

Integration

—a program framework for commanders

By CPT David M. Dlutowski

Few aspects of military life are certain during these unstable times of drawdown, decreasing defense budgets, and fluctuating military roles. One of the few things the Army can guarantee is change.

On 29 July 1994, Secretary of Defense William Perry announced the opening of 32,699 military positions to women. These changes, effective 1 October 1994, present commanders (specifically at the company level) with a unique opportunity to implement a comprehensive integration program.

Webster's dictionary defines integration as *the act or process of incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups; to form, coordinate, or blend into a functioning or unified whole*. This is the commander's challenge for a unit assigned female soldiers for the first time. The integration process demands detailed, deliberate planning to minimize organizational disruption and maintain unit morale and cohesion.

This article provides commanders a framework for an effective integration program. It's beyond the scope of the article to present a specific program for all units. But I would like to offer a three-phased strategy, a tool for

commanders to use when developing their own integration program. The three-phased process involves:

- Thorough unit pretraining
- A comprehensive inbrief
- Periodic, mandatory follow-up training

The framework is patterned after lessons learned during the integration of the 84th Chemical Company, a mechanized smoke generator company at Fort Polk, Louisiana. 84th Chem had females assigned for about a year to assist in the unit's deactivation. The 84th failed to devise an integration program. Frequent, in some instances serious, personnel problems arose.

Issues involved alleged sexual harassment, equal opportunity violations, and fraternization. The company's morale declined sharply and unit cohesion splintered. By developing a simple three-phased integration plan, other commanders can avoid these time-consuming and stressful lessons learned "the hard way."

Preparation

The introduction of women into a traditionally male unit can cause turmoil and tension if conducted frivolously. Improper attitudes and

stereotyping will erode unit cohesion and degrade readiness. Nancy Loring Goldman, *Female Soldiers—Combatants or Noncombatants? Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, says "The lack of acceptance of women by many military men creates problems for the women. As in other predominantly male settings, military women often face prejudice from male superiors, peers, and subordinates, and face certain male behavior that creates stress and interferes with their job performance. Such behavior includes differential treatment and sexual harassment of varying degrees."

Before conducting the first phase or pretraining, the commander should inform the company when the female soldiers will arrive. Carefully consider the tone and manner in which the announcement is made—it may set the precedence for unit acceptance and unification of the new soldiers. Hold an informal company briefing to consider soldiers' questions and concerns. Present a strong, positive command emphasis and ensure all personnel are present.

To assure thorough integration, assign female soldiers equally throughout the unit. Avoid creating "the female squad" or "the male

platoon." This type of isolation or separation discourages complete integration and fosters an "us" and "them" mindset. Simply assign the female soldiers as you would any other new arrivals.

Pretraining

Conduct thorough unit pretraining as early as possible before the female soldiers arrive. Ensure maximum participation (to include leaders) and provide make-up training for those unable to attend the initial training. Pretraining should include (but is not limited to):

- Commander's expectations/standards
- Sexual harassment regulations
- Fraternalization policies
- Equal opportunity training
- Barracks policies

Conduct pretraining with a positive, enthusiastic and well-qualified instructor. Thorough understanding of the most current policies is essential. Soldiers may feel this training is unnecessary or useless. Consider role playing or other direct involvement of the audience. Emphasize what constitutes sexual harassment and the complaint procedures and consequences under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The commander must stress the seriousness of these policies and convey total commitment to the integration program.

The Inbrief

An effective welcome and inbrief from the commander can go a long way toward easing the tensions of newly assigned female soldiers. Set the stage for their acceptance and equality by introducing them to high unit standards of conduct and effective personnel policies.

Stress the importance of openness, fairness, and communication. Assign unit sponsors to assist with inprocessing. Explain the company integration program, clearly define the scope and objectives of the plan.

Improper attitudes and stereotyping of women will erode unit cohesion and degrade readiness.

Let them know that smooth integration is your chief concern, and that you are totally committed to *your* program.

"An action program must begin at the top. Ultimate responsibility for the problems of military women should be placed at the levels of the military commander rather than at the NCO level. The attitude of the commander is the single most important factor in determining the implementation of reforms," writes Michael L. Rustad in *Women in Khaki, The American Enlisted Women*.

A few other considerations that both soldiers and leaders should be familiar with include:

- The commander's open door policy
- Single parent/family care plan requirements
- Necessary provisions in the field
- Physical training programs
- Spouse support groups
- Post support activities

By taking the time to get involved and clearly explaining these issues, the commander can convince the recently assigned soldiers that he is dedicated to ensuring their smooth transition into the unit.

Follow-up Training

The commander must remain involved and committed to the integration program. Training should continue periodically. Problems are likely to arise as the initial assignment of female soldiers interact and gain acceptance into the company.

"In addition to all the other things they need to learn, military men and

women must also learn about others' understanding of the relationship between the sexes—their ways of flirting, their style of bargaining, the responsibilities each sex accepts and expects of the other. Both men and women undoubtedly make mistakes in receiving, interpreting, and sending sexual signals; for women such mistakes may be quite consequential," comments Judith Hicks Stiehm, in *Arms and the Enlisted Women*.

In the military any such mistake may be quite consequential. The commander is ultimately responsible for ensuring proper procedure is followed should serious mistakes occur within his command. Don't hesitate to call the Judge Advocate General's Office, the Inspector General, or your next higher headquarters' equal opportunity or sexual harassment representative for advice should a mistake occur within your unit.

As stated earlier, change is assured in the military. New soldiers arrive, trained soldiers depart, new leaders come and go. Follow-up training is critical for proficiency sustainment. In addition to sexual harassment, equal opportunity and fraternization instruction, follow-up training may include sensing sessions and preventive medicine briefings.

Sensing sessions provide a platform for female soldiers to privately or anonymously disclose potential or actual conduct violations. These sessions provide the commander with an invaluable insight into his command climate.

Briefings conducted by preventive medicine personnel educate soldiers on various sex-related subjects including birth control, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. Although this briefing may, at first thought, seem unnecessary, remember that the average enlistee is 18-20 years old. "Junior enlisted personnel are at a sexually active stage of their lives. Many are away from family and community restraints for the first time, and the culture seems to encourage (at least for men) heterosexual experimentation," says Hicks.

As evidenced by the opening of almost 33,000 new positions, women

are becoming a more integral part of the United States military establishment. It seems likely that as the Army continues to restructure and reshape its organization and missions, so, too, will it reevaluate and redesignate the role women will play.

Thus, commanders must continuously strive to unify men and women into an effective and cohesive, sexually integrated team. By incorporating this simple three-phased strategy of pretraining, inbriefing, and follow-up training, commanders can meet this challenge and minimize internal personnel conflicts and focus on maintaining combat readiness.

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