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# Ranger Assessment Study



## Executive Report

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# **U.S. Army Ranger Assessment Study Executive Report**

## **I. Introduction.**

On 24 January 2013, the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) rescinded the 1994 Department of Defense (DOD) Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCAR) and directed the Services to begin planning for the removal of all gender-based barriers to the service. These actions required the Army to plan for the expansion of opportunities for women including opening all remaining closed Areas of Concentration (AOC), Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), units, and duty positions as expeditiously as possible, but no later than 1 January 2016.

In response, the Army established the Soldier 2020 initiative to ensure the best-qualified Soldiers have the opportunity to serve in any specialty regardless of gender. Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) tasked the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) with executing two lines of effort (LOEs). The first LOE called for the development and validation of gender-neutral accession standards that reflect the task-specific physical capabilities required for each Army MOS. This effort was named the Physical Demands Study (PDS). The second LOE tasked the TRADOC Analysis Center (TRAC) to conduct the Gender Integration Study (GIS) to identify the cultural and institutional factors associated with integrating women into closed units and specialties. Additionally, GIS was directed to provide mitigation strategies that reduced risk to morale, cohesion, and readiness. Presently, GIS findings and recommendations are complete, and PDS is nearing conclusion.

As part of Soldier 2020, HQDA also released All Army Activities (ALARACT) 222/2014 (11 September 2014), announcing the potential limited opening of the U.S. Army Ranger Course (hereby called Ranger School) to women in order to inform future gender integration decisions related to opening closed combat specialties and units. ALARACT 222/2014 called for the identification of physically-qualified female Soldiers from both the enlisted (E4-E9) and officer (O1-O4) ranks who would volunteer to attend Ranger School if the course was provisionally opened to women. Furthermore, the female volunteers who ultimately completed this limited assessment effort would receive a graduation certificate and authorization to wear the Ranger tab. On 6 January 2015, the Secretary of the Army (SecArmy) approved the provisional opening and assessment of the course to begin with Ranger Class 06-15 on 20 April 2015. As part of preparation and planning activities, the U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE) allocated 60 slots for women in Ranger Class 06-15 and required female volunteers to complete two-weeks of preparatory training at the Ranger Training and Assessment Course (RTAC) run by the Army National Guard (ARNG) Warrior Training Center (WTC).

## **II. Study Overview.**

On 6 January 2015, TRADOC tasked TRAC to conduct a study of the integration of women at Ranger School. Called the Ranger Assessment Study (RAS), this analytic effort examined four preparatory training classes at RTAC and Ranger Class 06-15. The study objective was to

identify challenges associated with opening RTAC and Ranger School to women and enable future integration planning and preparation. RAS study issues were:

1. What are the factors that influence success at Ranger School?
2. How does gender integration impact the class?
3. What changes were made to support gender integration?
4. What are the challenges and potential strategies associated with integration?

As part of addressing RAS study issues, TRAC partnered with Public Health Command (PHC) to assess the physical demands placed on Ranger students (men and women). Additionally, TRAC requested and received historic and contemporary data on student course performance from WTC and the Airborne Ranger Training Brigade (ARTB). Coupling this data with information collected during focus groups, interviews, and surveys of students, observers, and cadre, the TRAC team conducted a multi-method research design synthesizing RAS-specific findings with elements of GIS to address the study issues outlined above.

This Report is the final product of the six-month RAS effort. It distinguishes the factors that influence student success at Ranger School, identifies impacts associated with opening the course to women, reviews Ranger School changes to support integration, and evaluates the Ranger Assessment in the context of broader GIS findings and recommendations. While this Report cannot account for all of the factors that will potentially impact the integration of women into Ranger School, it incorporates historical and integrated class experiences of male and female Ranger students along with GIS research. Due to the limited number of women who attended the course, the singular nature of this assessment, and Ranger School's high attrition rate, many RAS findings are informative insights rather than definitive conclusions.

### **III. Study Findings.**

#### ***Factors that Influence Success at Ranger School***

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**1. Pre-Ranger Training.** Students who complete pre-Ranger training courses have a historical record of success at Ranger School. Student graduation from RTAC or other pre-Ranger courses is significantly related to successful completion of the first week of Ranger School known as the Ranger Assessment Phase (RAP-week). Events during RAP-week account for 44% of student course failures. The primary reasons for RAP-week drops are:

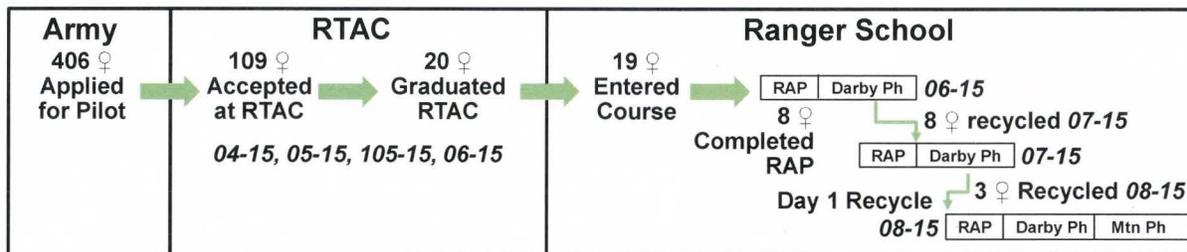
- Failure to meet the push-up standard in the Ranger Physical Fitness Test (RPFT).
- Failure of the 12-mile road march.
- Failure to pass the land navigation standard.

**2. Recycling.** Once a student passes RAP-week, analysis indicates that 71% will graduate; however, most will recycle one of Ranger School's three training phases at least once. Course completion without recycling a training phase only occurs for approximately 1 in 4 students. The act of repeating a training phase increases a student's overall tactical proficiency and likelihood of graduation.

**3. Tactical Knowledge of Light Infantry Skills.** Tactical knowledge and experience in light infantry skills contributes to student success. Infantry (IN) and Special Forces (SF) officers, NCOs, and Soldiers have higher graduation rates than students from other branches. Commissioning source also had an effect with United States Military Academy (USMA) officers having a higher graduation rate than other sources. Additionally, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) officers who were force branched into infantry had a significantly lower graduation rate than ROTC officers who selected infantry in their top three branching choices.

**4. Squad Composition.** Although historical data on student squad assignments is unavailable, the study team identified that squad personnel composition had an impact on student success during the Darby training phase (hereby called Darby Phase) in data collected from Ranger Classes 06-15 and 07-15. Similar to the above finding that tactical knowledge improves individual likelihood of success, the study team found that squads with a high ratio of combat arms Soldiers had greater success than squads with a lower ratio. Additionally, experience was also related to higher squad-level success – the increased presence of senior NCO and officer students (E-6, E-7, O-3) in squads positively affected individual student success in Darby Phase. Complementing this finding, Ranger Instructors (RIs) expressed that operational experience assists squads and has a tendency to keep squads focused on mission accomplishment.

**Gender Integration Class Impacts**



**Figure 1: Integrated Class Progress**

**1. RTAC.** As depicted in Figure 1, 406 women volunteered in response to ALARACT 222/2014 with 109 women (37 enlisted and 72 officers) selected to attend RTAC. Of these attendees, 20 women (~18%) met RTAC requirements and received a student slot in Ranger Class 06-15. Concurrently, 342 men (~45%) completed RTAC. For women, the two primary failure events at RTAC were inability to meet the push-up standard in the RPFT and land navigation. Other primary failure events, specifically the Combat Water Survival Assessment (CWSA) and the 6-mile road march, were not significant hurdles for women.

A number of gender-based differences existed between RTAC students. First, women were required by MCoE leadership to complete RTAC; whereas, men (with the exception of ARNG Soldiers) were not required to attend RTAC as a pre-requisite to Ranger School. Second, MCoE leadership provided women the option to remain at RTAC after failing an event, while male student failures returned home. MCoE leadership’s rationale was to provide additional experience and assistance in preparation for Ranger School. Finally, male RTAC graduates progressed immediately to Ranger School with no interim break, while female graduates of

RTAC Classes 04-15, 05-15, and 105-15 had a break between the courses due to the scheduled start of Ranger Class 06-15.

These differences contributed to negative views of integration from male RTAC students and cadre. Many men perceived an unequal training environment because women were allowed to remain at the course after failing an event, to repeat consecutive courses, and for those who passed the first three RTAC classes, an extended recovery time prior to starting Ranger School. These training opportunity differences placed an unfavorable focus on the female students at RTAC and led to some hostility towards the women from the cadre who felt MCoE leadership was giving special treatment to female students.

**2. Ranger School.** On 20 April 2015, Ranger Class 06-15 began with 400 students (381 men and 19 women).<sup>1</sup> During RAP-week, 201 men (~53%) and 11 women (~58%) failed to complete course requirements. Primarily, students failed the RPFT, land navigation, or the 12-mile road march. Following RAP-week, 71 students from previous Ranger classes recycled into Class 06-15. During the next two weeks (Darby Phase), the pass rate was 41% with the remaining eight female students recycling into Ranger Class 07-15. During their second attempt of Darby Phase, all eight female students failed again to meet course standards. Based on their performance, ARTB leadership offered five of the eight women a “Day 1” recycle with Class 08-15. Three women volunteered to continue. As of the writing of this Report, all three students have passed Darby Phase and continued to the second major training event of Ranger School, the Mountain Phase.

An assessment of the students who were dropped or recycled from Ranger Class 06-15 revealed that most believed they were treated fairly and the majority agreed that the RIs treated all students the same. In terms of standards, 73% believed male and female students were held to the same standards and 89% believed that the RIs treated all students fairly. There were no major differences in the peer evaluations of male and female Ranger students. As with the male students, some females performed better than others and there was one female who had low peer evaluations. In any group, performance variation exists, so this result was not unexpected. In general, peer evaluations for female students indicated that most women performed well and were accepted as part of their squads.

Despite similar peer evaluations for male and female Ranger students, an analysis of the “Go” / “No-Go” rates for students in integrated and non-integrated squads revealed a notable difference in performance. During the Darby Phase for Ranger Class 06-15, the patrol pass rate for integrated squads was 16% compared to 31% for non-integrated squads. For Ranger Class 07-15, the patrol pass rate increased to 31% for integrated squads versus 42% for non-integrated squads. These differences, though improved, represent a statistically significant variation between integrated and non-integrated squads. Even when female student grades are removed, this variation persists between male students in integrated and non-integrated squads.

Due to the limited sample size of women in Ranger Classes 06-15 and 07-15, it is difficult to hypothesize why this squad performance variation exists. One or a combination of the following factors provide potential explanations:

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<sup>1</sup> One RTAC graduate decided not to attend Ranger School for personal reasons.

- First, as previously outlined, squads with a higher mix of combat arms Soldiers and more experienced leaders have higher performance ratings. RIs expect students to possess a level of tactical proficiency in light infantry tactics and procedures to be successful in the course.
  - Second, physiological differences between male and female Ranger students may potentially impact performance. PHC analysis indicates that women are generally not as strong, possess less power, and have less endurance when carrying moderate to heavy loads when compared to men. Research indicates that some women are able to perform at the same level as the average man; however, they may suffer difficulty maintaining the same exertion level as men. Additionally, maintaining this high exertion level exacts a higher toll on the female body and its ability to perform over time. Anecdotally, RIs stated that female students had a hard time keeping up with the operational tempo; however, without biometric instrumentation, it is not possible to determine if this observation was reality or just a stereotypical perception that women are “weak.”
  - Third, RIs reported that men and women approached situations and leadership differently. They reported female students as more talkative, less-focused, and less-decisive leaders who preferred to lead by consensus. This observation is common in research on stereotypes of leadership styles based on gender. In particular, RIs come from an infantry culture that prizes leaders who are aggressive, direct, and decisive. Combining this cultural leadership expectation with their limited experience working with women, RIs viewed different leadership styles as incompatible with what is required for success during a graded Ranger School patrol.
  - Fourth, heightened public attention on Ranger Classes 06-15 and 07-15 may have contributed to unintentional differences in both RI grading and student performance. Specifically, the increased presence of media and senior leaders potentially may have created what is known as the “observer” effect. Academic research has shown that the expectations of observers, even if positive, can detrimentally impact performance. Study analysis indicates that the “observer” effect may have impacted the course – Ranger Classes 06-15 and 07-15 had historically high failure rates with a larger than normal number of students receiving patrol failures.
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- In terms of grading, RIs reported the view that their leadership and the Army did not seem to trust them to act as professionals. They did not appreciate the constant presence of female observer/advisors (O/As) who were not cadre or students. RIs also reported that repetitive senior leader visits did not set positive conditions. Additionally, RIs felt pressure from outside infantry peers to maintain standards and “hold the line” with respect to female students. Evidence suggests that the perception of ubiquitous attention potentially led many RIs to overly adhere to grading rules and regulations to avoid scrutiny. This strict interpretation of grading standards may have contributed to higher student failure rates.
  - In addition to cadre grading effects, the “observer” effect may have also impacted student performance. Female students reported that they not only felt pressure to perform well

for themselves and their command but also as representatives of all female Army personnel. This pressure may have also negatively impacted female student performance.

***Course Changes Made to Support Gender Integration***

ARTB made several minor administrative changes to the course; however, they did not change training standards. These administrative changes included modified medical screening based on gender, actions to ensure privacy for students and cadre, modification of the student packing list to include a small number of female-specific hygiene products, and slightly different hair grooming standards for women. Most of these changes had minimal impact. Exit surveys and focus groups with female students indicate that some of the privacy restrictions were too strict, and they recommended that ARTB relax some of them in order to facilitate better squad cohesion. ARTB is aware of these recommendations and is pursuing facility modifications.

MCoE and ARTB leadership did make a command decision to ask for female volunteers to serve as O/As for the course in order to assist RTAC and Ranger School cadre who did not have much experience working with women. Although this short-term solution did provide value in some cases, it also produced resentment among both students and cadre for a variety of reasons. As a result, this Report recommends MCoE and ARTB phase out the O/A program as cadre become more experienced with working in a mixed gender environment.

***Challenges and Potential Strategies Associated with Integration***

In addition to highlighting issues specific to Ranger School, RAS also provided insights into gender integration in general to include validating some of the findings outlined in the GIS Report. GIS identified 17 cultural and institutional factors (listed in Table 1) associated with integrating women into closed combat specialties and units. GIS also proposed a series of recommendations to mitigate the risk integration poses to morale, cohesion, and readiness. RAS identified substantial evidence of seven factors (**Bolded**) occurring during RTAC and Ranger Classes 06-15 and 07-15. Additionally, RAS uncovered some indicators of four other factors, while finding no evidence of six factors (~~struck through~~), as expected in this limited environment.

**Table 1. GIS Factors.**

<b>Physical Standards</b>	Fraternization	<b>Tokenism</b>
Sexual Harassment	<b>Professional Standards of Conduct</b>	<del>Role Models</del>
<del>Sexual Assault</del>	<del>Physical Proximity</del>	Consensual Sex
<del>Pregnancy</del>	<b>Differences in Leadership Styles</b>	<b>Men as Protectors</b>
Field Environment	<b>Combat Arms Unit Culture</b>	<del>Spouse Concerns</del>
Reclassification	<b>Stereotypes about Women</b>	

GIS-related observations and recommendations include:

1. Recycled students reported that RIs treated everyone fairly and that standards were equally applied to both men and women (**Professional Standards of Conduct** and **Physical Standards**). This observation supports the GIS finding that equal and fair treatment facilitates

team building and reduces potential morale and cohesion problems associated with integration. Conversely, students interpreted differential action towards women as special treatment (**Stereotypes about Women** and **Tokenism**). Treating female Soldiers differently reinforces stereotypes that women need special consideration because they are weaker or less deserving than their male peers. GIS found that this problem is particularly acute in organizations where women are low density populations and are potentially viewed as tokens. Aforementioned earlier, RAS uncovered negative perceptions of integration due to differential gender-based treatment at RTAC. GIS results suggest that many in the infantry community will view any change as accommodating women to ensure their success. Based on these findings, leadership should only make course changes for transparent reasons grounded in operational and/or safety considerations.

2. Mid-level NCOs (RIs) are most resistant to changes associated with integration (**Combat Arms Unit Culture**). As the keeper of the “infantryman” culture, these NCOs do not understand or agree with the rationale provided for integration and some are resistant to the presence of women. They do not believe that women will make the infantry better. According to a portion of student reports, some RIs graded women more stringently than their male counterparts. This behavior is representative of a portion of the NCO’s that do not believe that integrating women would make their squads and platoons better in small-unit close combat situations. These individuals will likely accept women only after they have proven themselves in the infantry environment (**Physical Standards**). Further, this observation corresponds to the GIS finding that clear, convincing, and demonstrable explanations from trusted unit leaders are required to change any organizational culture. In the absence of sustained messaging from all leaders, negative perceptions of integration initiatives will persist.

3. Male Soldiers with experience working with women are less negative towards integration (**Stereotypes about Women**). They appreciate that women can perform even though there are gender-based differences. In focus groups, these Soldiers reported being more open-minded about capabilities that women bring to their units; however, GIS findings indicate that openness does not necessarily translate into acceptance – only demonstrated performance (**Physical Standards**) in a dismounted infantry environment will overcome reluctance to accept women as full members of the team.

4. RIs reported differences in leadership styles between men and women existed (**Differences in Leadership Styles** and **Combat Arms Unit Culture**). As previously mentioned, the infantryman culture expects direct, aggressive leadership. GIS found that any prospective leader (male or female) who does not exhibit these culturally-expected characteristics will struggle to inspire subordinates to achieve mission accomplishment. Soldiers entering combat arms specialties must gain and maintain awareness of this cultural leadership expectation.

5. RIs observed male students and other cadre protecting/assisting female students more than other male students (**Men as Protectors**). GIS highlighted culturally-reinforced stereotypes in the combat arms of the chivalrous duty of men to watch over and protect women. This is a discipline issue that should be addressed through training and experience over time.

6. RAS did not uncover any overt incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or concerns about incidental physical contact due to the close proximity of Soldiers in light infantry

operations. However, some male Ranger students observed banter amongst RIs that could potentially be unacceptable if discussed in mixed gender environments. Leadership must maintain vigilance against future pre-cursors and incidents with a continued focus on professionalism and appropriate training / education in order to maintain a positive command climate.

#### **IV. Summary and Recommendations.**

Based on analysis of RTAC and Ranger School (through Darby Phase only), both the WTC and the ARTB are prepared to integrate women. Furthermore, analysis supports opening both RTAC and Ranger School to women.

If the Army decides to permanently open the Ranger Course to women, this Report advises the following actions for leadership consideration:

1. Formalize and coordinate pre-Ranger training and require attendance for all non-infantry / Special Forces students. Pre-Ranger training was identified as improving success during RAP-week and ultimately graduating the course.
2. Institute a formal process to balance the composition of squads during Ranger School. Individual capability combines with squad composition and dynamics to assist in passing patrols and ultimately graduating from the course. Squads with a balanced mix of junior and experienced Soldiers representing combat arms specialties is most beneficial.
3. Minimize external training distractors (i.e., presence of media, senior leader visits, O/A presence). This action will reduce the negative implications of the “observer” effect.