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By Cassie Crosby

Due to selection bias for combat-arms noncommissioned officers, women are functionally prohibited from serving as Senior Military Science Instructors (SMSI), the senior noncommissioned officer position in an Army ROTC battalion within US Army Cadet Command (USACC). This prohibition stems from the codification of combat-arms MOS for all SMSI positions within USACC. The scarcity of senior NCO women currently available to fill these positions is due to the nascent policy permitting their service in combat arms. However, we must allow non-combat arms NCOs to fill these critical leadership positions-

which have high selection rates for promotion and US Army Sergeants Major Academy attendance- to ensure sufficient representation of senior women leaders to influence the next generation of Army officers.

All 274 of these positions at universities and colleges throughout the United States are coded combat arms. However, the Army lacks senior women in these ranks due to our own policies that existed since the redcoats and colonial militia first exchanged gunfire at Lexington and Concord. The policy prohibiting women from serving in combat arms branches was fully rescinded in 2016, just four years ago. The pipeline to produce women of sufficient rank and experience within combat arms is lengthy, which means combat arms women won't fill these positions for nearly another decade. This policy also excludes other non-combat arms leaders who may have more relevant leadership and operational experience than their combat arms counterparts.

How does this policy look in action? An air defender who spent the last two years as a first sergeant in a unit that did not deploy and before that, served in recruiting for three years, qualifies to serve as SMSI. Even though this NCO lacks current operational experience, their military occupational specialty and rank automatically qualifies them to serve in this important position. At the same time, a non-combat arms NCO- a truckmaster, for example- who spent the last decade serving in a variety of leadership positions with multiple combat tours lacks the qualifications to share his or her leadership and experience with future Army officers. This "combat arms only" policy not only limits the talent pool for this critical position, it also prevents women from serving as SMSIs until we grow combat arms women into senior noncommissioned officers.

Ten years ago, my Brigade Commander took a leap of faith and assigned women as cannon platoon leaders before the Army authorized him to do so. He recognized the glass ceiling artificially imposed by allowing women to serve in field artillery, but prohibiting them from critical developmental positions necessary for promotion. He then used this short-term win to argue to Army senior leaders that women should be allowed to serve in all relevant

positions. He was almost successful at assigning the first woman as a Fire Support Officer for an Infantry Battalion, prematurely, but senior leaders prevented him from getting ahead of an impending policy change. However, the Army's self-limiting policy prevented my commander from matching the right person with the right job, at that time.

A solution to this problem is for the Army to code all SMSI positions within USACC as branch immaterial, and thereby immediately enable the assignment of non-combat arms NCOs- and qualified women- to fill SMSI position vacancies. The Army already moved in this direction with Professors of Military Science, which are branch-immaterial positions, apportioned throughout the Army and Army Reserves. It seems simple enough to enable this same logic for the assignment of SMSIs. However, in its current construct, each program across the country is coded for a specific combat arms branch. A smaller-scale solution is to code some positions as non-combat arms, giving Cadet Command an opportunity to test the waters on allowing non-combat arms NCOs to serve in these critical leadership positions. In the words of General Darren W. McDew (USAF-Retired), "Be bold and lead." If you never take the first step toward change, change will never come. While women, ostensibly, are less constrained than ever in their assignment choices, there is at least one position in the Army still not open to women - Senior Military Science Instructor for an Army ROTC Battalion. Our Cadets will benefit from a diverse set of leadership perspectives. Let's learn from our failed policies of the past, get creative, and normalize the presence of women in all leadership roles, including this one. Appointing a woman as an SMSI may be one small step for man but it would be one giant leap for the future of our Army.

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