



(US Air Force photo by Patrick Albright)

1st. Lt. Alessandra Kirby, Utah National Guard, negotiates the Darby Obstacle Course at Fort Benning, Ga., during the Ranger assessment conducted 15 November 2012. Those selected will be among a handful of women going to the grueling Army Ranger school as part of the U.S. military's first steps toward allowing women to move into the elite combat unit.

Women in Combat

The Question of Standards

Jude Eden

Are women in the military discouraged from training to meet the men's standards? Is this why all women have washed out of the Marine Corps' Officer Infantry Course? That is one of the charges female Marine 1st Lt. Sage Santangelo makes in a March 2014 article for the *Washington Post*. One of the 29 women, as of this writing, who have failed the course, Santangelo says,

I believe that I could pass, and that other women could pass, if the standards for men

and women were equal from the beginning of their time with the Marines, if endurance and strength training started earlier than the current practice for people interested in going into the infantry, and if women were allowed a second try, as men are. ... Women aren't encouraged to establish the same mental toughness as men—rather, they're told that they can't compete. Men, meanwhile, are encouraged to perceive women as weak.¹



(U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Marianne T. Mangrum)

Marine Corps 1st Lt. Marissa Loya, a female engagement team commanding officer, crawls through a doorway 30 December 2012 during a patrol in Marjah, Helmand Province, Afghanistan. The team worked with infantry Marines by engaging women and children in support of the International Security Assistance Force.

This always seems to happen. As traditionally male military occupational specialties (MOSs) are opened to women, the standards are questioned and maligned as unfairly discriminatory as women's inability to achieve them is exposed.

Development of Double Standards

Double standards were developed because every time women are tested, they prove that they cannot consistently achieve men's standards and that they suffer many more injuries than men do in the attempt. Proponents pushing more military opportunities for women have never insisted women achieve the men's standards because their lack of qualification would mean fewer women in the ranks. They could not achieve the standards when the military academies first were integrated. In his 1998 book *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, Army veteran Brian Mitchell cites results for physical testing at West Point and Annapolis:

When 61 percent [of female West Point plebes] failed a complete physical test, compared to 4.8 percent of male plebes, separate standards were devised for the women.

Similar adjustments were made to other standards. At Annapolis, a two-foot stepping stool was added to an indoor obstacle course to enable women to surmount an eight-foot wall.²

Mitchell also reports that when women were integrated into the Air Force's Cadet Wing,

The [Air Force] academy's physical fitness test included push-ups, pull-ups, a standing broad jump, and six-hundred-yard run, but since very few of the women could perform one pull-up or complete any of the other events, different standards were devised for them. They were allowed more time for the run, less distance on the jump, and fewer push-ups. Instead of pull-ups, female cadets were given points for the length of time they could hang on the bar They fell out of group runs, lagged behind on road marches, failed to negotiate obstacles on the assault courses (later modified to make them easier), could not climb a rope The women averaged eight visits to the medical clinic; the men averaged only 2.5 visits On the

average, women suffered nine times as many shin splints as men, five times as many stress fractures, and more than five times as many cases of tendinitis.³

By this time, the Army was further along with integrating women but was faced with a problem. There were no standards based on MOS requirements, so recruits were assigned to jobs based only on passing the physical fitness test in basic training. The Army had the right number of females allotted to recently opened heavy-lifting jobs. However, the women could not do the heavy lifting, they suffered higher rates of injury, and their attrition rates were higher.

Therefore, the Army developed an objective standard to test recruits and “match the physical capacity of its soldiers with military occupational specialty requirements.”⁴ Introduced in 1981, the Military Entrance Physical Strength Capacity Test (MEPSCAT) tested lifting capabilities based on MOS demands as light, medium, moderately heavy, heavy (over 50 lbs.), and very heavy (100 lbs.). “In the heavy lifting category, 82 percent of men and 8 percent of women qualified.”⁵

This is catastrophic in terms of mission readiness. According to a 1985 Army report entitled *Evaluation of the Military Entrance Physical Strength Capacity Test*, “if MEPSCAT had been a mandatory selection requirement during 1984, the Army would have created a substantial shortfall in the moderately heavy category (required lift is 80 pounds) by rejecting 32 percent of the female accessions.”⁶

In her 2000 book *The Kinder, Gentler Military: Can America's Gender-Neutral Fighting Force Still Win Wars?*, Stephanie Gutmann reports that a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services responded to this data by casting the familiar pall of unfair discrimination and sexism: “The Army is a male-oriented institution and officials are resistant to changes that will allow women to be fully utilized. ... Those [strength] standards reeked of that resistance.”⁷ The proposed MEPSCAT testing standard was never adopted because it exposed women’s lack of qualification for the jobs newly opened to them and to which they were already being assigned. Using that standard would have resulted in significantly less female representation in newly opened MOSs, so MEPSCAT was derided and summarily dispatched.

Those pushing women into combat today are no more able than their predecessors were to show that women can meet the men’s standards, let alone the men’s combat standards. The Center for Military Readiness (CMR), an independent public policy organization, published a report in October 2014 confirming this conclusion. The report cited testing by the U.S. Marine Corps Training and Education Command (TECOM) in 2013.⁸ The command tested 409 male and 379 female Marine volunteers in several combat-related tasks.⁹ The test data highlighted in the CMR’s report include results of the clean-and-press, the 155 mm artillery lift-and-carry, and the obstacle course wall-with-assist-box.¹⁰

According to the CMR, “the clean-and-press event involves single lifts of progressively heavier weights from the ground to above the head (70, 80, 95, [and] 115 lbs.), plus 6 rep[etition]s with a 65 lb. weight. In this event, 80 percent of the men passed the 115 lb. test, but only 8.7 percent of the women passed.”¹¹

The CMR reports,

In the 155 mm artillery lift-and-carry, a test simulating ordnance stowing, volunteers had to pick up a 95 lb. artillery round and carry it 50 meters in under 2 minutes. Noted the [Marine Corps] report, “Less than 1 percent of men, compared to 28.2 percent of women, could not complete the 155 mm artillery round lift-and-carry in the allotted time.” If trainees had to “shoulder the round and/or carry multiple rounds, the 28.2 percent failure rate would increase.”¹²

Moreover, the CMR states,

On the obstacle course wall-with-assist-box test, a 20” high box (used to simulate a helping hand) essentially reduced the height of the 7 ft. wall to approximately 5’4.” Quoting the [Marine Corps] report, “Less than 1.2 percent of the men could not get over the obstacle course wall using an assist box, while wearing [protective equipment] ... [compared to] 21.32 percent of women who could not get over the obstacle course wall.”¹³

Natural Differences

There is a reason to this rhyme, and her name is Nature. She has given us decades of data for a track record. It is not changing even though women are

participating in more sports and bodybuilding than ever. To complete the same physically demanding task, a woman expends much more effort than a man (no fair!). A man's bones are denser, his heart is bigger—making his aerobic capacity greater—and he is able to develop much more lean muscle mass. He can carry more weight and run farther and faster with it. His units-of-work effort is worth many of hers, and he will be able to maintain a demanding, arduous level of performance for far longer than she will in both the short and long term. Double standards did not create this reality; they are the response to it (and to political pressure to open more jobs to women). Kingsley Browne writes in his 2007 book *Co-ed Combat: The New Evidence That Women Shouldn't Fight the Nation's Wars*,

When males and females both start out in good physical condition, women gain less than men from further conditioning, so that the gap between the sexes actually increases. A study of male and female cadets at West Point, who all started out in relatively good condition, found that although women's upper body strength was initially 66 percent of men's, by the end of their first two years, it had dropped below 60 percent.¹⁴

Moreover, Browne states,

Sex differences in physical performance are here to stay. As Constance Holden observed in *Science* magazine, the male advantage in athletics will endure, due to men's "steady supply of a performance-enhancing drug that will never be banned: endogenous testosterone."¹⁵

In other words, a platoon of the top female CrossFitters is still no match for a platoon of the top male CrossFitters. It does not matter that one individual female CrossFitter may be stronger and faster than one particular male. The idea that one woman somewhere might someday be able to achieve the infantry standard is inadequate to justify putting women in the units. Women have to be able to consistently and predictably make and maintain the men's standards in order to demonstrate equal ability and be useful in combat.

Even on a lower general standard, women break at far higher rates than men do, with longer-term

injuries. More women leave the military, when or before their contracts are up. Women are regularly unavailable for duty for female issues. *Chicago Tribune* correspondent Kirsten Scharnberg reports in a 2005 article that women suffer post-traumatic stress disorder more acutely.¹⁶ The combat "opportunity" is sounding less and less equal all the time.

In his 2013 book *Deadly Consequences: How Cowards Are Pushing Women Into Combat*, retired Army Col. Robert Maginnis describes several military studies showing the physical suffering of women in combat:

1. A U.S. Navy study found the risk of anterior cruciate ligament injury associated with military training is almost ten times higher for women than for men.
2. A sex-blind study by the British military found that women were injured 7.5 times more often than men while training to the same standards. ...
5. Women suffer twice as many lower-extremity injuries as men, an Army study found, and they fatigue much more quickly because of the difference in "size of muscle," which makes them more vulnerable to non-battle injury.¹⁷

Marine Capt. Katie Petronio, writing in the *Marine Corps Gazette* about Officer Candidate School, states, Of candidates who were dropped from training because they were injured or not physically qualified, females were breaking at a much higher rate than males, 14 percent versus 4 percent. The same trends were seen at TBS [The Basic School] in 2011; the attrition rate for females was 13 percent versus 5 percent for males, and 5 percent of females were found not physically qualified compared with 1 percent of males.¹⁸

We females can train as hard as we like, and we may increase strength, stamina, and fitness. Nevertheless, our increased fitness still will not put us on par with that of the men who are training to their utmost, like men in combat units and the Special Forces. They are the top ten percent of the top ten percent. We also bear too many other risks to be cost effective. No matter how widespread feminism becomes, our bones will always be lighter, more vulnerable to breaks and fractures. Our aerobic capacity



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Tramel Garrett, 25th Infantry Division PAO)

Sgt. Amanda Carrasco, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, crosses the finish line 25 November 2014 during the 25th Infantry Division pre-ranger female screening in Hawaii. The 10-day assessment was intended to screen and select candidates for attendance at the Ranger Training Assessment Course, the Army's premier pre-ranger course, Fort Benning, Ga.

will still be 20 to 40 percent less, and we will still be less able to bear heavy gear at a hard-pounding run. It is not for lack of training. Throughout 2013, the female recruits going through Marine Corps boot camp were being trained to achieve the men's minimum pull-up standard. They were *trained to pass* the test, yet 55 percent of them could not make that minimum, according to an Associated Press report.¹⁹ Ninety-nine percent of male recruits can, whether or not they were particularly athletic before shipping off to boot camp.

Can women scale the eight-foot wall in full combat load without steps? No steps are provided to give women a boost in the heat of battle, as they are in coed military boot camps (and even the Marine Corps' Officer Candidate School). Santangelo boasts that she performed 16 pull-ups on her last physical fitness test. That is excellent, but the test is done in a t-shirt and shorts, it is a test only of general fitness, and it is far less strenuous than infantry training, let alone combat. Can women do a dozen pull-ups in full combat gear? That is just one of many requirements in the Combat Endurance Test (CET). Can

women carry a man on their backs with a full 80 lb. combat load? These differences in ability are deal breakers in combat—that is why these standards are not arbitrary. The military has yet to see the so-called “push-button war” that activists cite as mitigating for women's lesser physical strength. Our combat units have often been on foot with their heavy loads in the rough mountainous terrain of Afghanistan. The high infantry standards are designed to keep the weak out because accommodating the weak means lives lost and mission failure. The standards of the Officer Infantry Course are high because infantry officers must not only be educated, brave, and highly athletic, but they also must be better at everything than the members of their units because Marine officers lead from the front. Hence their motto: *Ductus Exemplo*, leadership by example.

In the 2013 Pentagon briefing to announce the repeal of the combat exclusion, then Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta stated that women are “serving in a growing number of critical roles on and off the battlefield,” and that men and women are “fighting and dying together.”²⁰ However, serving in critical

roles and dying in the combat zone do not equate to proving equal infantry capabilities. Noticeably omitted by advocates for women in combat is that the women who have been injured or died in Iraq and Afghanistan were not in the combat zone having passed the infantry's standards. We honor their sacrifice, but we acknowledge that they were part of support units who went through whatever pre-deployment workups their leadership gave them (and these can vary greatly). Being in the combat zone, dangerous as it is, is still worlds away from the door-kicking offensive missions of our combat units. Yet, advocates for women in combat are willing to keep women on a lower standard as they push for re-evaluation. *USA Today* correspondent Jim Michaels reports, "Nancy Duff Campbell, co-president of the National Women's Law Center, says the Marines should re-evaluate the standards before putting women through."²¹ In a recent article, U.S. Army Reserve Col. Ellen Haring opines that the CET, which women routinely find impossible to pass,

is merely an initiation rite, not comparable measurement for infantry suitability, and therefore passing it should be abandoned as a formal standard.²²

Claims of Discrimination

Lt. Santangelo wants us to believe that something other than women's ability is the reason they are not making the infantry's standards. It is not women's fault that 92 percent of them cannot do the 115 lb. clean-and-press; it is because men are victimizing brutes. If only this sexism and discrimination did not exist, women would be able to carry heavier loads for long distances over rough terrains at a fast clip without getting four times the injuries. She claims that not offering women a second try through the Officer Infantry Course equals discrimination. That is not true. The only officers, male or female, who get a chance to try the course again are those slated for an infantry unit, as Marine Lt. Emma Stokein explains in a piece called "The Mission Goes First: Female Marines and the Infantry."²³ Since combat units are



(U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Tyler L. Main)

A female Marine steadily treks on during a 20 February 2013 road march. The Infantry Training Battalion, Camp Geiger, N.C., has begun to fully integrate female Marines into an entire training cycle. This will help the Marine Corps evaluate the performance of the female Marines to determine the possibility of allowing women into combat-related job fields.

still closed to women, they do not get a second try because this delays their job training and pushes back Marines waiting their first turn. She and all the other non-infantry men who are not allowed a second try are discriminated against based on their MOS, not their sex. Letting her try the course again, which then Commandant Gen. James F. Amos did after Santangelo published her article, was applying a double standard. She asks that the rules and standards be ignored and that she get special treatment because she is a woman. That is quite a start for an officer claiming to want equal treatment, and wanting to lead men in combat. Does she want men to follow her example? Once she is head of a platoon, will she expect the men and women she leads to follow her example?

Another claim she makes is the Marine Corps' deliberate discouragement of women to train hard. This one does not ring true to me because it is so antithetical to my own experience and observations as a female Marine. In my four-year enlistment, from 2004 to 2008, no one ever told me (or anyone around me whom I knew of) that I could not compete because I was a woman, nor anything like it. They would not have dared. They were too worried about being politically correct since an off-color joke overheard by a third party is enough for a sexual harassment claim. Maybe I just had an exceptional experience to have made it through four years from Parris Island to Iraq unscathed by all those Neanderthals. No one ever discouraged me from training enough, and they did not have to encourage me to train more. I already pushed myself the hardest, including plenty of supplementary training so that I would not be the weakest link. Proving the feminist's lie that men and women are interchangeable takes a lot of extra work. When I was at Camp Lejeune's gym most days a week, I never noticed any shortage of women. Women compete in sports at the highest levels, and today CrossFit, mud runs, and Iron Man (Iron Woman!) triathlons are all the rage. Was Santangelo powerless in 2013 to shore up her own weaknesses if additional conditioning was all it took? Why does a strong, young college hockey player with the guts to join the Marines, the ability to become an officer, and such a strong desire to see women in combat that she would try out for the infantry then wilt at (alleged) discouragement from anyone? How was she able to

get so far? Herein lies the usual riddle of feminist dogma shared by nearly all those pushing women into combat: Women are as strong as men, but women are victims of men. They are not strong enough to prevent rape stateside, but they are sure-as-hell ready to go hand-to-hand with members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

I also reject Santangelo's charge that men in the military are encouraged to perceive women as weak. If anything, they are encouraged, at peril of ending their careers, to make themselves believe that women and men are interchangeable. Those who do not sing that tune are charged with waging the "war on women." In my experience, feminism and political correctness are so prevalent in the military that men trip over themselves trying to ensure they do not offend. Military leaders cannot afford to even think the truth: Women are not as strong and athletic as strong, athletic men are. It is biology and physics. It is Nature. Most important, it is consistent and predictable. Women's biology makes them a deficit in combat. Those who insist combat units should be opened to women can never prove it would be a real benefit because of all the persistent issues. They can only institute a mandatory doublethink.

For the sake of women's career opportunities, the old tougher standards have already been lowered or abandoned over the decades. Gone are the long jump and the 40-yard man-carry. Training tasks are long-since team-oriented, where individual weaknesses are camouflaged by the group, so the two-person (one dare not call it "two-man") stretcher-carry is now a four-person stretcher-carry. Between lower standards for women and political correctness that sees making war-fighting men out of boys as abuse, the results are a lower standard of performance overall. Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin E. Dempsey continued this decades-old tradition at the January 2013 Pentagon briefing. Dempsey said, "if we do decide that a particular standard is so high that a woman couldn't make it, the burden is now on the service to come back and explain, why is it that high? Does it really have to be that high?"²⁴

That seems a fantastically obtuse question for a military leader to ask, especially in a time of war. Yet it makes complete sense through the lens of feminist activism because Dempsey also said the military

“must make sure that there are a sufficient number of females entering the career field and already assigned to the related commands and leadership positions.”²⁵ The decree demands that the testing and implementation are done simultaneously by January 2016. The burden should be on supporters of women in combat to prove women can make and maintain the infantry and Special Forces standards as they are, and only after that should they proceed to discuss the parameters in which women might be effectively used in combat operations. Instead, the Department of Defense has put the onus on the units, who are also under pressure to prove they are diverse and not sexist by having the *correct* number of women. Next year’s budget may depend on it. Moreover, what happens in this kind of climate as military budgets are being slashed? The Army recently cut 20,000 from its ranks. Where everything is measured against diversity and “equal career opportunity for women” over mission readiness, we can assume quotas of women will continue to be filled while more qualified men are cut.

The Need for High Standards

Of the myriad of superb reasons to maintain the combat exclusion—such as additional hygiene needs and risks, sex, rape, risk of capture, pregnancy, unit cohesion, broken homes, and abandoned children to name a few—women’s inability to make the infantry standards is simply the first and most obvious. It is the wall women-in-combat activists cannot scale without a step box, if you will.

Meanwhile, the argument to maintain the combat exclusion makes itself easily in every aspect. Including women in combat units is bad for combat, bad for women, bad for men, bad for children, and bad for the country. The argument for the combat exclusion is provable all the time, every time. Political correctness has no chance against Nature. Her victories are staring us in the face at all times. The men just keep being able

to lift more and to run faster, harder, and longer with more weight on their backs while suffering fewer injuries. They just keep never getting pregnant. The combat units have needs that women cannot meet. Women have needs that life in a combat unit cannot accommodate without accepting significant disadvantage and much greater expense. Where 99 percent of men can do the heavy-lifting tasks typical of gunners, but 85 percent of women cannot, there is no gap women need to fill. Women are already utilized where they are needed in the combat zone, such as for intelligence gathering, or what I did, frisking women for explosives.

There is nothing going on in the infantry that men cannot do and for which they need women. Panetta said women are “serving in a growing number of critical roles on and off the battlefield. The fact is that they have become an integral part of our ability to perform our mission.”²⁶ Women have honorably served in the combat zone, but not on the infantry’s standards, on door-kicking missions. Let us be honest. Panetta’s words are spin—not exactly the stuff combat commanders’ dreams are made of when it comes to building the tip of the spear.

Military women are strong, tough, and dedicated in their own right. Women do not need to be in the combat units to prove they are important or to serve honorably and well, and they do not need to be there to gain career opportunities. Women have achieved some of the highest levels of military leadership without entering combat units. The United States is at war with child-raping, honor-killing, suicide-bombing, amputation-happy savages that are beheading and raping their way across Iraq and Afghanistan, not limited by rules of engagement or diversity metrics. The high male standards of U.S. military forces exist so that the Nation can be victorious against its enemies with the fewest casualties possible. We should see attempts to jettison high standards as detrimental to all, and we should soundly reject them. ■

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Notes

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8. Center for Military Readiness, *U.S. Marine Corps Research Findings: Where is the Case for Co-Ed Ground Combat?*, October 2014, vi, <http://cmrlink.org/data/sites/85/CMRDocuments/InterimCMRSpecRpt-100314.pdf> (accessed 9 January 2015). See the CMR report for additional sources of U.S. Marine Corps Training and Education Command and Naval Health Research Center data.
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14. Kingsley Browne, *Co-ed Combat: The New Evidence That Women Shouldn't Fight the Nation's Wars* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 24. Browne cites Phillip Bishop, Kirk Cureton, and Mitchell Collins, "Sex Difference in Muscular Strength in Equally Trained Women," *Ergonomics* 30, no. 4 (1987): 675-687.
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17. Robert L. Maginnis, *Deadly Consequences: How Cowards Are Pushing Women Into Combat* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2013), 122. See Maginnis for the numerous studies he cites.
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22. Ellen Haring, "Can Women Be Infantry Marines?," *Charlie Mike Blog*, War on the Rocks.com, entry posted 29 May 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/05/can-women-be-infantry-marines/#> (accessed 12 January 2015). Haring writes, "the Combat Endurance Test serves as an initiation rite and not a test of occupational qualification. Do initiation rites have a place in our military? ... Let's call it what it is—a challenging initiation into an elite group that prides itself on being tough, resilient, and loyal to the foundational beliefs of this country."
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24. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, quoted in U.S. Department of Defense news transcript of press briefing by then Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta and Gen. Dempsey from the Pentagon, 24 January 2013.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, Former Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta.