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# Sexual Harassment in the Military

by Karen Kaludis

Throughout our country's history women have played an important role in the military. Their duties have included "manning" guns in the American Revolution, flying in World War II, filling the more "traditional" nursing jobs, and more recently, serving aboard ships.<sup>1</sup> Until the draft was abolished in 1972, women represented only a small fraction of total enlisted troop strength. Since that time, the number of female enlisted personnel has increased from 2% to 9% of that total, and the Army's goal is to increase the number of enlisted women to 85,000 in an army of 765,000 troops within the next five years.

With increases in female personnel, incidents of sexual harassment increase. "Harassment ranges from innuendos, jeering, and fanny-pinching to assault and sexual blackmail for promotions."<sup>2</sup> Although a great many female, and some male, members of the military can testify to the existence of this problem, there are virtually no statistics to illustrate its extent. Sally R. Richardson, Chairman of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service (DACOWITS), admits that military administration is unaware of the extent and generally confused about the exact nature of the problem of sexual harassment.

Although sexual harassment exists in every phase of a military career, new recruits and lower-ranking enlisted personnel are the easiest targets for sexual harassment. They are the least sure of themselves, and the most in awe of rank. Harassment often begins with a male recruiter offering preferred placement, rank, or speedy handling of paperwork in exchange for sexual favors. Recruiting offices have been termed "one-sided dating bureaus."<sup>3</sup>

Statistics reflect that women recruits fail to complete their first enlistments more frequently than their male counterparts. An Army study estimates that 46.7% of women volunteers will fail to finish their first enlistment compared with 33.2% of the men,<sup>4</sup> reflecting an increase of more than 2% over the previous period of women who drop out, while the Army-wide average has remained the same. Even though Army officials have been alerted to the drop-out problem by their own statistics, there has been no investigation to determine reasons for early discharge, or how the reasons differ between men and women.<sup>5</sup>

The Pentagon's Equal Opportunity Chief, M. Kathleen Carter, suggests four main reasons for the large drop-out rates of female recruits:

Significant lack of acceptance of women in non-traditional roles by their male peers.

Army women who do manage to get traditionally male-type assignments are often left handling the paperwork.

Heavy psychological pressures, caused by constant, careful scrutiny of women's job performance.

*Sexual Harassment* is a factor in "souring" young women soldiers toward military life.<sup>6</sup>

Ms. Carter fails to go into specifics about the sexual harassment problem, but does admit its existence as a cause of female soldier drop-out.

Not exclusive to enlisted recruits, high drop-out rates have been present in the military academy since they were opened to women in 1975, after extensive litigation.<sup>7</sup> Of 394 women who started out in service academies, 165 dropped out. Women at the academies incurred resentment due to the breaking of more than a century of male tradition. In some instances, harassment was quite severe. Lt. Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster, Superintendent of West Point, said that hazing at times became "crude and obscene towards women."<sup>8</sup> Sexual harassment may be the prime reason for the high drop-out rate of women in the academies.

According to women soldiers at Fort Meade, Maryland, "sexual harassment, running the gamut from verbal abuse by young male recruits to exploitation by senior enlisted personnel and officers of their rank and position for sexual favors, is practiced there on a scale unmatched by any other installation with which they are familiar."<sup>9</sup> Such abusive treatment of women on the post has been an issue of little concern.

There are few women in the power structure at Fort Meade. With approximately 1,250 women at the post, there are less than 150 officers, none above the rank of major.<sup>10</sup> An Army report, "Evaluation of Women in the Army", notes that there are few women leaders in the Army to serve as role models for other women.<sup>11</sup> Since there are no women high in command to whom female soldiers can complain, female soldiers must take their complaints to male officers who often do not understand the problems. According to one female soldier, it is useless to complain to high ranking male officers. "Top officers come and go, but the sergeant majors, some of whom have been here more than 20 years, actually run things . . . And these guys are the ones who most often take advantage of their positions to try and get you in bed with them."<sup>12</sup> One ex-Ft. Meade woman soldier said, "I think the worst was the constant verbal harassment, waking up every morning, knowing you'd have to face it."<sup>13</sup>

The women soldiers interviewed agreed that sexual harassment was upsetting, and that complaining about

the harassment could produce even more unpleasant results. The penalties seemed to fall on the victim, rather than on the offender. At Fort Meade, those female soldiers who went through the designated channels to complain were frustrated by the reluctance of the appropriate officials to act, or to handle their complaints discretely.<sup>14</sup>

One female soldier who was sexually harassed related that, "The officer on duty wanted me to press charges, but the people I'd complained to were trying to do the same things."<sup>15</sup> Another soldier explained, "You have to be able to prove it with witnesses, names, dates, places, and so forth . . . it would be just your word against his. Nobody's going to make a pass at you with someone around."<sup>16</sup> Thus the female soldier is left with no alternative other than to drop out. Many women have dropped out; the rest try to cope as best they can.

The Army has not tackled this problem as it did racial difficulties. Michael Rustad, a sociologist, in his paper, "The Khaki-Collared Women of Company C", comments that "tensions between the sexes has replaced the racial tensions that the Army once faced."<sup>17</sup> Maj. Gen. Jeanne Holme, a retired Air Force officer who now serves on DACOWITS, commented, "What disturbs me is that military leaders are not even trying to find out how pervasive the problem is. They would never have tolerated racial harassment on this scale, in fact they have taken the lead in dealing with that problem. The services could be just as effective in this area with women."<sup>18</sup> One Ft. Meade veteran noted, "They were under a lot of pressure to do something about racial problems. They know women have been taught to be milder and that we're not likely to burn the post down. So they're not worried."<sup>19</sup>

Some measures have been taken to combat sexual harassment, but they are few and are not necessarily effective. In November, 1978, the Secretary of the Army put into writing the Army's previously unwritten fraternization policy, stating that service members of different ranks should avoid relationships that involve or appear to involve preferential treatment or improper use of rank or position for personal gain.<sup>20</sup> But merely writing the rule has had no impact.

The Army has put a special emphasis on acquiring new female officers through the ROTC, and formulated new courses to add to the leadership curriculum. The question is whether such courses as "Working With and Being Led by Women", "Social Relationships Between Men and Women in the Army", and "Recognizing and Overcoming Bias Against Women"<sup>21</sup> will actually become part of the ROTC curriculum.

DACOWITS has made three suggestions to improve the sexual harassment problem in the military. They are:

Achieve a more even balance between the sexes



(although it may be difficult.)

Move women into leadership positions (filling the vacuum left when the Women's Army Corps was phased out in 1978).

Educate male officers, particularly post commanders, to be sensitive to the harassment problem, which thrives under weak, unsympathetic leadership.<sup>22</sup>

Thus far the military has taken no major step to alleviate the problem of sexual harassment. Writing, without enforcing, one regulation, and suggesting a few new leadership courses, is not enough. A full scale investigation is needed to analyze the problem and determine appropriate measures to combat it. A woman who wishes to serve her country should be encouraged to do so. The valuable talents that women can supply should be recognized. As stated by academy superintendents, co-education has been good for the schools. It has, they say, "made them more humane places, closer to the reality of the outside world."<sup>23</sup> The military should thank, rather than harass, its female soldiers for making it more of a "humane" organization.

<sup>1</sup> *Owens v. Brown*, 435 F. Supp. 291 (D.D.C. 1978), and Pub. L. No. 95-485, 808, 92 Stat. 1623 (1967).

<sup>2</sup> Hosler, "Jeers, Threats and Assaults Reported to Occur Regularly", *The Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 16, 1972, at A2, col.6.

<sup>3</sup> Hosler, "Army Recruits Most Open to Abuse", *The Sunday Sun*, Dec. 17, 1972, at A2, col. 1.

<sup>4</sup> "Jane Crow in the Army: Obstacles to Sexual Integration", *Psychology Today*, vol. 14, no. 5, at 50 (October, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> *The Sun*, Dec. 16, 1979, *op. cit.*, at A2, col.6

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at col.3.

<sup>7</sup> See *Waldie v. Schlesinger*, 509 F.2d 508 (D.C. Cir. 1974) and Pub. L. No. 94-106, 98 Stat. 531, 537 §803(a) (1975).

<sup>8</sup> 11 "Academy Women Ready to Take Command", *U.S. News & World Report*, p.32 (May 26, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> *The Sunday Sun*, Dec. 17, 1979, at A1, col.1.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at A2.

<sup>11</sup> *Psychology Today*, *supra* at 59.

<sup>12</sup> *The Sun*, Dec. 17, 1979, *op. cit.*, at col.4.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at A2, col.2. <sup>15</sup> *Id.* at A2, col.3.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at A2, col.6. <sup>16</sup> *Id.* at col.5.

<sup>17</sup> *Psychology Today*, *op. cit.*, at 53.

<sup>18</sup> *The Sun*, Dec. 17, 1979, *op. cit.*, at A2, col.5.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at col.6. <sup>21</sup> *Id.* at col.4.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at col.1. <sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *USNW*, May 26, 1980, *supra* at 32.