

## Understanding Resistance and Communicating Change: Women in MFE Branches

by

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Class of 2014

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**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

*Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188*

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 15-04-2014		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b>	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Understanding Resistance and Communicating Change: Women in MFE Branches				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Lieutenant Colonel Shawn R. Edwards United States Army National Guard				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Colonel Robert Mundell Department of Command, Leadership, and Management				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> Word Count: 5,137					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The integration of women in Maneuver Fires and Effects branches in the Army represents a promising change for the Army and the nation. Not only will this long overdue change allow the Army to align with social norms pertaining to equality and inclusion, it will also enhance Army readiness and increase creativity and innovation in combat arms units. However, continued resistance to this change effort does not bode well for the Army moving forward. As such, senior Army leaders must understand factors that underscore resistance and communicate the importance of this change effort through strong messages and behavior patterns to influence institutional beliefs. This research project provides a historical review of women in the Army with emphasis on patterns of institutional resistance towards women, analyzes the benefits of integrating women into combat arms units, and provides recommendations for senior Army leaders to consider as they seek to effectively integrate women in combat arms units.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Organizational Norms, Diversity and Inclusion, Maneuver Fires and Effects (MFE)					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 31	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> UU	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> UU	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> UU			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)</b>



USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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## **Abstract**

Title: Understanding Resistance and Communicating Change: Women in MFE Branches

Report Date: 15 April 2014

Page Count: 31

Word Count: 5,137

Key Terms: Organizational Norms, Diversity and Inclusion, Maneuver Fires and Effects (MFE)

Classification: Unclassified

The integration of women in Maneuver Fires and Effects branches in the Army represents a promising change for the Army and the nation. Not only will this long overdue change allow the Army to align with social norms pertaining to equality and inclusion, it will also enhance Army readiness and increase creativity and innovation in combat arms units. However, continued resistance to this change effort does not bode well for the Army moving forward. As such, senior Army leaders must understand factors that underscore resistance and communicate the importance of this change effort through strong messages and behavior patterns to influence institutional beliefs. This research project provides a historical review of women in the Army with emphasis on patterns of institutional resistance towards women, analyzes the benefits of integrating women into combat arms units, and provides recommendations for senior Army leaders to consider as they seek to effectively integrate women in combat arms units.





## **Understanding Resistance and Communicating Change: Women in MFE Branches**

What is the role of women in the United States Army for the next 20 years? [the answer] is simple: the role of women, the role of any minority, should be identical to the role of the majority. In other words women should be able to do anything they are capable of doing.

—Dr. Robert M. Hill<sup>1</sup>

In January of 2013 the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff announced that the military would no longer restrict women from serving in Maneuver Fires and Effects branches. This long overdue change to organizational norms will benefit the Army for three important reasons. First, women will now benefit from greater opportunities to serve in those branches that have historically produced the vast majority of senior ranking military officers (four star levels). Second, this change better aligns the military with societal norms pertaining to equality and inclusion and allows the nation to remain relevant in the international environment as it advocates women's rights abroad. Third, the integration of women in these units will result in greater innovation and creativity because women bring different perspectives to problem solving based on their different and unique life experiences. However, the Army has failed to set conditions to prepare for this change. Therefore, senior Army leaders must challenge beliefs and opinions that are resistant to this change effort by communicating the positive outcomes and demonstrating behavior patterns to influence institutional beliefs. Understanding resistance to change assists in communicating change and allows leaders to better influence others by transforming beliefs and behaviors.

This strategic research effort examines factors that assist in understanding resistance to the integration of women in combat units and provides recommendations

for senior Army leaders to consider as they seek to implement change. The ability to persuasively communicate the strategic significance and positive outcomes of this change will prove critical in maintaining the Army's stature as the premiere land force in the world. Change often causes a significant degree of uncertainty and ambiguity, and much of the resistance promulgated over this change effort centers on the unknown caused by different interpretations of the likely outcomes associated with this paradigm shift. Leaders mitigate ambiguity and reduce uncertainty through communication and behavior patterns. Some opponents predict dire consequences by highlighting potential negative outcomes and effects, while others herald the change as progressive and open minded. The thoughts leaders convey and the behavior they demonstrate is of utmost importance because followers perpetuate behavior patterns consistent with the example set by their leaders. This is the essence of transformational leadership. The military's ability to realize the ideology conveyed in Dr. Hill's quote will be determined by the actions of leaders.

### Background

Throughout the history of the United States women have served in combat situations. During the Revolutionary War, the U.S. Civil War, and the Mexican American War women served with distinction and honor. Many served as "secret Soldiers" who disguised themselves as men and fought in combat next to their male counterparts. One of the first American female Soldiers, Deborah Sampson Gannett, enlisted in the Continental Army in 1782 under the name of her deceased brother Robert Shurtleff. She served for 17 months, was wounded twice and years later was awarded a pension for her service.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Cathay Williams, a female African American born as a slave,

disguised herself and joined the Army under the name of William Cathay.<sup>3</sup> Both Gannett and Williams, despite policies prohibiting women from serving, did so with honor.

The U.S. military has a history of easing traditional restrictions on gender roles in times of national emergency. During World War I over 33,000 American women served in the U.S. armed forces, however most served as Army nurses and worked alongside their male counterparts in close proximity to the front line.<sup>4</sup> The Navy and the Marine Corps opened enlistment to women to “fill the gaps of male recruits and to free up combat troops for service,” resulting in the first American women enlistees in the U.S. military.<sup>5</sup>

During World War II over 350,000 women served in the U.S. military, with more than 60,000 serving as Army nurses and 14,000 as Navy nurses.<sup>6</sup> Not to be outdone, the Army established the Woman’s Army Auxiliary Corp (WAAC) in 1942 under the direction of Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby, who served as the Corps’ first director.<sup>7</sup> Although the WAAC was heralded by many as a significant accomplishment that allowed women to break gender bearers in the Army, policies associated with the Corps were reflective of societal norms pertaining to women and demonstrated continued resistance to women serving in combat units. For example, basic training regimes designed for WAAC recruits only included drill and ceremony, classes on military customs and courtesies, map reading, and logistics-related management processes because the Army did not envision employing women in combat.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, women serving in the WAAC did not receive combat pay, were not eligible for life insurance, and were not authorized treatment at veterans’ hospitals.<sup>9</sup> The latter of these constraints is difficult to rationalize.

After considering the problematic policies governing the WAAC, the Army decided to grant women full military status and established the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in 1943. While the establishment of the WAC represented a paradigm shift for the Army, service policy and subsequent congressional legislation continued to restrict women from serving in combat. At the time, the Army considered this policy legitimate because rather than having women engaged in combat their employment in non-combat service and support functions would preserve men for combat roles. The "free a man to fight" strategy that underscored the policy was used as a recruiting tool even though the concept was often rejected by men and women service members during WWII.<sup>10</sup>

In more recent times, women became an increasingly important part of the military particularly after the inception of the all-volunteer force in 1973. In fact, the Army implemented mixed gender basic training programs in 1977 at two Army installations and standardized common enlistment qualifications for men and women in 1978.<sup>11</sup> Other significant change efforts during this time period included an increase in end strength from 65,000 to 70,000 enlisted service members, and an increase from 9,000 to 13,000 women officers.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, a 1975 legislative act opened military service academies such as West Point to women. However, in the case of this monumental change effort, institutional resistance was particularly strong. Notably, the superintendent of the Air Force Academy was concerned over challenges associated with females and males in close living spaces and suggested that this dynamic would result in "marriages, pregnancies, and abortions."<sup>13</sup>

As the military transitioned into the modern era, 1990 to present, the issue over women serving in combat arms units intensified, and as the number of women serving

in the military increased and greater opportunities emerged, women found themselves more frequently serving in combat-related and in direct combat roles. During the 1989 invasion of Panama, 600 women served in a variety of career fields ranging from truck drivers, and medics in direct support of maneuver units, to military police personnel that served in direct combat roles.<sup>14</sup> In fact, during the invasion U.S. Army Captain Linda Bray became the first woman to lead U.S. Soldiers in combat. Bray's leadership clearly questioned the legitimacy of military policies concerning women in combat and spearheaded the modern debate that continues today. Following Bray's actions, Congresswoman Pat Schroder called on the military to re-evaluate assignment policies that restricted women from serving in combat.<sup>15</sup> Schroder's dogged approach in pursuing change caused the military to act.

In 1994 Secretary of Defense Les Aspin "lifted the 'risk rule'" which prevented women from serving in units with a high probability of engaging in combat, partly in recognition of the fact that given the changing nature of warfare there were no longer any safe places on the battlefield.<sup>16</sup> The 1994 direct combat definition and policy, that is the current source of debate in the defense community and throughout the nation, states that, "Service members are eligible to be assigned in all positions for which they are qualified, except that women shall be excluded from assignments to units below the Brigade level whose primary mission is direct combat on the ground."<sup>17</sup> The policy further defined direct ground combat as "engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with hostile forces."<sup>18</sup>

One of the most controversial aspects of the policy, particularly given the nature of combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, is the idea of direct combat taking place “well forward on the battlefield.”<sup>19</sup> The concept of being “well forward on the battlefield” is obsolete; therefore, the 1994 policy is no longer relevant. However, resistance to women serving in combat still resonates in many senior leaders’ minds. To external stakeholders like the American public, these beliefs are peculiar, more importantly; these types of mindsets characterize the military as a close minded entity that is blind to the types of discriminatory practices that many Americans fought hard to overcome.

Today women continue to play active roles in Iraq and Afghanistan despite the 1994 exclusion rule. For the past decade women have been serving in uniform alongside their male counterparts in Afghanistan and in Iraq. “They serve and they lead military police units, air defense units, and intelligence units, all of which perform their roles on the modern battlefield in close and direct proximity to combat.”<sup>20</sup> The recent example set by Sergeant (SGT) Leigh Ann Hester while serving in Iraq underscores this dynamic.

In 2005 during combat operations in Iraq, SGT Leigh Ann Hester received the Silver Star for exceptional valor in close-quarters combat. SGT Hester led her team in a 25-minute firefight, using hand grenades and an M203 grenade launcher while maneuvering her team to cut off the enemy.<sup>21</sup> Her actions serve notice to the shallow nature of arguments that oppose the integration of women in combat. In response to questions by the press concerning her combat experience, SGT Hester’s answers exemplify the Warrior Ethos that all Soldiers, regardless of their gender aspire to; “I

didn't have time to be scared when the fight began. Your training kicks in, and the Soldier kick in...You've got a job to do protecting yourself and your fellow comrades."<sup>22</sup>

In analyzing the well-documented accounts of women serving in the military it is easy to understand why this change is long overdue. Similarly, the patterns of resistance to women in combat units are revealed in history. In this context history has great explanatory power and serves as an important factor in understanding resistance to any change effort. Examining history is also instructive in formulating strategy and implementing policy decisions that allow an organization to maintain a competitive future advantage. As such, the history of women serving in the U.S. military reveals the strategic relevance of this historic change effort.

#### Why Change is Relevant

In a letter to Secretary Panetta dated January 9, 2013, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey stated in very clear and simple terms that, "The time has come to rescind the direct combat exclusion rule for women and to eliminate all unnecessary gender based barriers to service."<sup>23</sup> This coherent message in many ways communicates the future for the U.S. military and provides clear intent. In communicating these thoughts, General Dempsey also highlights a challenging dynamic for the nation as a global power, that is progressive, committed to equality, and advocates women's rights abroad as a matter of international policy. In this regard the integration of women in combat arms units throughout the military has strategic implications and further highlights the relevance of this change effort.

The recession of the 1994 combat exclusion policy aligns the United States with other western countries such as: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania and Sweden, as well as

Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Eritrea, and Israel. All of these nations allow women to serve in combat roles. Interestingly, even North Korea, one of the countries the U.S. often criticizes for their human rights record allows women to serve in combat units.<sup>24</sup> Strategically the U.S. military can no longer afford “to operate in foreign countries among civilian populations while simultaneously chastising other nations for their treatment of women when we formally and informally exclude our women.”<sup>25</sup> This paradox is akin to the U.S., the world’s greatest democracy fighting Germany, the world’s greatest racist regime with a segregated Army during World War II.<sup>26</sup> Many highlight the hypocritical nature of the U.S. in the eyes of the international community as the impetus for the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. The following extract from the 1947 Presidential Commission report of civil rights in America captures the essence of the challenge facing the nation during this time frame:

The international reason for acting to secure our civil rights now is not to win the approval of our totalitarian critics. We would expect it if our record were spotless; to them our civil rights record is only a convenient weapon with which to attack us. Certainly we would like to deprive them of that weapon.<sup>27</sup>

The U.S. military has always, with persistent urging by external stakeholders, set the pace for societal change. The desegregation of the armed forces in 1948 came at a time when Jim Crow laws and racism reigned in American society and culture. Opponents to the integration of the U.S. military in 1948 viewed the act as a “social experiment that would impair military readiness.”<sup>28</sup> These beliefs were consistent with societal norms that characterized blacks as physically and psychologically ill-suited for combat.<sup>29</sup> Today, similar societal norms and cultural beliefs impact the integration of women in MFE branches.



Opponents to this change effort argue that women are physically incapable of performing as combat Soldiers, and if integrated they will undermine unit cohesiveness particularly in all male groups.<sup>30</sup> They view the act as a move towards “employment equality” which goes against the military’s focus on winning wars and is inconsistent with promotion and other advancement systems in meritocracies.<sup>31</sup> However, this change effort is less about equality and more about the need to ensure the accession and retention of the best qualified service members despite their gender. “The goal for military leaders today should be to maximize opportunities for Soldiers, to favor inclusion over exclusion, to widen opportunities for advancement, and help as many Soldiers as possible achieve these opportunities, while minimizing obstacles.”<sup>32</sup> It is also imperative that military leaders “identify the conditions most likely to expedite integration and provide strategic communications that set conditions for the successful integration of women in MFE branches.”<sup>33</sup>

In November 2010 a report released by the Military Diversity Commission titled “Women in Combat,” found no evidence that women lack the physical strength to perform combat roles. Likewise the report found no evidence that integrating women in combat units would erode good order and discipline or have an adverse effect on cohesion.<sup>34</sup> However the report did conclude that “constrained personnel assignment policies that exclude women from serving in combat units contribute to reduced career opportunities for women particularly in the officer corps.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the report revealed that senior military leadership was “too white and too male” and that only 16% of senior leaders are women.<sup>36</sup> The commission approved the following recommendations:

- DoD and the Services should eliminate the “combat exclusion policies” for women, including the removal of barriers and inconsistencies, to create a level playing field for all qualified service members. The Commission recommends a time-phased approach.<sup>37</sup>
- Women in career fields/specialties currently open to them should be immediately able to be assigned to any unit that requires that career field/specialty, consistent with the current operational environment.<sup>38</sup>
- DoD and the Services should take deliberate steps in a phased approach to open additional career fields and units involved in “direct ground combat” to qualified women.<sup>39</sup>
- DoD and the Services should report to Congress the process and timeline for removing barriers that inhibit women from achieving senior leadership positions.<sup>40</sup>

These recommendations will benefit the military because currently roughly 7% of women in the Army are general officers; in contrast, 80% of the Army’s general officers are selected from combat arms branches.<sup>41</sup> Lifting the policy provides women greater opportunities to serve in those branches that have historically produced virtually all of the most senior ranking military officers (four-star levels). The new policy challenges assignment policies that contributed to reduced career opportunities for women, and more so in the Army and Marine Corps.<sup>42</sup>

This change also better aligns the military with societal norms pertaining to equality and inclusion. The integration of women in combat arms branches transitions the services from institutions of exclusion to more diverse and inclusive institutions. Both diversity and inclusion are positive outcomes that “allow the military to maintain a future competitive advantage in an increasingly complex and dynamic global environment and enable the military to maintain the trust and confidence of its constituents, the American people.”<sup>43</sup> This is yet another vital aspect in crafting messages pertaining to this change effort and many research efforts support this

message. To name a few, a Catalyst Information Center study revealed that companies with women on boards of directors, especially those with three or more, had better financial performance than those with less women in these positions. Likewise, a 2009 White House Project report shows that an organization's bottom line improves when women are present in significant numbers.<sup>44</sup>

Diversity in the military's leadership better reflects the racial, ethnic and gender mix in the armed forces and in American society and provides the services a larger pool of best qualified service members to choose from.<sup>45</sup> Currently only 24% of the American population is eligible for military service and today's recruiters have to compete with universities and colleges for high quality recruits. Out of necessity the military needs to fully leverage the accession, expansion and retention of the best qualified service members despite their gender. Furthermore, the integration of women in combat arms units will result in greater innovation and creativity because women bring different perspectives to problem solving based on their unique life experiences, which are not present in the all male units. These perspectives "increase the number of different solutions brought to a problem, cultivate and foster knowledge and information sharing, create relationships between people with different life experiences and enable greater creativity, innovation, and organizational performance."<sup>46</sup> "Empirical research indicates that heterogeneous organizations outperform homogeneous organizations primarily because they produce more creative solutions to complex problems."<sup>47</sup> Collective intelligence studies also indicate that when women are added to teams the collective intelligence of the group increases exponentially regardless of group size.<sup>48</sup>

#### Why is the Army Resistant to Change?

Two main factors contribute to resistance surrounding women in combat arms:

1) cultural beliefs that women are physically incapable of serving in combat, and 2) the integration of women in combat arms will threaten good order and discipline. Army culture, and particularly MFE culture is characterized by an underlying assumption that “a traditional form of masculinity remains essential to the armed forces as an organization.”<sup>49</sup> Additionally, combat units engage in activities more aligned with the physical capabilities of men, and women serving in combat units will suffer higher injury rates as a result.<sup>50</sup>

Yet, over 150 years ago, the Union and Confederate armies' rosters included over 200 documented female Soldiers. Disguised as men, these women fought alongside their male counterparts, endured the worst war had to offer and proved to history that women have the physical and mental fortitude required of a Soldier.<sup>51</sup>

The same belief was used in 1942 against Audie Murphy who was rejected by the Marine Corp and the Army paratroopers because of his size. Standing 5 feet 5 inches and weighing less than 120 pounds he enlisted in the Army as a light infantryman.<sup>52</sup>

When he passed out during basic training, the Army tried to reclassify him as a cook, but he successfully lobbied to stay in the infantry. It is highly probable that Murphy would not have made it through the Marine Corps infantry officer course today. But he went on to become the most decorated combat soldier in the history of the United States. He received the Medal of Honor and every other decoration for valor that this country has to offer, some of them more than once. He also received a battlefield commission and commanded an infantry company before World War II ended.<sup>53</sup>

The Army currently has 112 women serving in the field artillery officer corps; although it's a small group, the number of women in the artillery continues to grow. The number of women holding the 13A military occupational skill designation for field artillery and wearing the crossed cannon insignia of the career branch is as follows:

- Regular Army: one lieutenant colonel, two majors, five captains, 45 first lieutenants and 51 second lieutenants, for a total of 104.<sup>54</sup>

- Army National Guard: one major and two second lieutenants, for a total of three.<sup>55</sup>
- Army Reserve: one lieutenant colonel, one major and three captains, for a total of five.<sup>56</sup>

As of December of 2013, 13 women have graduated from the Marine Corps enlisted infantry training course. However to date, none of the 13 graduates have been offered infantry assignments.<sup>57</sup> Instead their participation in the training is being used by the Marine Corps to determine the best means to, or whether to integrate women into combat positions and certain military specialties.<sup>58</sup> These female Marines have proven they are physically capable of meeting the requirements.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps stated that women will not be allowed to enlist in the infantry until female officers are present, and if there are not enough women that make it through the infantry officer's course it is probably not worth the effort to include women in the infantry.<sup>59</sup> When reflecting on this statement I ask myself, what message is he sending to the Marines, and the American people, and how will it be perceived? It is clearly a "classic and subtle means of exclusion, similar to reading tests at Jim Crow era voting booths, and its raises a structural barrier to integrating women into combat units."<sup>60</sup>

Many naysayers argue that the small percentages of "one off" women who could actually meet existing physical requirements do not make it "worth it" to allow them to serve in combat branches.<sup>61</sup> Initially the numbers will be small since this is a forced change, and assimilation will take time. However as women in combat arms branches becomes the norm in MFE culture, and as technology enables "physical differences to be offset and leveled" the numbers could possibly increase.<sup>62</sup> Until then, women who are capable of meeting the requirements to serve in combat arms branches should be

afforded the opportunity regardless of the numbers and should not be held back by “societal standards or the supposed weaknesses of her [their] gender.”<sup>63</sup> While physical disparities exist between men and women, this fact “shouldn’t shut down options, but should instead provide gravity to decisions that senior leaders make in dealing with it.”<sup>64</sup>

### Enacting Change through a Deeper Understanding

Opponents to the integration of women into combat arms argue that changing group dynamics in the MFE culture will disrupt bonding and harm unit cohesion. Merriam Webster defines cohesion as “a condition in which people or things are closely united.”<sup>65</sup> Research reveals that unit cohesion is increasingly becoming more task (group commitment towards mission accomplishment) focused versus socially focused (extent that people like each other).<sup>66</sup> Commanders and Soldiers who have served with women or under women in combat during Iraq and Afghanistan believe “that it is not a big deal; it doesn’t change anything as long as they are competent.”<sup>67</sup>

In 1948 Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall after hearing reports of the performance of British women in anti-aircraft combat duty against the Luftwaffe conducted an experiment, using women in mixed battery anti-aircraft artillery units. Marshall's experiment "stunned the General Staff" by showing that the units mixed with women and men in equal proportion performed better than all-male units and had a high unit cohesion.<sup>68</sup>

Integrating women with the goal of minimizing damage to existing structure and culture provides a negative starting point for enabling change. To enable change senior leaders must first understand the basis of resistance. Resistance in MFE culture is attributed to traditions, values and norms acculturated over a period of time. Changes to the status quo in MFE culture is seen as a threat to the established way of doing things. Other reasons for resistance include an unclear understanding of the change and its impact, a belief that the change does not align with the organization, and a low

tolerance for change.<sup>69</sup> Understanding the existing culture and diagnosing resistance to change enables senior leaders to develop a vision that sets conditions for change in an organization.

Senior leaders are the key to enacting change in MFE culture. They have the responsibility of communicating the need and importance of change by providing a clear vision and manifesting behavior patterns to positively influence change. In other words, they must talk the talk and walk the walk. The successful integration of women in combat arms units requires senior leaders to recognize that differences exist and communicate how these differences enhance operational readiness as opposed to using differences to drive a wedge between men and women in MFE units. They must openly and proactively advocate the integration of women in combat arms by ensuring the importance of their message is not underestimated, and that the message is communicated repetitively in a variety of ways to aid in retention and stickiness.<sup>70</sup>

An effective guiding vision is essential in helping senior leaders break through resistance by; providing a shared sense of direction and understanding, facilitating major change by serving as a motivating action to overcome the natural resistance to change, and helps coordinate actions quickly.<sup>71</sup> Communicating the vision before change occurs increases a common and shared understanding of why change is necessary and how the change will benefit the organization.<sup>72</sup>

Political behavior sometimes emerges before and during organizational change efforts when what is in the best interests of one group, (in this case, women in combat arms) is perceived not to be in the best interest of the total organization or other groups (in this case MFE branches). Instead of manifesting behavior patterns that support

change, political behavior uses manipulation tactics (defined by Kotter as a covert attempt to influence others by using selective information such as hollow arguments of physical inabilities and decreased moral and cohesion) to impede change.<sup>73</sup>

Successful change in the MFE culture will depend on how well senior leaders modify their attitudes and behavior and alter norms and values within the organization. This is a necessary step to contradict and overcome political behavior. The U.S. military and the Army in particular have a history of resistance when it comes to changing organizational norms and values. Although the military was the change agent for desegregation, Army senior leaders took five years after Executive Order 9981 was issued to fully integrate minorities.<sup>74</sup> Behavior is the most powerful way senior leaders can communicate this change. When senior leaders and their guiding coalition live the vision others will grasp it better, thereby causing the change to be anchored firmly in group norms and values and less vulnerable to regression.<sup>75</sup>

Major change is difficult to accomplish alone, therefore senior leaders must build a guiding coalition consisting of individuals with enough power to influence the change, establish direction, align the culture with the vision, and inspire Soldiers to make it happen despite resistance. Many successful transformation efforts are attributed to leadership.<sup>76</sup> Co-optation is also an important aspect of building an effective guiding coalition. Co-opting involves giving someone that is resistant to change a role in the design and implementation of the change. This is not a form of participation, because the advice of the co-opted is not warranted. Rather, their inclusion in the guiding coalition influences others that may also be resistant to alter their beliefs as well.<sup>77</sup>



This transformation effort is not completely inconsistent with the MFE culture. The Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage are enduring in all Army's units regardless of gender composition. However some specific norms are incompatible with this change. Senior leaders must develop the means to integrate women into MFE culture while eliminating those norms that are inconsistent with the change.<sup>78</sup> Army Secretary John McHugh's directive to open approximately 1,900 Field Artillery officer positions in the active component and 1,700 in the Guard and Reserve to women is a small step in the right direction. However, the continued exclusion of women from field artillery positions in special operations units, or positions with "male only" skill identifiers until gender-neutral accession standards are in place is sending the wrong signal and continues to embrace norms that are resistant to culture change.<sup>79</sup> Culture changes after the change produces organizational benefits for a period of time and the connection between the change and performance improvement is visible. Therefore, as senior leaders implement the new rule, it is critical that the same high standards that have made the American military the most feared and admired fighting force in the world are maintained.<sup>80</sup>

### Conclusion

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq exposed women to combat and placed them at risk. However support for women serving in the armed forces has not wavered, which demonstrates a clear sign that the necessity of women serving in combat is recognized. In an effort to provide women the same promotion opportunities as their male counterparts', women must be exposed to the same risks and be given the same assignment opportunities as men. "Allowing women to serve doubles the talent pool for delicate and sensitive jobs that require interpersonal skills not every Soldier has. Having

a wider personnel base allows militaries to have the best and most diplomatic Soldiers working to end conflict quickly.”<sup>81</sup>

The role of women in the Army over the next 20 years is to fight and win their spot in MFE branches. Rather than debate the reasons why they should not be included in the all inclusive category of “fighters and winners,” Army leaders should direct their energy to foster reasons why they should.”<sup>82</sup> History has demonstrated that women have and can succeed in combat; however history will not judge the military favorably if resistance to women in combat continues. Many of the historical examples presented in this research project are embarrassing for the military and the Nation in hindsight. The legacy of senior military leaders will be determined by the actions taken to enact this change. History will be the true judge of those actions, and history will influence society’s perception of the military’s ability to enact change in a culture of resistance.

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