

## Gender equality? A double standard for women in the military



Earlier this month, the U.S. Marine Corps announced that it was postponing its self-imposed deadline for women to be held to the same physical fitness standard as men. On January 1, 2014 female Marines would have been required to complete three pull ups on their physical fitness test; the same requirement as male Marines. Over 50 percent of women were unable to complete the new standard. Therefore, Marines chose to delay the deadline and allow women to pass without meeting the equal standard. With the military so willing to ignore these equal standards, one must wonder, does the military have a double standard when it comes to gender equality?

Last year military leadership lifted the ban on women in combat positions like the infantry and special operations without a clear pathway to successful integration. Physical standards and equality remain a primary issue of contention.

For decades, women and men have had 'equal but different' physical standards. The military recognized that men and women have different physical qualities which led to the generation of a separate physical grading scale. Correspondingly, women were also prohibited from the majority of combat roles including special operations, infantry, and other ground roles that required a higher level of physical performance. Now that women are able to pursue these combat arms-type positions within the military, the physical demand of the mission must be addressed.

So how do you handle this challenge? The answer lies in equality. But the word equality is not ambiguous. Equality is the state of being equal, and equal is defined as being of the same measure,

quantity, amount or number as another. The same standards, the same treatment, the same physical requirements, regardless of your gender. No political correctness, no ulterior motives. No senior level officers getting to bolster their Officer Evaluation Reports with accolades of leading the integration of females into infantry units.

Whenever compromise occurs in the 'name of equality' it only further perpetuates female stereotypes that women have spent years combating in the military. Military leaders must stand firm on equality and not buckle to the pressures of meeting a female quota at the expense of creating double standards of equality. We want the best and most qualified defending our freedoms and way of life. It doesn't matter if they are pretty, ugly, male, female, tall, or short, as long as they are the best physically, mentally, and emotionally to accomplish the mission of defending our nation.

Gender success should not be the focus of this issue, as the Marines hinted was the reason they have delayed enforcing the equal standard. Mission success must be the number one priority, as the military's purpose cannot be skewed by attempts at social engineering. Believe it or not, our national security depends on these standards that ensure mission success. We must maintain the most lethal and elite military in the world by meeting a mission standard, not a gender standard. It doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman. A standard is a standard.

The mission standard of these critical and vital units must not be *lowered* to meet the needs of females. If women are able to meet the physical standards required of the position, then good for them. They should then be granted every opportunity that a man is offered. But do not expect to have that opportunity without being able to toe-the-line with men. You're going to have to on the battlefield anyway. The mission isn't any less demanding because women are suddenly trying to accomplish it.

And the majority of women in the military don't expect or want different standards based solely upon their gender. They want to succeed based upon their own actions and merits, not be handed a consolation prize because they were granted special treatment. Military women don't need to appease certain parts of society that demand this change without ever having served in the military. Women who have been in the military for some time understand the resentment that comes along with 'equal but different' standards in a world that demands equality.

Unfortunately, as with the Marines, we are seeing military leadership more concerned with fulfilling quotas than meeting mission priorities. Many are more focused on setting women up for successful entries into these positions than actually holding them accountable to the standard.

Often men train for months to get physically prepared for certain job positions within the military. If women know they have a weak spot physically, shouldn't they be required to do the same instead of lowering a standard or postponing a deadline? This is a double standard in a society that preaches equality and a military that demands personal responsibility.