

Female Officers in the Engineer Regiment

MSG Darrell L. Dixon

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

M04 Class 57

Good Morning, SGM, Malauulu and Classmates of M04. I am MSG Dixon and for approximately the next ten minutes I will give you an informal, opinionated Unclassified Ethical Briefing. In my opinion, ethics is a big part of who we are as leaders. We as leaders are faced with ethical dilemmas/situations on and off duty. We all have or do work for an individual or individuals that have serious ethical issues. There is no difference between “a little serious versus real serious ethical issues. In my opinion, it is a choice to do what you know not to be the right thing.

My ethics are tested here everyday here at USASMA. But, my question to myself, is who do I turn to at USASMA? Who am I going to talk to about my myself or peers in reference ethical issues? This is a hard decision for me especially when I disagree with our Previous USASMA Battalion Commander. He said that all of the Faculty Advisors are personally picked and are the cream of the crop to work at the Academy. So, because of my disagreement with this, I just keep my ethical issues to myself. The day that we chose to overlook an ethical situation, you create a new standard. Once you start a new standard, it is hard to stop it LEGALLY. I really feel that USASMA’s information in reference the funds that you are told to bring with you for enrollment, \$95/100, need to be addressed. Every since we signed into the Academy, just about every week there is a request money. My suggestion is that the Academy should come up with a round or bout figure and put this into the welcome packet and website.

The rest of my ethics paper will discuss the ethical decisions that senior leaders in the US Army Engineer Corp must make concerning placement of female engineer officers in their organizations. I have personally experienced this ethical dilemma as a deployed 1SG. The situation created conflict between the Company Commander and the Battalion

Commander and impacted morale in the unit. Understanding the structure and manning of engineer units is critical to understand the underlying problem that contributes to this issue.

I have been in mechanized combat engineer units throughout my military career, Therefore my data is based on that environment. There are no female Enlisted Combat Engineer, 21B, soldiers in the US Army, however there are female Combat Engineer officers in the United States Army. When female engineer officers arrive in the organization they are slotted by the Battalion XO with guidance from the Battalion Commander. The female officers are assigned to Brigade and Battalion level Staff positions in HHC, The female officers are not assigned to the line companies within the battalion because it's not authorized by the MTOE.

This creates an interesting situation as the female officers stay in the Army and move up in rank. Female officers can command HHC, S-3, XO, and also become the Battalion Commander. It is hard to believe that they can command a battalion that they were not authorized to be a platoon leader or company commander of the line companies.

I was in a mechanized engineer battalion that had a female officer as the BN S-3. After the battalion commander was relieved she served as the battalion commander for five months. I personally feel that if female officers cannot serve as platoon leaders and company commanders in line companies they should not be authorized to be battalion commanders.

While serving as a deployed 1SG, I was told by my company commander that we would receive a female officer as a Platoon Leader in our company. I was puzzled and told the Commander that it was unauthorized. The commander explained that the

battalion commander was determined and had the decision approved by the Brigade Commander. The major reason for the approval was based on the fact that the unit was on a peacekeeping mission and therefore the platoon would not be involved in direct combat with the enemy. However if we were to go to war during this deployment, the platoon leader would be replaced with a male combat engineer officer.

The commander and I had a hard time accepting the decision and prepared a written argument and presented our opinions to the Battalion Commander. The Battalion Commander was disappointed in both of us and our strong reluctance to accept a female platoon leader. However we were able to convince him not to send her on the deployment and she was assigned to Bravo Company, which was not deployed. The Bravo company chain of command responded in the same manner and presented their beliefs. They were forced to accept the Battalion Commanders decision.

Under a 1994 policy, mandated by Congress, women are excluded from units at the level of battalion and below that engage in direct ground combat. Although the Army is barred from assigning women to ground combat battalions, in Iraq and Afghanistan units twist terminology. Instead of being "assigned," women are "attached in direct support of" the battalions. As a result, the Army avoids having to seek Pentagon and congressional approval to change the policy.

In order to avoid these unethical situations the President, Congress and the Department of Defense need to implement changes to the current policies. These changes need to be clear and avoid any misinterpretation of the regulation. It doesn't make sense to force senior leaders to make these type of decisions without proper guidance. Female officers should not command battalions where they are unable to lead platoons and

companies within. The Army must be realistic and apply the new policies to the nature of battles that we are involved in today. I feel that it is almost impossible in an asymmetrical battlefield to keep all female soldiers out of direct fire confrontations.

The change to the policy should either allow female officers to hold platoon leader and company commander positions in combat engineer battalions or prevent them from commanding combat engineer battalions. The engineer career management field is very large and consists of many different skills that are an asset to the battlefield. Some of these jobs are topographical engineers, construction engineers, heavy equipment engineers and many others.

These units are combat support and combat service support and are very different from combat engineer battalions. Another recommendation for policy change is to allow mixed gender combat support battalions to support combat battalions. However we must always remember the words spoke by President George Busch on 11 January 2005 "No women in combat". Many commanders in Iraq say they see a widening gap between War-zone realities and policies designed to limit women's exposure to combat.

QUOTE:

"What has changed? Nothing," said Lt. Col. Bob Roth of the 3rd Infantry Division. "You just want someone to feel better by saying we don't allow women in dangerous situations."

A debate over the policy erupted in Washington last year. As the Army began reorganizing its combat brigades, the 3rd Infantry attempted to assign mixed-sex forward support companies to combat battalions. Capt. Christine Roney was on the verge of

taking command of one of those companies when a soldier in her unit e-mailed Congress and opposed of women in combat. The Army reversed itself The Army has to understand the regulation that says women can't be placed in direct fire situations is archaic and not attainable," said Lt. Col. Cheri Provancha, commander of a Stryker Brigade support battalion in Mosul, who decided to bend Army rules and allow Guay to serve as a medic for an infantry company of the 82nd Airborne. Under a 1994 policy, mandated by Congress, women are excluded from units at the level of battalion and below that engage in direct ground combat.

"This war has proven that we need to revisit the policy, because they are out there doing it," Provancha, a 21-year Army veteran from San Diego, said from her base in Mosul, "We are embedded with the enemy."

Dozens of soldiers interviewed across Iraq -- male and female, from lower enlisted ranks to senior officers -- voiced frustration over restrictions on women mandated in Washington that they say make no sense in the war they are fighting. All said the policy should be changed to allow, at a minimum, mixed-sex support units to be assigned to combat battalions. Many favored a far more radical step: letting qualified women join the infantry.

But Congress is moving in the opposite direction. A House subcommittee, seeking to keep women out of combat, passed a measure that would bar women from thousands of Army positions now open to them. In Iraq, female soldiers immediately denounced the vote.

"I refuse to have my right as a soldier taken from me because of my gender," Guay wrote in e-mail. "It is my right to defend my country . . . I am well aware of the danger . . . Let me (us) do our job."

For many inside Army camps, the disconnect between Washington officials and the reality that female troops confront in Iraq was epitomized by President Bush's Jan. 11 declaration of "No women in combat."