



DACOWITS: Articles of Interest

WELLNESS

[State releases 4,000-plus email pages in Alaska National Guard scandal](#)

(27 Apr.) *Military Times*, By Mark Thiessen

The state of Alaska released more than 4,000 pages of emails covering the National Guard scandal, but they revealed little new information into how former Gov. Sean Parnell's administration handled the allegations of sexual assault and misconduct.

[A minority of women seek health care after military sexual assault](#)

(28 Apr.) *Veterans Affairs Research Communications*

Despite growing public awareness of sexual assault of women during their military service and increased efforts by the Department of Defense to deter sexual crimes and encourage reporting and help-seeking, a VA study suggests most female service members who experience sexual assault are still unlikely to seek post-assault health care, at least in the short term.

[New Bill Would Boost Whistleblower Protections for Military Sexual Assault Victims](#)

(29 Apr.) *Defense One*, By Molly O'Toole

In the wake of whistleblower and leak cases that have shaken the U.S. military and intelligence community, Democratic lawmakers introduced new legislation on Wednesday to protect military whistleblowers.

[Lawmakers want clearer Army breastfeeding rules](#)

(30 Apr.) *Military Times*, By Leo Shane III

House lawmakers want clearer rules on breastfeeding in the ranks, a few weeks after the issue of public nursing caused an uproar at an Idaho Air Force Base.

ASSIGNMENTS

[AWM Facebook post goes viral; recognizes first female commander](#)

(23 Apr.) *Fort Lee Traveller*, By T. Anthony Bell

The U.S. Army Women's Museum community might have known little about Capt. Marjana Bidwell prior to April 8, but thanks to the power of social media, those followers have come to know her quite well.

[Female soldiers cut off hair to meet Ranger School rule](#)

(24 Apr.) *Army Times*, By Michelle Tan

"The standard for the Ranger course is for students to have the shortest haircut authorized by AR 670-1," said Col. William Butler, deputy commandant of the U.S. Army Infantry School. The standard for women is defined as "hair length that extends no more than one inch from the scalp (excluding bangs), according to Butler.

[Volunteers needed in tests on combat jobs for women](#)

(25 Apr.) *Air Force Times*, By Stephen Losey

The Air Force this month will take a big step toward possibly opening up the last male-only combat jobs to women.

[Decisions loom after Marine infantry officer experiment ends](#)

(25 Apr.) *Marine Corps Times*, By Hope Hodge Seck

True, no woman has graduated the Marines' legendarily grueling infantry officers course after 32 months of attempts. But don't infer that the feat is impossible, warn observers in the military community.

[Nevada Guard hires its 1st female brigade commander](#)

(27 Apr.) *Military Times*

The Nevada Guard has hired its first female brigade commander.

[Ranger School Class With 8 Women Tackles Darby Queen Obstacle Course](#)

(27 Apr.) *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, By Chuck Williams

Sunday morning, 263 soldiers tackled the Darby Queen as they prepare to transition into a new phase of Ranger School, a more than 60-day combat leadership course that is the most physically and mentally challenging the Army offers. In that number were eight female students trying to become the first women Rangers. This is the first Ranger School class that has been open to women and 19 started a week ago. Less than half of that number, out of a class of 399, made it to the second week.

[Official Provides Update on Combat Jobs for Women](#)

(27 Apr.) *DoD News*, By Terri Moon Cronk

Since the Defense Department rescinded a 1994 policy that excluded women from serving in direct ground combat positions, the services have opened about 91,000 jobs to female service members, the Joint Staff's vice director said here today.

[Women in special operations: Female troops detail their time in combat](#)

(28 Apr.) *The Washington Post*, By Dan Lamothe

When Janiece Marquez arrived in Afghanistan in 2011 as a member of a cultural support team working alongside Special Forces, she had high hopes that she would contribute. But the initial team she was assigned to was reticent to put women in combat situations, leaving her team sidelined much of the time, she said.

[Cultural Support Team Women Served With Distinction](#)

(29 Apr.) *DoD News*, By Terri Moon Cronk

Three women who served overseas on cultural support teams in battle alongside U.S. special operators shared their experiences during a panel discussion at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace here April 27.

[Female 'boomer' officer lauds Navy](#)

(1 May) *The Times*, By John Andrew Prime

The "boomer," a ballistic missile submarine home-ported in Bangor, Washington, was one of the last places in the U.S. Navy where female officers, part of the service landscape since World War II, could not serve.

EXTRA

[Meet the Real-Life G.I. Janes Who Served with Special Ops in Afghanistan](#)

(24 Apr.) *People*, By Sandra Sobieraj Westfall

Caroline Cleveland, just 23 at the time, remembers vividly the night she thought she'd be killed. Cleveland was one of 20 women recruited by the Army in 2011 to "be a part of history" on a new, low-profile, female-only Cultural Support Team that deployed to Afghanistan for nine months starting in August of that year.

[Female military vets make jobs gains, but still lag behind](#)

(27 Apr.) *CNBC*, By Angela Johnson

According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the jobless rate for post-9/11 female veterans was 8.5 percent in 2014, higher than the 6.9 percent rate for their male counterparts.

[VA hospitals in Pittsburgh, Erie turn attention to female veterans' needs](#)

(27 Apr.) *Trib Total Media*, By Brian Bowling

VA hospitals in Pittsburgh and Erie are emphasizing women's health services as the number of female veterans grows, changing the character of hospitals once dominated by mostly older male patients.

[Sexual Assault Response Worker Earns DoD Award](#)

(30 Apr.) *DoD News*, From a North Dakota National Guard News Release

For her outstanding service in support of North Dakota's military members, Heather Mattson was named the 2015 Exceptional Sexual Assault Response Coordinator of the Year for the entire National Guard.

State releases 4,000-plus email pages in Alaska National Guard scandal

(27 Apr.) *Military Times*, By Mark Thiessen

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — The state of Alaska released more than 4,000 pages of emails covering the National Guard scandal, but they revealed little new information into how former Gov. Sean Parnell's administration handled the allegations of sexual assault and misconduct.

The state initially released about 600 pages under court order just before the November election. Besides a few more emails released the night before the general election, the state didn't release any until providing reporters with a link to a 4,142-page PDF document Friday afternoon.

The emails were heavily redacted, and the state also released a 51-page privilege log detailing the reason for the redactions, such as deliberative process. Many pages were also duplicative, including several copies of the voluminous federal report.

Parnell released the results of the federal investigation the same day in September that he demanded and received the resignation of his adjutant general, Thomas Katkus. This happened months before the election, but Parnell was dogged by criticism that he didn't act soon enough after Guard chaplains took their concerns to his administration as early as 2010. Parnell lost the election to Gov. Bill Walker.

Parnell has said Katkus had assured him reports of sexual assault and fraud were being properly handled.

Parnell said he received concrete examples of how Guard leadership was failing members, and in February 2014 asked the federal National Guard Bureau to investigate. The report by the bureau's Office of Complex Investigations found victims didn't trust the system because of a lack of confidence in the Guard's senior leadership.

Media organizations including The Associated Press sought the emails that touched the inbox of former Parnell Chief of Staff Mike Nizich from 2009-2014.

Included in the emails was an open letter to the Alaska Legislature in March 2012. The letter outlines what it claims were problems with the Guard under Katkus' leadership, including allegations that sexual assaults brought to the command's attentions weren't investigated.

The anonymous letter says the Parnell administration "has opted not to address these problems." It asks the Legislature to

investigate both the allegations of corruption and the "omission of action by Governor Parnell and his administration."

It wasn't immediately clear how or if the letter was transmitted to lawmakers. However, a week later, Nizich wrote in an email to Katkus: "We still need to do the letter refuting the claims and get it to legislators."

Former U.S. Sen. Mark Begich, D-Alaska, also asked the National Guard Bureau to investigate the allegations in 2012, and that office didn't find any wrongdoing in its investigation.

"Interesting that Sen. Begich had the same result in 2012 that I had in 2010 on the same issue," Parnell wrote in an email to his spokeswoman, Sharon Leighow, and Nizich was copied in to the note.

Parnell has said Nizich went to the FBI when he heard about specific conduct in 2010, and the federal agency found no basis for criminal charges. The FBI has said it doesn't discuss pending or past investigations.

Walker took office in December and later named Laurie Hummel as his adjutant general.

"Because the release of these documents is part of pending litigation, I need to refer all questions to Department of Law," Walker's spokeswoman, Grace Jang, said in an email to the AP.

Department of Law spokeswoman Cori Mills said the records took a long time to be released in part because they needed to be carefully reviewed to protect people's privacy. They included information about victims, perpetrators and whistleblowers, she said.

Mills said her office also re-reviewed every record provided before November's election. In many cases the department removed redactions from those records, she said.

The department in late May plans to release the results of a special investigator's report on the case, she said. <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/guard-reserve/2015/04/26/state-releases-4000-plus-email-pages-in-alaska-national-guard-scandal/26410587/>

A minority of women seek health care after military sexual assault

(28 Apr.) *Veterans Affairs Research Communications*

Despite growing public awareness of sexual assault of women during their military service and increased efforts by the Department of Defense to deter sexual crimes and encourage reporting and help-seeking, a VA study suggests most female service members who experience sexual assault are still unlikely to seek post-assault health care, at least in the short

term. The study, published in *Medical Care* in April 2015, found that fewer than a third of sexually assaulted servicewomen sought such care.

The low numbers are notable, say researchers, because women who experience sexual assault tend to become heavy users of health care resources in the years following their assault.

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"There are numerous health consequences associated with sexual assault," says Dr. Michelle Mengeling, an affiliate investigator with VA's Comprehensive Access and Delivery Research and Evaluation (CADRE) team and lead author on the study. "Examples include gynecologic, gastrointestinal, chronic pain symptoms, and sexual dysfunction. There are also mental health outcomes such as PTSD, depression, substance abuse, and anxiety."

While many studies have demonstrated the relationship between trauma, such as sexual assault, and chronic health problems, says Mengeling, this research looked specifically at the factors associated with post-assault care utilization and the reasons servicewomen did not seek care. The goal was to identify the factors that prevent servicewomen from seeking post-assault care.

Study involved more than 1,300 women

Research has shown that women in the military experience higher rates of sexual assault than their peers in the general population, with estimates of 30-45 percent of servicewomen experiencing military sexual trauma.

For the study, researchers interviewed 1,339 women who were either Veterans or were still serving in the military about their experiences with attempted and completed sexual assault. Of the whole group, 207 of the women reported being sexually assaulted during military service.

Of those, only about a third used health care specific to their assault. Roughly a quarter of those who used post-assault care sought both medical and mental health care, and only four servicewomen received both medical and mental health care within six months of the assault.

"Few women got care and few women reported [the assault]," says Mengeling, also an associate research scientist at the University of Iowa. "Sexual assault is widely considered the most serious and traumatic crime possible, short of homicide. One of the first steps in potentially mitigating some of the negative health effects of sexual assault is seeking immediate post-assault medical and mental health care."

New Bill Would Boost Whistleblower Protections for Military Sexual Assault Victims

(29 Apr.) Defense One, By Molly O'Toole

In the wake of whistleblower and leak cases that have shaken the U.S. military and intelligence community, Democratic lawmakers introduced new legislation on Wednesday to protect military whistleblowers. The bill from Sens. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif.; Ron Wyden, D-Ore.; and Edward Markey, D-Mass., as well as Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., who introduced it in the House, would also carve out safeguards for a group not often associated with the term whistleblower: survivors of military sexual assault.

"Servicemembers who bravely speak out about wrongdoing or misconduct — especially sexual assault survivors — deserve to know that they will be protected from retaliation," Boxer said in a release.

The "Legal Justice for Servicemembers Act" would bring the burden of proof in such cases in line with standards for other federal civilian employees, and enable Inspectors General to suspend punitive actions against a whistleblower. It also

Mengeling adds, "Most of the servicewomen said they did not immediately seek care because they were embarrassed, or did not think they needed medical attention." Many also voiced concerns about confidentiality and how seeking care might adversely affect their military careers. However, few said that leadership discouraged seeking medical care or mental health services.

Reporters more likely than non-reporters to receive care

Those who reported the sexual assault were far more likely to receive care. Mengeling says, "This finding was consistent with our prior work showing that few servicewomen made an official report to Department of Defense officials about their sexual assault, and that concerns about confidentiality, being embarrassed, and adverse career impacts were associated with servicewomen's decisions about both seeking post-assault health care and reporting."

Mengeling also points to the importance of sexual assault screening at routine health checkups. Although few servicewomen reported getting post-assault health care, almost all reported undergoing routine annual physical exams. Mengeling suggests providers screen for sexual assault histories in order to provide "trauma-informed care" throughout women's lives.

VA has been conducting universal military sexual trauma screening for both male and female Veterans since 2002. "Most women who have experienced sexual assault don't report or seek post-assault specific care, but they do continue to get health care," says Mengeling. "It is unclear if women's current health care providers are aware of their sexual assault histories. Thus, sensitively inquiring regarding sexual assault histories allows providers to provide appropriate and timely care to address the physical and emotional needs of their patients."

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/04/150428125400.htm>

would reform military correction boards to help troops receive restitution for any retaliation.

Markey called whistleblowers "modern-day Paul Reverses." The legislation's sponsors said the original Military Whistleblower Protection Act, which Boxer authored in 1988, is in dire need of updating in a new era of leaks and the rapid expansion of the U.S. national security infrastructure.

As evidence, the lawmakers point to Government Accountability Office audits, which concluded that there were serious problems with whistleblower investigations conducted by Inspectors General for the military services and DoD itself. In 2014, those IGs closed 645 claims of retaliation — and only 26 claims, or less than 5 percent, were substantiated, indicating that it is too difficult for a whistleblower to prove that he or she has been punished.

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“When the majority of whistleblowers report retaliation and the Pentagon’s processes fail to prevent it, it’s time to update the law,” Speier said in the release.

The military has touted slow but steady reductions of sexual assault in the ranks, but has also acknowledged failures to stop retaliation against victims who speak out. Pentagon data say 62 percent of the women who reported sexual assault in fiscal 2014 also reported perceiving some form of retaliation.

“We’ve learned that even the perception that those reporting, trying to prevent, or responding to an assault may be retaliated against may be retaliated against is a challenge for all of us,”

Lawmakers want clearer Army breastfeeding rules

(30 Apr.) Military Times, By Leo Shane III

House lawmakers want clearer rules on breastfeeding in the ranks, a few weeks after the issue of public nursing caused an uproar at an Idaho Air Force Base.

In an amendment to the House Armed Services Committee's defense authorization bill draft, lawmakers required the Secretary of the Army to "develop a comprehensive policy regarding breastfeeding" for female soldiers that addresses the availability of facilities and allows for work breaks for pumping milk.

The measure — sponsored by Rep. Niki Tsongas, D-Mass. — also specifies that areas with "adequate privacy and cleanliness" for breastfeeding should include electrical outlets to allow use of breast pumps. "Restrooms should not be considered an appropriate location."

The move comes just days after the commander of the 366th Fighter Wing at Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho was

AWM Facebook post goes viral; recognizes first female commander

(23 Apr.) Fort Lee Traveller, By T. Anthony Bell

FORT LEE, Va. (April 23, 2015) -- The U.S. Army Women’s Museum community might have known little about Capt. Marjana Bidwell prior to April 8, but thanks to the power of social media, those followers have come to know her quite well.

Bidwell, assigned to the 3rd Infantry Regiment (Old Guard), is poised within the next few months to become the first female to take command of a company in the famed ceremonial unit. Her story, part of a AWM campaign to ramp up its Facebook page, was posted as its “Archive of the Month” feature. Within 48 hours, the update had reached thousands.

“I was off for the day, but I looked at my phone and said, ‘Oh my gosh, there’s a lot of comments on this post,’” recalled Amanda Strickland, a contract archivist and museum operations specialist who posted the story. “I came back to work on Friday (April 10) and it had reached 100,000.”

Defense Secretary Ash Carter said last week in his first address on the issue. “Sadly, for too many of those assaulted, the crime is made worse by how he or she is treated after the attack ... after they’ve reported it.”

Speier, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, also filed the bill as an amendment to the fiscal 2016 National Defense Authorization Act. The committee is marking up its version Wednesday.

<http://www.defenseone.com/politics/2015/04/bill-would-boost-whistleblower-protections-military-sexual-assault-victims/111397/>

forced to rescind a policy requiring mothers breastfeeding in public areas on base relocate to a private room, use a nursing cover or leave the premises.

The policy applied to civilians and off-duty civil service employees, but not to active-duty service members or on-duty civilian employees. But it caused a public uproar, and a promise from officials to look for ways to better accommodate those mothers.

The Army is the only of the four services not to have a specific, service-wide breastfeeding policy.

The authorization bill will have to survive months more of House and Senate debate and be signed by the president before the Army breastfeeding requirement would become law.

<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/capitol-hill/2015/04/29/hasc-ndaa-breastfeeding/26598681/>

By April 16, the post had reached more than 219,000 people, said Strickland with a preface. “That’s everybody who could have seen it in the newsfeed.”

Furthermore, the story was shared more than 790 times and garnered 12,000 likes and 15,000 post clicks, “which means that we know we have actively engaged 15,000 people in some way,” Strickland said.

Museum staffers met Bidwell during a visit to Washington. After hearing about her achievement, they convinced the Soldier to give them some archival items as well as biographical data.

Strickland, who started to increase the AWM’s Facebook posts earlier this year, said the Bidwell story reached more people than any post in recent memory. “Within a couple of hours, we knew there was something great and extraordinary –

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not only about her story – but the post itself and what it means to people, and not just veterans.”

The post is accompanied by three photos of Bidwell. In one, the West Point graduate is seen standing at the position of attention with a platoon of Soldiers standing behind her in formation. She is wearing a male uniform and holding a saber. A male service cap shadows her eyes. It is a powerful image that seemed to capture the imagination of followers.

“Man, she looks so good at the front of that formation,” read one response.

“Gives me goose bumps !!!!!!! Out-doggone-standing!!!!” read another.

Furthermore, the post created interactions that were part glowing commentary, part forum and part educational, said Amanda Vtipilson, curator of education at AWM. Readers included family members, classmates, those who served with the Soldier and those who had never heard of her.

“Her post did so well and so many people were affected by it that it really makes me think outside the box again and say ‘Clearly, what I think is every day could be something amazing to someone else,’” she said. “It’s something that other people don’t get to see every day.”

Dr. Francoise Bonnell, the AWM director, said she is convinced social media in general and Facebook in particular is important because it has the power to go beyond distributing information.

Female soldiers cut off hair to meet Ranger School rule

(24 Apr.) *Army Times*, By Michelle Tan

Just like their male counterparts, female soldiers attending Ranger School are sporting short haircuts.

Nineteen women on Monday started the one-time, integrated assessment at the Army’s two-month Ranger School.

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

“The standard for the Ranger course is for students to have the shortest haircut authorized by AR 670-1,” said Col. William Butler, deputy commandant of the U.S. Army Infantry School.

The short hair is “for hygiene,” making it easier to find ticks, and for uniformity, Butler said.

For men, the standard is a buzzed haircut using clippers with no guard.

The standard for women is defined as “hair length that extends no more than one inch from the scalp (excluding bangs),

“What is wonderful and evident about Facebook is it allows two-way, three way, four-way and even a 200,000-way conversation,” she said. “That’s really unique.”

Perhaps what stood out in reference to the posts was how the conversation became a discussion that generated questions and answers, said Bonnell.

“There were people who read the posts and asked questions like, ‘Why is she wearing a man’s uniform?’” she said. Somebody would respond, “Well she’s in the Old Guard. Somebody, not us, came back to explain that. Two or three people did. That communication then becomes in and of itself a way that people become educated – they educate themselves and then they educate us. We actually learn a tremendous amount when we get that kind of interaction.”

Finally, said Bonnell, social media is a way to bridge the divide.

“This has become a way to connect the generations,” she said. “We have women veterans from World War II to the present who use Facebook. And we have family members of veterans who use it – men and women. In that sense, its very powerful because not only do you have voices speaking to each other, you have generations of veterans speaking to each other.”
http://www.ftletraveller.com/news/local_news/awm-facebook-post-goes-viral-recognizes-first-female-commander/article_5d4e9f8a-e92d-11e4-ab0e-af73935156d6.html

according to Butler, citing Army Regulation 670-1, which is the Army’s appearance regulation.

The women’s hair may be no shorter than one-quarter inch from the scalp, but may be evenly tapered to the scalp within two inches of the hair line edges, according to AR 670-1.

Bangs, if any, may not fall below the eyebrows and may extend to the hairline at the temple, Butler said.

By Thursday, the end of RAP week, eight women and 184 men remained in the Ranger course, officials at Fort Benning said.

RAP, which stands for Ranger Assessment Phase, spans the first four days of Ranger School. During this time, soldiers are evaluated on a series of punishing physical events, including a physical fitness test, a swim test and a land navigation test. Students also must complete a 12-mile foot march wearing a 35-pound rucksack in under three hours.

A total of 19 female and 381 male soldiers started the two-month Ranger School Monday.

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This is the first time women have been allowed to attend Ranger School.

To prepare, officials had to look at everything from accommodations to personal hygiene.

The Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade, which runs Ranger School, even updated its packing list for students to include several items specific for female students. They include feminine wipes, sports bras, cotton underwear, pads or tampons, and a female urinary diversion device, or FUDD.

Volunteers needed in tests on combat jobs for women

(25 Apr.) Air Force Times, By Stephen Losey

The Air Force this month will take a big step toward possibly opening up the last male-only combat jobs to women.

In an April 21 release, the Air Force said it will start conducting physical evaluations to set gender-neutral occupational standards for the jobs, which represent roughly 4,300 special operations positions.

The jobs are 13C special tactics officers, 13D combat rescue officers, 15WXC special operations weather officers, 1WOX2 special operations weather enlisted, 1C2 combat control, 1C4 Tactical Air Control Party, and 1T2 pararescue.

"Ultimately, the initiative to eliminate any remaining gender-based assignment restrictions will improve our readiness and the Air Force's ability to recruit and retain the most effective and qualified force," Air Force Sec. Deborah Lee James said in the release.

The Air Force said it will test about 200 male and female volunteers at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland in Texas. Airmen from the Lackland area will be the first volunteers chosen.

Air Education and Training Command spokeswoman Capt. Jennifer Richard said in an April 22 release that the tests will contain two studies: one on Physical Tests and Standards, which runs April 13 to July 18, and another on Re-validation of Strength Qualification Standards, which will go from April 15 to Aug. 1.

The physical tests study will contain running, pull-ups, push-ups and combat-related simulations like swimming, carrying life-size dummies, rock climbing and climbing walls, the AETC release said. This is intended to set fitness standards for training and operational levels for battlefield airmen career fields.

The strength qualification study will consist of "familiar entry physical tests, to include those that measure strength," AETC said. It will "ensure scientifically-based, operationally-tied fitness tests and standards for entry into all career fields," AETC said.

With use of a FUDD, a female soldier in the field can urinate more discreetly while standing and with minimal undressing.

The Army, through a careful selection process, also tapped more than two dozen female noncommissioned officers and officers to serve as observer/advisers. These soldiers were selected to work alongside the Ranger instructors and serve as extra eyes and ears and as a sounding board for the all-male cadre. The women will not evaluate or grade Ranger School students.

<http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/careers/army/2015/04/24/women-ranger-school-haircuts/26265435/>

Volunteers must be between 18 and 45 years old, have a current passing physical fitness test in all four components, and a current preventive health assessment or medical clearance. They must be willing to attempt physical tasks, the release said, and must complete a safety and medical screening questionnaire.

AETC is accepting both male and female airmen from active duty, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve. Each participant in the physical tests study must be willing to commit for two consecutive weeks between April 13 and June 13, or for one week between June 22 and July 18. Participants in the strength qualification study must be willing to commit for four hours each day on May 28 and 29, and more opportunities will be available between July 11 and Aug. 1.

This testing and evaluation will help the Air Force develop the physical tests that will show which airmen can succeed in these physically demanding jobs, said Brig. Gen. Brian Kelly, director of military force management policy.

"This effort marks the most stringent process yet by which we are developing occupationally specific physical standards, scientifically measured against operational requirements to match mission needs," Kelly said in the release. "All the services and United States Special Operations Command are working with various scientific and research agencies to review occupational standards to ensure they are specific and current, operationally relevant and are gender neutral."

Kelly said that the testing effort "is not about raising or lowering occupational standards."

"The key is to ensure we have set the right standards for the occupation based on mission requirements," Kelly said. "The effort is built upon science and experience, to ensure we continue to maintain our readiness and preserve the quality and capability of our all-volunteer force."

In a March speech outlining her plans to increase diversity in the Air Force, James reiterated her desire to open up these combat jobs to women.

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"And boy, the burden of proof will be heavy on any recommendation to keep any of these positions closed once we have gender-neutral, job-relevant standards in place," James said in March.

The release said the Air Force has already conducted focus groups, assessments and operational observations as part of the process of opening these jobs.

James is expected to send Defense Secretary Ash Carter her recommendations on opening up the remaining male only jobs

Decisions loom after Marine infantry officer experiment ends

(25 Apr.) *Marine Corps Times*, By Hope Hodge Seck

True, no woman has graduated the Marines' legendarily grueling infantry officers course after 32 months of attempts. But don't infer that the feat is impossible, warn observers in the military community.

As the Jan. 1 deadline nears for the commandant to make a recommendation to the defense secretary regarding the integration of female Marines into closed ground combat arms fields, years of the Corps' research and experimentation on the subject are drawing to a close.

Earlier this month, the last female Marine officers who were part of the Corps two-and-a-half year integrated test period were dropped from IOC, stymied by the grueling combat endurance test on day one. To date, 29 female officers have attempted the course and none has passed. Enlisted women have met more success with the shorter infantry training battalion course with a pass rate of 34 percent among female volunteers.

For proponents of integration, the data from IOC is far from faith-shaking. Marine 1st Lt. Sage Santangelo, who attempted IOC in early 2014 and later wrote a widely read opinion editorial arguing that female volunteers should be allowed to re-attempt the course, told *Marine Corps Times* that the service should continue giving women the opportunity to try.

"Do I think that the fact that no woman has passed IOC means that women are 'incapable' of performing in the infantry? Absolutely not," Santangelo said, adding that the many women who served in combat zones around the world had already proved otherwise. "We need to continue to push Marines to succeed. Not every Marine is fit for the infantry. But every Marine should have the opportunity to compete for the job."

Ellen Haring, a retired Army colonel who has vocally supported integration and criticized the military for keeping fields closed, said the lack of incentive may have kept prospective volunteers for IOC from attempting the course. Volunteers were told they would not receive an infantry military occupational specialty if they graduated from IOC, and the time they spent preparing for and attempting the course was time away from their chosen career path.

later this year. Carter is expected to send his recommendations on which jobs should be opened up on or about Jan. 1, which Congress will then choose to act on or not.

Air Force Education and Training Command will release more information on how Lackland-area airmen can volunteer to take part in these tests.

<http://www.airforcetimes.com/story/military/careers/air-force/2015/04/25/volunteers-needed-in-tests-on-combat-jobs-for-women/26307869/>

"I don't think you can judge all women based on this small group of volunteers," Haring said. "They're taking a few volunteers and extrapolating from that saying they represent all women. It doesn't even come close to the sample size that they were looking for."

Haring argues the Marines should move the combat endurance test to later in the course to give women a better shot at passing.

"That was a structural barrier that was erected," she said.

Now in flight school, Santangelo does not argue that the Corps should alter or lower course requirements to give female Marines a leg up.

"If a woman can meet the standard, she should have an opportunity to do the job," she said. "May the best Marine get the job, no exceptions."

The question of changing standards has been a concern for many as a decision nears on integration.

In 2013, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, told reporters that the onus would be on the military services to defend standards that appeared to be barriers to female integration.

"If we do decide that a particular standard is so high that a woman couldn't make it, the burden is now on the service to come back and explain to the secretary, 'Why is it that high?'" Dempsey said.

The Marine Corps, however, has so far held the line on its prized elite training requirements.

"We have said across the board that we are not going to lower standards, and female Marines do not want us to lower standards," said Capt. Maureen Krebs, a Marine spokeswoman at the Pentagon. "But a big part of what we're looking at are those standards for the occupations and what it takes to do the job."

The Combat Endurance Test, which was moved to the start of IOC in 2010, is meant to reflect the mental and physical rigors of combat and the pressures they place on the shoulders of junior officers, Krebs said previously.

But the test may not be the only element of IOC that has increased in difficulty and complexity after a decade and a half of war.

Matt Morgan, a former Marine infantry officer, wonders if he would have made it through today's version of the course.

When Morgan went through IOC in 1994, "we did everything in Quantico," he said. "Now they go to [Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center] Twentynine Palms, they go to [Mountain Warfare Training Center] Bridgeport; it's a far more demanding cycle across these different ranges. Few instructors [then] had any experience that remotely compares with the combat veterans who are instructors today."

Nevada Guard hires its 1st female brigade commander

(27 Apr.) Military Times

RENO, Nev. — The Nevada Guard has hired its first female brigade commander.

Col. Joanne Farris has assumed command of the 991st Multi-Functional Brigade, overseeing more than 700 soldiers and all of the Nevada Army Guard's aviation assets.

She replaces Col. Dan Waters, who will become the Nevada Army Guard's chief of staff later this year

Farris joined the Guard over 25 years ago and earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Nevada, Reno in 1991. She graduated from the Command and General Staff

Ranger School Class With 8 Women Tackles Darby Queen Obstacle Course

(27 Apr.) Columbus Ledger-Enquirer, By Chuck Williams

The Darby Queen is one of the toughest obstacle courses in the U.S. Army.

Over nearly a mile of rolling Chattahoochee County terrain on the far eastern reaches of Fort Benning, the course presents 26 obstacles for Ranger School students to navigate.

There is nothing easy about it as they climb over obstacles as tall as three stories and crawl through mud trenches that are covered with barbed wire.

And to make it worse, Ranger instructors litter the course, barking orders and demanding perfection.

Sunday morning, 263 soldiers tackled the Darby Queen as they prepare to transition into a new phase of Ranger School, a

That results in better-prepared officers, Morgan said.

A strong proponent of gender integration, Morgan said he believes that IOC should be open to women going forward, and that someday soon the course will graduate a female officer. But, he said he expects that the women who pass the course will likely be in an elite fitness category, with a strong athletic background.

Still, he said he wouldn't change standards just to give a higher volume of female officers a shot at passing.

"I can certainly see an advantage to having women leaders in combat arms," Morgan said, pointing to female engagement teams in Afghanistan and Iraq who were able to cross cultural barriers that male Marines could not. "But I think the great fear among many is, for these purposes, standards would have to be lowered. I don't think there is anybody who has served who is arguing for standards to be arbitrarily lowered."

<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/story/military/2015/04/25/big-decisions-after-ioc-experiment/26192849/>

College in 2004, the same year she earned a master's degree from Clayton College.

Brig. Gen. Michael Hanifan says Farris' experience in aviation command will serve her well in her new role. Among other positions, she was deputy brigade commander over the last year and commanded the 1-69th Press Camp Headquarters, which deployed to Bosnia in 1999.

<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/guard-reserve/2015/04/27/nevada-guard-hires-its-1st-female-brigade-commander/26482033/>

more than 60-day combat leadership course that is the most physically and mentally challenging the Army offers.

In that number were eight female students trying to become the first women Rangers. This is the first Ranger School class that has been open to women and 19 started a week ago. Less than half of that number, out of a class of 399, made it to the second week. The key figures on the obstacle course were the Ranger instructors. Two students were struggling with instructions when an instructor pulled them aside and said, "You can do it right once or wrong as many times as you want."

"They are beginning to learn to listen and pay attention when they are physically and mentally exhausted," said Gen. James Rainey, chief of the Infantry School.

The Ranger students have all completed a demanding week that included a physical assessment, water skills assessment, land navigation test, and grueling road march.

Ranger Training Battalion Maj. Steven Robins, the operations officer, said the obstacle course is difficult by design.

"The in-between obstacle stress that we place on them is all geared toward how bad do you want to make it to the next step," Robins said. "I have been here about six or seven months, and not once have I seen a Ranger quit on this course. As bad as it looks, if you go see the Ranger students when they are done, they feel accomplished."

But the real work is about to start as the students learn to plan and execute small unit patrols. They will work out of Camp Darby until May 8 when they are told if they have met the

Official Provides Update on Combat Jobs for Women

(27 Apr.) DoD News, By Terri Moon Cronk

WASHINGTON, April 27, 2015 – Since the Defense Department rescinded a 1994 policy that excluded women from serving in direct ground combat positions, the services have opened about 91,000 jobs to female service members, the Joint Staff's vice director said here today.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Jacqueline D. Van Ovost spoke at a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace event that looked at changes made by the Defense Department, the services and U.S. Southern Command for servicewomen since the 2013 repeal of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule.

Early next year, Defense Secretary Ash Carter is expected to announce final decisions to integrate remaining closed occupations and any approved exceptions to policy.

The repeal was endorsed by then-Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey.

"Today, 95 percent of all [military occupational specialties] are open to women," Van Ovost said. "Women are contributing in unprecedented ways to the military's mission of defending our nation."

What the Services Accomplished

Van Ovost briefly outlined some of the specialties the services have opened to women since the January 2013 repeal.

The Marine Corps allowed women in 2013 to participate in basic infantry training in its "ongoing research to determine what additional combat jobs may be open to female personnel," Van Ovost said. But while 34 percent of the women completed the course, she added, they won't be assigned to the infantry as a military occupational specialty or inside a unit.

"But they are critical to assess and validate the gender-neutral standards," she said.

The Navy's Coastal Riverine Force opened 267 jobs to women who learned combat skills, weapon fundamentals and equipment, land navigation, urban operations, offensive and defensive patrols and communications, Van Ovost said.

standards to move to Camp Merrill in the North Georgia mountains. The course concludes at Camp Rudder near Destin, Fla.

The end of the Darby Queen is a pivotal moment in the course, Robins said.

"As soon as this event is over, that is when all these black-shirted guys (Ranger instructors) turn into teachers instead of yellors," he said. "This is the last event where they are in their face 100 percent of the time. It turns into a teach-coach-mentor school. They will leave here and will go truly teach tactics."

<http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/04/27/ranger-school-class-8-women-tackles-darby-queen-obstacle-course.html?comp=7000023468004&rank=1>

The Army opened more combat engineer positions to women, who have learned a variety of tasks that include improvised explosive device detection, basic combat construction, field fortifications and bridging support to U.S. combat forces, she said.

"The Army combat engineer school is considered a model for developing women in combat standards," the general said. The most anticipated decision will be whether to open combat arms, infantry, armor and Special Forces occupations to women, she added.

Most Capable Service Members

"Our military leaders strive to make sure operations are carried out by the best-qualified and most-capable service member, period," she said. That's a policy that hasn't changed since DoD opened positions to women, Van Ovost said, adding that the guiding principles set by the chairman and the Joint Chiefs of Staff center on maintaining a strong military. Those principles also "ensure the success of our warfighting force by preserving unit readiness, cohesion and the equality of our all-volunteer force," she noted.

Chairman Immersed in Assessment

The chairman continues to be a key player in the assessment in his roles as the senior military adviser to the president and the defense secretary, Van Ovost said.

"As part of his assessment, General Dempsey not only engages military leaders," she said, "he actively seeks the opinion of all servicemen and servicewomen of all ranks, both genders and [all] occupational specialties."

Van Ovost said she's inspired by the chairman's commitment to work with the services on assessing combat roles for women.

"I can assure you his recommendations to the [defense] secretary will be based on rigorous analysis," she said.

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128680>

Women in special operations: Female troops detail their time in combat

(28 Apr.) *The Washington Post*, By Dan Lamothe

When Janiece Marquez arrived in Afghanistan in 2011 as a member of a cultural support team working alongside Special Forces, she had high hopes that she would contribute. But the initial team she was assigned to was reticent to put women in combat situations, leaving her team sidelined much of the time, she said.

Things improved partway through the deployment when a new Special Forces team arrived. Its soldiers had received more training about cultural support teams, and they not only allowed her to speak to Afghan women in the Pashto language she had learned, but also to take on dangerous jobs traditionally assigned to men.

“I thought I would be out to engage with women and children and be with the mission commander kind of standing away from everything, but that’s not how it ever was,” she said Monday. “There were times where I was the gunner. Actually, for the last three months of my deployment, I was a gunner, and then I would still go into these villages and talk to women and children, and go into their homes.”

Marquez, who left the Army in 2012, and two other women detailed their experiences serving in cultural support teams before a crowd of about 100 people at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Northwest Washington on Monday. The event, “Women in Combat: Where They Stand,” was heavily attended by female veterans and service members, and it underscored one of the major voices in the ongoing argument over whether women should serve in all jobs in combat: female veterans who have served proudly and can’t stand the restrictions.

The Pentagon dropped a longtime ban on women serving in direct combat units in January 2013, but it gave the services time to research whether they want to leave some jobs, such as infantryman, closed to women. The services have until later this year to request exceptions that would keep some jobs closed.

The event was sponsored by several organizations all in favor of fully dropping the ban on women in combat. Its supporters included Reps. Martha McSally (R-Ariz.) and Loretta Sanchez (D-Calif.), both of whom are vocal critics of existing restrictions on women in the military.

One of the centerpieces of the argument for allowing women in all military jobs is that they have been serving in combat for years, including in cultural support teams. The units,

established by Special Operations Command, put women in direct combat missions at times, including “direct-action” operations in which units go on the offensive against enemy forces.

The panel discussion Monday was moderated by Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, the author of the new book “Ashley’s War,” which details the life and death of 1st Lt. Ashley White-Stumpf. A cultural support team member, she died Oct. 22, 2011, in Afghanistan’s Kandahar province when the assault force she was deployed with triggered an improvised explosive device.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Meghan Malloy, a cultural support team member in Afghanistan in 2013, said her assignment while deployed alongside Special Forces was straightforward while on direct-action assaults. A medic, she patched up soldiers who got hurt and was told to shoot back at insurgents who shot at her.

The cultural support team’s role was a little more murky when working in Afghan villages as part of stability operations, she said.

“At one point when we first got out there, they were like, ‘You need to make yourself more important than the working dog,’ because the working dog had the spot on the team to go out,” she said. “So we had to make ourselves more valuable than him. Because that’s the only way we’re going out on a mission.”

Air Force Capt. Annie Yu Kleiman deployed with a cultural support team in 2012. She said she had a “weird cognitive dissonance” at first that she could be in combat. She joked that she thought she’d be in a “rear guard” until it was safe, but it didn’t turn out that way.

“There were bullets flying,” Kleiman said. “There wasn’t bullets flying directly at *me*, but they were, you know, 50 feet, 100 feet away.”

Kleiman said that after serving alongside special operations troops, life took on a different perspective.

“Everything else is just a little easier,” she said. “I’m in grad school now, and if I don’t get my paper perfect, no one is going to die. No bullets are flying.”

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/04/28/women-in-special-operations-female-troops-detail-their-time-in-combat/>

Cultural Support Team Women Served With Distinction

(29 Apr.) *DoD News*, By Terri Moon Cronk

WASHINGTON, April 29, 2015 – Three women who served overseas on cultural support teams in battle alongside U.S. special operators shared their experiences during a panel discussion at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace here April 27.

The trio -- an Air Force officer, an Army noncommissioned officer, and a former Army NCO -- participated in a daylong review of the roles of women in combat, following the 2013 repeal of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and

Assignment Rule, which had excluded women from serving in combat since 1994.

Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, author of the recently released book titled “Ashley’s War: The Untold Story of a Team of Women Soldiers on the Special Operations Battlefield,” was the panel’s moderator.

The cultural support team pilot program was underway when Army 1st Lt. Ashley White-Stumpf was killed by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan’s Kandahar

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province during an Oct. 22, 2011, night raid while her unit was embedded with the Army's 75th Ranger Regiment. "These women were bonded and had a sisterhood like none other," Tzemach Lemmon said. The story of cultural support teams, she said, is "one of purpose; a heroes' story we haven't heard as a country ... and about people who wanted to do something with a real-value mission as the women who served alongside the best of best."

Women Warriors

Servicewomen who have served on cultural support teams have been hailed as warriors by senior military leadership, said Tzemach Lemmon, adding that through her book research, she learned doing a job in combat comes down to the best person who could do it.

"So many leaders would say, 'I know what the regulations are, but this is a war we're fighting. We have to be innovative and use the best people,'" she said.

Women came into the program after special operations officials discussed its legality with military lawyers, Tzemach Lemmon learned. "They said, 'Yes, you can attach [women] to special operations units. It's perfectly legal,'" she said.

Those Who Served Gained

Army Sgt. 1st Class Meghan Malloy, Air Force Capt. Annie Yu Kleiman and Army Sgt. Janiece Marquez served with White. All attended the cultural support team school at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to learn about medical civic action programs, searches and seizures, humanitarian assistance and civil-military operations, basic human behavior, tribalism, Islamic and Afghan cultures, and the role of women in Afghanistan.

Malloy was an Army medic with three deployments when she learned of the CST program and felt driven to become a part of it. "I jumped on it and would do it again in a heartbeat," she said.

Kleiman's husband flew reconnaissance aircraft providing over watch for the teams who encouraged her to apply to the CST school. She didn't believe woman in battle existed, she said.

"I had this weird cognitive dissonance going on," said Kleiman, who recalled thinking, "I'm not going to be in combat. The objective is going to be secured before they bring us in."

During training, the women thought they would walk with the platoon leader and be separate from the assault element, Kleiman added.

Female 'boomer' officer lauds Navy

(1 May) *The Times*, By John Andrew Prime

There was a time when Maura Thompson would have caused a sensation on the USS Louisiana.

The "boomer," a ballistic missile submarine home-ported in Bangor, Washington, was one of the last places in the U.S. Navy where female officers, part of the service landscape since World War II, could not serve.

"We all bought into the combat exclusion thing and thought we wouldn't be in combat," she said. Now, Kleiman recalls bullets zipping past her from distances of 50 to 100 feet.

A Role with a Purpose

With the support of a superior, Marquez said, she fought her way up the chain of command to gain acceptance into the program.

"I finally had a purpose," she said of her new role on the cultural support team. "It wasn't just being in the military following everyone else. I was able to be a pioneer in a program that hadn't started yet ... a brand-new concept of putting women on these teams and being able to fight on the front lines. It was exciting."

The women rehearsed with the special operations forces, Marquez said. "And there were times when I was the gunner. [That's what] I did the entire last three months of my deployment," she added.

Malloy and her female cultural support team partner worked hard at performing better.

"We'd wonder, 'What can we do for this team?'" she said.

"How can we gather intel? How can we gain a bond with the women and children so they're willing to give us this info that would potentially help out the team?"

Malloy said that kind of thinking has helped in her career, because she looks at issues from a leadership perspective.

Confidence in Performance

Serving on the cultural support team has provided "through the roof" confidence to Marquez, she said.

"A lot more doors are open that wouldn't be if I didn't have the combat experience," said Marquez, who's now working in South America.

Marquez said senior leaders put their confidence in her because she was willing to put herself up front to fight and learn.

"Foreign military commanders invite me into their offices and talk about how to fix their programs because of what I've done," Marquez said. "Had I not been a CST [member] and fought on the front lines, I wouldn't have the clout that I do."

Women in the cultural support team program learn things that are completely new to them, Marquez said.

"And you go out there and put your best foot forward," she said.

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128691&source=GovDelivery>

But just a few years ago the boats opened up to female officers and Thompson, a 2004 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, jumped at the chance to serve. Today the West Virginia native is "just another face" on the sub's "blue crew." Submarines have two sets of crews, Blue and Gold, and the blue crew sailors are on shore now while the gold crew has the boat out on its current patrol.

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"I'll be heading back to sea in the early summer," said Thompson, a lieutenant commander and Louisiana's supply officer, in the area this week with several fellow sailors to share experiences with locals as part of 2015 Shreveport-Bossier Navy Week.

Today, she will speak to the Bossier City Rotary Club (members only) at Boomtown Casino, while at noon Friday she will address The Optimist Club of Shreveport at East Ridge Country Club, 1000 Stewart Drive.

She's visited New Orleans a few times but this is her first visit to North Louisiana, though her husband, Trace Thompson, is from the Dallas, Texas, area and has been here numerous times. Now a lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve, "he is in law school now and lives in California so we actually are quite far apart," she said. "He also was on submarines from 2006 to 2009, so he knows exactly what it's like."

And what it's like, she's telling people, is "nothing that's any more challenging for any male submariner. The gender goes away very quickly and the differences end up being just as they are for everyone else. What can you accomplish? How smart are you? How quickly can you get this done? How much work can you get done in a day? It's very equalizing."

Thompson joined the Navy at 17, to get an education. She's been commissioned 10 years and prior to the USS Louisiana did sea duty on the aircraft carrier USS George Washington.

"I've been on the Louisiana for 2-1/2 years and have been on three patrols," said Thompson, who with other blue crew members has been ashore five months and wants to get water under her feet again. "Hands down, I enjoy being on a submarine more. It's because of the crew, 100 percent because of the crew. The sailors on an aircraft carrier are all outstanding young men and women who volunteered to be there, but the young men and women on a submarine – we're so close and so small and the work so hard. It's wonderful to be able to work intimately with young people and see them grow and develop into leaders. Now I get to see it on a much closer basis than I did when I had 60 people working for me. Now I have just 12."

Meet the Real-Life G.I. Janes Who Served with Special Ops in Afghanistan

(24 Apr.) *People*, By Sandra Sobieraj Westfall

Caroline Cleveland, just 23 at the time, remembers vividly the night she thought she'd be killed.

During a raid of a suspected terrorist stronghold in Afghanistan, 1st Lt. Cleveland and her Army Ranger regiment were stealthily picking through narrow alleys toward their target when shots exploded.

"It was an ambush, a firefight with rounds passing all around me," Cleveland recalls now, four years later, for PEOPLE. "There was a point where I thought, 'We're nearly surrounded!' And that *what-if* floated into my brain for just a moment."

As the supply officer, Thompson and her sailors manage the galley and the vessel's warehouse, "and when I say 'warehouse,' obviously it's tucked into all sorts of nooks and crannies. As for the galley, we serve about 500 meals a day, providing a little motherhood and comfort to hungry sailors. On board Louisiana the food is excellent. We do our best to throw a little Creole influence in there whenever we can."

Thompson didn't plan on making the Navy a career when she joined. She was after the education.

"But as I got older and I grew into the Navy, from the time I was 17 to about 25, I saw a little bit more of the world and realized how great I had it in the Navy and decided to stay."

"I enjoy the challenge. It is certainly not easy work, but it is intellectually and physically challenging. The nice thing about having a small crew is always being able to count on them. If there's something you cannot accomplish, there's always someone there to help you, always an extra hand, an extra shoulder, an extra watch stander."

She and the three sailors with her from the Louisiana have been sharing their experiences in visits to area schools and hospitals, and at civic clubs such as her stops today and Friday.

"I know it's an Air Force town, but hopefully we'll be able to bring a little bit of a Navy flavor," she said. She plans to talk about women on subs, but "again it's not that big a deal. Soon we'll be bringing in young enlisted women, so it will be in the news again."

She plans "to stay in the Navy as long as the Navy will keep me. My passion has always been improving sailors' lives. I get to do it on a sailor-to-sailor basis now, which is the best way. Hopefully I can make an impact on more people as I get promoted. Some day I'd like to become an admiral and change the world, see that I'm making a difference."

<http://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/military/2015/04/30/female-boomer-officer-lauds-navy/26623813/>

Cleveland was one of 20 women recruited by the Army in 2011 to "be a part of history" on a new, low-profile, female-only Cultural Support Team that deployed to Afghanistan for nine months starting in August of that year.

Their story is told in the new book *Ashley's War: The Untold Story of a Team of Women Soldiers on the Special Ops Battlefield* by Gayle Tzemach Lemmon.

In March, Reese Witherspoon obtained the movie rights to the book.

CSTs, as they were officially known (or "The Pink Team," as they were nicknamed by others), operated under a ban on U.S. military women in combat roles even as they accompanied Ranger strike forces on dangerous night raids of suspected terrorist hideouts.

There, it was the CSTs' job to gather intelligence by searching and questioning any women and children.

But when the Afghan men of any given compound resisted the raid, "It sure felt like combat," says Cleveland, who has since left the military and is soon starting school for physical therapy.

The Defense Department barred women from ground-combat units until that ban was lifted in January 2013. Commanders in each of the services now have until Jan. 1, 2016 to open

all roles to women or justify why a certain military job should remain male-only.

Kat Kaelin, 27, was a staff sergeant who served with Cleveland and the other CST "girls," as both women call themselves. Kaelin, now an at-home mom to three young girls, says the CSTs proved that women deserve to have Special Ops jobs open to whoever can meet their rigorous selection and training standards.

"We are right next to these Rangers. We just don't have a title," says Kaelin. "Americans don't want to hear their daughters and mothers and sisters are out there fighting and dying, but it's like, 'Sorry. We were.'"

<http://www.people.com/article/reese-wITHERSPOON-BUYS-RIGHTS-ARMY-GIRLS-SPECIAL-OPS-AFGHANISTAN>

Female military vets make jobs gains, but still lag behind

(27 Apr.) CNBC, By Angela Johnson

In recent years the U.S. government and corporate America have made a massive push to hire veterans, but not all former military service members are seeing the full benefit of these efforts.

According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the jobless rate for post-9/11 female veterans was 8.5 percent in 2014, higher than the 6.9 percent rate for their male counterparts.

It's a discrepancy that matters more now than ever. In 2014, there were 3.2 million post-9/11 veterans in the United States, and 20 percent of them were women. By comparison, women accounted for only 4 percent of veterans from the era that includes World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

Business and government efforts to boost veteran hiring have had successes, bringing the post-9/11 veterans unemployment rate down from its 12.1 percent high in 2011, to 7.2 percent in 2014. Still, veterans continue to suffer higher unemployment—and it's worse for women. Female veterans' jobless rates also lag behind their nonveteran female peers, who had an unemployment rate of 5.9 percent in 2014.

"Female veterans tend to be young, and young people tend to have higher unemployment rates," said a BLS spokesperson. Another widely accepted explanation is that women vets tend to bear the brunt of more child care responsibilities than their male counterparts.

Despite the challenges, however, a combination of forces from government, educational institutions and corporations are combating the problem.

In 2009, President Barack Obama signed an executive order instructing federal agencies to focus on the recruitment and hiring of veterans for government jobs.

On Wall Street, Goldman Sachs, Citigroup and Deutsche Bank created Veterans on Wall Street in 2012 in order to give former military personnel a foot in the door to the corporate world. Other veterans organizations such as Hiring our Heroes and Be a Hero, Hire a Hero partner with schools and other businesses to hold job fairs and workshops.

Those efforts account for only a tiny portion of the overall push, however, and it's not all gloom and doom for female veterans, according to a 2015 Veteran Economic Opportunity Report.

"While women veterans have a higher unemployment rate," the report said, "those who attend school and/or secure an employment opportunity are faring better than their non-veteran counterparts."

Rebecca Miller Pringle, 46, is a Gulf War-era veteran who cares for a 3-year-old daughter afflicted with cancer. Pringle attended the Be a Hero, Hire a Hero job fair at Berkeley College in Woodland Park, New Jersey, last week, hoping to find an employer that understands the special challenges she faces.

"It's a big part of the package," Pringle said. She said she's lost two jobs because of the time she must dedicate to taking care of her daughter, attending chemotherapy and going to doctor appointments.

Despite having a master's degree in public administration from Central Michigan University, Pringle has had to turn to the Department of Veterans Affairs and other organizations to assist with housing issues.

"I like the VA, they have been good to me," said Pringle. "They helped me out with a financial grant for housing, through the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program."

Pringle was also assisted by Vantage Health System's Opening Doors program, which finds permanent housing and offers support services to homeless families with school-age children. "They only had two slots open; it was a blessing," she said.

The New York Shipping Association, which represents the marine cargo industry, was among attendees at the Berkeley College job fair looking to hire veterans. The association's vice president of workforce development, Susan Winfree, said the NYSA has hired 300 veterans for union positions as of 2014 and plans to hire more.

"They're used to the elements, around-the-clock operations, have a great work ethic and are organized," Winfree said. "We appreciate all of those things, but mostly their service. It's a good fit."

The shipping industry jobs available typically start at \$20 an hour and "There's always overtime," she said. Winfree said she is always hopeful she will see more female veterans

interested in the positions, but typically gets more interest from men.

"We thought we would see more female applicants than we have," she said, "and hope that we see more as we continue hiring our veterans."

Since 2008, the worst year on record for post-9/11 veterans was 2011, when their annualized unemployment rate reached

12.1 percent. January 2011 was the worst month for male veterans, with unemployment hitting 15.5 percent. December 2011 was the worst month for female veterans, with the unemployment hitting a staggering 21.1 percent.

<http://www.cnn.com/id/102606321>

VA hospitals in Pittsburgh, Erie turn attention to female veterans' needs

(27 Apr.) Trib Total Media, By Brian Bowling

VA hospitals in Pittsburgh and Erie are emphasizing women's health services as the number of female veterans grows, changing the character of hospitals once dominated by mostly older male patients.

Department of Veterans Affairs officials say the system is working to change the reality and perception of its ability to treat women.

"You're almost scared to go to the gynecologist at the VA because you don't know how good they are," said Lisa Bokinsky, 43, of Windber, a former Navy Seabee.

Yet the VA Pittsburgh Health System has begun to provide more traditional women's health care, adding staff and specialists, said Dr. Melissa McNeil, director of women's health for the hospitals in Oakland and O'Hara.

It has expanded cervical cancer screening, contraception and maternity care, and added an interdisciplinary breast cancer program.

"All of which we've built in response to our increasing number of women," she said.

Her goal is to provide care that keeps female veterans from having to visit different facilities. Many have not utilized the VA as much as men have.

"They somehow seem to think that the care they need won't be there," McNeil said.

VA statistics show that, nationally, the number of female veterans receiving disability compensation or pensions increased 28 percent, to about 370,000, between 2011 and 2014. In 10 Western Pennsylvania counties, the number grew by 68 percent, to 1,563 women.

By comparison, the number of male veterans with disability benefits increased 9 percent, to 25,031.

At the Erie VA Medical Center, the number of female veterans enrolled in fiscal year 2014 was 1,418 — a 9 percent increase over the two years prior, said spokeswoman Sarah Gudgeon. The center responded by expanding its women's health services and adding a women-only group to discuss post-traumatic stress disorder.

Officials are cognizant of the need to tell women about the changes, Gudgeon said.

"You always think of the veterans hospitals as your grandfather's VA," she said.

Experts say the number of female veterans will continue to increase.

Women comprise about 15 percent of active duty military, but 20 percent of recruits are women, said Shawn Scott Hope, a spokesman in Pittsburgh for Disabled American Veterans. Nationally, there are about 7,000 female veterans from the Vietnam era, 41,000 from the first Gulf War and 300,000 from post-9/11, he said.

Those seeking treatment at VA hospitals, such as Bokinsky, are younger than doctors and nurses traditionally saw in the past, McNeil said.

Bokinsky injured her knee while supervising a construction project on Diego Garcia, an atoll in the Indian Ocean that's home to a large Navy base.

The project was a stop on her deployment to Iraq, where she was to oversee construction projects. Instead, she ended up in an office with a bum knee.

"It took about a year and a half to get corrected," Bokinsky said.

She also developed palmoplantar psoriasis, a rare condition that covered her hands and feet in blisters and spread to other parts of her body. A former Navy reservist, she said she generally has received good medical care and agrees with the VA's new emphasis on women's health issues.

Erica Ellis, 32, of Erie said she rarely sees other women seeking primary care at the Erie hospital.

A 10-year veteran of the Navy, she fell down a ladder well on an aircraft carrier, permanently injuring her leg, and has severe carpal tunnel syndrome.

"I love my doctor at the VA — she's awesome," Ellis said.

But the medical center often refers her to community doctors because it lacks specialists in women's health, she said. "It's extremely frustrating."

The Erie hospital provides basic women's health screenings but doesn't have enough female patients to hire specialists in women's health, Gudgeon said.

<http://triblive.com/news/allegheeny/8055481-74/women-veterans-female#ixzz3YghGvyuN>

Sexual Assault Response Worker Earns DoD Award

(30 Apr.) DoD News, From a North Dakota National Guard News Release

BISMARCK, N.D., April 30, 2015 – For her outstanding service in support of North Dakota's military members, Heather Mattson was named the 2015 Exceptional Sexual Assault Response Coordinator of the Year for the entire National Guard.

Mattson, of Jamestown, North Dakota, was congratulated last week by Army Gen. Frank J. Grass, chief of the National Guard Bureau, during an April 20 video teleconference here at Fraire Barracks, the North Dakota National Guard's headquarters facility.

Mattson has served as the North Dakota National Guard's SARC since September 2012.

"I applaud Ms. Heather Mattson's selection as the 2015 Sexual Assault Response Coordinator of the Year," Grass said. "Her tremendous efforts and innovative approaches working with community agencies and service providers greatly aided in the recovery of sexual assault survivors and contributed to fostering a culture of dignity and trust within the National Guard. Her dedication, professionalism and passion epitomize the essence of the National Guard as a community-based organization that vigorously advocates for survivors and the Guard community."

Heather's initiative and creativity in challenging our Guardsmen to confront the damaging realities of sexual assault and domestic violence."

During the teleconference, Mattson was commended for developing a number of innovative, far-reaching projects to increase awareness about sexual assault throughout North Dakota's communities.

One of those projects is the Race to Zero 5K Run/Walk, which annually is held in Bismarck. For the past three years, Mattson has worked as a co-organizer for this event, partnering with multiple local and state agencies, such as the North Dakota Council on Abused Women's Services, Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota, Abused Adult Resource Center, Bismarck Prevention Task Force, and Region 7 Foster Care/Adoption Recruitment Coalition, and more than 20 private sector sponsors.

Mattson also has led the North Dakota SAPR program's victim advocates in developing promotional resources and products for Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Posters, displays and fact sheets about sexual harassment/assault response and prevention are distributed at each North Dakota National Guard facility across the state in April.

Additionally, Mattson has partnered with the Abused Adult Resource Center to develop a series of public service announcements, which have been broadcast on local television stations. The videos feature North Dakota National Guard soldiers and airmen and civilian professionals from multiple state agencies. In addition to public distribution, the products have been incorporated into unit training for North Dakota Guardsmen.

National Recognition

Six awards are presented annually to SARCs across the country in each military branch and reserve component, which includes the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and National Guard. The recognition is given in April to coincide with the nationally observed Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month.

As the SARC for the North Dakota National Guard, Mattson leads the state's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program, an educational and prevention-based program designed to protect the rights and safety of the organization's soldiers and airmen.

Through confidential reporting measures, sexual assaults can be reported at any time and victims receive "sensitive and immediate comprehensive care and treatment they need to restore their health and well-being," according to the National Guard Bureau's website.

Taking Care of Soldiers, Airmen

"Taking care of our soldiers and airmen has always been my No. 1 priority, and professionals like Heather provide the resources, training, expertise and leadership to ensure that goal is met," said Army Maj. Gen. David A. Sprynczynatyk, North Dakota's adjutant general.

Sprynczynatyk added, "As an organization, we have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to sexual assault. It's important for all to know that our leadership fully supports our Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program and values

'A Dynamic Professional'

An excerpt from the 2015 Exceptional SARC Award citation reads:

"A dynamic professional, Mrs. Mattson displayed a passion to dispel myths and challenge negative attitudes toward victims of sexual assault. Her boundless enthusiasm and genuine concern lead to improved morale, thereby enabling commanders to focus on accomplishing the mission. Widely recognized for her innovation, she is often sought out for advice and assistance. Mrs. Mattson established a curriculum committee to ensure the delivery of current and relevant training. Her infectious energy and interactive presentations greatly increased audience participation, significantly elevating the effectiveness of the training."

A graduate of the University of North Dakota, Mattson holds a Bachelor of Science degree in social work. In 2010, she earned her master's degree in social work and is a licensed-certified social worker. She also is a 2011 recipient of the Dakotah Cassandra Award, which recognizes professionals who have worked in communities around North Dakota to combat violence against women.

1 May 2015

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128695&source=GovDelivery>

Mattson has served as a traditional member of the North Dakota Air National Guard since 2005. She was named the 2012 Outstanding Noncommissioned Officer of the Year for the 119th Wing in Fargo, North Dakota.