



AUSA BACKGROUND BRIEF



ARMY WOMEN IN COMBAT ROLES

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Today, the active Army includes in its ranks about 83,000 women or 11 percent of the total force. The percentage of women in the Army's Reserve Components (the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard) is even higher. Fifteen years ago, the Army was only 2.6 percent female. Not surprisingly, the number of Army jobs or positions available to women has grown steadily since the early 1970's. Part of this process of expanding opportunities for Army women has been the continuous revision of rules and policies concerning the positions women may fill in the military service.

In the fall of 1987, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) issued a highly critical report on Department of Defense efforts to address the issues and problems confronting women in the Army and its sister services. Then Secretary of Defense, Frank C. Carlucci, responded by forming a Task Force on Women in the Military, which, in January 1988, issued a report focusing on the services combat-exclusion policies. It also delved into attitudes towards women service members and the career progression for women in the military.

After reviewing the report, Secretary Carlucci ordered a new educational effort aimed toward curtailing and eventually eliminating sexual harassment in the Armed Forces. Additionally, he mandated that all four services adopt the same rule for determining which job positions would remain closed to women. Carlucci required that the services apply a uniform standard, called the "risk rule", to examine the risks of "exposure to hostile fire capture" as the proper criteria for opening certain jobs to women.

In the past, each service had generally been free to apply the two combat-exclusion statutes (Title 10 U.S.C. 6015 and 8549) as it deemed appropriate, taking into account vague policy directives from the Secretary of Defense and the different forms of combat operations each service conducts. Specific opportunities available to women changed as the tactical doctrine, technology, weapons and force structure of each service evolved.

Traditionally, the Army has used battlefield proximity as the primary factor in considering which positions to open or close to women and has stated that women would not be assigned to positions involving the highest probability of direct combat. Direct combat is defined as "engaging an enemy with individual or crew-served weapons while being exposed to direct enemy fire, a high probability of direct physical contact with the enemy and a substantial risk of capture".

In 1983, the Secretary of the Army created the Direct Combat Probability Coding System (DCPC). Under this system, every billet in the Army was evaluated based upon the duties of the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) or Area of Concentration (AOC) and the unit's mission, tactical doctrine and location on the battlefield. Then, each position was given a P-code based upon the probability of that position engaging in direct combat. Under this system, P1 represented the greatest probability of direct combat and P7, the lowest. Women could serve in all but P1 positions. In addition, several non-combat arms positions were closed due to their forward location on the battlefield. Generally, assignments to units operating forward of the brigade rear area were closed to women while those operating generally behind brigade rear were open.

In 1985, then Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger, issued a statement to the services regarding combat-exclusion policies. He said, in part, "the combat exclusion rule should be interpreted to allow as many possible career opportunities for women to be kept open." In response to this directive, the Army opened forward support battalions which habitually operate throughout the brigade area to women, with the exception of infantry and tank support teams within the forward support battalions.

As a result of Secretary Carlucci's directive to follow the "risk rule", the Army announced, on 14 November 1988, that an additional 3,128 active duty and 8,010 Reserve Component jobs previously closed would be open to women. These new opportunities include communications and electronics positions in the headquarters units of infantry and armor divisions, air defense artillery battalions, signal battalions and some light infantry divisions. The Army is continuing to examine its policies regarding the combat exclusion of women and to adjust those policies when necessary to provide the maximum opportunities for women to serve in their chosen field without violating U.S. law.

RECAPITULATION

Of nearly 2.2 million active duty military positions, about 1.1 million, or fifty percent, are presently closed to women. In the Army, 375,275 of 750,000 active duty positions are closed to women—also about 50 percent. Of those billets closed to women, 276,594 are closed for statutory reasons, while 98,681 are male-only positions in order to provide state-jobs for combat troops returning from overseas assignment, or to provide equal promotion opportunity for men and women at all ranks.

SOURCES

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