

BACKGROUND PAPER
ON
GENDER INTEGRATION

PURPOSE

In accordance with DACOWITS' Terms of Reference, the Employment and Integration (E&I) Subcommittee will examine current efforts to fully integrate women into previously closed combat positions, determine whether barriers are inhibiting full integration, and identify actionable solutions. In addition, the E&I Subcommittee examined recent modifications to women's uniforms, as well as combat gear and equipment, to identify solutions, as required.

QUESTION #6

In December 2015, the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) opened all remaining occupations and positions to women with no exceptions. As a result, the Defense Department opened approximately 213,600 closed positions and 52 closed military occupational specialties to women for the first time. Afterwards, the SecDef directed the Secretaries of the Military Departments and Chiefs of the Military Services to provide their final, detailed Gender Integration Implementation Plans no later than January 1, 2016. Once approved, the Military Services were tasked with executing their plans by April 1, 2016. The Committee requests an updated briefing from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force to address the following (include women in Special Operations Forces (SOF)):

a. Adjustments made to the original 2016 Gender Integration Implementation Plans. Provide specific details on these adjustments, if applicable.

- None.

b. Milestones not met in accordance with the originally published plan. Provide the reason for each milestone not being met, if applicable.

- None.

c. Existing limitations that have stalled the progression (e.g., berthing and privacy, combat gear and/or equipment, etc.), if applicable.

- AETC tracks male and female injury rates for service members in Air Force Special Warfare (AFSPECWAR) career fields, but a comprehensive statistical analysis is hindered by the small number of female candidates and the lack of historical data. In 2021, AETC calculated an 11% injury rate for male AFSPECWAR candidates during qualification courses while females were injured at a rate of 25%. Injuries are common during daily AFSPECWAR training and load bearing activities that occur over several continuous months, with most injuries occurring in the hips, knees, and lower extremities. AETC continues to gather injury data monthly in search of significant gender-specific injury issues and trends.

- Over time the Air Force has introduced a range of Human Performance Optimization (HPO) capabilities into training and operational units to reduce injury rates, speed recovery, and improve overall performance. These efforts include the integration of physical therapists, strength and conditioning coaches, clinical psychologists, athletic trainers, sports medicine physicians, dietitians, and other specialists. These programs improve readiness and sustain the well-being of AFSPECWAR forces. Within the initial skills training pipeline in AETC, assigned HPO specialists educate and train candidates on strength and conditioning, performance nutrition, physical therapy, and psychological support. The program also provides rehabilitative support that accelerates return to duty or training following an injury. The AETC program provides an HPO foundation for Airmen that is reinforced in the operational units through HPO programs at their parent Major Command, as well as through U.S. Special Operations Command's Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) program within Air Force Special Operations Command.

d. Projected timeline for the next 18 months to fully integrate remaining occupations and positions to women.

- The Air Force proactively recruits men and women for AFSPECWAR specialties. In 2018, Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS) established a dedicated recruiting squadron and staff elements focused exclusively on identifying, recruiting, and developing capable AFSPECWAR candidates. AFRS recruited diverse applicants from all regions of the country in 2021 through multiple AFSPECWAR recruitment and inclusion initiatives. These efforts included recruiting events and fitness competitions such as CrossFit, Spartan Races, Wodapalooza, and FitExpo in addition to female-only action sports competitions such as SuperGirl Pro. The Air Force supported these efforts by updating its marketing strategy and dedicating 45% of the AFSPECWAR media budget to producing imagery targeting potential female candidates. In addition, AFRS's Detachment 1 mission to leverage social media to inform, influence, and inspire tomorrow's leaders through innovative outreach opportunities helped attract and recruit diverse, high-performing, and innovative AFSPECWAR candidates. The Air Force will continue to seek opportunities and execute outreach efforts designed to recruit women and diversify the AFSPECWAR population more broadly.

- AETC funded its third iteration of the Candidate Development Support Service (COSS) contract in 2021. Through this contract, AETC employs strength and conditioning "developers" geographically dispersed across the country to work with potential AFSPECWAR candidates prior to accession into the Air Force to prepare them for the AFSPECWAR training pipeline. These developers are all prior tactical athletes familiar with the high-fail events within the training pipeline. They provide tailored individual training programs and one-on-one coaching for each candidate to enhance strengths and address weaknesses in preparation for the challenges they will face in the AFSPECWAR training pipeline. On average, the developers work with approximately 30 total female candidates each month nation-wide. The upward trend in female performance in the AFSPECWAR pipeline is largely due to this targeted approach to pre-accession resiliency.

- Validated operationally relevant, gender-neutral standards for fitness, aptitude, and performance are in place for the previously closed specialties and in use at all recruiting, pre-accession development, and training locations.

AETC requires gender integration training for all new personnel involved with the AF-SPECWAR training pipeline, both trainees and cadre, and then again annually for anyone involved with courses with female trainees. AETC utilizes a one-time seven-hour training module for all new AFSPECWAR instructors followed by annual refresher training. This training addresses the instructor's role in ensuring a culture and environment characterized by dignity and respect for all Airmen. Additionally, AETC provides guidance to its commanders on responsibilities regarding women in training. Topics include integration concerns, training standards, gender differences, unconscious bias, and reinforcement of zero tolerance for sexual harassment, sexual assault, hazing, and other unprofessional behaviors. AETC also ensures female support members serve as cadre advocates for female trainees to increase comfort in reporting issues and concerns that arise during training and to identify and mitigate unintentional bias. AETC made significant modifications to training facilities and dormitories originally constructed for all male students on Joint Base San Antonio - Lackland. Structural modifications to sleeping areas, showers, and restrooms decreased performance barriers for women by increasing cohesion and enhancing daily interactions with teammates without compromising professionalism or privacy, regardless of gender. The Air Force is also pursuing facility modifications that mitigate gender-specific training obstacles at Special Warfare Dive School and Apprentice Courses for Combat Rescue, Pararescue, Special Tactics, Special Reconnaissance, and Combat Controller career fields.

e. Current or future initiatives being undertaken to increase female accession and retention in combat occupations and positions (e.g., mentorship and/or sponsorship programs, duty assignments, promotions, Army's "Leader's First" policy, etc.)?

- The Air Force remains committed to gender integration across the Service and will continue to take active steps to recruit and prepare women for previously closed specialties. The Air Force will also continue to collect data on women undergoing recruiting, pre-accession development, and training in these specialties to inform data-driven improvements and ensure equal opportunity for all Airmen who wish to pursue these ground combat specialties. Each Major Command's Inspector General office conducts unit effectiveness inspections every 24 to 36 months (48 to 60 months in the Air National Guard) to assess whether Air Force organizations meet service-specific compliance requirements, including those associated with the full integration of women. The Air Force Inspector General will continue to assess and evaluate program management and address any associated complaints.