



## DACOWITS: Articles of Interest 14 August 2015

### WELLNESS

#### [Marines slam Navy's new fitness rules, call for better body fat test](#)

*(8 Aug) Marine Corps Times, By James K. Sanborn*

The Navy is doing away with the much-maligned neck-and-torso tape test that many have criticized for years as wildly inaccurate, but Marines have something new to be hot about: relaxed physical fitness standards for sailors that allow higher body fat percentages.

#### [The Navy's Best Anti-Rape Weapon: Theater](#)

*(10 Aug) The Daily Beast, By Sarah Shourd*

Ever since the Navy implemented a new participatory theater program to show sailors when to turn in a peer or superior for sexual assault, reporting is higher than ever.

### ASSIGNMENTS

#### [For two women, way to Ranger School history lies through Florida swamps \(+video\)](#)

*(10 Aug) Christian Science Monitor, By Anna Mulrine*

Their performance to date is inspiring many Ranger School instructors, who admit that they had their doubts in the beginning, to come to what they see as an ineluctable conclusion: that their female compatriots can – and should – be here.

#### [Military Officers Don't Need College Degrees](#)

*(11 Aug) Wall Street Journal, By Benjamin Luxenberg*

According to the Defense Department, nearly 94% of enlisted personnel have a high-school diploma, while only 60% of Americans do. About 83% of officers have a bachelor's degree, in comparison with 30% of the general population.

#### [Will the Army open its elite Ranger Regiment to women? A controversial decision awaits.](#)

*(11 Aug) The Washington Post, By Dan Lamothe*

"History is in the balance: For the first time, two female students advanced to the third and final phase of the famously exhausting course in the swamps of Florida, and are within reach of graduating. If they pass, they will become the first Ranger-qualified women in the history of the U.S. military..."

### EXTRA

#### [The Mistreatment Of Female Veterans Is Not Just A Women's Issue](#)

*(11 Aug) Task & Purpose, By Jennifer Dolsen*

Nearly 280,000 women have served since Sept. 11, and almost 9% of those women are unemployed, facing homelessness at twice the rate of non-veteran women. The VA estimates younger female veterans kill themselves 12 times as often as non-veterans, rapidly approaching the male veteran suicide rate.

#### [Navy's 1st Female Commander Talks Career On 'The Bait'](#)

*(11 Aug) DoD News, Defense Media Activity, By Katie Lange*

Adversity is something many women in the military have dealt with over the years.

#### [Cost Of Treating Transgender Troops Called Negligible](#)

*(12 Aug) USA Today, By Tom Vanden Brook*

Treating the military's estimated 12,800 transgender troops with hormone therapy and surgery will cost about \$5.6 million a year, a tiny amount compared with overall spending on military health care, according to an article published Wednesday by the New England Journal of Medicine.

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#### **[Marines slam Navy's new fitness rules, call for better body fat test](#)**

*(8 Aug) Marine Corps Times, By James K. Sanborn*

The Navy is doing away with the much-maligned neck-and-torso tape test that many have criticized for years as wildly inaccurate, but Marines have something new to be hot about:

relaxed physical fitness standards for sailors that allow higher body fat percentages.

The Navy changes are part of an initiative pushed by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus to focus on holistic health, curb risky weight-loss methods and stem an exodus of talented sailors. It's a shift away from a punitive system that punishes sailors for failing fitness tests toward one that encourages year-round fitness, with a focus on helping those who are struggling in that regard.

At the request of Mabus, the Marine Corps is conducting its own review of fitness standards, although what Marine leaders might change, if anything, remains to be seen. Results are not expected until the end of August.

The Navy has already released a host of changes to their fitness regulations in response to critiques from sailors who crammed to make weight under the former system. Sailors are transitioning to a waist-only tape test that sets a maximum of 39 inches for men and 35.5 inches for women. That's similar to the test used by the Air Force.

Other Navy initiatives include healthier food choices that do away with fried foods in chow halls and add color-coded dishes, with green labels signifying the healthiest choices.

The Navy also plans to run a pilot program in the Pacific Fleet and Navy Reserve using wearable fitness trackers like Fitbits.

While many Marines say they'd like to do away with the Corps' current tape test, which measures the waist and neck to calculate body fat percentage, some say the Navy appears to be taking a step toward relaxing fitness standards. And Marines say they want no part of that.

"I don't think the standards should change at all, but the method of measurement should," said former Cpl. Joshua Naylor, who left the Marine Corps in 2014.

Naylor said he felt his career was in jeopardy whenever he faced the tape test even though he's a competitive body builder and Marine Corps Martial Arts Program instructor who earned top Physical and Combat Fitness Test scores.

The former motor vehicle operator, who now works as a physical trainer, is about 5-feet, 11-inches tall and weighs 198 pounds.

Naylor's experience with the tape test left him longing for a new system, but he said he opposes one that might allow Marines who aren't in shape to remain in uniform with no repercussions.

Instead, he'd like to see both sea services look into using skin calipers to measure body fat, which he says are far more accurate than the tape test.

"I was competing in body building competitions for three-fourths of my career," said Naylor, whose last assignment was at Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center near Bridgeport, California.

"I was 7 percent body fat at my highest and 4 percent at my lowest. I competed one time right before I weighed in and taped and it said I was at 19 percent. No way can you compete at 19 percent."

Calipers are a good solution for Marines and sailors, he said. The system is fast, more accurate, and measurements are easy to administer.

Another Marine, who is based in Kansas City, Missouri, and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Marines used to ask him for advice to cut weight since he is also a bodybuilder who notches top PFT scores. He said he often sacrifices performance to make weight.

"Once I start dropping weight, I lose a lot of strength to do a lot of stuff that I can [do] when I'm heavier," he said. "When it comes down to it, I love the Marine Corps more than being large, so I'll lose weight every time."

That runs counter to the very reasons for the Navy's recent revisions. As Vice Adm. Bill Moran, chief of naval personnel, put it July 28: "Fitness should truly be about being healthy and mission readiness — are you physically fit for times of combat and stress in the fleet?"

As for the Navy's idea to offer more healthy food choices, both Marines said they'd support it. But Marines should still be given the option to choose fatty or fried foods if they want them, Naylor said.

The idea of having Marines wear Fitbits or other devices to track their fitness levels was less popular.

"I think that is a completely ridiculous way to approach it from a financial standpoint," Naylor said.

He and the Kansas City Marine agreed that if service members want a Fitbit, they should purchase their own.

Both said they see that device as overkill if the goal is simply to maintain basic fitness.

*Staff writer Mark D. Faram contributed to this report.*

<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/story/military/2015/08/08/marines-slam-navys-new-fitness-rules-call-better-body-fat-test/31253095/>

## The Navy's Best Anti-Rape Weapon: Theater

(10 Aug) *The Daily Beast*, By Sarah Shourd

“Look around you,” says Marc Rich, standing in front of a room filled with over 1,000 Marines. “You’re all dressed almost exactly the same.”

Not an especially perceptive way to open a workshop—unless you’ve been contracted by the Navy to use *participatory theater* to educate sailors on consent and [rape prevention](#).

“If rape happens to people dressed in camo, to elderly people, and children, it has nothing to do with how you look or dress,” Rich continues. “It’s about is dangerous predators looking for easy targets.”

In 2014, Rich, the director of [interACT](#), an educational theater group based out of [Long Beach State University](#), was hired by the Navy to lead role-playing workshops that essentially try to *teach sailors not to rape*—or how to avoid being raped—while on active duty.

Two years later, Rich and his troupe have traveled to more than a dozen Navy bases around the world—from Camp Pendleton to 29 Palms to [Guantanamo Bay](#)—reaching an estimated 50,000 sailors and Marines.

“We go from ‘*I don’t want to be here*’ to standing ovations,” says Rich. “The response has been amazing.”

In 2013 a [Pentagon survey](#) shocked the world by showing an increase in [sexual assaults in the military](#) from 19,000 in 2010 to 26,000 in 2012.

These statistics sparked public outrage, leading Congress to demand the military take a more aggressive stance on rape prevention and prosecuting criminal behavior. The [Navy’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office](#) was told they needed to step up.

The military’s rape-prevention program has long been criticized. Posters with messages like “Wait ‘Til She’s Sober” seem to support rape culture more than challenge it.

One mandatory educational video depicts a terrified Marine running to a fellow soldier after barely escaping an attack: “Why didn’t you have a buddy with you?” he asks her, accusingly.

“We’ve gotten a bad rap,” says Jill Loftus, the Navy’s SAPRO director, “partially because we’ve been so proactive.”

“PowerPoint presentations don’t work,” says Loftus, who cites the advent of Rich’s participatory theater workshops as proof the Navy is responding to these critiques.

“The great thing about this is it puts sailors on the spot,” Loftus says. “It’s one thing to sit in a chair and talk about how you would have handled a situation differently. It’s another thing to have to get on stage and try it out.”

“We put young actors on stage that sailors can relate to, can laugh with,” Rich says. “Then, when the mood changes and one of those actors sexually assaults a woman, the men watching are caught off-guard. They want to know what this says about *them*.”

That’s why the program works for at least reporting more assaults, Loftus says. It gives sailors practical examples—not just abstract scenarios—for when they have to turn in a friend or a superior.

“It’s hard to go against your peers,” Loftus continues, “or stand up to someone senior to you—no one wants to break up the party.”

“As a concept theater is an amazing tool,” says Amy Herdy, a journalist who began exposing sexual assault in the [military in 2004](#), “but you can’t teach a rapist not to rape.”

Three years after the Pentagon’s game-changing 2012 report, millions of dollars have been funneled into rape prevention in the military, but a debate is still raging about whether these programs have made any actual difference.

“The problem is that most sexual assaults in the military are power plays,” says Herdy. “An officer abusing their rank or a victim incapacitated by drugs or alcohol. Participatory theater isn’t able to address situations where there are no bystanders and no opportunity for intervention.”

2013 showed a 50 percent increase in reporting of sexual assault in the military—numbers military officials often show as proof that their efforts are working. But only 484 of those cases actually went to trial, and a mere 376 resulted in convictions.

“Without prosecution prevention strategies can create a false sense of safety,” continues Herdy. “This may sound harsh but most survivors would much rather see their perpetrator prosecuted than watch a skit teaching empathy.”

“If the military really wanted to end this epidemic, they would court-martial the sex offenders,” says Herdy. “It really is as simple as that.”

**Sharon Mixon was 17** when she joined the National Guard. She was later accepted into the Air Force Academy and sent to Saudi Arabia during Desert Storm.

Then, in 1991, while preparing to return to the United States, Mixon was drugged and gang-raped by fellow servicemen.

“I didn’t want the military to get a black eye,” says Mixon. “So at first I didn’t push it with my command.”

In 1999, at the encouragement of her therapist, Mixon began to speak out about the crimes committed against her. It was then that her life completely fell apart. She was harassed, tormented and even went through a period of homelessness.

“I was a decorated soldier,” says Mixon. “I served 12½ years, but because of what happened to me I lost my career. I lost everything.”

Service members who report crimes of sexual assault are 12 times more likely to experience retaliation than they are to see an attacker convicted, says [Human Rights Watch](#). This includes shaming on social media, threatening text messages, and vandalism.

“For one thing, prosecution needs to be taken out of house,” says Mixon. “When a rape is reported it’s the commanding officer that decides whether it will go forward—and they’re almost never impartial.”

Since interACT started leading theater workshops for the Navy, Rich has seen many of the challenges of preventing sexual assault first-hand.

“We need to help potential victims look for the right warning signs before things escalate,” he says. “Predators are constantly looking to cross boundaries. This can be as simple as someone asking to buy you a drink and when you refuse he continues to insist.”

Rich says theater isn’t a silver bullet. The program has to work in tandem with other rape prevention techniques for systemic change to take hold.

## **For two women, way to Ranger School history lies through Florida swamps (+video)**

*(10 Aug) Christian Science Monitor, By Anna Mulrine*

The chest-deep waters of the Florida swamps stand as an unsettling endorsement for the worldview that the planet can be neatly divided into two camps: predators and prey.

Lurking beneath the Yellow River running through these parts are venomous cottonmouths and alligators roughly the length of a VW bus. That’s not to mention palm snakes with razor-sharp teeth, coral snakes and, for good measure, biting flies and ravenous quicksand.

Equally perilous, these environs breed the sort of lingering damp that can work nefarious wonders on feet and wear down hearts and minds with considerable haste.

It is here in this final phase of Army Ranger School that students must prove once-and-for-all that they have what it takes to lead dog-tired soldiers in the toughest of conditions, as they trudge along sandy boot-swallowing banks with as little food and sleep as most of them have ever been forced to endure, prepared to hunt or be hunted.

Jungle training is not for the faint of heart. Two-dozen Ranger students have died in the Florida swamps since the school’s inception in 1951. It is also telling that this is the sole post in the Army with certified, bonded reptile

“We’re one piece of the puzzle,” he says. “My hope is that the other pieces will be addressed as comprehensively as the prevention side.”

According to the [Military’s 2014 Annual Report](#), sexual assault has dropped 23 percent since 2012, yet nearly half of the assaults reported were not “unwanted sexual contact,” groping or verbal abuse. They were “penetrative sexual assaults,” a percentage significantly higher than previously believed.

“We’ve seen an increase of reporting of over 121 percent,” Loftus continues. “A tripling of male reporting in the last two years.”

“My job,” says Loftus, “is to create a safe environment for sailors and Marines to do their jobs. But we’ve become numb as a society to violence and sexual behavior that is inappropriate.”

Next week is the 24th anniversary of Mixon’s gang rape.

“I do feel hopeful about the increase in reporting. But I also feel angry that the military never seems to get to the heart of the problem,” she says.

“This theater—these workshops—are checking a box to say they’ve done something. What they need to do is hold enlisted men and women accountable.”

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/08/10/the-navy-s-best-anti-rape-weapon-theater.html>

handlers on hand – who qualify for the job only after they have volunteered to be bitten themselves by the nonvenomous snake of their choice.

The inherent hazards of the school have long been a point of pride here. What is new are the two female soldiers within the student ranks, part of the Pentagon’s current experiment involving whether women can – and should – inhabit this predacious world.

Their performance to date is inspiring many Ranger School instructors, who admit that they had their doubts in the beginning, to come to what they see as an ineluctable conclusion: that their female compatriots can – and should – be here.

“Seeing is believing on this one,” says Sgt. 1st Class Jeremy Lemma, an instructor and one half of the two-man team that won the Army’s annual Best Ranger competition in April. “They’re tough – mentally I’d put them up against the toughest men. And they’re doing it. That’s courage, strength,” he says. “It’s impressive.”

“Physically, they’re in the top of the class,” says Sgt. Brian Thomas, one of the camp’s certified reptile handlers, who

was so calm after he was accidentally bitten by a cottonmouth that he recorded a video cataloging details of his condition for emergency room workers awaiting his arrival with antivenom.

This opinion of the female students here is one he says he shares with Ranger instructor friends who have observed them in earlier phases of the school. “Honestly, we’ve all been thoroughly impressed.”

The standards, the instructors here stress in what has become their unremitting mantra, remain unchanged.

The women here are giving battle orders, air assaulting into “enemy” territory, shepherding their soldiers, and – like their fellow Ranger students – learning what it takes to motivate their troops to go to grim places they would rather not go.

Of the 19 women who started Ranger School in late April, a captain and a first lieutenant – both West Point graduates – remain. They have been highly-rated among their peers, for their mental and physical strength, and for their proven ability to do what Rangers are explicitly tasked to do: “Close with and destroy the enemy in direct-fire battle.”

Make it through one more week of swamp training, and they will become the first women ever to wear a Ranger tab.

While this tab tends to garner considerable respect among fellow soldiers – less than 3 percent of the Army wears one – women who have earned it will not, however, be permitted to serve in Ranger Regiment, the special operations branch of the force. This may change after January, when services must either open all combat jobs to women, or come up with a marked reason, based on scientific research, why they recommend against it. For this reason, this class is being closely watched by top Pentagon brass.

That makes it notable, but the students here will experience the same trials and tribulations as the Rangers who came before them – Rangers who recall this school as the place where they experienced some of the best, and the worst, moments of their lives.

Under the canopy of long-leaf pines and shrub oak, the students rehearse building one-rope bridges knotted so they will disassemble with a single decisive pull when Rangers must fade into the jungle canopy without enemy detection, leaving no trace of their equipment behind.

“Look at me, Ranger,” an instructor says to a student uncomfortably making his way across the river using said rope bridge, head precariously pulled back by the weight of his 80-pound pack caught in a current. As the student wills his head forward, the instructor responds encouragingly, “Now, there’s a cold, steely-eyed killer.”

There is a marked lack of the yelling that characterizes the earlier phrases of Ranger School, a point of pride among the instructors here. Ranger school is divided into three

“phases” – woodlands, mountains, and swamp, or, as the instructors here like to say, “crawl, walk, run.” Their time here in the swamps is the “run.”

“There’s hardly anyone getting smoked anymore,” by the time they arrive for jungle training, says Capt. Jackson Wittkamper, an instructor. “We expect them to basically know what they’re doing at this point.

The soldiers who remain should be able to lead ambushes, repel them, and keep track of their troops, all at the same time. Even as their missions are growing in complexity, however, the students are physically “pretty beat up” by the time they arrive to the swamps, says Lt. Col. Bart Hensler, commander of the 6th Ranger Training Battalion, which runs the Florida phase of the school.

At this point, he notes, “They are probably in the worst shape of their lives.” Students are averaging between zero and four hours of sleep a night, expected to perform at their highest level yet when their reserves are at their lowest. Among their most important jobs here is perfecting their “movement to contact,” as it’s known in military parlance.

“That’s hunting,” says Lt. Colonel Hensler. “You’re hunting the enemy.”

To aid in that process today, students have donned face camouflage in a wide array of motifs. “There’s always a little flair going into it, but some guys get ridiculous,” Captain Wittkamper says, shaking his head as he surveys the students. There is a right way to apply it – dark on the nose, cheekbones, and other high points of the face – and students who fail to adhere to these basic rules of thumb are marked down.

War paint on, it is even harder to tell the women apart as one female student makes her way to the shore, holding the line as her fellow Ranger students pile into a zodiac boat for a river crossing. She will serve as coxswain on this mission, rowing and giving orders to help her team navigate the boat through some tricky currents.

As the zodiacs arrive ashore, students are told to set their oars down “nicely and quietly” to avoid making noise. They pull security for their Ranger buddies in order to “remain tactical” as they take off their life vests, pointing their weapons in an outward-facing perimeter.

Instructors watch all this transpire holding wooden staffs ringed with glow-in-the-dark duct tape to gauge knee, waist, and chest-deep water. After a November 1995 swamp phase in which four students died after contracting hypothermia in the chest-deep waters, instructors also test air and water temperature. Too low, and students don’t get in the water. “It’s not a ‘wink, wink’ thing,” Hensler says.

Even with the safety measures and without the yelling, there are many ways the RI’s here can make student life unpleasant to discourage complacency. Some they deploy when platoons make major mistakes, like accidentally leaving a soldier – who’s been silently tapped out by instructors – behind and not realizing until miles later that

he's gone. "That's really unforgivable," says Capt. George Calhoun, an instructor here.

As punishment, instructors playing enemy forces might deliberately "kill" a platoon's largest soldier during an ambush, so it can no longer use him to carry the big guns. "You'd be surprised how much that can hurt" a unit's performance for a mission, Captain Calhoun says.

This is particularly true since, as the platoons have gotten smaller with student attrition throughout the course, the loads they're each carrying have gotten larger.

In outdoor classroom complete with bleachers, Ranger students are being instructed in the fine art of the ambush.

They are tired, and with each minute into the lecture, a student or two stands up, to avoid falling asleep. This serves two purposes: They will not be marked down, known here as receiving a "spot report," for unauthorized sleeping, which tends to be the single largest cause of spot reports at this point in the course. It will also ensure that their entire class is not asked to stand during the lecture as punishment for their own personal exhaustion.

"We're predators by nature – we notice movement," the instructor says, as he urges them not to become easy targets. "I need you to cloverleaf your movement – you're creeping, you're melting," he says. "You're doing a low-crawl. I know it sucks. I know you guys are tired. But the enemy knows the terrain – you don't."

Students have spent an afternoon preparing battle plans, which are expected to contain a considerable amount of detail. Just presenting them will take 40 minutes. They will outline how the enemy might use any avenues of approach, choose specific targets, and tell their troops where their machine gun emplacements should be – and how quickly they should be firing their weapons – while attacking the enemy.

They will also give their troops left and right limits of fire, as in "You will not shoot left of the water tower," Calhoun explains. This reduces the risk of fratricide, and also ensures that troops properly saturate the area with bullets. Should Rangers fail to do that, he adds, "The enemy won't have his head down."

As she prepares orders for her unit, one of the female students is standing, writing on the bleachers while other soldiers are sitting, measuring angles with protractors. It is the outdoor planning cell – what troops here call the "tower of power" – replete with whiteboards, markers, and tables. It is the very last time students will have such luxurious resources before they begin missions in the swamps.

Nearby, students are plucking bud-sized leaves from branches they have gathered, to use as markers on the sand table, a waist-high sandbox that soldiers will use to chart 3D troop movements and terrain. Ranger students have been known to carry colored golf tees and toy soldiers in their packs, to use as markers to enhance their sand tables,

since particularly good ones garner extra credit in the course.

As they work, nearly all of the students are chewing gum. Years ago, they used chewing tobacco, but it was banned for being addictive, instructors say. Now, the students here brag that they actually have it harder at Ranger School than the old-timers, since they do it without stimulants.

In their choice of chewing gum, students tend to eschew mint in favor of fruit and dessert flavors. Before they buy it, they check calorie counts--the higher, the better in a place where food is tightly controlled and gum is a precious commodity. Ranger students break it into bits to use as motivation for their soldiers when it's their turn to lead, or to offer consolation to their buddies in times of need.

"When I got a 'no go' it lifted me up," Calhoun fondly recalls of the gift of gum he received as a student from one of his sympathetic Ranger buddies.

"No go's" are failures to complete a mission or task, and they are ubiquitous here. The majority of those who have ultimately made it through Ranger School have failed at least one phase of the program – only 30 percent make it straight through the first time – and been forced to repeat it.

The women are no exception. The two who remain repeated, known here as "recycling," the first phase of Ranger School at Camp Darby three times before being given the green light. One more woman is currently in the process of repeating the Mountain phase.

Wittkamper says he recalls failing the Darby phase – when he accidentally left behind a fellow Ranger student under his command who fell asleep in the woods – as "an emotionally low period in my life." He then had to help load successful Ranger students on to the bus where they were moving on to the next phase of Ranger school. "You have to stay and they get to go," he says. "They're painful memories."

For this reason, the instructors here have particular empathy – and respect – for the female students who repeated Darby three times.

The swamp phase has its highlights, too. Staff Sgt. Coty Burns, an instructor, recalls with particular fondness the "chow birds" that have become a tradition here. According to Ranger school lore, a military helicopter flown by Army student-pilots crashed and a platoon of Ranger students came to their aid. As a way of showing their thanks, the pilots carry coolers filled with illicit fast food and sugary drinks when they're transporting the always-famished Ranger students here.

Staff Sergeant Burns recalls his chow bird experience as one of the best days of his life.

"If there's one extra sandwich, we would each take a bite and pass it around, until it's gone." He and his fellow

students stuffed themselves with as much food as they could before the bird landed, wiping sandwich sauce off each others' faces so their instructors would be none-the-wiser.

It is lifelong gratitude for these small acts of kindness in the face of great trial and deprivation that help forge the intense bonds among Rangers.

It was a similar gesture of kindness, too, that helped to convince Timothy Spayd, a former active duty sergeant who graduated from Ranger School in 1980, that maybe women do belong here after all.

Initially opposed to women becoming Rangers, Mr. Spayd was convinced that they would "water down the tab." Then he ran a hardcore 10-mile obstacle race with some female Army soldiers serving as observer-advisors for the Ranger School. Spayd, who has been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, was struggling physically.

### **Military Officers Don't Need College Degrees**

*(11 Aug) Wall Street Journal, By Benjamin Luxenberg*

Military recruiters and top brass like to repeat the refrain that the average member of the armed forces is better educated than the average American. It's true. According to the Defense Department, nearly 94% of enlisted personnel have a high-school diploma, while only 60% of Americans do. About 83% of officers have a bachelor's degree, in comparison with 30% of the general population.

These statistics, though, involve a bit of self-selection: Most officers have a bachelor's degree because becoming an officer generally requires one, though this prerequisite appears increasingly anachronistic.

For one thing, the requirement of a college degree is simply a box for officer candidates to check. It doesn't matter to the armed forces where you went to school, what you studied, or how well you did – short of a minimal GPA level of about 2.5 out of 4.0.

Scholarships provided by the Reserve Officer Training Corps and military academies such as West Point and Annapolis may have more stringent criteria, but in general anyone with a four-year degree who can pass the basic background checks and physical requirements of the military may apply for Officer Candidate School.

Instead of mandating that officers have college degrees, the military should expand alternative avenues to officership. A few exceptions to the degree mandate already exist: Warrant officers or limited-duty officers – typically highly trained specialists in technical fields like avionics or equipment maintenance – have worked their way to officership. Their service is akin to apprenticeship, where useful knowledge is gained through practical experience, not textbook theory. Why not offer the same deal to other recruits?

Historically, a college degree signaled superior intelligence, critical reasoning and writing skills, and dedication. A degree holder could be expected to form logical, coherent arguments and effectively communicate ideas. But a college degree in

"They stayed with me," he says, recalling that there was one female soldier on each side of him as they helped him along. "That really touched me," he adds, noting that they embraced "the whole 'no-man-left-behind' thing."

Through this experience, he became open to the possibility of female Rangers, he says. As a frequent visitor to the school, he has watched the two female Ranger students come through the Florida swamps, and what he has seen has caused him reconsider his initial opposition to their presence.

"They've impressed me," he says. "They're really manning up."

<http://m.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2015/0810/For-two-women-way-to-Ranger-School-history-lies-through-Florida-swamps-video>

2015 no longer signals – let alone guarantees – much of anything.

According to a 2014 Lumina-Gallup poll, "just 11% of business leaders strongly agree that higher education institutions in this country are graduating students with the skills and competencies that their business needs, and 17% strongly disagree." In a Chronicle for Higher Education survey published in March 2013, employers said that applicants with degrees lacked decision-making and problem-solving abilities, written and oral communication skills, adaptability, and even the capacity to manage multiple priorities.

Even more than in civilian environments, those are skills needed for war. If a college degree no longer confers them, then why should the armed forces require it at all? Beyond the usual arguments about the prohibitive cost for many high-school graduates unable to take on debt, a college degree isn't needed to be successful. Peter Thiel, an accomplished tech businessman, offers a fellowship of \$100,000 for aspiring entrepreneurs who want to skip college and build businesses instead. Companies started as a result now employ 200 people and have generated \$200 million in economic activity, according to the fellowship.

Some may argue that obtaining a bachelor's degree shows responsibility or maturity. Yet how much responsibility does a typical single, childless 22-year-old college senior have? Has he demonstrated greater responsibility than a 22-year-old corporal at the end of his first tour of duty? Has he even demonstrated greater responsibility than a 19-year-old private first class after six months of service?

The only mark of distinction that a college degree still indicates, perhaps, is dedication. It usually requires four or more years to achieve, and following through to the end suggests long-term commitment to a goal. Yet clearly, college and putting off the working world is not for everyone. In 2013, the six-year graduation rate in the U.S. was only 59%, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Commitment is certainly important to success in the military, but the armed forces already have a way to measure and test it: a four-year enlistment. If aspiring officers must demonstrate commitment and responsibility, completing a four-year enlistment should suffice. If they must prove raw intellectual aptitude, high scores on the military's own General Classification Test should be enough. If they must have general knowledge and the ability to think and write coherently, an exam akin to the State Department's Foreign Service Officer Test would work.

A combination of these could easily form a new path to an officer's commission – and providing an alternative to the bachelor's degree would produce an even more qualified officer corps.

*Mr. Luxenberg served as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps from 2009-13. He is now pursuing an M.B.A. and master's in public policy at Harvard.*

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/military-officers-dont-need-college-degrees-1439249756>

## **Will the Army open its elite Ranger Regiment to women? A controversial decision awaits.**

*(11 Aug) The Washington Post, By Dan Lamothe*

Air National Guard C-130s roared over the lush, shaggy grass of the Elizabeth Drop Zone here last week, a near-steady hum overhead. Army Ranger students were a few hours into a mission known as Operation Pegasus, and needed to parachute in from a height of about 1,100 feet.

Aircrews made several passes without letting any students out due to breezy conditions deemed unsafe to jump. But eventually, the students' green chutes dotted the early-evening Thursday sky. They floated down into the open fields of Eglin with 70 pounds of equipment, food and water before disappearing into thick brush, beginning a 10-day exercise that ends this Saturday and is the last major field event in the Army's famously difficult Ranger School.

History is in the balance: For the first time, two female students advanced to the third and final phase of the famously exhausting course in the swamps of Florida, and are within reach of graduating. If they pass, they will become the first Ranger-qualified women in the history of the U.S. military and celebrated at an Aug. 21 graduation ceremony at Fort Benning, Ga., that is expected to draw not only family and friends, but hundreds of other well-wishers and media from across the country.

If they graduate, the Army must confront a separate, but related decision: Whether to allow women to try out for the elite 75th Ranger Regiment. The highly trained Special Operations unit carries out raids and other difficult missions and includes about 3,600 soldiers, according to [a recent Government Accountability Office report](#). It remains completely closed to women, even though [some of the jobs in it](#), ranging from parachute rigger to intelligence analyst, are open in other parts of the Army.

The women were allowed into Ranger School this year as part of the military's ongoing assessment of how to integrate women into combat roles. In 2013, Pentagon leaders decided to rescind the long-held policy banning women from serving in combat-arms jobs like infantryman. Thus far, the Army has said that any woman who graduates will be allowed to wear the prestigious Ranger Tab, but won't be allowed to serve in the Ranger Regiment. The decoration is highly respected across the military, and considered a necessity to advance in many Army careers.

Other elite forces, including the Navy SEALs and Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, also are grappling with whether they will incorporate more women in the future, and how. If the services want to keep any position

closed, they must seek an exception to the new policy from the Pentagon in coming months.

Critics of integrating the military's most elite units with women have so far been able to say that no woman has demonstrated she can keep up with men by passing Ranger School, a physical and mental crucible that is considered one of the military's most difficult courses and dates back to the 1950s. It includes phases at Fort Benning, on the mountains of northern Georgia and in the coastal Florida Panhandle swamps in and around Eglin. A woman completing the course would weaken the argument against gender integration in the military.

The Army allowed a handful of journalists to observe three days of Ranger School at Eglin on the Florida Panhandle last week, an effort to demystify how it is evaluating soldiers and underscore that the female students there are being treated no differently than the men. The decision has prompted criticism from some graduates of the course, but Col. David Fivecoat, commander of the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade that oversees the school, said doing so showed transparency. Fivecoat said he is aware of the scrutiny Ranger School faces, but thinks opening it to women is reasonable considering that women regularly served alongside men who were in combat units over the last decade. He recalled leading an infantry battalion with the 101st Airborne Division of Fort Campbell, Ky., in Afghanistan in 2010 and 2011, and sending at least two female soldiers to virtually all of his bases so that they were available to search women and children.

"I wanted that capability in country, and this to me seems like a logical step," he said. "Why wouldn't you want that woman that you're going to put out there to provide that capability to be Ranger-trained?"

About 4,000 students attempt Ranger School each year, with about 1,600 — 40 percent — eventually graduating. They include soldiers who will serve in the Ranger Regiment, but also many others who will serve in conventional infantry units, as well as military policemen, helicopter pilots and some members from the other U.S. armed services.

A soldier who is recruited for the Ranger Regiment typically takes the eight-week Ranger Assessment and Selection Program course shortly after entering the Army, but must also wait for a chance to go to Ranger School and graduate it. If they do not, they are eventually swapped to another unit, said Lt. Col. Bart Hensler, commander of the 6th Recruit Training Battalion that trains Ranger students at Eglin.

Twenty women qualified for the Ranger School class that began in April, joining 380 men. Ninety-five men already



have graduated, including 37 who completed each of the three phases on the first try. More than half of all the students from the April class — 257 men and 17 women — already have been dropped.

Depending on his or her performance, a Ranger student can be “recycled” and sent back to the beginning of a phase multiple times. The three remaining women left in the course now were recycled twice during the first “Darby Phase” that takes place at Fort Benning, and then granted a “Day 1 recycle” that allows them to try again, but only if they started over at the beginning with a difficult four-day physical fitness again, too. They did so and passed. All are graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., but the Army declines to identify them, citing their right to privacy.

Once in the Mountain Phase, two of the three women advanced on the first try. But they still face another challenge in addition to the requirements of Florida: exhaustion. By the next Ranger School graduation ceremony, they and 28 men who started Ranger School alongside them will have endured through more than 120 days of training. That’s considered a significant hardship: If a student passes each phase on the first try, the course is 61 days long, or half as long as the women and a few dozen of their peers now have been in training.

The final field exercise at Eglin last week began with Operation Pegasus, a combined operation in which students who are airborne-qualified jumped from C-130s, and those who are not climbed aboard 11 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters as part of a simulated air assault on the drop zone. One of the two women and 81 of the 165 men jumped from the C-130s.

Surprises can still occur that prevent a student from graduating. During the parachuting, for example, the rucksacks for two students disconnected from them and screamed to the ground from more than 300 feet high. A deep thump echoed across the drop zone as the second one crashed. Unless the equipment was deemed faulty, the student responsible will be held back at Ranger School.

“As soon as it dropped, he pretty much knew his fate,” said Maj. Eric Nylander, the executive officer of the battalion training Ranger students at Eglin.

The students will live and train outdoors for the remainder of the 10-day field exercise. Many of them are likely nursing injuries and other physical problems, but must press on anyway to graduate. Occasionally, some simply give up, said Capt. George Calhoun, a Ranger instructor who previously led an infantry platoon in Afghanistan. He recalled one student who simply refused to leave the swamp one day after reaching a breaking point.

“Some of them say, ‘I don’t want to do this anymore.’ And some just stop. They quit by their action,” Calhoun said. After the students parachuted into Eglin last week, they fanned out into the woods near the drop zone. Their mission included searching for a variety of locations on the base containing materials they might search for in an overseas mission, including a mortar launcher and chemicals used in improvised explosive devices.

Fivecoat said he wants to do whatever is possible to make sure that Ranger School is neither any harder nor any easier for the female students. After the initial phase with women was held at Fort Benning, two of the instructors based there visited others in northern Georgia and in Florida for a meeting without senior Ranger School leaders to discuss what worked and what needed improvement. Fivecoat said he wanted them to speak candidly.

“I’m trying to make sure they have every opportunity to succeed or fail,” Fivecoat said of the female students. “I’m not naive enough to tell you that there aren’t folks out here that aren’t real big fans of it, but that’s our leadership issue that we dealt with.”

The graduation ceremony, he acknowledged, will be closely watched if women complete the course.

“Like any military organization, we’re doing prudent planning to prepare for that eventuality,” he said. “We think it’s going to be a big deal, and we think there will be a lot of media.” He later added: “It’s going to be a long week.”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/08/11/will-the-army-open-its-elite-ranger-regiment-to-women-a-controversial-decision-awaits/>

## **The Mistreatment Of Female Veterans Is Not Just A Women’s Issue**

*(11 Aug) Task & Purpose, By Jennifer Dolsen*

In 1966, at 26 years old, decorated nurse and Vietnam veteran Sarah Blum joined the U.S. Army, drawn to serve by the daily news reports on the radio.

The Atlantic City, New Jersey, native joined as an operating room nurse and was eventually assigned to the 12th Evacuation Hospital in Củ Chi, a district outside Ho Chi Minh City — the location of several military campaigns, and most notably, the base of operations for the Viet Cong’s violent Tét Offensive in 1968.

“My year in Vietnam changed everything,” said Blum, now a nurse psychotherapist treating post-traumatic stress and author of the book, “[Women Under Fire: Abuse in the Military](#),” a collection of women veterans’ accounts ranging from World War II to present day. “I had lived through war and its effects in a life-threatening situation for a full year and was used to high intensity.”

“My own transition was very difficult,” she told Task & Purpose. “I was five months pregnant and a qualified nurse from a high leadership position in the military, but could not get a job at home. When I got out ... I was completely out of sync with society.”

Not much has changed for veterans today.

While both male and female veterans face similar transition issues or trauma experienced during combat, as well as a [culture of sexual violence](#) — 5% active-duty women and 1% of men reported being the victim of sexual assault in the active-duty military last year — the long-term effects and homecoming for women is significantly different.

Nearly 280,000 women have served since Sept. 11, and [almost 9% of those women are unemployed](#), facing homelessness at twice the rate of non-veteran women. The VA estimates

younger female veterans kill themselves 12 times as often as non-veterans, rapidly approaching the male veteran suicide rate.

A [survey published](#) last year by Disabled American Veterans offered some insight into why these numbers are so high, despite the major gender shift of post-9/11 veterans engaged in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Female veterans often have higher rates of mental health issues due to trauma-related experiences, more child care responsibilities, and the added stressors that come with a lack of sustainable employment.

Female veterans who develop post-traumatic stress may also face [higher rates of heart disease](#), suggesting that the effects of a traumatic event go far beyond mental health.

Many of these challenges are exacerbated by civilian populations that don't understand the problems female veterans face specifically, or the more generally, fail to understand women's increasing presence in the military.

"It's a regular thing to be told I'm too pretty to have served in the military, let alone war," said a respondent in a [recent survey](#) released by nonprofit veterans organization The Mission Continues. The survey addresses the common perception and misconception of females in the military.

In my own experience, I regularly receive misguided comments about my military service and veteran status: mystified confusion, filled with highly subjective, backhanded compliments on why my physical appearance discredits me as a service member, especially if I deployed to a warzone.

Disbelief that a woman may be a veteran comes in all sorts of unfortunate forms.

Just this year, a female Air Force veteran was [accused of being a civilian](#) who wrongly parked in a "veterans only" spot at a North Carolina grocery store. A supposed wounded vet signed the note.

"Unfortunately, many communities still do not understand that 15% of our military are women and are not conscious of the women veterans in their midst," said Blum.

Women have served our country since its beginning. Women were never subjected to the draft; they have always volunteered during wartime. Nearly 10 years ago, Army veteran and author Kayla Williams addressed the issues surrounding the public's perception of female veterans in her book, "[Love My Rifle More than You](#)." A decade later, servicewomen have excelled in male-dominated career fields, are regularly awarded medals for bravery, and have proven themselves competent in combat zones where they faced the same risks as their male counterparts.

So, how is it still so unbelievable and unexpected among many communities at the possibility of a woman being a veteran?

Journalist Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, who [recently wrote a book](#) about a team of servicewomen recruited by special operations to serve on combat missions in Afghanistan, says while a record number of women have been going to war since

the Sept. 11 attacks, their war stories have yet to catch up with pop culture.

"Pop culture plays a huge part for any kind of change and America listening to the different story," she told Task & Purpose.

Lemmon's [recent article in The Atlantic](#) explores this cultural gap when it comes to women in uniform as reflected in television, movies, and literature. The culture of sexual violence in the military trumps the story of the women serving their country bravely and honorably. As the military grapples with the very real epidemic of sexual violence and harassment in its ranks, women veterans' active presence down range is rarely seen in the handful of male-dominated, non-fiction war stories from the Iraq and Afghan wars.

"The reality of what it's like to be a deployed soldier and on the battlefield has not been reflected in the way we see veterans," said Lemmon. "Between [veterans] reality and our perception; the reality of women in the military is even further divorced from the American public."

For a country where less than 1% have served in the military, this limited view has consequences in how a society relates and understands its military.

"Whether you're male or female transitioning out of the military is challenging," Lemmon added. "But from what I've seen, it's just that much harder when you're female. People don't think you've seen combat and that couldn't be further from the truth in some cases."

An equally sad reality is the dismissive mentality and invisibility women experience at VA centers. On a regular basis, I'm mistaken for a spouse of a male veteran, completely overlooked by healthcare staff, or cut in line by male patients oblivious to my presence.

"I have heard many women complain that when they are waiting to be served in line at the VA, the person taking down information will literally look past the woman in line to the men, as though, in their mind, only men are veterans," said Blum.

"Imagine being a woman who served in the military and needing to see a doctor for a gynecological condition and having to tell that to a man with several men behind listening. Imagine being a woman who was sexually assaulted in the military, feeling vulnerable as she stands in a line full of men, some of whom could be rapists." Blum added.

Possibly more insulting and humiliating is the [higher burden of proof](#) the Veterans Benefits Administration imposes on service members in order to attach military sexual trauma to a claim for disability benefits. According to the administration's rules, military sexual trauma is not a diagnosis, but rather an "experience" in which post-traumatic stress is the result of military sexual trauma.

For service members managing the effects of unwarranted and unwanted sexual violence and trauma, [recent research by the Service Women's Action Network](#) shows only 32% of

military sexual trauma-related post-traumatic stress claims are approved compared to 54% of other post-traumatic stress claims.

Today's female veterans also experience challenges in reclaiming a sense of self after years spent in uniform.

"My transition was similar to any combat veteran's. I initially found myself in an angry place, trying to integrate myself into a world of non-veterans who had never served in a war." veteran Amber Robinson told Task & Purpose.

"I was angry to hear people complain about mundane things in their lives. Meanwhile, I was comparing everything in my life to war."

Robinson, a resident of San Diego and a former Army staff sergeant with multiple deployments to Afghanistan, said on top of the struggles to reintegrate, she had to learn to be a woman again after years in male-dominated units.

"I had depended on being 'tough' and aggressive in the service to get respect. Women in the service don't realize they essentially learn to operate like a man," said Robinson, who now is vice president and communications director for San Diego-based nonprofit [American History Theater](#), which raises awareness of veterans issues, specifically issues affecting female vets.

While being tough and aggressive isn't exclusive to one gender, they are a few of the characteristics necessary for anyone's success in the military. Empowerment and support from strong women of all ranks was crucial to my success as a service member. It's equally crucial to success outside the military.

Relating to other women and men who never served, or have little to no concept of the military, is challenging and often isolating. Even the most supportive and military-minded friends and family can be difficult to connect with. Personally, I was unable to effectively communicate my needs. I didn't acknowledge and confront any of my combat-related and non-combat-related trauma. As a result I didn't understand why I wasn't functioning at my best.

Many veterans experience this hardship. For women, accessing female-specific health care, quality employment, and trauma-informed care come with some challenges when women struggle to even be seen as veterans in communities and aren't functioning as the competent, highly skilled, and empowered teammates they served as.

"I think women veterans need a visible presence in their communities and a connection to the closest military base and

create a liaison between them," said Blum. "Any woman transitioning out of the military has a support group ready and waiting. That group of women veterans needs to have some kind of community presentation regularly about who they are and the needs of women veterans in the community."

Depending on where you live and how close you are to a military base, some local outreach programs are meeting the needs of female veterans. Most outreach programs are at the national level, but often partner with local groups to serve veterans in transition.

Service Women's Action Network [aims to reform](#) health care and benefits for women and their families, offering legal services and domestic and sexual violence support. Free, confidential mental health counseling can also be found [here](#).

The nonprofit [American Women Veterans](#) advocates for awareness of the challenges women face when transitioning from the military offering childcare and housing resources, while [Grace After Fire](#) nationally assists with accessing education benefits and military peer networking support.

Volunteers of America offers supportive services and reintegration programs for homeless veterans, with [local resources available](#).

Employment opportunities for women can also be found at [Hirepurpose](#), which connects veterans with military-friendly employers and partners.

While there are many [more organizations](#) available to assist female veterans, the biggest challenge may be taking the first step to reach out for help and support. Like many veterans, the pride felt as a service member is the same pride that may keep them from admitting and recognizing support is needed.

Every veteran transitions on their own terms with varying needs for themselves and their families. So to approach veteran transition issues with one-size-fits-all solutions ignores the diversity of the military community and the unique challenges they face during and after their service.

Women are a valuable part of that diversity that add positive growth and support, and bridge a deeper understanding of our military within the communities they return.

Advocating for female veterans to ensure they are fully recognized and cared for is not just a women's issue, it's everyone's issue.

[http://taskandpurpose.com/mistreatment-female-veterans-not-just-womens-issue/?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_content=tp-facebook&utm\\_campaign=culture](http://taskandpurpose.com/mistreatment-female-veterans-not-just-womens-issue/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_content=tp-facebook&utm_campaign=culture)

## **Navy's 1st Female Commander Talks Career On 'The Bait'**

*(11 Aug) DoD News, Defense Media Activity, By Katie Lange*  
Adversity is something many women in the military have dealt with over the years. It's also something that deep sea fishing boat captains face.

Why the odd analogy, you ask? Well, because those two worlds are colliding tonight on an episode of the Discovery Channel show "The Bait." It's a preshow to the popular series

“Deadliest Catch,” which follows several fishing vessels in the Bering Sea.

In a segment called “Captain to Captain,” retired Navy Cmdr. Darlene Iskra, the first female commanding officer of a U.S. Navy ship, sat down for a chat with some of the captains of the boats featured in the popular show.

Ahead of that episode, Iskra talked with me about some of the adversity she faced in her career as a commander, a diver and a surface warfare officer.

Iskra was a lieutenant commander in 1990 when she was handed the reins of the salvage ship USS Opportune, making her the first woman to become commander of any U.S. Navy ship. About a decade before that, she was also one of the first female line officers to graduate from the Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center.

But the path to success wasn’t easy, she said. Establishing credibility was hard because, until the 1980s, very few jobs were available for women in the Navy.

“All the men had ever seen women do in the past was either be nurses or administrative personnel. Now, suddenly, you had women who were going to sea, going into diving, women who were flying airplanes,” Iskra said.

Those women had to work hard to build trust and prove themselves.

“Unfortunately, for a woman, it just seemed like every time you moved to a new command, you had to do it again and again and again,” she continued. “That was the hard part.”

Early in her career, women could only go on certain types of ships, which was a problem for women like her who had careers that required ship time. It wasn’t until the mid-1980s that the Navy began building a new class of dive and salvage ships that were gender-neutral.

During her time on the Opportune, Iskra’s crew patrolled the Suez Canal during Operation Desert Storm, making sure it remained open for commerce. She made it clear that it was an opportunity that wasn’t just handed to her.

“I worked just as hard as everybody else did – in fact, harder – to get to that position,” she said.

Iskra attributed getting through the tough times in her career to two simple things: Friends and physical training (as she put it, she was in “fantastic shape” then).

Her advice to other military women striving for success?

Don’t take things personally when they go wrong, and don’t let anyone take advantage of you.

“You need to hold them accountable. Challenge them,” she said. “You have to let them know you’re not going to accept that kind of treatment.”

Iskra retired as commander in 2000 after 21 years of service.

She earned her doctorate in sociology in 2007 and spent several years teaching leadership education and development at the University of Maryland. She now lives in Washington State and is semi-retired, teaching online courses part-time for the Columbia College of Missouri and doing volunteer work. Oh yeah – and making cameos on “The Bait.”

“The thing I was a little surprised about was how casual it was. I really didn’t know what to expect,” she said, admitting that she’d never watched the show. “But the guys were very nice, very respectful.”

So, is she nervous for her episode to air?

“It’s too late to be nervous!” she joked. “I just looked at it as a new experience – something fun. I had a blast.”

Iskra’s episode of “The Bait” airs at 8 p.m. Tuesday on The Discovery Channel.

<http://www.dodlive.mil/index.php/2015/08/navys-1st-female-commander-talks-career-on-the-bait/>

## **Cost Of Treating Transgender Troops Called Negligible**

*(12 Aug) USA Today, By Tom Vanden Brook*

Treating the military’s estimated 12,800 transgender troops with hormone therapy and surgery will cost about \$5.6 million a year, a tiny amount compared with overall spending on military health care, according to an article published Wednesday by the New England Journal of Medicine.

The cost of medical care will be a key factor as the Pentagon develops a plan to integrate transgender troops, which it announced last month. Defense Secretary Ash Carter gave his staff six months to work out details to allow them to serve openly, which current policy does not allow.

The article, “Caring for Our Transgender Troops – The Negligible Cost of Transition-Related Care,” was written by Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center, which researches issues regarding sexual orientation issues in the military.

The military spends nearly \$48 billion on health care, Belkin writes. He estimated 188 troops will require gender transition-related care each year at a cost of \$5.6 million, or \$438 per transgender service member per year.

The relatively cheap treatment should allay concerns about the cost of rescinding the ban, Belkin said in an interview.

“I was particularly surprised at the number in the context of what the military overall spends on health care,” Belkin said. Four years ago, the Pentagon eliminated Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, which prohibited gay and lesbian troops from serving openly and is borrowing similar tactics to dismantle the ban on transgender troops. For instance, the Pentagon recently made

it more difficult to discharge transgender troops by requiring a high-ranking civilian to make the decision. That tactic effectively acted as a moratorium on dismissals of gay and lesbian troops.

Some transgender troops are serving openly with the knowledge of their commanders and some are receiving treatment, Belkin said.

Pete Sepp, president of the National Taxpayers Union, a non-partisan government spending watchdog, said the Pentagon should consider cost-cutting elsewhere if it takes on the responsibility of treating transgender troops.

“If transition-related care is deemed a necessity, then preserving other vital health services for the troops should mean finding lower-priority items to cut so service people and taxpayers are protected,” Sepp said. The Pentagon should also consider tapping non-profit groups for funding for transition care.

In June, the American Medical Association weighed in on transgender troops, adopting a policy that states there are no valid medical reasons to prevent them from serving and affirming that they should receive medical care.

Belkin relied on data from employers whose insurance plans offered care to transgender workers, including hormone treatment and surgery. It cost just shy of \$30,000 for University of California employees and their dependents transition-related care over 6.5 years.

He also noted that the Australian military treats its transgender troops. Over 30 months, 13 of its 58,000 troops received gender transition therapy. Australia is one of 18 countries that allow transgender troops to serve openly, according to the Palm Center.

Moreover, the U.S. government already pays for some transgender therapies. Medicare, federal health care for those

65 and older, provides transgender therapy, including surgery. The Veterans Affairs Department also treats veterans with gender dysphoria, a conflict between a person's sex at birth and the gender he or she identifies with.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/08/12/transgender-troops-treatment/31537791/>