

**DEFENSE DEPARTMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN THE
SERVICES (DACOWITS) MEETING MINUTES
March 23 and 24, 2009**

DACOWITS held a meeting March 23 and 24, 2009, at the DoubleTree Hotel, Crystal City, National Airport, 300 Army-Navy Drive, Arlington, Virginia. Members and public present during the meeting are at enclosures one and two. Materials used during the meeting are at enclosure three.

23 March 2009

Dr. Mary Nelson, Chairperson DACOWITS, opened the meeting at 8:30 a.m. The Chair discussed that the issues the Committee would be accomplishing over the next two days. The primary purpose of the meeting was for panel discussions on women's roles in deployment and the Service's current assignment policies for the same. Additionally, the Committee, Support Staff and Services collaborated on the Wounded Warrior Family issues, and the upcoming summer surge of Installation visits for this year's topics: Women's roles during OIF/OEF deployments, and whether the military is meeting the needs of the Wounded Warrior families. They reviewed the proposed sites, the visit agenda, discussed the recommended composition of the focus groups, and discussed with the Members how they can best get out of the visit a useful product for the Service in both topic areas.

- At 08:45 a.m. Dr. Nelson initiated the panel discussion with respect to Women's Roles in OIF/OEF deployments with the enlisted panel. Members of the panel were:
 - o 1 - CSM (Army)
 - o 2 - SKC (Coast Guard)
 - o 3 - CMSgt (Air Force)
 - o 4 - HMC (Navy)
 - o 5 - SSG (National Guard) – *not present*
 - o 6 - SFG (National Guard)
 - o 7 - Sgt (Marine Corps)

Introductions were made and Chair fielded the first question “**We're interested in knowing what you did and what you expected to be doing**”. Each enlisted non-commissioned officer articulated their particular deployment experience, and their participatory level in actual combat. The panel members had a variety of skill sets from medical, to logistics, and special assignments beyond their assigned military occupational specialty. Discussions surrounding the Lioness program ensued, as did discussions regarding the adequacy level of tactical military training, the asymmetrical battleground, and the various levels of exposure/risk for the deployed women (not just gender specific,

as was brought up on numerous accounts). All NCOs were proud of their service, regardless of the level of exposure to fire, and would do it again if called upon.

The Committee interspersed various questions during the session, upon which the Chair asked the concluding question: **“If you could have the best of all worlds, what would you tell Congress to do about the combat policy for women? (personal thoughts, not the voice of their respective service)”**? Answers were congruent amongst the enlisted panel members: “do away with the policy; it is a volunteer Army, don’t sign up for a combat MOS if you don’t want one, let water seek its own level; we are all volunteers; do not discriminate against me because I’m a female; the exclusion thing should go away, we are all there because we want to be; completely agree, the exclusion policy should be abolished. I am in combat now, so there’s no point in having something that stops me from doing my job; we are finding ourselves in more and more combat situations, where we are not expected to be, but we more than welcome it. We want to help our country in any way we can. To put a limit on that is kind of crazy, because we’re already there doing it, and then to say we can’t, it’s limiting the success of the mission. There needs to be changes or updates to the policy”. All preceding notes are direct quotes from enlisted panel members, all of who have been deployed at various levels in OIF/OEF.

The Committee took a break from 10:00 a.m. to 10:15 a.m.

- At 10:15 a.m. Dr. Nelson initiated the panel discussion with respect to Women’s Roles in OIF/OEF deployments with the officer panel. Members of the panel were:

- o 1- LCDR (Navy)
- o 2 - MAJ (Air Force)
- o 3 - CPT Cruz (Air Force)
- o 4 - CPT (National Guard)
- o 5 - MAJ (Marine Corps)
- o 6 - LT (Coast Guard)
- o 7 - LTC (Army)

The Chair opened with: **“We’re looking at this year women in combat, and if they think it’s appropriate, do they want to be doing it, is it what they expected? Can you tell us about your experiences and expectations”**? Following introductions each officer articulated their particular deployment experience, and their participatory level in actual combat, as a leader, employment of their female subordinates, and their personal family impact. The panel members had a variety of skill sets from medical, human resources, logistics, and special assignments. All had strong/supportive family connections, which they acknowledged made it more tolerable for their children.

A repeat pattern of the need for additional tactical training mirroring the enlisted panel's comments was noteworthy, as was the agreement that "we are all volunteers". They understand that it is an austere asymmetrical environment, and they are women in combat. One officer mentioned being attached to a combat unit in CONUS, and as a young female at the time, found that if you can prove that you're smart enough to do your job, and get in there with the guys' and do it, you will earn the guys respect and be treated just like everyone else.

There was discussion with respect to Army transformation and modularity and its effect in an asymmetrical battlefield, and its apparent unintended consequences with respect to their military occupational specialty. As with the enlisted panel, there is much miscommunications and misinterpretation with respect to the respective military assignment policies, as reinforced by the earlier Rand study.

The Committee Members interspersed questions throughout the discussion. The Chair continued the session with the following question: **I'd like to hear how you feel about the combat exclusion policy. Should there be no exclusions since it makes no difference to what they're actually doing without the full recognition? I think a lot of the American public thinks that women are not doing what you're all saying they do?**

As with the enlisted panel, the officer's responses sync with each other's with regard to context: **Panelist:** I think it's all words, (with respect to) what's written down in policy, it allows for attachments, which allows women to serve in full capacity in a combat environment, so what does the policy really mean? **Chair:** I don't think the American public is aware of what women are doing. **Panelist:** I don't think America is oblivious (or) see uproar at women fatalities. **Chair:** I think the public thinks they are killed in the back units which happen to be attacked. **Panelist:** I think at the beginning the American public was not as aware as they are today. Our communities are very much aware of who we are and what we do, and that we've been there multiple times now. I think the American public is aware of what's it's like out there for our women today. **Panelist:** We know it'll be an uphill battle to get the wording changed. I think it will be a vocal minority that will fight the change. We do have these youngsters who are coming in and are serving in these functions, and it's confusing. They go to school together, train together, but then they are separated off. It's upsetting and embarrassing. I was told that I can't do that or can't go there because of the law. I considered myself an equal to the males next to me, and so it's embarrassing that I'm prevented from doing what I'm trained for. **Panelist:** I think it's important to consider that it's an all volunteer force. And women are excelling, and while there are some limited career fields, in our current environment and the way we engage, this many relegate women to a position that's lower than their male counterparts. (Note: repeat theme of confusion with respect to law vs policy, and the need to educate at all levels).

The Committee and the Panel then reengaged the need for more tactical/weapons training (not gender-specific issue). Officers concur with the enlisted panel in that

qualification should be the operative word, not gender, in regards to utilization. This was emphasized with examples such as, “what if your best medic is a female/or what if your best gunner is a female”?

The Chair concluded the session with the following question: **Would you want the policy changed, or is leaving it ambiguous to your advantage? Do you see it as a positive thing if the exclusions were just wiped out? And if so, should women be assigned or only be in combat if they volunteer? What’s your personal opinion?** Responses are direct quotes from the respective officers: “In my opinion, I don’t think it’s going to change the way we fight the war. We’re in there already. For the reasons that you stated, we may want to change it, but it won’t change how we’re fighting this war; my personal opinion is to leave it as is. In some instances, some females may be more pressured to go into combat role instead of support role. So I would say to leave it as is; a cleaner line needs to be drawn, it works for our service. I wouldn’t want to see the restrictions enhances so that they’re pulled back from what they’re doing right now; in my personal opinion, policy is somewhat arbitrary in that it decides less what they can contribute. I’d like to see a better balance for women to be recognized for what they’re doing. Taking it one step further with Congress is broader look at legal laws and how they’re handled with our recruits and their contract. It’s not a simple policy shift, but a deeper well to dig. There needs to be education and training. It’s not a simple question; in my experiences as leader in the Air Force, there have been some young women who don’t want to go to Iraq. The education needs to be there on what they can expect to be doing; there’s third and fourth order effects, and this is a much deeper issue than just changing the policy; I’ve been serving as student over past few months, where we have sister services, over 36 international officers. Each one that I ask, they say, what’s the big deal? Most of them the only exclusion is Special Forces – Bulgaria, Netherlands, Spain, Israel. All of my male counterparts, they don’t see what the issue is because they’re fully integrated. I do think the policy needs to be reevaluated, because it impacts funding and training. We need that clarification, because women are in that environment, and is the institution taking the necessary steps to align itself with written policy compared to what we’re actually doing; ditto. I think that if you take on this policy, it has to be an overall policy revision across the board, including how people deal with family. It has to be focused on removing the handicaps or additional work load to get the women in the positions that they’re capable of doing. And you have to increase training. That’s where the revision needs to be made is to pull the handicaps out and use the rest of those necessary training and family issues. So I’m not sure if you can delete just a line – it has to be an overall revision; It’s time to re-look at the policy in light of what and how well women have served in these recent wars; and the after effects of changing the policy need to be considered. I would be concerned with integrating those women in the combat training. How would we put two to three female in an infantry training? I do agree that the policy needs to be reexamined and looked at.

The officer panel fully concurred with the enlisted panel with respect to all are proud to have served and would do it again.

Dr. Nelson ended the session with saying: Thank you for your service. I want to say that on behalf of the Committee, we really appreciate you being here today. And your input is very important to our report, so we thank you very much.

The Committee took lunch at 11:30 p.m. and returned at 12:30 p.m.

At 12:30 p.m. the Committee reconvened and received a briefing from the USMC on the Marine Corps Assignment Policy, to include a detailed discussion on the terms assigned, attached and direct ground combat, followed by Guest Speaker, Charlotte Brock, on Women's Roles in Deployments. Ms. Brock (former USMC CPT) shared her own deployment experiences prior to her current job as editor/analyst at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assignments. An at length discussion on the capabilities women can bring to the fight ensued, followed by a discussion of policy vs law, assignment vs utilization, and again the need for better education for the field is apparent.

The Committee broke from 2:00 p.m. to 2:15 a.m.

At 2:15 p.m. the ICF (research firm) spoke with regards to research and the topics and conduct of the upcoming visits, to including a discussion with the Committee on the values of having the male perspective on the questions/focus group make up, to which the majority agreed. Site and team make up discussions followed.

At 4:30 p.m. the Committee asked if there was a public forum presentation. There was not a presentation for the public forum.

The Committee completed business and adjourned for the day at 5:00p.m.

24 March 2009

Dr Mary Nelson, Chairperson DACOWITS, opened the meeting at 8:30 a.m. The Chair discussed the issues the Committee would be accomplishing the rest of the meeting, which was discussion of the two research questions and collaborating on the upcoming Installation visits with respective Service panels.

At 8:45 a.m. the Navy led off the day's discussions with the review of research questions for both topics with their respective POCs from the Navy. They worked collaboratively with the Committee, looking over the proposed sites, visiting the agenda, discussing the questions, and the recommended composition of the focus groups, and discussing with the Members how they can best get out of the visit a useful product for the Service in both topic areas. The Navy will support the effort through Bethesda Naval Medical Center, in MD, and San Diego, and Balboa, the latter two being in CA.

The Committee took a break from 9:45a.m. to 10:00 a.m.

At 10:00 a.m. the Army followed suit with the Navy in its discussion of the research topics and the upcoming visit to Ft. Drum, NY for the active component, and in the surrounding Watertown, NY area for the Reserve component, working collaboratively with the Committee.

At 11:00 a.m. the Air Force followed suit with the Army in its discussion of the research topics and the upcoming visit to Langley, VA for the active component, working collaboratively with the Committee.

The Committee took lunch at 12:00 p.m. and returned at 1:00 p.m.

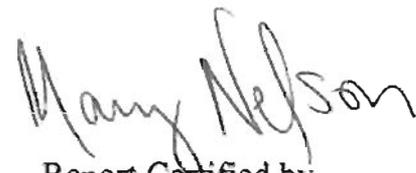
At 1:00 p.m. COL Alberto, Army G1, gave a very complete briefing regarding the Army's assignment policy, to include multiple definitions with respect to assignment, attachment, direct combat etc., examples, full information, and fielded numerous questions from the Committee. Col Alberto concluded with the following guidance: The thing to remember is, the services can make their policies more restrictive, but not less. We have to follow the DOD policy. As broad as it is, that's the minimum that each service must follow. We can only take away the greater restrictions that we have put on, like the collocation clause. DOD can eliminate restrictions as long as they notify Congress and wait for them to take action (30 day rule).

Following the Army assignment policy briefing and until 4:00 p.m., the USMC, Army National Guard, and the Coast Guard, in order, followed suit with the Army in its discussion of the research topics and the upcoming visit to Camp Lejuene, GA, and Ohio, respectively, working collaboratively with the Committee.

At 4:00 p.m. the Committee had an overall discussion regarding the next meeting and the way ahead. It was confirmed that 27-28 May 2009, after Memorial Day weekend would be the best time. There was discussion on whether to limit the research to the Women in Combat issue only, however, the Committee majority felt it was best to complete the Wounded Warrior Family follow up question as well, despite the stress it may place on remaining Committee members if a new Committee is not appointed in a timely manner and the current membership is not extended. As of this time the request for Committee extension has not been acted upon in the higher chain of command.

Committee adjourned for the day at 5:00 p.m.

 5/26/09
Report Submitted by
Col Emma K. Coulson, USA
Military Director, DACOWITS


Report Certified by
Dr. Mary Nelson
DACOWITS Chair

Attachments as Stated

Enclosure One

**DACOWITS MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE
Committee Members Present 23 March 2009**

Dr. Mary Nelson
Mrs. Denise Balzano
Diana Denman
Col Torres
Mrs. Lassus
Mrs. Santiago

Members Absent

None

Members Present 24 March 2009

Dr. Mary Nelson
Mrs. Denise Balzano
Diana Denman
Col Torres
Mrs. Lassus
Mrs. Santiago

Members Absent

None

Enclosure Two

Sign in sheets