BACKGROUND

Women’s participation in the military has been restricted since gender integration began. About 33,000 women served in World War I—20,000 of them in the Army and Navy Nurse Corps, which were separate from the regular Army and Navy. In World War II, manpower shortages and reports of valuable performance by women in other countries’ armed forces led the United States to utilize approximately 350,000 women for its own military effort. The attack on Pearl Harbor resulted in the creation of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). Women typically filled nursing and administrative jobs, which were consistent with civilian women’s work, although they also served in all other noncombat jobs. The 350,000 women who served in World War II were regarded as temporary support that would free more men for combat.

After the war, women’s future role with the military was called into question. In 1948, the year President Truman mandated racial integration, Congress passed the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act, which placed highly specific limits on the women who would now be allowed to join the Army. Women could make up no more than 2 percent of the total enlisted ranks; the proportion of female officers could equal no more than 10 percent of enlisted women. No woman could serve in a command position, attain the rank of general, or hold permanent rank above lieutenant colonel. This act specifically prohibited women from being assigned to aircraft or vessels engaged in combat missions. While these combat assignment
restrictions did not apply directly to the Army, the Secretary of the Army developed policies to exclude women from direct combat, based upon the implied congressional intent of the Navy and Air Force statutes.¹

The doors for women have opened gradually over the past four decades. In 1967, the 2-percent cap on enlisted women and some restrictions on promotions were lifted; in 1972, the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) was opened to women; in 1976, the first women entered the service academies; in 1978, Navy women were assigned to noncombatant ships, and the separate Women’s Army Corps was dissolved; in 1989, two women led their units into combat in Panama; in 1990, the first female commanded a Navy ship; and in 1991, in the Persian Gulf War, large numbers of women moved forward with their units into combat zones. A Department of Defense Task Force on Women in the Military recommended a “risk rule” to bar women from units and positions in which the “risk of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire, or capture is equal to or greater than that experienced by associated combat units in the same theater of operations.”

The department’s policy on the assignment of women has proceeded in three phases—first with a focus on aviation, then on assignment to naval combatants, and, most recently, on ground assignments. In April 1993, following congressional repeal of the law that prohibited women from being assigned to combat aircraft, then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin directed the services to open additional occupational specialties and assignments to women. In particular, women began to compete for assignments in aircraft that engage in combat. Secretary Aspin also directed the Secretary of the Navy to open more assignments for women on noncombatant vessels and to develop legislation to repeal the naval combatant exclusion law. One important qualification in the implementing memorandum was that women were not to be assigned to units that engage in direct combat on the ground.

Congress made the second phase possible in November 1993, when it repealed the naval combatant exclusion law. The November 1993

¹For a detailed history of women in the military, see Holm (1992).
law also prohibited opening additional combat positions to women without congressional review. The law requires 30 days advance notice for proposed changes to assignment policies to combat units, combat aircraft, and combat vessels and 90 days advance notice for changes to any “Direct Ground Combat Exclusion Policy.” The Secretary of Defense has submitted three such reports. The secretary reported opening combat aviation and additional noncombatant ships on January 21, 1994. A February 4, 1994, report informed Congress of the department’s intent to allow women to be permanently assigned to surface combatant vessels as a result of the repeal of the Naval Combatant Exclusion Law. That change would open more than 136,000 new positions in the Navy to both men and women. At the same time that Congress repealed the naval combatant exclusion law, it established important guidelines for the integration of women into previously closed occupations when it also required the Secretary of Defense to

- Ensure that qualification for and continuance in occupational career fields is evaluated on the basis of a common, relevant performance standard and not on the basis of gender;
- Refrain from the use of gender quotas, goals, or ceilings, except as specifically authorized by Congress; and
- Refrain from changing occupational standards simply to increase or decrease the number of women in an occupational career field.2

In January 1994, the Secretary of Defense promulgated a definition of direct ground combat and an associated assignment rule and announced that he was rescinding the “risk rule,” with these actions to be effective October 1, 1994. Direct ground combat was defined 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 the hostile force’s personnel. Direct ground combat takes place well forward on the battlefield

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2Quoted from Legislative History, House Report No. 103-200 Section 542—Gender Neutral Occupational Performance Standards. Bullets added.
while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect. (House Report 103-200.)

The memorandum also directed that this guidance be used only to expand opportunities to women and not be used to close units or positions that had previously been open to women.

On July 28, 1994, Congress was notified that the DoD Risk Rule would be rescinded and the services would open additional noncombat positions and career fields to women effective October 1, 1994. This guidance established the framework for the utilization of women under which the department now operates.

Under the current policy, women are eligible to be assigned to all positions for which they are qualified, except that they are excluded from assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground.

Two kinds of opportunities resulted from these legislative and policy changes in the 1992–1994 period. First, new positions, or skills, opened to women. Second, units that had been previously closed to women because of the risk rule opened to women.

**PURPOSE OF STUDY**

Given these changes, the House Report for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997 directed the Secretary of Defense to obtain an independent study by an FFRDC evaluating the performance of each military service in integrating women into military occupations previously closed. As part of this study, the FFRDC shall evaluate the effect on defense readiness and morale of integrating women into newly-opened occupations and positions as well as factors affecting the pace at which military services are integrating women.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy asked RAND to undertake this study. Because we judged unit cohesion as critical to morale, we expanded the study to address the effects of gender integration upon readiness, cohesion, and morale.
The study has three components. The first determines how each service interpreted the guidance to open new skills and organizations to women. Each service had interpreted the guidance differently, and it is important to understand those interpretations before assessing the progress in implementing the congressional guidance. The second component assesses the progress of what we refer to as gender integration. In this component, we determined the extent to which the services carried out their interpretations of the congressional direction. The third component assesses the effects of gender integration on the readiness, cohesion and morale of units.

**SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

This study is a short-term analytical effort to evaluate the progress of gender integration in the services and the effects of this integration on selected units. While further study is recommended to determine the extent of the trends identified during this research and to evaluate specific gender-related policies, this effort provides important insights about the effects of gender integration in previously closed units and units with previously closed occupations, in the context of unit readiness, cohesion, and morale.

This effort did not include an extensive literature review. However, both authors have research experience in this area, and an extensive research bibliography is included in this document.

Units were carefully selected to provide the broadest possible view of the issues within our constraints of time and resources. The compressed schedule limited the number of locations that the research team could visit and also, for some units, reduced the number of people available to the researchers. Nonetheless, we believe enough individuals participated to provide satisfactory research results. The methods used, the types of units studied, and the representative proportion of individuals included in the study are briefly described below and are discussed in greater detail in Appendix A.

**Research Methods**

Our first task was to assess the pace at which the services were integrating women into the recently opened units and occupations. To
do so, we established contact with experts in each of the four services’ headquarters manpower offices.

We interviewed our contacts about the process for determining positions to be opened and how the integration was planned to proceed. These contacts referred to us additional people who were involved in this process in the 1993–1994 time frame, many of whom we were also able to interview. The service contacts also provided information about which units and occupations had been opened, number of positions those entailed, and locations where we would find those units and occupations.

To answer the question about the effects on readiness and morale, we selected some of those locations for site-based research. We were not able to visit overseas locations or ships at sea. From the CONUS locations, we selected the ones that had the greatest range of variance in characteristics. Because we could not undertake a random sample of all relevant units, we followed a tradition for exploratory research, which is to attempt to capture as many different types of cases as possible. Thus, we included ships, aviation, and ground units; east and west coast locations; and units that only recently included women, as well as those that already had women but now had them in new occupations. Once we had the data indicating where women had been placed, it became apparent that we could not fairly assess Air Force units. Most had only one woman in newly opened positions, and we could not visit enough locations to protect the women’s anonymity and make conclusions that we could assert were due to gender rather than personality.  

To assess readiness, we relied primarily on the perceptions of unit commanders, who regularly track indicators of readiness over time and have a larger organizational picture than individual members might have. Interviews with unit leadership focused on current assessments of readiness and whether they had noticed a change in readiness levels due to the recent integration of women. We also asked unit personnel for their perceptions of gender-related influences on readiness, however, as their perceptions may be linked to other attitudes and behaviors relevant for this study.

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\(^3\)This is explained in greater detail in the Air Force discussion in Chapter Two and in Appendix A.
To assess morale, we also had to examine cohesion, because previous research has identified morale as inextricably linked with cohesion. While we interviewed commanders about their perceptions of overall cohesion and morale, the bulk of the data for this question came from the people whose levels of cohesion and morale we wished to discover. We chose focus groups as the method to probe people for their opinions about the effects of recent changes on their unit cohesion and morale. Our topics focused on gender issues, and groups were divided by gender and rank to allow for greater freedom in responses. Where someone asserted that something was the result of recent integration, we encouraged the individual to tell us how this unit differed from his or her previous unit, which had either been traditionally all-male or highly integrated for most people. Through reference to prior units, people also indicated which issues they thought were servicewide, rather than singular to a particular command or integration transition.

Since we could only include about 10 people per focus group, we gave each person a survey, then scheduled additional time to survey a larger number of individuals serving in the same units. Although surveys are limited in that they cannot communicate the complexity and depth of responses that interviews can, they allowed us to broaden our database, ensure that the views we heard in the focus groups were representative of the unit as a whole, and connect opinions to demographic variables. We encouraged respondents to write comments on their surveys if they wanted to make additional points or clarify the reasons behind their responses. The questionnaire was also considered key because it would allow people to express anonymously something they might feel uncomfortable revealing in front of their peers.

For small units, our sampling strategy was to attempt to include everyone in the survey who would be available the day of our visit. In larger units, we sought as many people as we could process surveys for in our given time frame. In those locations, we asked that people from a variety of work groups be represented.

For each questionnaire item, we ran an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and tested for significant variation along the lines of gender, rank, race, unit, and service. Significance levels reported in the text are
based on the F score. Open-ended questions were systematically coded, and responses are presented in tables within the document.

Quotations that appear in the text were selected because they represent a commonly expressed view either on questionnaires or in focus groups. We did not include quotations that communicated ideas that were only rarely or singularly made.

**Military Units Selected for Field Research**

We surveyed and conducted interviews and focus groups with individuals from five Army units, seven Navy units, and two Marine Corps units. Although we originally intended to include Air Force units in our field research, our preliminary research results indicated that, because of the way women had been assigned to the newly opened occupations and units, we could not be sure of obtaining valid research results, and we could not include them without potentially violating the confidentiality and anonymity of the individuals interviewed.

In addition to the five Army units with which we conducted interviews, focus groups, and surveys, we also interviewed command personnel from other Army units. We included units in the study that had been traditionally open to women, units that had been open to women but included recently opened Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs), and units that had been previously closed to women. The units visited included combat arms, combat support, and combat service support units.

We visited three Navy combatant ships and four Navy aviation units, three of which recently opened to women. To sample the Navy population, we identified already integrated combatant ships, then made our final selection based upon their availability (i.e., were in port at the time of our scheduled research visit). Our sample included different-sized ships, ranging from destroyer to aircraft carrier, and different types of aviation units. The ships we visited

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4This is explained in greater detail in Chapter Two, which explains the Air Force interpretation of the policy and its resulting assignment policy, and in Appendix A, which details our methodology.
also differed in the amount of time since their last deployment and included vessels based on both the east and west coasts.

We selected two Marine Corps units: One had been open to women prior to the legislative and policy changes, but had women in newly opened occupations, and the other had previously been closed to women. We visited fewer Marine Corps units than Army or Navy units, but we were able to sample a larger percentage of their unit personnel.

Table 1.1 indicates the total number of individuals who participated in the survey and the division of study participants by service. Of the 934 survey respondents, 492 individuals participated in focus-group discussions, including 320 men and 172 women. Approximately 40 percent of female focus-group participants were junior enlisted women, whereas the men who participated in focus groups were evenly distributed among the grades. More detailed demographics are provided in Appendix C.

The average percentages of unit personnel who participated in the study are shown in Table 1.2. For example, of all the personnel assigned to the Army units that we visited, we spoke to 43 percent of all the female personnel in grades E1-E4 and 23 percent of their male peers. We spoke to 44 percent and 20 percent of female and male Army E5s and E6s, respectively. Sixty-seven percent of the female Army personnel in grades E7 to E9 in these units participated in our study, as did 25 percent of the men in these same grades. There were very few female Army officers in these units, and they were not available to us, but the data represent 21 percent of the male officers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage of Study Sample</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Corps</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy Aviation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy Ships</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>934</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.2
Percentage of Unit That Participated in Focus Groups and/or Written Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E1-E4</th>
<th>E5-E6</th>
<th>E7-E9</th>
<th>Officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Male)</td>
<td>(Female)</td>
<td>(Male)</td>
<td>(Female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army Units</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Corps Units</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Ship(s)(^b)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Ship(s)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Aviation Units</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)There were very few women in these pay grades, and they were not available.
\(^b\)Unit for ships is taken to be the entire ship, so the measurement of sample size appears very different.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

The next chapter of this document describes how the services implemented the new guidance and legislative changes regarding gender integration into service policies. Specifically, Chapter Two examines the types of occupations and of units that became available to women, and the current status of women in these occupations and units. Chapter Three examines the effects of gender integration on readiness. Chapters Four and Five address the effects of gender integration on cohesion and morale. In Chapter Six, we draw upon the experiences of those personnel serving in recently integrated units and occupations to address issues related to gender integration: generational differences and military culture, integration of basic training, the reporting of sexual harassment, and the units and occupations that remain closed to military women. Conclusions and recommendations appear in Chapter Seven. The appendixes include a more detailed description of our methodology, additional data regarding the opportunities available to or closed to women in the services, the demographics of the individuals studied, and the men's and women's versions of the questionnaire.