DACOWITS: Articles of Interest
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WELLNESS

Serving in Silence: News4 Obtains the First Numbers on Military Punishment for Sex Assaults
(29 Jun) News4, By Trisha Thompson
It's information the military didn't want you, or even Congress, to have. But for the first time, the News4 I-Team reveals what is really happening to those accused of raping or sexually assaulting their fellow service members -- prompting one powerful member of Congress to now say the data shows the National Guard isn't doing enough to protect those serving in silence.

Submariner sentenced to 10 months for videos of female officers
(29 Jun) Navy Times
Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan Secrest is the sixth sailor tried in the case, and the fifth to be found guilty.

Postpartum depression linked to later mental health disorders
(30 Jun) Military Times, By Patricia Kime
To understand the prevalence of postpartum depression in active-duty women, military researchers reviewed the medical records of all troops who gave birth between 1998 and 2013.

PTSD may increase heart attack, stroke risk in women
(30 Jun) CNN Special Report, By Carina Storrs
New research reveals that the effects of PTSD can go beyond the mind -- and put women's hearts and brains at risk.

DoD To Study Link Between Sex Assault Claims, Career Retaliation
(30 Jun) Air Force Times, By Stephen Losey
The Defense Department's Office of Inspector General plans to look into whether service members were improperly forced out of the military due to mental health issues after reporting their sexual assaults.

ASSIGNMENTS

General Officer Assignments. The chief of staff, Army announced the following assignments:

- Maj. Gen. Megan P. Tatu, U.S. Army Reserve, commander, Troop Program Unit, 79th U.S. Army Reserve Sustainment Support Command, Los Alamitos, California, to chief of staff, Individual Mobilization Augmentee, U.S. Army Reserve Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.
- Brig. Gen. Mary-Kate Leahy, U.S. Army Reserve, deputy commanding general, Troop Program Unit, 81st Regional Support Command, Fort Jackson, South Carolina, to director, J-2, U.S. Southern Command, Doral, Florida.

Female Ranger students advance to Darby Phase for 3rd try
(26 Jun) Army Times, By Michelle Tan
After four physically punishing days, the three women in the Army's gender-integrated assessment of Ranger School are moving on to the Darby Phase, officials said Friday.

Gender neutral standards: Opening combat jobs to women
(29 Jun) Air Force Times, By Stephen Losey
A key step toward possibly opening the Air Force's last male-only combat jobs to women concluded June 19.

Women not clamoring to enter combat arms fields
(30 Jun) USA Today, By Jim Michaels
"Overall we find that generally the propensity is low," Gen. David Perkins, commander of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, said at a meeting of defense writers Tuesday. "There aren't a lot that want to do it."

Neller Tapped As Next Commandant Of The Marine Corps
(1 Jul) Marine Corps Times, by Hope Hodge Seck and Aaron Mehta
If [Lt. Gen. Robert] Neller is confirmed by the Senate and takes the helm of the Marine Corps in late summer or early fall, he could be responsible for making high-profile decisions tied to opening ground combat fields to women.

EXTRA

Female Uniform Initiatives – 8 Things to Know
(25 Jun) Navy Live, By the Uniform Matters Office
Several significant female uniform initiatives have been in the press and discussed at all hands calls and events across the Fleet.

Military kids' education outside the gates under study
(26 Jun) Military Times, By Karen Jowers
Defense officials have convened a working group to focus on issues related to military children's education in schools outside the gates, an Army official said.

Embraced Yet Forbidden, Staff Sergeant Comes Out As Transgender
(27 Jun) NPR News
By serving in the Army, Staff Sgt. Patricia King is breaking the rules.

Transgender soldier back on the front lines
(30 Jun) Stars and Stripes, By William Cole
Sgt. Shane Ortega is a three-time combat veteran with bulging biceps who can dead-lift 480 pounds and crank out dozens of pullups. But in the eyes of the Army -- at least for right now -- he is officially a "she" who has to use women's bathrooms on base and sometimes wear an ill-fitting and embarrassing female dress uniform with a blouse.

Prison Born
(July/August Issue) The Atlantic, By Sarah Yager
Over the past four decades, as the inmate population in the United States has grown into the largest in the world, the number of children with a parent in custody has risen to nearly 3 million. For corrections officials and policy makers, those relationships can fade into the background. But not when a child is born on the inside.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Women in Combat -- Lessons Learned from Cultural Support Teams:
A discussion with former members of the U.S. Department of Defense's cultural support teams (CSTs). The CSTs consisted of small teams of U.S. servicewomen who were specially selected, trained, and deployed in support of special operations missions in Afghanistan. The women served with Ranger teams during direct action missions and on Special Forces teams during village stability operations. The event will be held at the GWU Elliott School (Rm. B12) at 1957 E. Street NW, on July 13th, from 3:30pm-5:00pm. The event is free; however, you must RVSP by clicking the above link in the header.

Author Series Event -- *Ashley's War*:
In 2010, the US Army Special Operations Command created Cultural Support Teams, a pilot program to put women on the battlefield alongside special operations teams in Afghanistan. The idea was that women could have access and build relationships—woman to woman—in ways that male soldiers could not. In the New York Times bestseller Ashley's War, Gayle Tzemach Lemmon draws on her first-hand reporting to tell the story of First Lieutenant Ashley White and her unit, CST–2. On Tuesday, 21 July, the Women's Foreign Policy Group will be hosting a luncheon and program. The program will be followed by a book signing with the author. Space is limited and advance registration is required. Visit https://wfpg.memberclicks.net/upcoming-events for more information.

Serving in Silence: News4 Obtains the First Numbers on Military Punishment for Sex Assaults

(29 Jun) News4, By Trisha Thompson

It's information the military didn't want you, or even Congress, to have. But for the first time, the News4 I-Team reveals what is really happening to those accused of raping or sexually assaulting their fellow service members -- prompting one powerful member of Congress to now say the data shows the National Guard isn't doing enough to protect those serving in silence.

Kimberly Davis said it started like any other night when she and about 20 others in her National Guard unit went out to the bar. "It wasn't unusual for all of us to be out drinking," she said. "It wasn't unusual for us to challenge each other to keep doing shots."

But she became so intoxicated, Davis said, her supervisor drove her home. To his home.

She remembers his face coming to close to hers as they approached his front door. "I remember kind of laughing and saying, 'Get off of me.' Like, 'What are you doing?' In my head, I was thinking, 'Is he crazy? Get off me dude, you know this isn't happening. Hate to break it to you.' And then, I blacked out," Davis said.

When she woke up, Davis said she realized she'd been raped by a man who outranked her.

"I didn't have any clothes on. I did hurt a little bit and quickly realized something bad had happened."

Davis said she was so afraid of retaliation that she endured eight years of harassment by her attacker before finally making an official report.

The New York National Guard told the News4 I-Team it "followed the process to investigate her claim but eight years makes it very difficult."

A spokesman said, "We can't say it didn't happen, but we can't substantiate the claim." He added, "We applaud her courage to come forward."

Davis said her attacker retired a few months after her investigation, which the National Guard confirmed, while the retaliation she so feared became a reality.

"Not only was I not promoted for the first time in 20 years, I started getting negative evaluations," she said. "I started getting official letters of reprimand."

It was enough, she said, for her to consider suicide. "It changes who you are," she said as she started to cry for the first time in the interview. "I feel like they robbed me of that fun person. I'm not fun anymore, I don't laugh a lot anymore."

"If we want people to come forward early, while the evidence is available and prosecution will be possible, we need to make sure their careers will be safe," Meghan Rhoad of Human Rights Watch said.

Rhoad was the lead author of a recent study that found, based on interviews with military survivors of sexual assault, that they're 12 times more likely to face retaliation than see their attacker convicted for the crime.

But she told us no one has been able to get any numbers from the military on retaliation or punishments. "If you're going to address the problem, you need to know the scope of what it is and what the dynamics are. That is essential."

In a statement, the National Guard Bureau told the News4 I-Team "we are aggressively working to understand the scope of the problem to determine a way forward." But when we asked the Guard Bureau for statistics on how it investigates sex assaults, including retaliation and punishment outcomes, the Guard Bureau admitted it did not have that data on a nationwide level.

We were told, "reaching out to each State National Guard would likely be the best way to go."

But in an internal email, the Guard Bureau also told all of its units to "hold off" and not give us this information, leaving states like West Virginia to write us, "we are not allowed to release these stats."

And, in another internal email we obtained, the National Guard sent out a message asking all Guard units to start collecting this data because "interest in the National Guard has increased exponentially."

That's when the News4 I-Team sent out a survey to every Guard unit in the nation, including all fifty states as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands.

We asked them to answer ten questions about how they investigate sexual assault, including what kind of punishments they've handed out in the last five years.

40 out of 54 units responded to our questions, allowing us to gather the very first numbers ever released to the public about what actually happens to those accused of sexual assault in the military.

"We don't even have the basic information now," said New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand. "Your survey is the first slice of information we actually have."

She told us even Congress hasn't been able to get the information we gathered and was stunned by what we uncovered.

Only six of the responding states held a court martial for sexual assault within the last five years, resulting in just three incarcerations and one dishonorable discharge.
Most states used less serious types of discharge, like "General" or "Less than Honorable" discharges, or administrative punishments like letters of reprimand. Some allowed attackers to resign or retire.

"It's insufficient for a serious felony," Gillibrand said. "These are felonies. These are criminal charges in the civilian system if you're convicted of rape. You go to jail. And you go to jail for a long time."

The National Guard Bureau declined our request for an on-camera interview, but tells us, "It is a tenet of military command that commanders have unimpeded discretion, without undue influence, to discipline those under their command" and "each case stands on its own merits."

Unlike the rest of the Services, the National Guard said it is not required by Congress to collect data on case outcomes. It told us in its statement the National Guard is "making progress" convincing adjutants general to provide this data but "welcomed" a "congressional mandate" to force them to do it because "we feel it is important."

"I think it's great you took the time to do the survey," Sen. Gililbrand said, "because it really shines a light on a huge issue that we don't have the level of transparency and accountability that we need on these serious criminal cases in the National Guard."

http://www.nbcwashington.com/investigations/Serving-in-Silence-News4-Obtains-the-First-Numbers-on-Military-Punishment-for-Sex-Assaults--310711431.html

Submariner sentenced to 10 months for videos of female officers

(29 Jun) Navy Times

A submarine sailor has pleaded guilty to illegally videotaping female officers in the vessel's shower area, and has been sentenced to 10 months in a Navy brig.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan Secrest pleaded guilty Monday to charges that he made the video and lied to investigators. He also received a bad conduct discharge and a reduction in rank.

Secrest is among seven sailors charged in a case that has disrupted the Navy's integration of women into its submarine force. The women in the videos were among the first to serve on subs.

Military prosecutors say Secrest in 2014 used the camera on his cellphone to take a video of the officers.

Secrest is the sixth sailor tried in the case, and the fifth to be found guilty.
http://www.navytimes.com/story/military/crime/2015/06/29/submariner-sentenced-to-10-months-for-videos-of-female-officers/29470063/

Postpartum depression linked to later mental health disorders

(30 Jun) Military Times, By Patricia Kime

Military women who develop postpartum depression are more likely to be diagnosed later with another mental illness and are at higher risk for considering suicide than those who dodge the condition, according to a new report by the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center.

To understand the prevalence of postpartum depression in active-duty women, military researchers reviewed the medical records of all troops who gave birth between 1998 and 2013.

Postpartum depression was diagnosed in 5,203 of 126,006 deliveries, or about 4 percent, of the births.

For the service women in the 4 percent, the results showed they were "much more likely to be subsequently diagnosed with depression, anxiety disorder or bipolar disorder," months or even years after the births at rates higher than those who did not develop depression after childbirth.

They also were at higher risk for leaving military service earlier than their counterparts and for suicidality — an increased risk of contemplating or attempting suicide.

The researchers said their findings, backed by statistical data, are important indicators that early identification and treatment could improve quality of life for those affected — as well as military retention and readiness.

"Early screening support and treatment are essential during this vulnerable postpartum time frame to preserve the female fighting force," wrote Dr. Kasi Chu and epidemiologists at the center.

The authors said they conducted the research because few studies have examined the links between postpartum depression and mental health disorders. They noted that the public health impact of the disorder is substantial, affecting not only moms but their babies, who may languish if not properly nurtured.

According to the study, cases of postpartum depression have risen in the military population over time, with the highest levels seen in women serving in the health care field and in military occupational specialties that are not related to combat.

The authors theorized that the rise in cases may be tied in part to increased awareness and education regarding the disorder.

The study had several shortcomings that may have affected the data, the authors acknowledged. For one thing, it relied on a definition of the disorder — a diagnosis of depression in the first year after a birth — that uses a time frame much longer than what is considered to be the medical diagnostic standard of four weeks. That may have yielded a higher number of patients.

The study also included all military women who gave birth during the time span reviewed, regardless of delivery outcome. So in cases in which babies were stillborn or died shortly after delivery, what was counted as postpartum depression may in fact have been grief in some cases.

Chu said the research makes an argument for expanding programs to support expecting and new active-duty moms, such as extended maternity leave and career furloughs.

"Individuals who are identified … could be supported through multidisciplinary teams and further expansion and availability of DoD career intermission programs, the main goals of which would be to facilitate transition through this vulnerable time," the authors wrote.
http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/benefits/health-care/2015/06/30/afhsc-post-partum-depression-us-troops/29508039/

PTSD may increase heart attack, stroke risk in women

(30 Jun) CNN Special Report, By Carina Storrs

New research reveals that the effects of PTSD can go beyond the mind -- and put women's hearts and brains at risk.

Post-traumatic stress disorder can wreak havoc on a person's ability to deal with small disturbances, such as a loud noise or an upsetting story in the news, and it can keep them from getting good sleep. In addition to these problems, and perhaps because of them, PTSD might also increase women's risk of heart attack and stroke, according to new research.

Researchers looked at nearly 55,000 women in the Nurses' Health Study II, a long-term study of young women that began in 1989. In 2008, the researchers asked the women to fill out surveys about traumatic events they had experienced in the last 20 years, including physical assault or a natural disaster as well as whether they had PTSD symptoms such as recurring thoughts about the event.

The researchers found that women who were exposed to a trauma and had at least four PTSD symptoms were 60% more likely to have a heart attack or stroke than women who reported having no trauma.

"This study raises awareness that the effects of PTSD don't just stop in the head and that they have more holistic consequences for health," said Jennifer A. Sumner, a clinical psychologist at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. Sumner is lead author of the study, which was published Monday in Circulation, the journal of the American Heart Association.

"Our hope is that providers and patients (with PTSD) can be aware of this link and monitor cardiovascular health and try to engage in prevention efforts," Sumner said.

Previous research has reported links between PTSD and heart attacks as well as other types of heart disease, primarily in male war veterans. Sumner and her colleagues were interested in studying the connection in women, who are at higher risk of PTSD. (Ten percent of women have PTSD in their lifetimes compared with 5% of men.)

The current study found that even women who experienced a trauma, but did not report having any PTSD symptoms, were at 45% higher risk of heart attack and stroke than their trauma-free peers.

"That was somewhat surprising to us, although it's not too inconsistent with other findings," Sumner said. People who experienced trauma could have ramped up stress levels, such as higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which has been associated with heart attack risk, without being aware of it, she added.

However, women who were exposed to trauma and reported having only between one and three PTSD symptoms did not have an increase in heart attack or stroke risk, in contrast to women who experienced trauma and had either no PTSD symptoms, or at least four.

It might be too early to get a full picture of the heart attack and stroke risk in this study because the women, now between 44 and 62, are largely still too young to have these diseases, Sumner said. The researchers are following the women, and will see if those who reported having between one and three PTSD symptoms end up being at increased risk as well.

Part of the reason that women in this study were at greater risk of heart disease appeared to be their lifestyles. The researchers found that women who lived through a traumatic event, and had either zero or four or more PTSD symptoms, were more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking and sedentary lifestyles.

In fact, about half of the increase in heart attack and stroke risk among the women who had at least four PTSD symptoms could be attributed to these behaviors. Among the women who had experienced trauma and no PTSD symptoms, these behaviors accounted for 14% of their risk.

Although there have been other studies looking at PTSD and heart disease risk, "this (study) is big because it's a very large sample, and if you've got thousands of people, it really drives the point home," said Dr. Una McCann, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

There is good evidence that use of alcohol, tobacco and unhealthy behaviors, which can themselves increase heart disease risk, are more common in people with PTSD, McCann said. "But even on its own, PTSD can probably increase the risk," she said.

People with PTSD are in a constant state of hyper-awareness of their environment, which drives up their heart rates, McCann said. "Constantly having your heart on overdrive, it's not hard to figure out why that might cause heart attack and stroke," McCann said.

People with PTSD might also have trouble sleeping, partly because of nightmares. Sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea, are generally considered risk factors for heart disease, McCann said.

There's also a troubling relationship between PTSD and heart disease. Experiencing a heart attack, like other serious and unexpected illnesses, has been found to put people at greater risk of experiencing PTSD.

Fortunately, PTSD can be "cured," often with a combination of antidepressants, the drug prazosin, which curbs the release of adrenaline, and therapy, McCann said. By improving PTSD, these treatments can probably also lower the risk of heart attack and stroke, she added.

http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/30/health/ptsd-heart-attack-stroke-risk-women/

DoD To Study Link Between Sex Assault Claims, Career Retaliation

(30 Jun) Air Force Times, By Stephen Losey

The Defense Department's Office of Inspector General plans to look into whether service members were improperly forced out of the military due to mental health issues after reporting their sexual assaults.

In a June 24 memo to the Army, Navy and Air Force, Randolph Stone, deputy inspector general for policy and oversight, said the OIG plans to first identify service members who made unrestricted sexual assault reports since the beginning of 2009, and identify service members by type of separation after filing such reports. The OIG will then evaluate whether those who were separated for non-disability medical conditions – including personality and adjustment disorder – were done according to DoD rules.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., added a provision to the fiscal 2016 National Defense Authorization Act requiring the OIG to review separations of troops for personality and adjustment disorders after reporting their sexual assaults. This is often done to retaliate against service members for coming forward, she said.

"For years, service members have been forced out of the military simply for reporting a sexual assault, often under the pretext of a false personality or adjustment disorder diagnosis," Speier said in an April 30 release. "This report will finally allow us to assess the scale of this issue so that we can begin to crack down on this life-altering type of retaliation."

Protect our Defenders and Human Rights Watch – two organizations that advocate for survivors of sexual assault in the military – applauded the OIG's plan to look into the problem.

"It's a huge, huge problem," said Miranda Petersen, programs and policy director for Protect our Defenders. "And part of the problem is, we don't know" how widespread it is.

Petersen and Sara Darehshori, a senior U.S. counsel at Human Rights Watch, said that being separated for a personality or adjustment disorder is stigmatizing and traumatizing for someone who has suffered a sexual assault – and causes significant hardships. Being discharged for a non-disability medical condition means service members aren't eligible for disability payments, have limited access to Veterans Affairs care, don't have access to GI Bill benefits, and can hurt their chances of getting a security clearance and finding a new job.

Darehshori said some troops who were discharged due to a personality or adjustment disorder after a sexual assault have had those diagnoses used against them in divorce proceedings and lost custody of their children.

Getting an improperly diagnosed disorder removed from one's official record is also next to impossible, they said.

They hope that the OIG's review will help some ex-troops get their records changed, if they were found to have been unjustly diagnosed.

The committee told the IG to submit its report to congressional defense committees by May 1, 2016.

http://www.airforcetimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2015/06/30/dod-to-probe-troop-separations-after-sexual-assault/29479263/

Female Ranger students advance to Darby Phase for 3rd try

(26 Jun) Army Times, By Michelle Tan

After four physically punishing days, the three women in the Army's gender-integrated assessment of Ranger School are moving on to the Darby Phase, officials said Friday.

The women, along with 163 male classmates, successfully completed the Ranger Assessment Phase, commonly known as RAP week.

A total of 365 students started RAP week on Monday at Fort Benning, Georgia.

The women have attempted the Darby Phase twice before. They were offered Day One Recycles after their second failed attempt.

On average, about 45 percent of Ranger School students will graduate from the grueling two-month course. As many as 60 percent of all Ranger School failures will occur during RAP week, which makes up the first four days of the course.

The women in the course are part of a one-time, integrated assessment of the storied 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 Ranger School, which until now has been open only to men.

Nineteen female and 381 male soldiers started Ranger School on April 20. Eight of the women made it through RAP week.

None of the eight women made it past the Darby Phase on the first try and were recycled, along with 101 of their male classmates, on May 8.

After the second attempt at the Darby Phase, three female and two male students on May 29 were given the option of a Day One Recycle, which is a normal course procedure that's used when students struggle with one aspect of the course and excel at others, said officials at Fort Benning.

The two male students declined to recycle, officials said.

The remaining five women returned to their units and were not recycled again. A total of 29 students were dropped from the course for failing to meet the standards of the Darby Phase.

These students did not meet the standard for a number of reasons, including leading patrols, poor peer evaluations, too many negative spot reports, or a combination of all three.

Ranger School students who make it through RAP week move on to the Darby Phase, which is 15 days of intensive squad training and operations in a field environment at Fort Benning.

The phase consists of a day for basic airborne refresher and sustained airborne training, as well as a day for an airborne operation for those Ranger students who are airborne qualified (usually about 50 percent of the class); a day for the Darby Queen, an advanced obstacle course; a day of techniques training; two days of cadre assisted patrols; three days of student led patrols; one day of retraining; three days of student led patrols; and two administrative days where the students are counseled on their performance during the phase.

On average, more than 37 percent of Ranger School graduates recycle at least one phase of the school. About two-thirds of those who complete RAP week will eventually pass the Darby phase and move on to the mountain phase, according to data on the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade website.
http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/careers/army/2015/06/26/ranger-school-women-advance-darby-phase/29346895/

Gender neutral standards: Opening combat jobs to women

(29 Jun) Air Force Times, By Stephen Losey

A key step toward possibly opening the Air Force's last male-only combat jobs to women concluded June 19.

That day, the Air Force's Air Education and Training Command finished testing 175 male and female volunteers over two months at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland on the kind of physical challenges they would face on the battlefield, said Neal Baumgartner, exercise physiology and fitness consultant to the Air Force and AETC's program director for fitness.

And the service will use the results to set the first gender-neutral occupational standards for those jobs, linked to specific tasks battlefield airmen will be expected to do in combat.

"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 Secretary Deborah Lee James said in an April release announcing the tests.

Brig. Gen. Brian Kelly, director of military force management policy, said in April that the tests will help the Air Force set tests that will show which airmen can succeed in the physically demanding combat jobs.

"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.

The Air Force's combat jobs that remain off-limits to women are 13C special tactics officers, 13D combat rescue officers, 15WXC special operations weather officers, 1W0X2 special operations weather enlisted, 1C2 combat control, 1C4 Tactical Air Control Party and 1T2 pararescue. Combined, those seven career fields represent roughly 4,300 special operations positions.

Battlefield airmen have to do a wide variety of physically demanding tasks in their line of work — drag a wounded comrade on a sled or hoist him on a litter, launch a boat, rescue people at sea, climb rope ladders, climb over walls, ruck over long distances into enemy territory, among many others. But setting up real-life scenarios to test each of those abilities would be too complicated and expensive to do on a regular basis. So the Air Force is trying to match each of those tasks with regular physical fitness tests, such as pullups, distance runs, lunges, standing long jumps, and dead lifts.

The Air Force had actual special operators such as combat controllers score the simulated tasks for how frequently they encountered them, how intense they are, how long they were expected to do such tasks, and how critical those tasks were to accomplish their mission. For example, if someone can't carry supplies to an aircraft, Baumgartner said, that's a problem, but it might not scuttle the whole mission. But if someone can't climb a rope ladder into a helicopter, that could cause the mission to fail.

"A lot of effort and analysis went into developing those [simulations]," Baumgartner said.

Then, once the critical task list of the most arduous, important tasks was set, volunteers each spent 10 days at Lackland. The first week, they did 39 fitness tests to assess their agility, power, muscular strength, muscular endurance, and anaerobic and aerobic capacities. The second week, they performed 15 different task simulations mirroring what they would encounter on the battlefield — swimming, wall climbing, and dragging dummies to simulate casualties. For example, Lackland built a structure to the exact specifications for a C-17 ramp, and had airmen carry a simulated litter to the top of the ramp, raise it, hold it, and then mount it in the simulated aircraft.

The Air Force will next correlate and analyze the results of both the physical fitness tests and the battlefield simulations to see where they line up. For example, if some airmen do well on pushups and also do well on the litter carry, and other airmen don't do well on either, that could be a sign that they go together. And instead of having to stage a litter carry on a C-17 simulator to figure out if someone can hack it, the Air Force could give them a pushup test and other tests that correlate with litter carrying abilities.

The Air Force says the testing effort will not mean lower standards to accommodate women.

"The key is to ensure we have set the right standards for the occupation based on mission requirements," Kelly said in

April. "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."

Baumgartner said AETC is trying to figure out which tests can predict success on the battlefield, regardless of whether the airman is a man or a woman.

"Whether it's a male or female is not the issue," Baumgartner said. "It's 'Can the operator maintain status and can we select people that have the physical raw abilities that they can then train up to that status?'"

Baumgartner said his team at AETC has until July 31 to provide its recommendations on standards to Air Force leadership. After that, the Air Force and other services will make their own recommendations to Defense Secretary Ash Carter in August or September, he said.

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

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.

"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.
http://www.airforcetimes.com/story/military/2015/06/29/gender-neutral-standards-opening-combat-jobs-to-women/29335225/

Women not clamoring to enter combat arms fields

(30 Jun) USA Today, By Jim Michaels

Women are not clamoring to join the infantry and other so-called combat arms specialties despite Pentagon orders to allow them to enter the fields next year.

"Overall we find that generally the propensity is low," Gen. David Perkins, commander of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, said at a meeting of defense writers Tuesday. "There aren't a lot that want to do it."

An extensive U.S. Army study is underway to determine the physical requirements for the combat arms fields, which includes infantry, armor and other ground combat jobs that have been closed to women.

The study will allow the Army to establish tests to screen men and women who want to enter such positions. The Army also surveyed women in the military and potential recruits to gauge their level of interest.

Perkins did not specify the percentage of women interested but indicated it was low, adding the interest level of men in combat arms is also fairly minor.

The U.S. experience is expected to be similar to Canada's armed forces which opened all occupations to women in 1989.

Women make up about 2.6% of the infantry in Canada's active and reserve components.

Women in the U.S. military have been exposed to combat regularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, but they are currently banned from serving in most combat arms fields, which generally require extensive physical strength and endurance.

Decisions about how to proceed will be made before the end of the year. Under the new order, if any of the services want to keep some specialties closed to women they will need a waiver from the Pentagon.

A low interest level among women could complicate the process of gender integration once the process begins. Women will be needed to act as instructors and mentors in the newly opened fields.

Ranger School, one of the Army's most physically demanding training courses, was recently opened to women. To help make the process run smoothly the Army brought in female advisers to assist the staff with the changes.
http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/06/30/women-army-doctrine-command/29524001/

Neller Tapped As Next Commandant Of The Marine Corps

(1 Jul) Marine Corps Times, by Hope Hodge Seck and Aaron Mehta

Lt. Gen. Robert Neller is the Obama administration's choice to succeed Gen. Joseph Dunford as 37th commandant of the Marine Corps, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced Wednesday.

Neller, 62, now serves as commander of Marine Corps Forces Command in Norfolk, Virginia, where he oversees deployment planning and execution and East Coast Marine bases. He also commands Marine Corps Forces Europe.

A 40-year Marine infantry officer, Neller has seen operational experience during wartime and peace, with deployments to Iraq, Somalia and Panama.

At a press event where the nomination was made official, Carter praised the "phenomenal" capabilities of Keller.

"Bob is a warrior. He's a leader. He's a statesman," Carter said, noting that the two worked closely together when Carter was deputy secretary and Neller was the director of operations, the J-3, for the joint staff.

"We traveled together in the theater and around this country, where I saw Bob's outstanding relationship with the troops," Carter said. "He loves them. He relates to them. And they light up when he talks to them."

The future leadership of the Marine Corps has been a mystery since early May, when Dunford was nominated to succeed retiring Army Gen. Martin Dempsey as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Dunford, who became commandant in October, recently began implementing a series of reforms aimed at creating a more mature and balanced Marine Corps with better-educated enlisted leaders.

If confirmed, Neller will come to the commandancy with an extensive resume of operational and administrative experience, including joint positions overseas. He previously served as commander of Marine Corps Central Command, overseeing Marine operations in the Middle East; as president of Marine Corps University in Quantico, Virginia; as the director for Headquarters Marine Corps Plans, Policies and Operations out of the Pentagon; and as the deputy commanding general for operations for I Marine Expeditionary Force in Iraq from 2005 to 2007.

He has also participated in lesser-known Marine Corps operations, including a deployment to Somalia in support of operation "Restore Hope" with 3rd Light Armored Infantry Battalion, and two deployments to Panama as the commanding officer of Marine Corps Security Force Company in support of the U.S. deposition of dictator Manuel Noriega in operations "Just Cause" and "Promote Liberty."

The nomination is, nonetheless, an unexpected choice for the post of commandant. Neller was chosen over the Corps' two other four-star generals, Gen. John Kelly, commander of U.S. Southern Command, and Gen. John "Jay" Paxton, now assistant commandant.

The decision, which is typically made with input from the current commandant and defense and Navy secretaries, may signal a desire to capitalize on Neller's experience working with naval counterparts in his current post at MARFORCOM as the Marine Corps embraces new seabasing concepts and a closer partnership with the Navy.

If Neller is confirmed by the Senate and takes the helm of the Marine Corps in late summer or early fall, he could be responsible for making high-profile decisions tied to opening ground combat fields to women.

Marine Corps analysts are in the process of compiling a dense and detailed report about the prospect in accordance with a directive from the Office of the Secretary of Defense that takes effect on the first of next year. Based on the report, which draws from data collected in a recently completed 10-month experiment in which a gender-integrated Marine task force accomplished combat tasks, the commandant may request that some fields remain closed to women.

Neller, who sources say is known for his blunt and direct communication style, has not commented publicly on the topic of women in infantry roles.

According to a command philosophy letter he published after his arrival at MARFORCOM, his priorities include professional education for Marines; ethical behavior, including a zero-tolerance policy for hazing and racial and gender-based discrimination; and professional fulfillment.

"I ask you to share your ideas and problems with me – maybe I can help implement your proposals or provide some insight into possible solutions," he wrote in the letter. "...I will ask you to work as long and as hard as it takes to accomplish the mission – no longer and no harder."

Neller also spearheaded a campaign this year aimed at rooting out alcohol abuse in the ranks, asking troops to protect each other and safeguard their own careers by exercising moderation.

A date for Neller's confirmation hearing before the Senate has not yet been set, but the hearing will likely take place later this month.

Neller is the third joint chief nominee that SecDef Carter has named through his first five months in office. His previous selections were Gen. Mark Milley, commander of Army Forces Command, who is nominated as Army chief of staff, and Adm. John Richardson, current head of naval reactors, the nominee to become the next chief of naval operations.

Those go along with the nominations of Dunford as chairman of the Joint Chiefs and Gen. Paul Selva, the head of U.S. Transportation Command, as the vice chairman.

Experts say the sheer amount of turnover for the Joint Chiefs is giving Carter – who is expected to leave office when the next administration takes over in 2017 – a nearly unprecedented opportunity to install leaders who share his goals into top positions.

http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/story/military/2015/07/01/neller-to-be-tapped-for-commandant/29567019/

Female Uniform Initiatives – 8 Things to Know

(25 Jun) Navy Live, By the Uniform Matters Office

Several significant female uniform initiatives have been in the press and discussed at all hands calls and events across the Fleet. A “choker” style Service Dress White (SDW) uniform for officers and chiefs, was recently showcased at the U.S. Naval Academy graduation and a Cracker-Jack style Service Dress Blues (SDB) for E6 and below that will appear next year. There are some other Sailor and Fleet requested design improvements for women’s uniforms that are in the pipeline.

Here are eight things to know about planned uniform changes:

1. Female uniform changes in the works include a beltless khaki slack for wear with the overblouse; a pencil design skirt in white and khaki, and enlarging the internal pocket of the

officer and chief SDB and SDW uniforms to accommodate larger items like cell phones. We are looking at what we can do to shorten the timeline from design to Fleet introduction.

2. We've completed the improvement to the female khaki tuck-in shirt with reinforced stitching to the shirt's bottom hem.

3. The Navy's goal is to provide greater uniformity among Sailors as well as an overall improved quality, comfort, and appearance in our uniforms.

4. To develop a better fit for our uniforms, Navy Clothing and Textile Research Facility is collecting data on Sailors' measurements to update baseline sizes, patterns and designs used for manufacturing all uniforms. We have been relying on data from 1988 for females and 1997 for males and the new information will be used to update all our uniform patterns.

5. Leadership has finalized the design, timeline, and transition for the female E6 and below SDB, improved white Cracker-Jacks and the Dixie cup cover. Timeline for the roll out of the new uniforms is being developed and is expected to begin within the next two years.

6. A female officers and chiefs choker version of the SDW coat and the alternate combination cover has been approved. A wear test of the prototype is being conducted this summer and the information gathered will be used to inform the final design. The coat is expected to be available for purchase and optional wear early next year. Mandatory wear date has not been determined, but will be before January 2020.

7. The alternate combination covers for men and women will be available for purchase and optional wear by the end of this year.

8. Like any acquisition process, there is a very detailed and lengthy timeline. From the initial concept to final production, to produce a new uniform or to incorporate any design change into an existing uniform item can take 36 to 48 months from concept to roll out.
http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2015/06/25/female-uniform-initiatives-8-things-to-know/

Military kids' education outside the gates under study

(26 Jun) Military Times, By Karen Jowers

Defense officials have convened a working group to focus on issues related to military children's education in schools outside the gates, an Army official said.

"They're looking across all the military services, with respect to what the larger department might be able to do to address some of the concerns we have with public schools," said Carla Coulson, director of installation services for the Army's office of the assistant chief of staff for installation management.

"We look forward to taking part."

Coulson was on a panel that discussed the ties between the economic well-being and education standards of communities that host military installations.

A report released Thursday by the Stimson Center found that schools offering a lower quality of education could end up costing their communities if the military places a high priority on that factor in making base closure decisions.

"If host communities do not offer soldiers' children a consistently high-quality education, they risk the economic challenges that result from losing support of a major employer," concluded the report, "The Army Goes to School: The Connection between K-12 Education Standards and the Military-Base Economy."

The study was limited to Army communities, but the author of the study, Matthew Leatherman, acknowledged this is an area of interest to the other military branches as well.

Lt. Gen. David Halverson, commander of Army Installation Management Command and assistant chief of staff for installation management, did not commit to whether the Army could possibly consider education standards in any future BRAC process, if there is one.

"We use a lot of factors when we look at [BRAC]," he said. "This is an awareness aspect. We do have to keep the drumbeat going. It's an issue our families have."

Halverson said it's important for the Army to participate in the discussion because "we want to be part of that voice to ensure that you know from the soldier's perspective, it's important."

Coulson said that in the wake of a study on the quality of public schools near Army posts — ordered by Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno — installation leaders have opened discussions with local school districts about those assessments of school performance.

Odierno launched that process in October 2013 when he told a family forum that elected leaders often ask him what they can do for him. If they want to keep their bases in their communities, he said, "they better start paying attention to the schools that are outside and inside our installations. Because as we evaluate and as we make decisions on future force structure, that will be one of the criteria."

Discussions with local school districts have been going on in communities with schools that had at least 200 military children, Coulson said. "We've learned a lot about each other," she said. "We've been able to talk with each other in a more robust fashion than we have in the past.

"The chief of staff did accomplish something by [opening up] this dialogue," she said.

Coulson added that Tom Brady, director of the Department of Defense Education Activity, works closely with local school districts to ensure there is an open dialogue.

The quality of public schools near some military bases has been an issue for military families, and the subject of a number of studies, for decades. The Military Child Education Coalition was formed to tackle many related issues, and all states have signed on to the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, which aims to make transitions easier for military children, such as simplifying the transfer of course credits.

The Defense Department has taken steps such as providing grants for construction or renovation of some public schools that serve heavy populations of military children, and can provide assistance on transitions, deployments and other issues of military children, when districts request it.

Amy Zink, whose husband recently retired from the Army, acknowledged that it's not a new problem, but said she's encouraged to see that states are implementing education standards.

"And I'm seeing continued outreach. It would help if the military could make districts aware of the resources available to military families," said Zink, who participated on the panel.

Her children attended seven schools, with three sets of standards. When they moved to Clarksville, Tennessee, two years ago, when her husband was stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, local school officials weren't aware of the interstate compact. They researched it, and she was able to use it to get some testing for her daughter's eligibility for a program.

Leatherman said he hopes the analysis will serve to advance the discussion about the quality of schools near military bases, and said he hopes the report will serve to amplify and broadcast the message.

He used public data from the Army study to look at the performance of schools near Army posts. The report did not make specific connections between the quality of the schools in a community and the level of economic impact the Army has on that community, Leatherman said, because the study is not public and they were unable to release that data.

According to the report, 19 Army posts contribute at least 15 percent of the total income of their host counties. In six counties, the Army generated 50 percent or more of every dollar earned. Another four posts generated at least one-third of their counties' income.

Leatherman said there was a "very wide" variation in the quality of schools of those 19 posts. "There was no clustering on one end or the other" of poor-quality schools or excellent schools, he said.

"I hope these communities see this as a wake-up call when it comes to K-12 education standards within their state," said Patty Barron, director of family readiness for the Association of the U.S. Army. "Increasing performance levels of students not only benefits military children, it benefits all children. It shouldn't take the threat of losing a military installation to raise academic standards."
http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/benefits/education/2015/06/26/dod-to-look-at-issues-of-military-kids-education-outside-the-gate/29299929/

Embraced Yet Forbidden, Staff Sergeant Comes Out As Transgender

(27 Jun) NPR News

By serving in the Army, Staff Sgt. Patricia King is breaking the rules.

King enlisted 1999 under her birth name, Peter. At the beginning of this year, King — a decorated soldier with three deployments to Afghanistan under her belt — started her gender transition.

While gays and lesbians have been allowed to openly serve since 2011, service members are still prohibited from being openly transgender. The policy has been drawing criticism and motivating action from service members and lawmakers.

For her part, King has been vocal about her own experience, through her blog and in a profile by the Colorado Springs *Gazette* this month. King sat down with NPR's Arun Rath to discuss what it was like to come out as transgender in the Army and what it means to be part of a military force that officially she's not allowed to serve.

Interview Highlights

On the decision to start her gender transition

I can actually tell you the day. It was Jan. 3, 2015. In December 2014, I started to feel really strongly like transition was something that I wanted. And so I put a lot of thought and a lot of prayer into it, and on Jan. 3, that was the day that I came out to my parents and ultimately decided I was going to transition. ...

Actually, it was about the same as jumping out of an airplane. Because you stand at the door and you have to make that first step, but once you've made it, you can't go back in.

On the Pentagon's current policy regarding transgender soldiers — and whether she's in violation of it

The current policy still states that you are not allowed to be openly transgender in the Army. And they find it to be a medical discharge and an administrative discharge at the same time. It's a little bit complicated. But what they've done recently is they've elevated the discharge authority to the highest levels of the Army. ...

They haven't rewritten the policy. So anybody who is transgender, whether they're open or closeted about it, is technically not allowed to be in the military. And we're simply waiting for that policy to be rewritten.

On coming out as transgender in the military

My support system at work has been absolutely amazing. You start by telling people that you are reasonably sure are going to be accepting, and from there you move to the people that you question. And after that, you just kind of come out, and you just accept that you have a big enough support network that I can be myself. I've been embraced by commanders who've said, "We support you and we're proud of you, and we want you to be who you are. Unfortunately the rules say this." ...

On whether her feelings about the Army have changed

Absolutely not. I have always been incredibly proud of my service to my country, and I love serving in the Army. I'll stay as long as they'll have me. The difference is that now I'm equally proud of who I am.
http://www.npr.org/2015/06/27/416015320/embraced-yet-forbidden-staff-sergeant-comes-out-as-transgender?sc=tw

Transgender soldier back on the front lines

(30 Jun) Stars and Stripes, By William Cole

Sgt. Shane Ortega is a three-time combat veteran and Wheeler Army Airfield soldier with bulging biceps who can dead-lift 480 pounds and crank out dozens of pullups. On Saturday, he competed in the Ikaika Bodybuilding Championships at the Blaisdell Center, finishing fourth in the men's physique event.

But in the eyes of the Army -- at least for right now -- he is officially a "she" who has to use women's bathrooms on base and sometimes wear an ill-fitting and embarrassing female dress uniform with a blouse.

Now one of the Army's most outspoken transgender soldiers, Ortega is an "A type" go-getter who receives great performance reviews and fits in just fine with his CH-47 Chinook helicopter company.

But he is technically unacceptable to the Army and in a legal limbo that's about as uncomfortable as the women's clothes he occasionally has to wear.

"It's not ideal, is what I like to say," Ortega said in a phone interview. "I know that's so PC, but it's not an ideal situation. Obviously, I get very frustrated."

After ditching "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and allowing openly gay service members, the Defense Department still has to come to terms with transgender individuals who already are in the military, or want to serve, but are banned from doing so openly.

An estimated 15,500 transgender troops are on active duty and in the Guard or Reserve, according to the Williams Institute, which conducts research on sexual orientation at UCLA.

The White House and Pentagon have been inching toward official acceptance of transgender military members, and Ortega now finds himself on the front lines of the fight to be able to openly serve as one.

Air Force Senior Airman Logan Ireland, an Afghanistan war veteran who, like Ortega, transitioned from female to male, was the invited guest of President Barack Obama at the White House's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Month reception Wednesday.

Ireland, whose command put him on special orders to attend in a male dress uniform, was accompanied by his fiancee, Army Cpl. Laila Villanueva, a transgender woman.

The Army and Air Force have adopted policies that make it much harder to discharge transgender service members, but official prohibitions remain.

Ortega, 28, who's been in the military for 10 years, recently wrote a letter to Obama as commander in chief, asking for a stop to transgender discharges and a review to repeal the ban.

He's also petitioned the Army for a gender identity change -- a request that already has been granted in at least one other case.

"Sir, as I near the middle of my career, the question comes up -- should I stay or should I go? Can I keep serving authentically?" Ortega wrote. "Can I continue to live the values of a warrior -- integrity, honor and selfless service? Can I do this while I continue to be misgendered and without discrimination protections? I have kept my word, my honor, and commitment true for 10 years now. I want to continue to serve our nation to the best of my ability."

Ortega noted that he's been working on LGBT policy in the military almost as long as he's been serving in it, including the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

He's received plenty of correspondence from transgender service members who feel desperate, alienated, alone and sometimes suicidal.

"They range from field grade officers to new privates," Ortega wrote in the letter to the president. "Everyone is fighting an internal war that no one wants to speak up for."

Field grade refers to majors, lieutenant colonels and colonels.

The arc of Ortega's military service over the past 10 years reflects a growing acceptance of transgender service members within the ranks but also a regulation challenge last summer that required legal intervention and led, he said, to an Army-wide policy change.

Ortega, who is black, Latino and Cherokee, graduated from high school in Richmond, Va. His dad was in the Navy, and his mom served in the Navy and Army. Although born female, for as long as Ortega can remember, he has identified as being male, he said.

From 2005 to 2009 he was in the Marines. From then on he's been in the Army -- the result of a decision, ultimately unsuccessful, to become an explosive ordnance disposal technician.

Ortega came out nationally in an April 9 Washington Post article, which noted that of his three combat tours -- two to Iraq and one to Afghanistan -- the first two were served as a woman, the last as a man.

"I felt the most comfortable and authentically me when in the combat theater," Ortega told news website RYOT. "No one worried about anything but my performance on the job. We lived, ate and showered in the same facilities, and we were professionals.

"It's here at home that I have to endure the daily scrutiny of other people's ideals of what my gender should be."

In 2011 he started taking testosterone -- with the knowledge of Army doctors, he said. He also had breast reduction surgery. The word POET (Ortega writes poetry), stars and an owl tattoo "which just reminds me to use logic, use wisdom" now spread across his chest, among other ink-work on his body.

In 2012 he started going by "Shane," said the soldier, who prefers not to divulge his original name.

"I think the most noticeable change when somebody begins testosterone is that their voice drops," Ortega said. But everyone is different, he said.

"My musculature obviously is more masculine. But before (taking testosterone) I was pretty physically fit," said Ortega, whose energy level seems high even over the phone.

Pullups and running "were already natural things that I had ability for," said the 5-foot-6, 160-pound soldier. "I honestly don't think that my physical appearance has changed. I would just say that maybe my face appears more masculine."

The 25th Infantry Division supports him, unofficially. At work he wears a flight suit that's worn by men and women, he said.

As part of the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, Ortega is subject to higher medical and physical standards than nonaviation soldiers, he said. The Army has known since 2011 that he's transgender, but aviation headquarters at Fort Rucker, Ala., noticed that last summer and said, "Oh, this is a female soldier on testosterone," and attempted to separate him from the Army, Ortega said.

He also was grounded from flying as a crew chief in Chinook helicopters.

Ortega said he turned to the ACLU and Maj. Shari Shugart, an Army lawyer, and the collective result was an approximately 200-page "thesis" outlining a case for transgender service that was sent to the Defense Department office of the surgeon general.

In March the Army changed its policy to require that any discharges of transgender soldiers must be approved by the assistant secretary of the Army for manpower and Reserve affairs.

Ortega said he has a meeting with that assistant secretary of the Army, Debra S. Wada, in Washington, D.C., in July.

Some U.S. military leaders have expressed reservations about allowing openly transgender people to serve in the armed forces, while new Defense Secretary Ash Carter suggested he is open to the idea, the Associated Press reported in March.

The opposition centered on questions of where transgender troops would be housed, what berthing they would have on ships, which bathrooms they would use and whether their presence would affect the ability of small units to work well together, AP said.

The American Medical Association noted in early June that a commission co-chaired by a former acting Army surgeon general determined that providing transgender personnel with medically necessary health care would not be excessively burdensome, and passed a resolution affirming that "there is no medically valid reason to exclude transgender individuals from service in the U.S. military."

Caught in the middle are soldiers including Ortega who just want to serve their nation.

"The things that I'm doing, I'm intentionally trying to set honorable precedent," he said.

http://www.stripes.com/news/us/transgender-soldier-back-on-the-front-lines-1.355432

Prison Born

(July/August Issue) The Atlantic, By Sarah Yager

The officer who handcuffed Mayer in the motel didn't seem to care when she told him she was pregnant. Neither did the parole judge, who charged her with fraternizing with another parolee and skipping curfew and ordered her back to prison.

As she stripped down at the intake facility and stepped forward to be searched, she faced the question that thousands of American women do each year: What happens to a baby born in detention?

OVER THE PAST four decades, as the inmate population in the United States has grown into the largest in the world, the number of children with a parent in custody has risen to nearly 3 million. For corrections officials and policy makers, those relationships can fade into the background. But not when a child is born on the inside.

For as long as women have been doing time, prisons have had to contend with the children they carry. In 1825, a pregnant inmate named Rachel Welch received a whipping so severe that it was suspected of causing her death not long after she gave birth. Nearly 200 years later, the clashes are less violent but perhaps no less consequential: the vast majority of women who give birth while incarcerated in the United States must hand over their baby within a few hours of delivery, to family, friends, or the foster-care system. For some mothers—even those with short sentences—these separations turn out to be permanent. And with a nearly 800 percent increase in the number of women in custody since the late 1970s, the births are happening on a scale that is hard to ignore. An estimated one in 25 female inmates is pregnant when the prison doors lock behind her.

In recent years, the flood of women into the correctional system has prompted a growing number of states to create programs known as prison nurseries, which allow women to keep their newborn children with them behind bars. Inmates who qualify can raise their babies for a limited time—ranging from one month to three years, but in most states 18 months—in separate housing units on prison grounds. Eight states now offer prison nurseries, all but one of which have opened in the past two decades; Wyoming recently finished constructing a facility that will bring the total to nine.

Research associating participation in the programs with lower recidivism rates among mothers has helped make nurseries a rare shared cause for prisoner advocates and officials looking to manage costs. The idea, though, is more than 100 years old. First popularized around the turn of the 20th century, nurseries flourished for a time, but started to close about 50 years ago, as correctional attitudes became more punitive and prison administrators began to question the costs and the effects on children.

Today, as nurseries return to prisons teeming with an unprecedented number of inmates, the questions are even more pressing. Should institutions that limit so many basic rights allow inmates to be active parents? Most important, what does spending the first years of life in prison mean for a child?

INSIDE THE BARBED-WIRE enclosure of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a maximum-security women's prison an hour north of New York City, about a dozen of the newest residents played within the confines of a three-foot-high baby gate. The morning program was under way in the prison's Infant Development Center, where sunlight slanted through flowered curtains. A small boy with a pacifier banged a drum. Staff in smocks and stocking feet circulated, some rocking babies, while a toddler sat in pajamas and surveyed her options: a row of dolls on a shelf, piles of board books, crates of balls and squishy blocks. A menagerie painted on the back wall—a lion, a koala, a monkey swinging from a banana tree—stood out brightly against the cinder block.

Bedford Hills is home to the country's longest-running prison nursery, which opened with the rest of the facility in 1901. Set amid the colonial estates and horse pastures of Westchester County, the brick buildings sit on a rise surrounded by maple and oak trees, whose leaves were just turning when I visited in October.

The prison is the reception center for all female inmates in New York, so Mayer had learned about the nursery when she landed in Bedford Hills the first time, before she was transferred to a lower-security facility upstate. While at Bedford Hills, she could sometimes see mothers and babies in the yard during their recreation period, or a row of strollers parked outside the Infant Development Center. But as she waited in the county jail a few years later—facing just over a year of additional time, and entering her third trimester—she didn't know whether she wanted to keep her own baby in prison. "I didn't want my son to experience what I did," she told me. "Being locked up all the time."

Working with an advocate she met through her lawyer, Mayer looked into community programs that would offer an alternative to prison, but none would agree to take her while she was pregnant. She ran through the list of who could take custody while she was gone. Her boyfriend had ended up with extra charges for a gun the officer had found at the motel, and was going to be locked up for another seven years. She didn't want to ask her family, either: she and her mother still weren't close, and she didn't want to burden her grandmother, who had already raised several children and grandchildren and was now caring for her aging husband. So when Mayer arrived again at Bedford Hills, in December 2013, she filled out an application for the nursery. Two months later, she gave birth to her son at the local hospital. She named him DeVanté, after his father. They rode back to the grounds together in a prison van.

I first met Mayer outside the Infant Development Center, where she was picking up her son, who had just turned eight months old, at the end of her morning shift sorting packages and cleaning in the visitor-reception area. Now 24, she wore a pink T-shirt over her prison-issue pants, and her curly brown hair hung loose over the tattoo on her collarbone. DeVanté was propped on her hip, a diaper poking out of his elastic-waist jeans, sucking down a bottle.

The two of them were living with 12 other mothers and their babies in the nursery's housing unit, one floor in a building set apart from the general population. Although Bedford Hills is a maximum-security facility, most inmates in the nursery program are less serious offenders—the screening process tends to eliminate women with a history of violent crime or involvement with the child-welfare system—and the unit looks more like a college dormitory than a cellblock. Mothers with newborns live along a corridor of double rooms, moving into singles once their babies are four months old. (The age limit for children at Bedford Hills is one year, but women who

will be out before their babies turn 18 months old can apply for an extension so they can leave prison with their child.) Mayer and DeVanté shared a small room with pastel walls and a window looking out on the trees beyond the prison fence. Her narrow bed stood a few feet from his crib, photos of her boyfriend taped to a metal locker between them.

After Mayer put DeVanté down for a nap, we sat on couches in the unit's rec room. Light filtered in from an attached sun porch, where decorations for an up-coming Halloween party were spread across the floor. The mothers spend all their time in the self-contained nursery, except while they are attending their daily programs—GED classes, substance-abuse treatment, career training—when their children are watched in the Infant Development Center. The unit has its own dining room, and a kitchen where the women can cook. They go outside for recreation in a private yard. In the evenings, they play together or watch Netflix in the rec room. DeVanté liked to settle in with a book. "He just wants to sit on my lap," Mayer said. "He's a mommy's boy."

Despite the toys and bright paint, the nursery is recognizably a prison—a fact made clear by the corrections officer stationed just inside the entrance. The seclusion makes for a sense of community—the women trade advice and babysit for one another when someone wants to go to the gym or the library—but also isolation. And the sleep deprivation that every new mother endures gets worse when all of your neighbors also have newborns crying at night. But Mayer believes that the experience has created a special bond between her and her son. "Nothing has made me want to change before," she said. "Kids make you want to change."

They don't, of course, guarantee that you can. Many nursery participants have older children back home. But administrators point out that the program provides support and structure that women might not have had on the outside. "We've had mothers say, 'I have two other kids, and I didn't know the color of their eyes,' " Jane Silfen, the nursery director, told me. "They can connect with their babies here. If they were on the outside, they'd be doing everything *but* that."

"The long-term goal is that women leave better off than they came in," Karen Graff, the nursery manager, told me. In addition to doing administrative work—ordering baby wipes, coordinating visits from a lactation specialist and a pediatrician, overseeing clothing donations from Westchester residents—Graff, who is a trained social worker, helps mothers with daily challenges that range from soothing a baby who won't stop crying to navigating tensions with corrections officers. "A lot of my job is just listening," she said. "So many women have a long history of extreme trauma." She tries to get them to reflect: *How did you get here? How do you want to parent your children while you're here? What happens when you go home?*

The program seems to be working: research has suggested that women who participate in the nursery at Bedford Hills are significantly less likely to return to prison than inmates in the general population. Results like these have drawn interest from other states. A few weeks before my visit, a group of legislators and corrections administrators from Connecticut came to tour the nursery. Members of the state's general assembly had raised the possibility of starting a similar program at the Connecticut women's prison, York Correctional Institution, and the delegation had traveled to Bedford Hills to talk with administrators and inmates.

Eric Coleman, a co-chair of the Connecticut legislature's judiciary committee, told me that he first learned about prison nurseries a few years ago, from a legislative clerk. The clerk had been translating for a group of prosecutors visiting from Russia. When the conversation turned to corrections, the prosecutors expressed surprise at the American policy of separating mothers from their babies. In their country, they told the clerk, children born to inmates could stay right there with them. Why didn't prisons in the United States allow the same?

Much of the rest of the world manages to uphold public safety without routinely taking newborns from their incarcerated mothers—some with accommodations that would be unthinkable in an American prison. At the Preungesheim Prison in Frankfurt, Germany, women can keep their children on the grounds until they are old enough to go to school. Mothers with older children at home are allowed to spend days with their family as a kind of work release—cooking and cleaning and tucking their kids into bed before checking back into prison for the night.

According to a comprehensive survey from 1987—the low point for American prison nurseries—the U.S. was one of only five responding United Nations member countries (along with the Bahamas, Canada, Liberia, and Suriname) that did not generally provide accommodations for a baby born during a woman's prison term.

THIS WAS NOT always the case. The country's first prisons exclusively for female inmates opened after the Civil War, built on the idea that specialized attention, rather than warehousing in the attics of male penitentiaries, would be more likely to successfully reintegrate law-breaking women into society. By the 1900s, a new model of detention for women, the reformatory, had cropped up in some 20 states. Whereas the penitentiary model focused on restricting freedoms, reformatories—which mostly held women for moral offenses, like prostitution and "manifest danger of falling into vice"—made it their mission to correct behavior, instructing inmates in everything from physical fitness to table manners to vocational trades.

Reformatory administrators focused on rehabilitating the women in their charge. "We must guard against institutionalizing them," the board of directors at the Connecticut State Farm for Women declared shortly after the facility opened in 1918. "Our training here must fit them for the work they are to do when they go out." That training often included child-rearing. Many of these early women's prisons provided separate facilities where young children could stay with their incarcerated mothers.

Estelle Freedman, a historian at Stanford, told me that prison nurseries had originally been guided by an ideology of maternalism, the belief that innate virtues accompany motherhood. The presence of children in prison, the thinking went, could have a virtuous effect on "fallen women." But as decades passed, that optimism waned. Drug use increased, as did the population of black inmates in the Northeast and Midwest, where the reformatory movement had concentrated, and Progressive-era reformers gave way to a generation of "corrections officials," whose attitude toward incarcerated women was fast becoming, as Freedman put it: "There's nothing we can do about them."

In the 1960s, a pair of social workers who visited a nursery in West Virginia—where a prominent activist once called the presence of children "a pleasant humanizing influence"—signaled what would soon become the new correctional mind-set: "Prison is no place for a child."

Over the next few decades, as lawmakers answered Richard Nixon's call for a war on drugs with zero-tolerance policies and mandatory sentencing minimums, prison terms got longer, and judges were given less discretion about how to dole them out. Women—particularly women of color—counted high among the casualties. Since the 1970s, the female incarceration rate has increased twice as fast as the male rate. At the same time that incarceration became the main answer to a slate of the country's social problems, the states that still had nurseries stopped operating the programs and repealed the laws that governed them. Through the '70s and into the early '80s, every facility except Bedford Hills closed; administrators cited concerns about security, insurance costs, management problems, and child welfare.

As nurseries disappeared, the prison explosion of the 1980s flung families even farther apart. Farming and manufacturing jobs were drying up across the country, and small towns and rural areas competed for prison-construction contracts and the employment opportunities they would create. New facilities were built far from the urban centers where many offenders lived, so inmates who were parents usually ended up more than 100 miles from their families—and because there were so few women's prisons, many mothers were even farther away. Most did not see their children until they were released. And those reunions, in many cases, were brief: by the early '90s, the rate of inmates, male and female, re-arrested within three years of release had reached nearly 70 percent. More than half would return to prison.

Corrections officials were unprepared for the influx of women, many of whom were unmarried mothers of young children. In 1992, the National Institute of Corrections held a training to address the growing population of female prisoners. The superintendent of Bedford Hills stood up to speak about the nursery program, catching the attention of an audience member named Larry Wayne.

Wayne was then the superintendent of the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women, which had a visitation program that allowed children to stay with their mothers a few nights each month. The program not only provided an incentive for good behavior but also had what Wayne called "a therapeutic effect" on the whole population. A nursery seemed to promise even more benefits. Two years later, using Bedford Hills as a model, Nebraska's corrections department opened a nursery of its own.

Administrators in Nebraska invited Joseph Carlson, a new hire in the criminal-justice department at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, to evaluate their program. His first results, published in 1998, showed a 13 percent drop in misconduct reports among women who joined the nursery. He also found, based on early data, that only about a third as many nursery participants returned to the prison compared with inmates who had been separated from their infants before the program started. "The potential for rehabilitating and training the mother inmate far exceeds the costs to the state and taxpayer," Carlson wrote. He calculated that nursery supplies, staff salaries, and medical expenses would total about 40 percent less each year than foster care for the babies who would otherwise end up there, and predicted more-significant savings from a decline in recidivism. "If this trend keeps up, the program would pay for itself over time."

Other corrections departments soon followed Nebraska's lead. South Dakota opened a nursery the same year that Carlson published his report, and Washington State followed in 1999. When Ohio opened a nursery a few years later, prison administrators cited the promising results in Nebraska. New York released its own data in 2002, reporting that the recidivism rate for participants was half that of the general population. In 2009, Carlson published the 10-year results of his study, which showed that while 50 percent of mothers who had been separated from their newborns had returned to custody, only 17 percent of nursery participants had. By that time, nurseries had opened in Illinois, Indiana, and West Virginia.

Policy makers were interested not only in reducing the number of women in prison but also in improving outcomes for their children. Some research suggested that children of incarcerated parents were at elevated risk for academic, behavioral, and emotional problems, as well as future involvement with the criminal-justice system. More than half of the mothers in Nebraska's nursery program reported to Carlson that their own mothers had been incarcerated. "The cycle has to be broken," he wrote, "and education of the mother is one of the first places to begin." When Wyoming passed a nursery-funding proposal in 2012, the warden of the women's prison at the time, a former employee of the Nebraska prison, told a local newspaper that he saw the impact of a nursery reaching down generations. "We want [the mothers] to be successful at raising those children," he said, "so those children don't repeat the sins of the parents."

The claim that nurseries could benefit children as well as their mothers has a radical extension: children not only should be allowed in prison but might be better off there. That idea is, unsurprisingly, controversial.

"I DON'T THINK ANY children should be in prison," James Dwyer told me last year, as legislators in Connecticut considered a proposal for a nursery. "Period."

Dwyer, a family-law professor at the College of William & Mary and the country's most outspoken critic of prison nurseries, disputes the idea that advocates of the programs have child welfare in mind. Screening inmates for fitness as parents based on a history of child abuse or violence, he told me, is missing a larger point: incarceration itself is a marker of unfitness. In a paper published last year in the *Utah Law Review*, Dwyer further argued that allowing mothers who have broken the law to keep their children in prison is not only unwise but unconstitutional:

There would likely be widespread public outrage if any state began putting mentally disabled or senile adults in prisons with incarcerated relatives in the hope that this would reduce recidivism and provide some benefits to those incompetent adults.

Objections to putting innocent children in prison go back to the heyday of nurseries. "If we were more than three degrees removed from the level of the chimpanzee," a writer for the Newspaper Enterprise Association declared in 1930, "the bare announcement that thre [*sic*] was even one baby in prison, anywhere in the land, would stir us to a yell of protest that would rock that prison to its foundations."

The shortcomings of raising a baby in prison are probably most obvious to those actually doing it. DeVanté was an easy infant, Alyssa Mayer told me, even taking naps when they were closed in their room for the twice-daily attendance count. But now he wanted to crawl around and explore. He had started scooting up and down the corridor outside their room and lurching around the rec room, holding on to couches for support. He would be 14 months old when she was up for release, and she was already thinking about how much catching up they had to do: he had never seen the ocean, never been on a swing. "Sometimes I think I'm selfish for keeping him here, even though he doesn't know what's happening," she said. "If he was home, there's so much more he would experience."

Those who advocate on behalf of incarcerated mothers are also quick to point out the drawbacks to parenthood in prison. In February, the Women in Prison Project at the Correctional Association of New York released a report finding that pregnant inmates were routinely shackled during labor and recovery—sometimes with waist chains after a C-section delivery—despite a 2009 law restricting the practice. Other problems are more subtle. Gail Smith, the founder of Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers, served on an advisory committee for the Illinois prison nursery a decade ago and recalls the "control-oriented thinking" that permeated the early planning process. "Staff members were discussing the 'parameters' of breast-feeding and when mothers would and would not be permitted to feed their babies," she told me. "I was appalled that these administrators could think … that it was appropriate to deny a hungry infant sustenance until the scheduled time convenient for corrections officers." Advocates argue that funding could be better invested in community-based alternatives to incarceration, where women can parent their newborns without all the restrictions inherent to the prison environment.

Such alternatives, though, remain scarce for pregnant women—and many have no better places for their newborns to go. Most incarcerated mothers, unlike incarcerated fathers, were primary caregivers for their children before getting arrested, and family members or others who take custody are in many cases poor, sick, or overburdened. Researchers don't know exactly why children of inmates might be at elevated risk for behavioral problems, but evidence suggests that the disruption of family life could play a significant role. For Dwyer, this is a reason for prison officials to encourage adoption.

But short of that extreme, prison nurseries may actually be the most stable environment for babies of incarcerated mothers. New York implemented a legal standard in 1930 for nursery admission matching the one that guides custody decisions outside prison: the best interests of the child. In 1973, an inmate in a New York jail named Kathleen Apgar, who had given birth while awaiting trial for murder, brought a suit against the local sheriff for taking her newborn son from her at the hospital. The state supreme court, ruling in Apgar's favor, wrote that in addition to adequate food, shelter, and medical care, a child's best interests included "the constant care and attention of its natural mother"—even if the mother was an accused murderer. That notion, which is at the heart of the disagreement between nursery advocates and critics like Dwyer, is only now being researched in depth for children starting life inside prison.

IN 1945, AN AUSTRIAN-BORN psychoanalyst named René Spitz conducted a seminal study of childhood in incarceration. He used a 16-mm camera to film two groups of babies and toddlers—one being raised by their mothers in the nursery of a penal institution for delinquent girls, and the other by the staff of a "foundling home," a shelter for abandoned youth. His findings revealed developmental gaps. Even the oldest children in the foundling home, who were between 18 and 30 months old, were incontinent. Few could walk, talk, or eat without assistance. Even though the facility was kept clean and a physician visited every day, more than a quarter of the children died from a disease outbreak.

Which makes what Spitz found in the nursery especially striking: Children who were less than a year old could already speak a few words. They were so mobile that without close supervision, they would shimmy up the bars of their cribs and dive onto the floor. The biggest challenge, Spitz reported, was "how to tame the healthy toddlers' curiosity and enterprise."

Spitz searched for an explanation for the contrast. Food and housing conditions in the two institutions were similar, and the children in the foundling home came from more-favorable family backgrounds. The most significant difference? The "nursery provides each child with a mother to the nth degree," he concluded, "a mother who gives the child everything a good mother does and, beyond that, everything else she has."

Seventy years later, Spitz's proposition has gained support from the first longitudinal study of prison-nursery outcomes. Starting in 2003, a team of researchers led by Mary Byrne, a professor at the Columbia University School of Nursing, followed 100 children and their mothers as they went through the nursery program in New York and reentered their communities. (The study participants were drawn from Bedford Hills and a neighboring medium-security facility, where the New York corrections department had opened a second nursery program in 1990. The two programs consolidated a few years ago.)

Byrne's research is based on attachment theory—a line of thought that surfaced about a decade after Spitz's study, holding that children develop a secure sense of themselves and others through the stability and attentiveness of caregivers in the first stages of life. The theory suggests that early caregiving can have profound implications on everything from brain development to the quality of future relationships.

For a paper published in 2010, Byrne's team interviewed nursery mothers and found that only a third had formed secure attachments to their own parents. So what the researchers discovered when these mothers' babies reached their first birthday was surprising: 60 percent showed signs of secure attachment, on par with a comparison group of children growing up in stable middle-class families outside prison, and a significantly higher rate than that of sample groups of at-risk children. "Their children should be in trouble," Byrne told me. "But they're not."

Looking more closely at the results, the researchers found that children who stayed the longest in the nursery had the best outcomes. About half of the mothers had less than a year left on their sentence when their baby was born, and had returned home by the time of the assessment. The rate of secure attachment among those children, while still not significantly different from the rate for the comparison group of middle-class children, was lower than among their peers who had stayed in the nursery for a full year. Byrne hypothesized that rather than being harmed by the correctional setting, the babies actually benefitted from the structure the prison provided—particularly the restriction of drugs and alcohol, as well as the parenting support their mothers got from staff and other inmates. (The longitudinal study included parenting guidance from a nurse practitioner, which Byrne believes also contributed to the outcomes.)
James Dwyer points out that the attachment findings might be optimistic if extrapolated to nursery participants as a whole. The results included only children who were with their mothers at the time of assessment. As Byrne documented in a subsequent paper, more than 40 percent of pairs in the longitudinal study were separated before the mother left prison, in most cases because the baby reached the age limit or because of disciplinary action against the woman. Byrne noted that the misbehavior in those cases did not seem to pose any obvious threat to the children. (At Bedford Hills, the kind of mistakes any sleep-deprived new mother might make—leaving an extra blanket in the crib, drifting off with your baby on your chest—can become grounds for losing custody. The safety and well-being of the babies is the program's primary concern, administrators told me, and behavior that puts them at even slightly elevated risk cannot be tolerated.)

Although separation in the first year can be damaging, experts say that babies who form secure attachments to their mother early on may be better off even if they are later split up. A study led by a member of Byrne's team and published last year compared a group of 3-to-5-year-olds who had spent between one and 18 months in a prison nursery with a group of children the same age who, as infants or toddlers, had been separated from their incarcerated mothers. Most of the children were living with their mothers at the time of the study, but some in each group were with alternate caregivers. They faced comparable amounts of trouble at home, measured by the adults' drinking and drug use, reliance on public assistance, and harsh treatment. But the preschoolers who had lived with their mothers in the nursery displayed significantly lower levels of depressed, anxious, or withdrawn behavior. The study concluded that participation in a nursery program may be a "buffer" against environmental risks when children leave the prison.

Byrne is now starting to analyze how the children in the longitudinal study fare as they go through grade school. What her team has found so far, she told me, is that children raised in the nursery perform no differently from other kids across a number of measures. The study design is limiting; for example, her team couldn't randomly assign women or children to the nursery. But Byrne's research suggests that prison nurseries could provide children of incarcerated mothers a better starting place than any existing alternative.

ALYSSA MAYER AND DEVANTÉ left Bedford Hills at the end of April. Her mother—now the closest family she has in the area, since her grandmother moved out of state—came to pick them up the day they were released. It had been an emotional morning: saying goodbye to people who had become like family to her and her son, and not knowing what would come next. DeVanté had never ridden in a car without bars on the windows. They stopped at a grocery store on the way home, and he gaped as they moved through the aisles, picking out fresh fruits and vegetables. After dinner, she curled up in bed with him to watch TV—for the first time, just the two of them.

Three weeks later, when I visited Mayer at her mother's house—a tidy split-level about half an hour from Kingston that she bought several years ago—DeVanté seemed to have settled into life on the outside. He swiped on an iPad and babbled at Siri, toddled between rooms playing peekaboo, helped himself to a bowl of candy. His hair had grown out in thick curls, and he had a gap between his front teeth that showed when he smiled. Mayer lifted him onto the kitchen counter and pulled up a Barney sing-along on YouTube. He bobbed his head and pumped his small hands toward the ceiling. She laughed. At Bedford Hills, she'd had a radio that she would play so he could dance, but only a couple of stations came through. "That's what happens when he listens to hip-hop."

Mayer told me DeVanté had brought her closer to her mother. "His bond with her is keeping my bond with her," she said.

And she knew she was lucky to have a place to go. Still, she looked forward to getting a job and moving into her own place in the city. She had always wanted to be a nurse, but knew that her record could keep her from getting a license. For now, she was open to anything that would pay the bills. At Bedford Hills, she hadn't had to worry about things like food and shelter, diapers and child care. Leaving the program, she knew her choices mattered for both of them.

"It's not like I can just get up and decide, *Tonight I'm going to go to the bar*," Mayer said. "He gives me that second thought I should have had a long time ago." That weekend, her mother had offered to babysit so she could go out with friends, for the first time since she'd come home. They were planning to go to a restaurant in the next town: she wanted to stay away from the nightlife in Kingston. She had broken things off with DeVanté's father, who was still in prison upstate, because she'd heard he was keeping contacts in the streets. "You can't be in the middle of picking yourself up and pick somebody else up at the same time," she said. "I feel like I have more-important things to put my effort into."

Before I left, she picked up a potted plant from the kitchen window, a ruby globe with spiny ridges on a corrugated green stalk. "It's a moon cactus," she said. "It was originally just a regular green cactus, but this happens"—she pointed to the globe—"when it lacks chlorophyll." The mutation that gives the moon cactus its bright color also keeps it from thriving on its own, so the seedlings have to be grafted onto another succulent so they can grow. She and DeVanté had bought the plant for Mother's Day. She set it back on the windowsill, where it could soak up the light outside.
http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/07/prison-born/395297/