

# SOLDIER 2020

By GEN Robert W. Cone

*Above, soldiers conduct tactical movement with combat load testing at Fort Bliss, Texas. CPL Kristine Tejada, below, of the 3rd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, provides security for a tour of the ancient city of Ur, Iraq.*

**T**his year, the Army initiated a deliberate service-wide effort—Soldier 2020—to ensure that our units are filled with the best qualified soldiers.

This effort includes opening previously closed positions and occupational specialties to women while maintaining

our combat effectiveness. For generations, women in uniform have served our nation with skill, courage and tenacity. In the last 12 years, more than a quarter of a million women served in Iraq and Afghanistan, of whom approximately 150 were killed in action and another 800 were wounded. Today, women fulfill crucial combat support roles in combat arms battalions around the world.

Our recent wartime experience indicates there are few practical limits to the vital contributions women can make in our Army formations.

Therefore, the Soldier 2020 effort seeks to remove as many barriers as



Left: U.S. Army/PVT Andrew Slovinsky. Above: U.S. Army.



*A soldier drags a casualty to safety at Fort Sill, Okla., as part of TRADOC's review of physical standards.*

possible and allow talented people—regardless of gender—to serve in any position in which they are capable of performing to standard. Soldier 2020 is rooted in three principles:

- Maintain the dominance of our nation's warfighting forces by preserving unit readiness, cohesion and morale.
- Validate both physical and mental occupational performance standards for all MOSs, initially focusing on those currently closed to women.
- Set the conditions so all soldiers, men and women, have an opportunity to succeed as their talents dictate.

### **Including Women—The Time Has Come**

The Army began expanding roles for women 40 years ago. Since then, women have trained and fought alongside men as members of the profession of arms. Starting in the 1970s, they used the same curricula, learned the same tasks and did so under the same conditions as their male counterparts. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, we integrated women into most of the force, making them part of nearly every training event. By the time we went into Iraq and Afghanistan,

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women were filling essential roles throughout the force. During the wars, commanders routinely attached women to small combat units when they possessed skills needed on the battlefield.

The contributions and sacrifices made by women have challenged many long-standing assumptions about their roles in battle as well as the efficacy of the rules meant to keep them from serving in combat units. This summer, when the Army allowed women into a number of combat battalions in MOSs that were already open to them, there was no need for fanfare. The vast majority of our force is already integrated.

We are approaching the gender integration of the combat arms MOSs in a clear-eyed manner. We must do this right, lest we put women and our institutional credibility at risk. The combat readiness of our well-seasoned Army must remain the first priority. While this integration requires a well-thought-out approach, I am confident we can do this right and improve the total force. Moreover, our current challenges cannot be an excuse to stop examining integration and, where warranted, executing it.

U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) initiated this effort by examining current attitudes about women in combat units. We conducted interviews and focus group discussions with more than 2,500 participants from a variety of organizations. We found that most men who had

worked and fought beside women expected them to do well in combat roles. Some work remains to be done in order to convince men with little or no experience serving alongside women that they will perform well in new roles, but I am convinced that those with concerns will change their views. Across the force, everyone—including our female soldiers and leaders—insisted that we not lower the standards for service in combat MOSs. The one unmistakable message we received is that most soldiers agree that women, based on their wartime performance, have earned the opportunity to stand in any one of our formations for which they qualify, if they wish to do so.

### **Validate Standards**

As part of Soldier 2020, TRADOC is implementing several essential initiatives to provide every American soldier with the same opportunity to serve in any MOS while maintaining standards. Our fundamental goal is to place everyone on a path toward a meaningful career based on individual merit while ensuring combat effectiveness.

First, we must clearly define the standards for service in MOSs currently closed to women. A recent survey of infantry recruits shows our standards are antiquated. The truth is that the shortest infantryman we recruited last year stood under 5 feet tall; the lightest weighed less than 100 pounds. We are clearly accepting people into these positions who may be physically overmatched by the demands of modern combat.

Resolving this mismatch begins by identifying the most demanding tasks an artilleryman, engineer, infantryman, scout or armored crewman must perform, and determining how to measure a soldier's ability to perform them. Branch commandants and their command sergeants major (CSM) led teams that initially identified 31 tasks across the closed MOSs. They established proposed performance standards for those tasks and forwarded their recommendations to the Sergeant Major of the Army Board of Directors—our most senior NCOs.

Once the CSMs on the board approved the proposed standards, the standards were tested in combat arms units. Random populations of MOS-qualified soldiers attempted to perform the tasks. By and large, we found that our proposals were accurate. Regarding a significant portion of the test population that was unable to meet the standards, we are looking to see if the cause is a training shortfall or if the proposal exceeds the actual standard needed within combat arms units. For those instances in which nearly everyone passed the physical test, we are examining if our proposed standard is too low or if the task is not really a discriminator. As we speak with those in the field and continue our study, we may also determine the need to add tasks.

Throughout this endeavor, our partners at the U.S. Army Medical Command and U.S. Army Research Institute for Environmental Medicine (USARIEM) observed our processes and made sure our results remained scientifically valid. Once we possess clearly established standards and gain broad consensus, USARIEM will lead the final phase, transforming the standards into physical tests an individual must meet to enter a combat MOS.

### U.S. Army Education Advisory Committee Consultants

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- LTG Paul E. Funk, Ed.D., U.S. Army retired
- MG Marcia M. Anderson, Deputy Chief of the Army Reserve (Individual Mobilization Augmentation)
- BG Maureen LeBoeuf, U.S. Army retired
- Jack L. Tilley, 12th Sergeant Major of the Army
- CSM Jackie Moore, U.S. Army retired

We will not only develop a gender-neutral standard, but we will also ensure that everyone in an MOS can perform the necessary tasks associated with his or her job. Soldier 2020 holds the promise of improving quality across our warfighting formations while providing a level field upon which all soldiers can succeed based upon talent.

While this initiative is a promising step toward gender integration, we must harness past lessons learned and discern points of friction the Soldier 2020 program will encounter. Therefore, in the second major effort, I directed the TRADOC Analysis Center (TRAC) to conduct an extensive study to identify integration challenges and develop mitigation strategies for overcoming institutional, cultural and implementation barriers. TRAC began with a detailed study of historical references, medical studies and experiences of foreign armies.

This thorough review developed research questions on policies, programs and requisite leadership action. TRAC is now employing its unique analytical skills, coupled with a command sergeant major support team grounded in the rigors of war, to examine these questions. USARIEM and the U.S. Army Institute of Public Health will complement

TRAC's study with pertinent historical and analytical data as well as scientific review. These analytical centers are employing a variety of tools to answer the most important questions. A distinguished collection of external scholars, writers and retired Army leaders is also providing advice [see box]. They offer a critical and comprehensive look at the viability of our planned methodology, study outcomes, and proposed recommendations throughout every step of the



U.S. Army/David Kamm

*Scientists at the U.S. Army Research Institute for Environmental Medicine's Military Performance Division measure the physical exertion expended as a soldier simulates loading artillery.*

*Identifiable by the distinctive hat, more than 500 women serve as drill sergeants.*



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process. Together, these studies and reviews will help us see the history of the issue, understand the lessons of the past and identify where leaders need to focus their attention and resources.

### Set Conditions

The third element of Soldier 2020 revolves around setting the conditions in units as they integrate women into closed MOSs. During the course of these studies, researchers found that women are looking forward to being allowed to test themselves against the many physical and professional challenges they will face within combat units. So far, their biggest fear is not about their ability to perform, but instead the sense of isolation resulting from being the first to do something. Ensuring no one faces such a hostile or isolated environment is nonnegotiable for Army leaders.

Project Athena, the study of the U.S. Military Academy's integration of women into the Corps of Cadets, found that avoiding isolation requires a minimum population of women at the small-unit level. Furthermore, placing a cadre of female leaders into units during integration who provide mentorship and help the command smoothly transition is also essential. That infusion of leadership will come from two directions. First, the current policy of allowing women to serve in MOSs that are currently open within combat battalions will provide commanders with trusted senior leaders who can serve as mentors and role models. Furthermore, as we open MOSs, we will seek qualified female NCOs and officers who wish to transfer into them. They will provide the leadership required at the point of attack.

We know how to do this. TRADOC's long history of integrating women into demanding positions provides a

proven point of departure. More than 500 highly qualified women serve as drill sergeants, and 14 serve as training battalion and brigade command sergeants major. In addition, women fill critical command positions, including one training brigade, two training battalions and 35 training companies. In short, they occupy significant positions of trust leading America's sons and daughters as they face the trials associated with entering our profession.

When a series of ordnance and artillery specialties was opened to women last year, we moved female NCOs into the training units and made practical infrastructure changes to maintain a safe and secure environment. We also added a number of female platoon sergeants who, though not responsible for the MOS instruction of new soldiers, play a direct and close supervisory role. Now, the imperative is to help replicate these conditions across all our formations.

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As commander of TRADOC, women's performance during combat operations certainly does not surprise me. We set the stage for success nearly four decades ago when we began integrating training throughout our Army. Well before the wars, women prepared for conflict right beside men. Our work, however, continues today. We have challenges, and every leader must remain vigilant to ensure we do not tolerate harassment or mistreatment of our teammates while upholding the highest standards of performance.

In the end, though, we will only get better. I am confident because all our soldiers, men and women, continue proving themselves as highly capable warriors on a daily basis. By expanding opportunities and assignments for women, we will only strengthen the force. ★