

Strategy Research Project

Integration of Women into Maneuver, Fires, and Effects Career Fields

by

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United States Army War College
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Abstract

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The rescission of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule for women announced by Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey on 24 January, 2013 represents a promising change that will better align the Army with the society it serves and enhance the overall performance of combat arms units. In order to fully capitalize on this positive change, leaders at every level must challenge cultural resistance to women serving in previously all male Maneuver, Fires, and Effects (MFE) career fields at the brigade level and below. Many of these cultural impediments are contained in messages that oppose this change effort and have primarily dominated pre-execution dialogue, and thereby risk sabotaging the implementation process by marginalizing potential positive outcomes. Therefore, senior leaders must change cultural beliefs and assumptions by acknowledging the positive aspects of this change effort, while marginalizing negative sentiments. In doing so, subordinate leaders and Soldiers will be empowered to reinforce new assumptions and beliefs observed in senior leaders.

Integration of Women into Maneuver, Fires, and Effects Career Fields

Today every American can be proud that our military will grow even stronger with our mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters playing a greater role in protecting this country we love.

—President Barack Obama¹

The Integration of women into the Maneuver, Fires, and Effects career fields is often met with resistance and an underlying belief that negative consequences will dominate in this transition. As a typical example of this logic, Robert Maginnis, a retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel, argues In his book, *Deadly Consequences: How Cowards are Pushing Women into Combat*, that allowing women to serve in ground combat positions will result in a lowering of physical standards for combat Soldiers, increase sexual assaults against women, and result in women suffering a disproportionately higher number of physical and psychological problems in comparison to their male counterparts². Many currently serving leaders, including myself, echoed these sentiments when first informed of the Defense Department directed change. We didn't think women belonged in the Infantry and would not allow ourselves to believe that a female Soldier could succeed in the Infantry. Leaders, peers, and seasoned subordinates reinforced these beliefs making it easier to embrace the negative implications of women serving in combat Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) instead of considering the potentially positive outcomes.

As a historical analogy, my sentiments and the sentiments of others concerning the integration of women into the Maneuver, Fires, and Effects (MFE) were similar to resistance that existed when the Army integrated African American Soldiers into all white units. In the case of this historical change effort, overt institutional resistance focused on the potential negative effects instead of accentuating the positive aspects of

the change. As a learning organization, this historical example provides valuable lessons for the Army as it seeks to enact this change effort. Unless senior leaders acknowledge the underlying assumptions related to the cultural resistance and purpose to change them, integration efforts will continue to embrace challenges and prolong the positive implications.

In July of 1948 President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981, calling on the armed forces to provide equal treatment and opportunity for the black servicemen.³ Despite this presidential order the Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, an avid supporter of integration, refused to address the order, and instead allowed each service to decide how it would administer integration.⁴ In response to Forrestal's directive the Army maintained and reinforced the underlying assumption that black and white servicemen were better off segregated. Therefore, the order had no immediate effect on the Army's racial policy.⁵ Similarly, Secretary Forrestal's predecessor, Louis Johnson signed a directive in April 1949 reiterating the President's Executive Order. In response to Johnson's directive, the Army offered statistics to prove the existing policy of segregation guaranteed equal opportunity.⁶ Senior Army officials, including General Omar Bradley, argued during congressional testimony against complete integration on the basis of morale and efficiency, and many Army leaders were convinced that the performance of black troops during World War I and World War II did not qualify black servicemen for a role in the Army's current mission.⁷ Although these beliefs were highly debatable, they were tenaciously held by many senior officials and were often couched in terms of decreased readiness and societal unacceptability that were extremely difficult to refute.⁸

Reflecting on the significant contribution of black Soldiers in today's Army it is nearly unfathomable that those debates took place. What is important to note is that resistance to the integration of black Soldiers in all white units does not necessarily infer that senior Army leaders at the time were narrow minded or racist; rather, they were passionately reinforcing strong underlying assumptions prevalent in organizational and national culture. Similar to the resistance of integrating African American Soldiers into all white units, the resistance to integrating women into the MFE is largely misunderstood. Because we do not understand why we are culturally resistant we overemphasize challenges and potential negative implications while marginalizing the positive aspects of this impending change.

Cultural resistance will impede this change effort if senior leaders fail to change the underlying assumption that women do not belong in MFE units. In realizing this change, senior leaders must shift pre-execution discourse centered on negative aspects, to dialogue and discussion that leverages the positive implications for the Army and the nation. This paper analyzes the positive implications and associated institutional challenges of women serving in MFE career fields, examines intense cultural resistance to this change, compares and contrasts the impending change with the admission of women at West Point, and provides senior Army leaders recommendations for changing culture.

Positive Implications

Soon after the announcement of the landmark decision to rescind the 1994 direct combat definition and assignment rule for women service members, President Obama demonstrated his support for the policy by stating, "Earlier today I called Secretary of Defense Panetta to express my strong support for this decision, which will strengthen

our military, enhance our readiness, and be another step toward fulfilling our Nation's founding ideals of fairness and equality."⁹ President Obama's statement emphasizes three positive aspects of this change; strengthening our military, enhancing readiness, and better aligning the military with national values of fairness and equality.

In the book, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, author Samuel Huntington asserts that "the foundation of most civil-military relations theory is the assumption that military institutions in any society are shaped by two forces: functional imperatives that allow the military to defeat threats to a society's security, and a societal imperative based on the ideologies, social forces, and institutions dominant within the society."¹⁰ Lifting the ban on women in combat aligns with both imperatives.

In a press briefing focused on the rescission of the combat exclusion policy, Secretary Panetta stated that, "Our nation was built on the premise of Citizen Soldiers. In our democracy...it is the responsibility of every citizen to protect the nation. And every citizen who can meet the qualifications of service should have that opportunity."¹¹ Secretary Panetta went on to say that "by opening up more opportunities for people to serve in uniform, we are making our military stronger and we are making America stronger...We are renewing our commitment to the American values our service members fight and die to defend."¹² The Army has a history of adjusting policies to better align with American values. The most recent example is the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" which terminated a barrier to service based on sexual orientation.¹³ Other examples include the integration of African American Soldiers into all white units, the

establishment of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in 1948, and the admission of women to West Point in 1975.¹⁴

The rescission of the combat exclusion policy also contributes to the functional imperative described by Huntington of enhancing military readiness. This should come as no surprise given the performance of women in combat since 2001. Over the past thirteen years women performed exceptionally well serving alongside men in combat. One example of this is Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester, the Army's first female Silver Star recipient since World War II.

One of the most tangible examples of the benefit of women serving in MFE units is the case of Female Engagement Teams (FETs).¹⁵ These teams proved critical in enabling the Army's success in the population-centric nature of operations in Afghanistan, and will undoubtedly continue to prove effective for the Army moving forward. As the world's preeminent land force, the integration of women into MFE units will lead to an evolution of FET capability and provide the Army with a marked functional advantage while operating in the human domain of conflict.

General Cone, the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) commander further emphasized the functional benefit of the policy stating that, "By expanding opportunities and assignments for women we will only strengthen the force."¹⁶ Furthermore, the policy creates opportunities for increased gender diversity in the military. Research indicates that a group's "collective intelligence tends to increase as the percentage of women in the group increases."¹⁷ Applying this research to the military suggests that increased gender diversity will strengthen organizations. "Our teams, from small unit infantry squads which up to this point have been male centric, to

the joint staff, which has less than 20 percent women, are potentially less intelligent than they could be if we were to optimize what women bring to the collective intelligence of groups.”¹⁸ Increased senior leader opportunities for women that will accompany this change will also contribute to a stronger military. Although this policy change will better serve both societal and functional imperatives, implementation will present challenges that have the potential to dominate the transition and delay positive effects.

Challenges

In his book, *Leading Change*, John Kotter states that “the downside of change is inevitable. Whenever human communities are forced to adjust to shifting conditions, pain is ever present.”¹⁹ The pain associated with the rescission of the combat exclusion policy is manifested in opposing arguments that are dominating the pre-execution phase of this policy change. Those challenges include physical standards, issues of sexuality, and institutional cultural barriers.

Anthony King, a professor of sociology in the United Kingdom and former advisor to senior military leaders in Afghanistan, stated that, “On purely physiological grounds, the exclusion of women from the infantry is still seen by many as appropriate, even necessary.”²⁰ On the periphery, King’s sentiments appear quite pragmatic; however they are eerily similar to sentiments voiced by many key leaders during dialogue and discussion prior to the enactment of Women’s Armed Services Integration Act in 1948. The Women’s Armed Services Integration Act, Public Law 625, provided a means of mobilizing womanpower in the event of general war.²¹ Congressional debate in the legislation of this bill included Armed Services Committee concerns that there would be “large numbers of military women retiring for physical disability because of ‘menopausal symptoms’”.²² Although this assertion appears ridiculous today, expanding roles for

women in the Army in 1948 represented a serious threat to an underlying assumption that defined organizational culture and as a result was met with significant resistance.

Dr. William Gregor, a professor of Social Sciences at Fort Leavenworth similarly concluded that, "There is no study that indicates that training can overcome the large physical differences between men and women."²³ He went on to state that, "Attempting to train women with men will require either training men less well or accepting a high attrition rate among the very few women who will meet the nominal qualifications for heavy work jobs."²⁴ General Cone, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Commander recognizes the physical challenges of integrating women into the MFE and stated that, "we must clearly define the standards for service in our Military Occupational Specialties currently closed to women."²⁵ The challenge of training and holding Soldiers to a physical standard takes on a new dimension with the introduction of women into the MFE, but it is not a fundamentally new challenge and should not over shadow the benefits of change.

Another friction point offered by opponents to this change effort is the issue of sexuality. Opponents suggest the change will threaten unit cohesion and increase the risk of sexual harassment and sexual assault. In regard to this concern, Anthony King argues that, "the presence of a female in the ranks undermines unity among male Soldiers."²⁶ King further adds that "many officers [in British units] opposed the general principle of female integration because they had witnessed cases of fraternization and its nefarious effects."²⁷ On the issue of sexual assault/sexual harassment, Kayla Williams, a military intelligence specialist who was attached to the 101st Airborne Division in Iraq in 2003 to 2004 stated that she was subject to invasive stares of male

Soldiers, lewd propositions, and indecent assault.²⁸ Allen West, a former representative from Florida, stated in an interview that “putting women in combat roles would only encourage such aggressive behavior, perhaps because males would feel that their ‘warrior’ status was being compromised by their female counterparts.”²⁹ He goes on to say that, “I find it completely hypocritical for everyone to be up in arms about military sexual assault, but then want to cast women into high stress small unit combat elements.”³⁰ Similar to the challenge of physical standards, issues stemming from the sexual differences between men and women and the impact on the military are not new. Introducing women to MFE units adds another layer to this already significant challenge but should not impede progress.

Army leaders are allowing the challenges of physical standards and sexuality to dominate the pre-execution dialogue of the integration of women into MFE units due to an institutional cultural barrier stemming from an underlying assumption that women do not belong in combat MOSs. Physical standards and sexuality challenges are not unique to MFE career fields and are not new to the Army, but they have been emphasized to the point of overshadowing the promising benefits of the policy change because of cultural resistance within MFE units. This cultural resistance is based on the underlying assumption that women do not belong in combat positions.

Cultural Resistance

Edgar Schein defines culture as, “a pattern of shared *basic assumptions* that a group learns as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.”³¹ A basic assumption impacting the culture of an organization is the degree of consensus

resulting from repeated success in implementing certain beliefs and values.³² “If a basic assumption is strongly held in a group, members will find behavior based on any other premise inconceivable.”³³ The underlying assumption that women do not belong in MFE career fields is evident when examining their impact in the military from an historical perspective.

Women’s service in the military can be traced to the Revolutionary and Civil War; however their service has been limited to non-combat related roles.³⁴ For example, on May 14, 1942, the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps was created “for noncombatant service in the Army for the purpose of making available to the national defense when needed the knowledge, skill, and special training of women of the Nation.”³⁵ Although the role of women in the Army expanded after World War II, the underlying assumption that they did not belong in combat roles persisted as evidenced in many recent examples.

During the 1983 U.S. military invasion of the Island of Grenade, four U.S. military police women were ordered to return back to their home station by the 82nd Airborne Division Commander.³⁶ Following this incident, the services conducted a study to analyze the risks new roles for women in the military posed to military effectiveness. Based on this study, the Secretary of Defense issued the “Standard Risk Rule” that required an evaluation of the likelihood of women being exposed to hostile fire or capture when determining what assignments should be open to women.³⁷ In 1992, the Department of Defense reinforced this assumption when a commission on the assignment of women in the Armed Forces recommended that, “women should be excluded from direct land combat units and positions.”³⁸ As women’s roles in the Armed

Service were expanded again in 1994, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin approved a new assignment rule intended to increase assignments for women stating that, "Service members are eligible to be assigned to all positions for which they are qualified, except that women shall be excluded from assignment in units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground."³⁹

Despite the expanding role of women in the Army, the assumption that they do not belong in combat MOSs has been reinforced through personnel policies and leader behavior. Based on these policies and behavior patterns, an underlying assumption pertaining to the legitimacy of women serving in combat units is deeply rooted in Army culture. This deeply rooted assumption combined with identity salience in MFE units underscores cultural resistance to this change effort.

Historical Example: The Integration of Women at West Point

The integration of women at West Point in 1976 provides a useful historical example of challenges that occur when the expanding roles of women collide with a culture whose underlying assumptions include a belief that women do not belong in it. In May, 1975, just a couple of months prior to President Ford signing a bill allowing the admission of women into service academies, LTG Sidney Berry, Superintendent of West Point, attempted to convince the president that women had no place at the academy.⁴⁰ LTG Berry, along with most senior Army officers, reasoned that women represented a, "threat to the cohesiveness, morale, and combat effectiveness of every unit in the Army; and therefore women had no place in the Long Gray Line."⁴¹ Similar to the integration of women in the MFE, the underlying assumption that women do not belong at West Point created a culture of resistance that overshadowed the positive implications of aligning the academy with society, strengthening the Corps of Cadets

through diversity, and increasing readiness in the Army by producing better trained female officers. As evidenced above, this culture of resistance started with the most senior Army leaders and permeated the rank and file of the Army, the West Point cadre, and the Corps of Cadets.

Graduates of the Academy communicated their protest to the integration of women at West Point through written letters to the Superintendent, and President Ford.⁴² One retired Brigadier General stated that the only way he would support the change was through “legislation to eliminate the service academies since they have been relegated to nothing more than coeducational trade schools.”⁴³ General Retired Matthew Ridgway “suggested to Gerald Ford that opening the service academies to women would prove to be an ill-considered action inimical to the best interests of the nation.”⁴⁴

The sentiments of these esteemed senior leaders clearly influenced cadet beliefs pertaining to the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to the integration of women into the academy and further stimulated resistance. In 1972, the Deputy Commandant of Cadets wrote, “My feeling is that we should come out with an ‘over my dead body’ approach to girls at West Point.”⁴⁵ When the official announcement was made to the Corps, “there were groans and curses as a pervasive feeling of disgust swept the Corps. Some upperclassmen even broke regulations by standing up and leaving the mess hall early as a sign of protest.”⁴⁶ Male cadets resented female cadets, and as Cadet Sonya Nikituk, a member of the first class to admit women at West Point recalls, “one male upperclassman told the women in her company that his goal for the year was to run them all out.”⁴⁷

Despite this culture of resistance, women were integrated into West Point and female West Point graduates have served honorably alongside their male counterparts for over three decades. From earning Rhodes Scholarships to attaining the rank of four star general, the integration of women at West Point was beneficial to the Army and the country. Yet, despite these accomplishments, the effects of cultural resistance continue to manifest itself at West Point. As an instructor at West Point in 2004, I witnessed a Regimental Tactical Officer, a senior Lieutenant Colonel and former battalion commander handpicked for the critical role of overseeing cadet development, get relieved for referring to female cadets as, “his bitches”. I also witnessed male cadets commonly refer to female cadets in a derogatory manner calling them “gray trou,” a reference to the uniform pants they were required to wear. As recently as May 2013, the West Point Rugby team was disbanded in a scandal involving the entire team for lewd behavior. “This scandal involved photographs of fellow teammates, including women members, and a massive number of emails that contained salacious and inappropriate comments about other cadets.”⁴⁸ “Lt Gen Robert Caslen Jr, the superintendent at West Point, said that the rugby scandal revealed a bad subculture that had existed for years.”⁴⁹ Speaking on the subject of the West Point rugby team scandal, Brenda Fulton, a graduate of the West Point class of 1980 and Presidential appointee to the West Point Board of Visitors stated that, “I have seen no evidence that West Point’s senior leadership has a clue about the current command climate and its utter contempt for women. Meanwhile, I have seen plenty of evidence that women cadets and officers remain second-class citizens at the Academy.”⁵⁰

The benefits associated with the integration of women at West Point are clouded by the negative impact of cultural resistance manifested through leader and cadet attitudes and actions. Even though the Army has clearly benefited from the integration of women at West Point, evidence of this cultural resistance can still be seen 34 years later through terms like “gray trou” and the actions of the West Point Rugby team. To fully capitalize on the positive implications associated with the rescission of the Combat Exclusion Policy and avoid negative long term cultural problems like the ones at West Point, MFE units must alter beliefs by removing the underlying assumption that women do not belong.

Changing Culture

From a functional imperative perspective, the Army, and in particular MFE career fields, are widely perceived as successful and therefore naturally resist change. In his book, *Organizational Culture and Leadership Defined*, Edgar Schein concluded that, “Continued success creates an organizational phenomenon that make culture change more difficult in that many basic assumptions become more strongly held.”⁵¹ The basic assumption that women do not belong in the MFE is largely accepted as valid. Changing this assumption and ultimately culture is a leader responsibility. Schein goes on the note that, “culture is ultimately created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated by leaders.”⁵²

Leaders should expect anxiety, frustration and uncertainty as they attempt to change an organization’s culture. “The most central issue for leaders is to understand the deeper levels of culture, to assess the functionality of the assumptions made at those levels, and to deal with the anxiety that is unleashed when assumptions are challenged.”⁵³ The deeper level of culture to understand is that culture provides

members with a sense of identity and enhances self-esteem.⁵⁴ The anxiety associated with culture change stems from a perceived threat to personal and social identity.

James Fearon, a Professor in the Department of Political Science at Stanford University notes that, "Personal identity consists of those distinguishing characteristics, values, and beliefs that people take pride in."⁵⁵ "When a category (group) becomes salient, people come to see themselves and other members less as individuals and more as interchangeable exemplars of the group prototype."⁵⁶ The implication here is that members of MFE career fields derive their personal identity from the social identity of the combat arms Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) to which they belong.

Social Identity refers to "those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he/she belongs."⁵⁷ Cultural resistance to this current change effort is underscored by social identity salience; a term used in social science to emphasize the strong influence social identity has on socio-cognition and behavior. The term was first introduced by Henri Tajel, a social scientist best known for his research on the cognitive aspects of social prejudice. Social identity theory suggests that individuals that have strong social identities create in-group categorization and enhancement in ways that favor the in-group at the expense of the out-group.⁵⁸ Tajfel further identified three factors that enhance the salience of in-group favoritism. First, individuals internalize membership in a group as a significant dimension of their self-identity which creates a strong degree of pride and self-esteem. Second, certain social situations further enhance the importance of making comparisons between in-group and out-group members. And third, individuals and groups are more likely to demonstrate biased beliefs when the outcome of a social change effort has a potentially negative

effect on the salience of their in-group. In the case of change efforts that threaten a group's identity, group members often emphasize the negative aspects of change as opposed to positive aspects.⁵⁹

The negative aspects promulgated in opposing arguments are a manifestation of the potential negative outcomes of social change in MFE units. The male centric nature of these units up to this point is a source of pride and facilitates a strong degree of self esteem for group members. This dynamic is consistent with change efforts that resulted in a significant degree of resistance during the integration of women into West Point, and as the Army established the WAC in 1942. This type of resistance was also demonstrated as the Army integrated African Americans in all white Soldier units. As such, changing the culture of MFE career fields will require changing the social identity of combat arms MOSs and the personal identity of its members by challenging and redefining basic assumptions deeply embedded in culture.

MFE culture will not change unless leaders recognize the existence of an underlying assumption that informs its members that women do not belong in MFE units and how that assumption has shaped its members' personal identity. This advanced degree of self-awareness will empower leaders to change MFE culture and allow leaders to model and reinforce beliefs that alter MFE social identity and the personal identity of group members. Sydney Akin, a professor from the University of Virginia refers to this as "frame breaking", defined as a major upheaval where the organization breaks with past practices and directions.⁶⁰

Recommendations

"Culture does not change because we desire to change it. Culture changes when the organization is transformed."⁶¹ Changing a culture is extremely difficult and takes

time. A wealth of literature and academic research is dedicated to changing organizational culture. Frame breaking is just one of many academic concepts applicable to the process of changing organizational culture. No one concept or framework provides a complete guide to changing the MFE culture and eliminating resistance concerning the integration of women into the MFE. However, two broad areas that are applicable to changing MFE culture and that are present throughout “organizational culture change” literature are effective communication and leader behavior. In this context, official Army statements combined with observable patterns of leader behavior emerge as two key factors in transmitting beliefs. In this regard, a senior Army leader’s understanding of the idea of “culture as information capable of affecting individuals’ behavior that they acquire from other members of their species through teaching, imitation, and other forms of social transmission” becomes imperative.⁶² The use of the term information in this description refers to any kind of mental state, conscious or not, that is manifested in behavior patterns.⁶³

John Kotter emphasizes the power of communicating change in his book, “Leading Change”, and states that, “Gaining understanding and commitment to a new direction is never an easy task.”⁶⁴ Kotter further posits that a “shared sense of a desirable future can help motivate and coordinate the kinds of actions that create transformations.”⁶⁵ Kotter outlines key elements of effective communication that will greatly enhance a senior Army leader’s ability to lead this change effort. Keeping the message simple, using metaphors, analogies, multiple forums, and repetition are useful techniques that are noticeably absent in on-going discourse. The simple message is that integrating women into the MFE is good for the Army. Using examples from

women's combat experience in Iraq and Afghanistan as the basis for metaphors and analogies to communicate this message repeatedly across multiple forums will begin to set conditions for the impending change. However, these techniques must be synchronized with Kotter's final three key elements of effective communication; explanation of seeming inconsistencies, give-and-take communication, and lead by example.⁶⁶

First, senior Army leaders have not provided an *explanation of seeming inconsistencies* with respect to the integration of women in the MFE. The underlying assumption that they do not belong is so strong that it prevents leaders from fully embracing the change effort and undermines the credibility of integration efforts. Second, because senior leaders have failed to address inconsistencies, there is no *give-and-take* communication. The absence of professional dialogue between leaders at every level and those they lead concerning the integration of women in the MFE further undermines integration efforts. Finally, there is not an obvious effort to *lead by example*. Kotter notes that, "behavior from important people that is inconsistent with the vision overwhelms other forms of communication."⁶⁷

One of the most decisive ways beliefs and norms are embedded in an organization is through visible patterns of observable behavior.⁶⁸ Leaders at every level must stop allowing the challenges associated with the introduction of women into MFE units to dominate the pre-execution phase of this policy change. Challenges associated with sexuality, physical standards, and cultural identity cannot be ignored, but they must not be allowed to overshadow the positive implications. Leader behavior is currently undermining integration efforts and has the potential to sabotage execution. Leaders

must address anticipated challenges while attacking the base assumption that women do not belong in MFE career fields. As such, leaders must develop an implementation strategy that addresses challenges while emphasizing the positive implications.

As Army leaders gain an awareness of the underlying assumption that women do not belong in the MFE and how that assumption is undermining integration efforts they will begin to model a more positive and nuanced approach to this impending change. Additional research efforts dedicated to identifying and mitigating the Army's cultural resistance to the integration of women in the MFE will have a positive impact on the integration process and should be pursued.

Conclusion

Senator Murray, chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee called Secretary's Panetta's decision to rescind the combat exclusion rule, "a historic step for equality that recognizes the role women play in the military."⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the positive implications of this historic change are being overshadowed by challenges that are unfairly dominating the integration process because of senior leaders' inability to recognize and address the underlying assumption that women do not belong in combat positions. This strongly held belief contributes greatly to the social identity of MFE units and the personal identity of its members. Senior leaders have successfully dealt with fundamentally changing underlying assumptions that define a culture in the past, and must apply lessons from previous change efforts in realizing the promise of this change effort.

Senior Army leaders must acknowledge MFE culture's underlying assumption that women do not belong and aggressively pursue changing it through modified leader behavior and the execution of a comprehensive communications strategy. Failing to do

so will result in integration efforts that are slow and overemphasize challenges instead of the positive implications that gender integration promises. Overcoming this cultural impediment will empower subordinate leaders to effectively lead change and fully capitalize on the positive aspects of the integration of women into the Maneuver Fire and Effects career fields.

Endnotes

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