



Combat Integration: A Snapshot Two Years Later January 22, 2014

Two years later, women have not been permitted to qualify for most of the occupations that were closed to them on January 24, 2013. The pace of combat integration under DOD's multiple plans is slow, despite the Secretary's directive that it "occur as expeditiously as possible."

The Services and SOCOM submitted implementation plans to Secretary Hagel in May 2013, setting forth the process they will follow and the timetables they will meet to comply with the 2013 directive. The plans focused on opening approximately 251,670 positions in two categories:

1. Opening assignments to women who hold military occupational specialties (MOSs) so they can serve in *units* that have been closed (e.g. assigning a medic [an already open occupation] to an infantry company) (approximately 77,406 positions);
2. Opening MOSs that are closed to women (primarily infantry, armor, artillery, Special Forces) (174,264 positions).

The largest number of closed positions and units are in the Army, the Marine Corps and SOCOM. Navy and Air Force have fewer closed positions and many of those positions require cross assignment to Special Operations Command.

- **Army:** Although the Army has the preponderance of closed billets, so far they have closely followed their plan, opening 55,000 positions mostly in previously closed units. Today all units down to the company level are open. Women can now serve in infantry companies in historically open specialties like communications and supply. Additionally, the Army promised to establish a process for developing and validating gender neutral individual standards for all occupations by December 2014. That appears to be complete and standards for artillery and combat engineers are set. This spring the Army begins sequentially opening all remaining closed Field Artillery and Combat Engineer specialties. However, while the Army promises to open Infantry and Armor specialties they are still setting standards and those occupations won't be open until well after the January 2016 deadline.
- **SOCOM:** None of the occupations within the Special Operations community has been opened to women and very little information is available, relative to how they have gone about setting gender neutral standards, or of any future openings. All Army Special Forces, Army Rangers, Navy SEALs, Marine Raiders, Battlefield Airmen and miscellaneous "tactical enablers" are still closed. This month the Army announced a

plan to allow women to attend Army Ranger School, on a trial basis, but made it clear that even if women pass the course they won't be assigned to the Ranger Regiment. More recently, the Air Force said they will open all 7 remaining closed specialties, all of which require cross assignment to SOCOM, but the openings won't begin until after the January 2016 deadline. Although the Air Force had the fewest number of closed positions and specialties, 7 specialties and less than 5,000 positions, they have not opened anything in the first two years. SOCOM has opened a few units. Women can now serve in all open specialties in the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and on Special Forces battalion staffs.

- **Marine Corps:** Aspects of the Marine Corps plan raise grave doubts about the seriousness of their efforts. There has been some progress on the integration of women into closed units in jobs where they already qualify but all infantry units remain completely closed as do of the previously closed occupations. The Marines Corps' initial integration plan was modified to include an extensive experiment. Initially, the Marine's announced that their standards setting process is already valid and gender neutral and they allowed women to attempt to complete their infantry qualification courses. Very quickly enlisted women began to qualify as infantrymen while no women officers have yet to qualify. After women began to qualify the Marines determined that perhaps they had not accurately set collective task standards that Marines must perform once they are assigned to the fleet. The experimental task force is an effort to determine and set collective task requirements. The experiment is ongoing and will not be complete until late summer 2015 at which time the Marines will determine which, if any, combat specialties will be opened to women. Many aspects of the experiment raise concerns. For example, if the experiment is being conducted to establish collective task standards how will the results be used to determine if and how to integrate women into the closed occupations and units? Other aspects of the Marine Corps' research are also troubling. So far no women officers have completed the infantry officer course. Only 4 have ever made it past the first day. All three women who passed the first day from the most recent class were dropped on the same day later in the course for not keeping pace during a hike despite the fact that none of the class was able to meet the established standard.
- **Navy:** Recently the Navy opened coastal riverine force and small craft occupations and units. Seven previously closed submarine enlisted occupations were opened. The Navy also opened positions in Marine Air-Ground Naval Gunfire Liaison Companies and on Marine Corps Battalion staffs less infantry. Still closed are assignments to Navy billets in USMC units that remain closed to women Marines and special operations occupations and units including Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL Teams. Positions for enlisted women aboard some Frigates, Mine Counter Measure ships and Coastal Patrol Craft are closed due to berthing limitations and most likely will not be opened because they are scheduled for decommissioning between 2016 and 2024.