others also suspect a major conspiracy's afoot. Former U.S. Attorney-turned-corporate litigator Peter Decker (Peter Facinelli, "Nurse Jackie") finds that he's embroiled in a merger with the same company that's funding the jihadists.

As the lawyer puts himself and his family in danger by attempting to connect these corrupt dots, a young activist (Jake Robinson), with the help of a skilled computer hacker, also sticks his nose into places the military and menacing corporate bigwigs are trying to keep secret.

The heart and soul of the show, however, is soldier Odelle. Friel pours everything she has into the role.

At a recent NBC press session, the actress said she got cut, scraped, bruised and worse while filming the desert horrors. "Abrasion of the cornea, torn ligaments, dislocated shoulder" were among her injuries, she said.

"We got in from Africa last night," Friel said, adding: "The last three days has been me tied up with my hands behind my back and my legs tied lying in a big (pile of) kitty litter." She also trained arduously with a military unit and learned to speak Arabic for various scenes.

"American Odyssey" comes from the mind of Peter Horton ("thirtysomething," "Grey's Anatomy"), who described the drama as a kind of David-fights-Goliath scenario.

"The story is about three very ordinary people," he said.

"They're not trained as cops. They're not trained as spies.

They're very ordinary people doing extraordinary things as they stumble upon a kind of Halliburton-gone-wild corporation."

A warning: The first 15 minutes or so of "Odyssey" are mired in a bit too much talk, causing the show to initially move at a yawn-inspiring pace.

Once the action heats up, however, particularly the against-all-odds struggles of our military heroine, viewers may find themselves chilled, thrilled and thoroughly hooked.

http://www.mysanantonio.com/entertainment/entertainment_columnists/jeanne_jakle/article/Women-soldiers-get-own-gutsy-TV-heroine-6171223.php