

Determining gender equality in the marine corps



Established in 1775, the United States Marine Corps was formed as an infantry force when our Continental Navy made landfall. They are world-renowned for tenacity and combat strength. Marines pride themselves in Honor, Courage, and Commitment, which is forged in the Marine's DNA upon graduating basic training. A history rich in tradition and customs, the United States Marine Corp have changed little since their inception. Donned in new uniforms and military equipment they pride themselves in knowing their past and keeping the memory of their organizations birth in a Philadelphian tavern. Traditions die hard, and change doesn't come without a war.

Women in combat arms was a sensitive issue for senior leadership in the United States Marine Corps. Women not being allowed to serve in combat positions due to their sex saw this issue as discrimination. This was particularly difficult for those women who were in fact physically capable of performing the grueling duties that these combat positions required. The biggest concern for senior leadership and the main reason why women were not allowed to serve in combat positions was that the combat weight load would be too much for the female frame and ultimately how this would affect their positions in an actual skirmish. Arguments on sides became a national topic of discussion and brought to light just how much the Marine Corps lacked in diversity with their ranks. There are currently only 27 women in the Infantry Occupational specialty in the Marine Corps, which includes 1 Infantry Officer. My plan as the task force leader is to analyze the research and data as well as interview female Marines who are currently enrolled or those that have completed the Infantry Officers Course (IOC). Shockingly, the typical statistic for this course is " 25% of students who attempt it don't

pass.” (Browne and Green, 2017). My objective is to determine if women are indeed physically incapable of taking up combat roles or is the Marine Corps excessively behind the times in gender equality. As the task force leader assigned by the Commanding General, I was tasked with the mission of analyzing hindrances to organizational efficiency. I will begin to review Marine Corps culture, identify areas of weakness, and propose solutions for completely opening combat arms in the United States Marine Corps.

Current Culture

Historically, the United States Marine Corps has always been slow to change. Their motto *Semper Fidelis*, which is Latin for Always Faithful, speaks of an organization who is loyal to its core and foundation. It is indeed a force to be reckoned with dedicated to the preservation of the American way of life and its long list of traditions and customs. Advancing on the enemy and winning the war is ingrained in their ethos. The mission is first and foremost, with everything in question seizing up and giving way to this demand. Therefore, roles in combat arms remained closed to women because of the strong belief that women could not handle the task.

Compared to the Army where there are currently close to 800 women serving in combat roles to include those that graduated from Army Ranger School, the Marine Corps is trailing behind the curve. Interesting enough, “women make up only about 7% of the Marine Corps’ ranks, the smallest percentage of any service.” (Michaels, 2017). According to the Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs, once the Pentagon opened up combat units that were previously closed to Female Marines they saw an increase of nearly 50% of women joining those newly opened units. This data shows

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that women in the Marine are willing and capable of serving in roles that had been traditionally held by males only.

Opha May Johnson was the first woman to enlist in the United States Marine Corps. She joined the Reserve on August 13, 1918. It was the day after the Secretary of the Navy permitted women to in enlisting in the Reserve. Such a move aimed to free up the men who were assigned clerical duties and allow them to fight in World War I. Women Marines began their supportive role as a United States Marine which would lead to them playing other roles in battle.

On March 18, 1967, Master Sergeant Barbara Dulinski arrived at Bien Hoa Air Force Base, Vietnam. Not far from Saigon, she became “ the first female Marine to serve in a combat zone.” (Clark, 2016). Due to the clear and present danger of the combat zone, all personnel was required to wear combat boots and utilities. This wasn't the norm as female Marines typically worn a business suit-like uniform complete with dress and heels.

Eventually, more women began joining the military to answer their beloved nation's call to service. This, however, was not met with enthusiasm from their male counterparts. Our society, after all, wasn't exactly a level playing field for the sexes. General sentiments were still in favor of the traditional view of men in the field and women with the babies. Male chauvinism was alive and well then, and some present female Marines would agree it still is. Time has proved helpful in clearing most of these hurdles. Female Marines can be viewed by their peers and superiors as anything from helpless to a prostitute. I remember an occasion when I interviewed a retired female

Marine. The statement above rang true as she recounted numerous times when she was made to feel she wasn't worth much and in another account, sexually harassed.

Areas of Weakness

The United States Marine Corps' approach to culture is to begin assimilation immediately in boot camp. The enlisted recruits or officer candidates are instructed on its' core values and ethos. Leadership qualities are instilled via challenging tests and inspections. Their approach to diversity begins by way of annual training requirements. Theaters are packed with Marines where they are drilled with scenarios of cultural sensitivity and ethics classes. Teamwork and motivational strategies are sustained through group physical exercise or military training. Every Marine is experiencing the pain and resolve to finish with their fellow Marines to their left and right. Motivation is applied when units compete in friendly challenges with other units to building additional teamwork skills and comradery.

One area of weakness is that the Marine is always working with less and expected to do more with it. Funds are always lacking which trickles down to the needs of the Marines, or lack thereof. Since the Marine Corps has consistently operated under less than favorable conditions compared to other branches, this has become almost expected. What this means is that Marines receive poor living arrangements, training material, transportation, and protection equipment. Another potential weakness is the reluctance to change. The United States Marine Corps is a proud organization of our armed forces. They have an extensive list of traditions which are taught at

the most junior of ranks and sustained at the highest. Schooling programs were developed to ensure that every Marine would remain aware of their culture and regulations.

Proposed Solutions

Unfortunately, without change, an organization can become stagnant. The organization will not remain relevant to the current times and begin to suffer. Eventually giving in to time it may fade away. How can the United States Marine Corps remain relevant in the struggle for equal rights?

Women are already serving in combat areas, but there is expressed concern, and this task force will conduct a continuous evaluation of data and record keeping.

Our first suggestion to tackle the funding issue is to establish the best way forward in operations with an increase in funding. We will also establish an additional course of action where we can handle sustainment with the bare minimum of funds offered by Congress. We must also establish a new culture which is welcome and resilient to change. This will be addressed by new online training modules and mandatory meetings conducted by supervisors with their subordinates. The aim will be to have the peer groups break off afterward for their own side-by-side instructional time. Utilizing these working groups, everyone will begin training on social norms and acceptable behavior about race, religion, and gender.

The female Marines shall be followed over the course of three, five, and seven-year studies. Mental and physiological evaluations and survey shall be conducted to gather the data. The metrics will provide valuable data

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concerning the sustainment of women in combat roles. Should the data provide a negative output, then a plan must be devised to roll back the changes made to accommodate female positions in the infantry.

Executive Summary

The United States Marine Corps has a reputation for being resistant and slow to change. Semper Fidelis remains in every Marine, defining an organization of loyalty. However, an organization must accept change to remain relevant in today's environment. Women have long been viewed as equals in current times. So, it wasn't long before the United States decided to ensure the opening of combat arms in the Marine Corps to the women that chose to endure. Coupling this trial is the ever lack of funding and the expectation to complete the mission with minimal readiness. It will be necessary to pressure Congress to provide the Marine Corps with additional funding to accommodate the increase of female personnel in our infantry. Additionally, we shall begin the planning and necessary training required to establish a culture of resilience. Our new infantry female Marines shall be followed over the course of three, five and seven-year studies which will provide necessary data to provide the true value of such sustainment. We shall be ready for whichever course our nation decides to continue following.

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