

STATEMENT
OF
GENERAL ROBERT NELLER
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION TO OPEN ALL GROUND COMBAT UNITS TO
WOMEN
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ROOM SD-G50

General Robert B. Neller
Commandant of the Marine Corps
Biography

General Robert B. Neller is the 37th Commandant of the United States Marine Corps. Prior to his current assignment, he served as the Commander, Marine Forces Command from July 2014 to September 2015 and Commander, Marine Forces Central Command from September 2012 to June 2014.

A native of East Lansing, Michigan, General Neller graduated from the University of Virginia and was commissioned in 1975. He has served as an infantry officer at all levels, including command of Marine Security Force Company Panama during Operations JUST CAUSE and PROMOTE LIBERTY; 3d Light Armored Infantry Battalion during Operation RESTORE HOPE; 6th Marine Regiment; and 3d Marine Division.

General Neller also served as Deputy Commanding General, I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (05-07); Assistant Division Commander for 1st and 2d Marine Divisions; and President of Marine Corps University.

His Joint assignments include service in the Policy Division of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Casteau, Belgium, and as the Director of Operations (J-3) of the Joint Staff in Washington, D.C.

General Neller is a graduate of the Armor Officer Advanced Course, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, NATO Defense College, and the Armed Forces Staff College. He holds a master's degree in Human Resource Management from Pepperdine University.

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, thank you for your continued interest in ensuring the ongoing readiness of the Nation's Marine Corps. Successful execution of gender integration implementation will be key to sustaining our readiness, as well as ensuring all Marines have the greatest opportunity to succeed as valued members of our team.

As you know, then-Secretary of Defense Panetta fully rescinded the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCDAR) in January 2013. He directed the Services to integrate female service members into the remaining closed military occupational specialties (MOS) and units throughout the Department of Defense beginning in January 2016. Secretary Panetta also offered a period of time to study the implications of this policy change and directed the Services to return with any exception recommendations. The Marine Corps did not stand idle. Under the guiding principles of the Secretary of Defense, we implemented a deliberate, measured, and responsible research effort to better understand the aspects of gender integration in those remaining closed MOS's, and setting the conditions for successful policy implementation. Our research was about "how" to integrate, not "if."

Our first action was to form the Marine Corps Force Innovation Office (MCFIO), led by a General Officer. This group had the primary task to develop what we now call the Marine Corps Force Integration Plan (MCFIP). The MCFIP is a research and implementation campaign plan consisting of four lines of effort:

- 1) assigning female Marine officers, staff non-commissioned officers, and non-commissioned officers serving in combat support MOS's to 20 active and nine reserve ground combat arms units which were previously closed;

- 2) training female Marine volunteers at the entry-level, MOS-producing schools for infantry, artillery, tank and assault amphibious vehicles to gain insights into the relative propensity among new female Marines to serve in various ground combat arms occupations, as well as relative success and injury rates and causes, by gender;

- 3) establishing a Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force (GCEITF) to inform the development and validation of gender-neutral individual performance standards, as well as to conduct scientific research to understand the impacts, if any, of gender integration on unit-level performance (collective tasks) under conditions most closely approximating actual ground combat conditions; and

- 4) opening eleven MOS's that had previously been closed due principally to the co-location restriction within DGCDAR.

In support of our campaign plan, the Marine Corps directly, and through third parties, conducted numerous studies and reviews within the time allotted to ascertain the benefits, impacts, risks, and potential mitigation measures, if needed, of a fully gender integrated ground combat force. This effort included visits to allied militaries with experience integrating female service members in ground combat arms specialties, equipment

adaptation studies, literature reviews, surveys, and focus groups. In addition to our Marine Corps Recruiting Command; Training and Education Command; MCFIO; Operations Analysis Division; and the Marine Corps Operational Test and Evaluation Activity, the following external research partners supported the MCFIP:

- Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)
- University of Pittsburgh Warrior Human Performance Research Center
- Michigan State University
- George Mason University
- Research and Development (RAND) Corporation
- Center for Naval Analyses (CNA)
- Naval Health Research Center (NHRC)

A MCFIP status update was included in the quarterly and, subsequently, semi-annual Women in Service Review (WISR) written updates provided through the Secretary of the Navy to the Secretary of Defense. Additionally, a MCFIP update brief was provided to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) “Tank” sessions on a quarterly basis over the past two years as part of regularly scheduled JCS WISR updates.

Our research has analyzed the performance of individual Marines in our formal MOS-producing ground combat arms courses; as a result, we developed, refined, and implemented improved occupation-specific physical standards and the associated screening tools for obtaining these MOS’s. But the individual is only one aspect. The Marine Corps fights in teams – as units – and it was important to understand the relative performance of units as well. We studied both gender integrated and non-integrated units, operating as squads, teams, and crews; and we did this under live-fire conditions that most closely replicate actual ground combat conditions. This is the first time this level of research has been conducted. To ensure accuracy, our study was peer reviewed by a team from George Mason University.

In my professional opinion, the research we conducted and the plan we executed in response to Secretary Panetta’s guidance was deliberate, measured, and responsible. We believe the data was compelling and supported our decision to request an exception to policy based on best military advice.

Marines follow orders. In response to Secretary of Defense Carter’s decision in December 2015, the Marine Corps is stepping out smartly to facilitate the integration of all qualified Marines into previously closed MOS’s. Informed by our research, integration will be executed in a well-planned and responsible manner. We have already awarded additional MOS’s to all Marines who earned it through primary MOS-producing schools, and two female Second Lieutenants are currently undergoing MOS training at the Field Artillery Officer Basic Course. Also, Marines awarded these additional MOS qualifications can now request formal reclassification into the combat arms designation.

We will build upon previous integration experiences and will strictly adhere to the refined individual performance standards that have resulted from the studies we have

conducted. The framework of our study was – and continues to be – viewed through three interrelated lenses: first and foremost, the combat effectiveness of our Marine units; second, the health and welfare of our individual Marines; and finally, with an eye toward the best talent management of our total force – both today and into the future. Our readiness will remain the guiding focus as we implement our plan.

We owe a debt of gratitude to all Marines, both female and male, who participated in our Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force experiment. They were volunteers and did not have to put themselves through the demanding rigors of this months-long research. I believe they volunteered because, ultimately, Marines always seek a challenge; want to provide service to their Corps; and because they are committed to being part of a Marine Corps that is the best fighting force in the world.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to our many allied military partners, and to all our research partners.

As we move forward with our gender integration plan, we are establishing a methodology for assessment, just as we do with any plan we execute. The Marine Corps is a learning organization. We will evaluate the success of our plan and inform in-stride adjustments throughout this ongoing process as we: recruit, train, develop, deploy, and retain the highest quality force. Specifically, we will assess our integration efforts to:

- 1) ensure we understand the impact (positive or negative) on recruiting and retention;
- 2) ensure we understand the impact (positive or negative) on the combat readiness of our units; and
- 3) ensure we understand the impact (positive or negative) to relative competitiveness of the individual Marine to be the most successful they can be in achieving their goals. We will seek the greatest talent management objectives in concert with seeking the most combat ready units.

In closing, I'm confident of the rigor we applied to our testing, our methodology, and the proud professionalism of all Marines involved in this process, especially those who volunteered for our experiments and schools, and paved the way to make us a better organization. Your Marine Corps is not focused on the past, but on the future. We have a responsibility to our Marines and the American people to ensure we get this right. Many have strong opinions about this issue. I am very proud that those within our ranks have stayed focused on what is important – training hard and being ready when the Nation calls. The continued success of your Corps is based on a simple tenet: placing the best and most fully qualified Marines where they can succeed and make the strongest contribution to the broad range of missions the Marine Corps executes as the Nation's expeditionary force-in-readiness.

I look forward to your questions.