

AU/ACSC/016/1999-04

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

THE IMPACT OF *PREGNANCY* ON U.S. ARMY  
READINESS

By

Merideth A. Bucher, Major, U.S. Army

A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

Advisor: Lt. Col. George Barr

Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

April 1999

Distribution A: Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited

## **Disclaimer**

The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US government or the Department of Defense. In accordance with Air Force Instruction 51-303, it is not copyrighted, but is the property of the United States government.

## *Contents*

	<i>Page</i>
DISCLAIMER .....	ii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
PREFACE.....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vi
THE IMPACT OF PREGNANCY ON U.S. ARMY READINESS .....	1
ARMY READINESS.....	3
Conflicting Studies.....	4
The Army’s Position .....	6
The Numbers Confirm the Problem.....	7
Political Correctness.....	9
TODAY’S PROGRAMS AND THE NEED FOR CHANGE .....	11
Impact on the Soldier .....	12
Impact on the Unit .....	13
The Retention Issue.....	14
What it all Means.....	15
MATERNAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE: TIME FOR THE NEXT STEP.....	17
The Maternity Leave of Absence.....	18
How it will Work .....	18
Advantages of MLA.....	20
Advantages to the Army .....	20
Advantages to the Pregnant Soldier .....	21
Disadvantages of MLA .....	22
Disadvantages to the Army.....	22
Disadvantages to the Pregnant Soldier.....	24
RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY .....	25
Summary.....	26
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	28

*Tables*

	<i>Page</i>
Table 1. Overall Percentages for Desert Shield/Desert Storm Non-deployability .....	4
Table 2. Pregnant Non-Deployable Percentages .....	8

## *Preface*

The conflict between pregnancy and military service has always existed in the Army. As a female soldier I have often felt the pressure to avoid having children for the sake of my career. I have always placed the needs of the Army before my own but someday I too hope to become a parent. And when I do, I hope to find a maternity leave program in place that will support my absence from my unit. The Army's readiness must come first and that is why I felt compelled to research this subject. When I began I fully intended to produce a document supporting a leave program similar to the Coast Guards Care of Newborn Children program. Lt. Col. Linda Christ from the Army War College had already done a similar paper so I decided to try the concept from a different angle. It was my intention to provoke thought by offering a program much different from what exists today.

I would like to thank my research advisor, Lt. Col. George Barr for giving me the freedom to learn the research process and find my way to the end of this project. I would also like to thank Lt. Col. Christ for providing me with valuable research information and support.

*Abstract*

The impact of pregnancy on U.S. Army readiness came to the forefront following the Persian Gulf War and the large-scale deployment of military servicewomen. Some deploying units reported that non-deployable rates for pregnancy among women were as much as 30% of those assigned. Numerous studies were conducted to determine the impact of pregnancy on Army readiness and different conclusions were drawn. From a tactical perspective the numbers of non-deployable for pregnancy are more than 16% in support units with a high concentration of female soldiers. Pregnancy in these units has a great impact on readiness, as well as the experience of the pregnant soldier. The Army should evaluate for implementation a one-year comprehensive Maternity Leave of Absence program that takes place during the time the soldier is non-deployable for pregnancy. A volunteer from the Reserve Component force will fill the pregnant soldier's vacancy as a deployable replacement, while gaining valuable active duty training at the same time. The MLA program would benefit the Army by integrating Reserve Component forces and by limiting the time lost from the pregnant soldier's active duty service obligation.

## Chapter 1

### **The Impact of Pregnancy on U.S. Army Readiness**

*We have to take care of the readiness of the U.S. Army, and enhance the war-fighting capability and combat readiness of the force.*

—Lt. Gen. David H. Ohle  
Army personnel chief<sup>1</sup>

The role of women in the military received unprecedented attention during the deployment of U.S. forces to the Persian Gulf War. Pictures and news segments showing tearful farewells and young children torn from their mother's arms were etched into the minds of Americans as we were faced, for the first time, with sending American women to war. The issue of sending women into combat sparked debate on the roles of women in the military and brought clearly into focus the social conflict of deploying mothers and the impact of pregnancy on the readiness of military units.

A lot has changed in the military, the Army specifically, since the Persian Gulf War. In the last decade the Army reduced its ranks by more than half a million soldiers and civilians, closed over 700 installations and shifted from a forward-deployed force to a power-projection, US based force. Yet while the Army's active and reserve strength authorizations have decreased, deployments have increased by nearly 300 percent, and recruiting and retention rates have fallen.<sup>2</sup> Our greatest challenge today is to remain capable of sustaining this increased operations tempo, or OPTEMPO, with less people and resources.

The Army plays a critical role in support of the National Military Strategy by responding to a wide range of crises and missions both abroad and at home.<sup>3</sup> The readiness of our Army has never been more important. There are many components of readiness and this paper will investigate the issue of personnel readiness; specifically, the impact of pregnancy on the readiness of the Army and a need for a more comprehensive maternity leave program to support readiness.

To adequately examine this topic, it is first necessary to demonstrate that pregnancy does affect Army readiness. This paper will define readiness, how it is measured at each level of command and the differences in each perspective. This paper will also demonstrate that pregnancy has a greater impact at the tactical level than in the aggregate, and describe the impact pregnancy has on the soldier's unit and the soldier, herself. Finally, this paper will address the current Army maternity policies and then recommend a specific program to support the Army's need for improved readiness and the soldiers' need for a planned, stress-free pregnancy.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Tice, Jim, "New Personnel Chief: Readiness Top Priority", *Army Times*, 4 January 1999, 22.

<sup>2</sup> United States Army Posture Statement FY99, *America's Army—One Team, One Fight, One Future*, February 1998, vii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



## Chapter 2

### Army Readiness

*Readiness remains the number one priority for the Army, and the key to readiness is quality people.*

—United States Army Posture Statement FY99

“Readiness is defined as the nation’s ability to have the right forces in the right place at the right time to fight the right war.”<sup>1</sup> Readiness is measured and reported at the tactical, operational and strategic levels and consists of seven areas: people, equipment, maintenance, training, tactics-techniques and procedures, transportation and communication, and infrastructure. The Army’s fighting capability depends on units at each level maintaining high levels of readiness in each of these seven areas.

One of the problems determining the impact of pregnancy on Army readiness depends upon which level of command is collecting and analyzing the data. All Army units from companies to major command headquarters (MACOM’s) submit their reports, which are then consolidated and reported to the Department of the Army. Currently, there is no system in place that aggregates readiness data from one level to the next. “For example, to measure strategic readiness, tactical and operational readiness data must be aggregated even further and combined with other data. At this stage, the data for the force as a whole will often obscure the readiness of individual units, even if they are experiencing significant readiness shortfalls.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the impact of pregnancy on unit

readiness becomes an issue of perspective, which can unfortunately lead to incorrect conclusions.

### **Conflicting Studies**

Many studies have examined the impact of pregnancy on military readiness but they draw different conclusions. One of the first studies to address the issue was conducted by a Presidential Commission that formed after the Persian Gulf War to research readiness problems surrounding women in the military. According to testimony and survey research presented to the commission, the pregnancy rate at the onset of the War “significantly affected the deployability of some units.” A great deal of attention was focused on pregnancy throughout the Commission’s tenure because of its impact on readiness, deployability and cohesion in the Armed Forces. The Commission found that the non-deployability rate for women was three times greater than that of men, largely due to pregnancy. When pregnancy is taken into account women have nearly four times as much lost time as men.

**Table 1. Overall Percentages for Desert Shield/Desert Storm Non-deployability**

	<b>% MALE</b>	<b>%FEMALE</b>	<b>COMPARISON FACTOR</b>
ARMY	2.7	9.0	3.3X
NAVY	1.5	5.6	3.7X
AIR FORCE	1.8	6.4	3.5X
MARINE CORPS	8.8	26.3	3.9X

**Source:** Presidential Commission on the assignment of women in the Armed Forces.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of their study, the Commission made recommendations regarding pregnancy, deployment and family policies, among others. Specifically, they recommended the Army develop a deployment-probability-designation coding system to distinguish those areas where a pregnant woman can serve during pregnancy, and those areas where her pregnancy would have an adverse affect on the unit.<sup>4</sup> For example, if a soldier became pregnant while assigned to a unit with a high deployment probability designation code, she could be reassigned to a lower probability unit pending the termination of her pregnancy.

Another study, conducted by the RAND Corporation, evaluated the impact of integrating women on defense readiness and concluded that when units were undermanned or had a disproportionate number of women, pregnancy or injuries among the women tended to be noted as problem to commanders and co-workers. Conversely, when units were fully staffed and the proportion of women was representative (of the Army as a whole), pregnancy seemed to be of little concern.<sup>5</sup>

Deployment figures from the Gulf War confirm that commanders of combat service and combat service support units, like a Division Support Command (DISCOM) should anticipate a higher rate of nondeployability among female soldiers. A report from the Center for Army Lessons Learned states that in some units 18 to 20 percent of female soldiers were nondeployable, primarily for disqualifying physical profiles and pregnancy. One senior officer who commanded in the Gulf discussed the problems he had with pregnancies stating 33% of the women in his battalion could not deploy because of pregnancy or they were sent home early because of it.<sup>6</sup>

## **The Army's Position**

The Army has not developed a coding system as recommended by the Commission, or any other program addressing females and readiness. One reason may be that there is no consensus at the Army level that pregnancy does in fact impact personnel readiness. The Army has no official position on the issue, but unofficially an Army readiness officer says that pregnancy does not impact readiness in the aggregate since less than 1% of the Army is non-deployable due to pregnancies at any point in time. However, he concedes there are readiness issues in units with a high density of females assigned or in units experiencing significant shortfalls.<sup>7</sup> A recent Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) research paper also concluded that pregnancy does not impact military readiness but qualified those results by acknowledging it is dependent upon what perspective you have.<sup>8</sup> Both the Army official and the ACSC research paper draw the same conclusion while looking at readiness from the top down. As Admiral Prueher, United States Pacific Command (PACOM) commander, noted “from this perspective the force as a whole can obscure the data of individual units.”

All of these studies demonstrate the disparity of findings and disagreement regarding the impact of pregnancy on Army readiness. The Army chooses to look at the problem from a top-down, operational perspective. Admittedly, from this perspective pregnancy has little impact on personnel readiness. This paper's contention is that by looking at the numbers from the top down the Army is ignoring the significant impact pregnancy is having at the tactical level because “data for the force as a whole is obscuring the readiness of individual units.”<sup>9</sup> This tendency will be demonstrated by an analysis of the numbers from the bottom up.

## **The Numbers Confirm the Problem**

Until 1975, women in the Armed Forces could not serve once they became pregnant; a ban seen as a measure to protect the health of the soldier and her baby.<sup>10</sup> Today, it is common to see pregnant soldiers serving throughout the Army, including assignments to deployable units within Forces Command (FORSCOM). Women are an integral part of the Army today, comprising roughly 15% of the force and the impact pregnancy has on the unit's readiness will depend upon how many females are assigned to that particular unit, and how many are pregnant and nondeployable at the same time. According to the Army, the numbers are predictable because the pregnancy rate at any one time averages 5-6% of assigned females, or less than 1% of the total force. Yet, as of 15 March 1998, 8% of females in FORSCOM were pregnant. The Army says the larger percentage is due to the higher number of entry-level female soldiers assigned to FORSCOM and its support units.<sup>11</sup> For example, DISCOM units within FORSCOM typically have a larger proportion of females assigned than is representative of the Army due to the assignment policy restricting women from serving with units assigned a direct combat mission.<sup>12</sup> The Army acknowledges the numbers will be greater at this level without acknowledging a corresponding impact to unit readiness.

Instead of trying to downplay the inconsistencies, the numbers should raise a red flag. A sampling of FORSCOM's III Corps show an even greater percentage of pregnant and non-deployable females assigned.

**Table 2. Pregnant Non-Deployable Percentages**

	<b>Total Assigned</b>	<b>Females Assigned</b>	<b>Pregnant</b>	<b>% of Women</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
<b>US ARMY</b>	480,898	71,148	2,947	4%	<1%
<b>FORSCOM</b>	210,285	26,807	2,402	9%	1%
<b>3<sup>RD</sup> CORPS</b>	96,711	7,691	756	10%	<1%
<b>4<sup>TH</sup> ID MECH</b>	11,990	1212	159	13 %	1%
<b>DISCOM</b>	2,359	837	132	16 %	6%
<b>704<sup>TH</sup> MSB</b>	696	278	47	17%	7%

**Source:** 4<sup>th</sup> ID numbers do not include the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade and support units that are geographically separated from the 4<sup>th</sup> ID and located at Fort Carson, CO. <sup>13 14 15 16</sup>

Obviously, the impact of pregnancy on unit readiness is much more significant at lower levels of command than in the aggregate. It is not unexpected that the percentages of nondeployables increase as unit size decreases. What is important is the impact the numbers have on unit operations and readiness. The table shows that 6% of the assigned soldiers in the 4<sup>th</sup> ID DISCOM are unavailable to deploy and in most cases unable to work in their assigned specialties. We can assume that the 4<sup>th</sup> ID DISCOM is typical of the other nine active duty DISCOM's in non-deployable percentages and that these numbers are relatively static. This being the case, there is a predictable and recurring personnel shortage in our deployable units that is not being addressed by the Army.

## Political Correctness

If pregnancy so obviously impacts readiness at the tactical level why hasn't the Army addressed the problem? Army leadership is in a catch 22 position; they must maintain the fighting strength and readiness of the force while at the same time balancing the political issues of a dual-gender Army. It is considered "politically incorrect" or gender-biased to verbalize the problems pregnancies cause our Army, and as a result no one will admit there is a problem. The only way to develop a feasible solution is to acknowledge there is a problem. Only then will there be a solution that benefits both the Army and the pregnant soldier.

There are three truths that must be stated before progressing further. First, pregnancy is a female issue. There is no bias in this statement, only fact, and women must bear the burdens associated with it. Second, pregnancy is preventable and therefore cannot be compared to the readiness problems caused by long-term illnesses or injuries. Those issues and possible solutions must be addressed separately. Finally, if pregnancy rates are static and relatively predictable, they can be planned for at the Army level. Obviously, from a tactical perspective the percentages of non-deployable are significantly higher than from an operational perspective. This being the case, the argument is even stronger to develop a plan compensating for the impact of pregnancy on unit readiness. Because our force depends on quality people, any plan must also support the soldier as well as the Army.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adm Joseph W. Prueher, "Measuring Readiness," *Armed Forces Journal International*, January 1999, 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

## Notes

<sup>3</sup> Presidential Commission, *Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, Report to the President*, November 15, 1992 (Washington D.C.; U.S. Government Printing Office), iii,15,19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Margaret C. Harrell and Laura L. Miller, *New Opportunities for Military Women: Effects upon Readiness, Cohesion, and Morale*,” RAND, National Defense Research Institute, (Santa Monica, Ca, 1997), xvii-xviii.

<sup>6</sup> Katherine McIntire, “Women in the Army; Pregnancy Raises Questions of Deployability,” *Army Times*, 18 April 1994, 14.

<sup>7</sup> <WATSOKL@hqda.amry.mil>. “re: FW: PIWG Briefing.” Electronic mail message to Merideth Bucher <mbucher@max1.au.af.mil>. 24 November 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Maj Kathleen P. Monsen, “Pregnancy in the U.S. Armed Services and its Impact on Readiness”, Research Report no.97-0536 (Maxwell AFB, AL, Air Command and Staff College, 1987), 2-31.

<sup>9</sup> Prueher, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Victoria Sherrow, *Women and the Military: An Encyclopedia, 1*. ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, CA, 1996, 222.

<sup>11</sup> Lt Col Kevin L. Watson, Chief, Distribution and Readiness Branch, Department of the Army, Information Paper, 19 June 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Army Regulation (AR) 600-1, *Army Policy for the Assignment of Female Soldiers*, 27 March 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Spreadsheet of 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (MECH) Pregnant Non-deployable, Lt. Vaughn, 22 January 1999,

<sup>14</sup> Watson, email.

<sup>15</sup> Email message with information from III Corps, Lt. Col Christ, III Corps G1, 1 February 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Telephone conversation, Lt. Jefferson, DISCOM S1, 1February 1999.



## Chapter 3

### Today's Programs and the Need for Change

Not unexpectedly, the vast majority of military women are young enlisted women of childbearing age.<sup>1</sup> So it is only natural to assume these young women will have children at some point in their lives. Yet current Army maternity policy and programs do not take this into account and plan for the lost time, nor do they address the personal needs of the soldier, during and immediately after her pregnancy. The “lost time” for a pregnancy is significant—once a soldier is medically confirmed pregnant she immediately becomes “non-deployable” and will remain in this status for up to one year.

Current Army regulations authorize 6 weeks of post-partum convalescent leave after a soldier has given birth, beginning when the soldier is discharged from the hospital. This is often followed by several weeks of regular leave, which can be granted by the soldier's commander. Additionally, the Department of Defense (DOD) has issued a regulation allowing military members who are new mothers or one member of a dual military family who adopts a child, a 4-month period during which they are exempt from deployments.<sup>2</sup> By the time a soldier returns to a deployable status, she will have spent more than one year as non-deployable and unable to carry out the terms of her contract.

From a personnel management perspective it is difficult to rationalize so much lost time. The demands as they relate to the military mission require that military members

always be ready to meet the mission—along with the weapons systems and equipment. Personnel readiness requires that each soldier be mentally and physically fit, disciplined, immediately available and qualified to perform the mission. Therein lies the conflict between pregnancy and military service.<sup>3</sup> The Army must address the pregnancy-readiness issue in this era of downsizing, increased OPTEMPO and personnel shortages,

### **Impact on the Soldier**

An enlisted soldier has two options when she is medically diagnosed pregnant. She can remain on active duty to complete her service obligation, or she can choose voluntary separation if it is determined that parenthood interferes with her military responsibilities. In either case, the unit and the Army will lose the manpower of the soldier for at least one year. Her company commander formally presents the options in a counseling session where she is also informed about Family Care Plan requirements. All dual-service parents and single parents, male and female, with children under 18 must submit a written Family Care Plan identifying who will serve as the children's guardian if the soldier deploys. Failure to develop and maintain a plan within a reasonable time is grounds for involuntary separation.<sup>4</sup>

The soldier is also given a physical profile during the year she is nondeployable, limiting her activities. Pregnant soldiers are exempt from participating in a physical training program and many women, depending on the individual and her capabilities, will only engage in limited physical activities. As a result, it will take time for many soldiers to regain their physical condition once the pregnancy is over. They will have a total of 132 days from the termination of pregnancy to prepare for and complete an Army physical fitness test and return to authorized weight limits.<sup>5</sup>

## **Impact on the Unit**

Soldiers are also restricted from participating in most training events during pregnancy. This includes marksmanship, field exercises, aircraft flying and riding in tactical vehicles. Duties are mostly limited to indoor office work so soldiers working in certain specialties or under hazardous conditions are reassigned for the duration of their pregnancy to protect her health and the health of the unborn child. Consequently, the presence of pregnant women in a unit is often seen as increasing the workload of everyone else and brings with it the risk of causing resentment among co-workers. Any perceived double standards (i.e., different performance expectations and responsibilities) undermine women's credibility and generate hostility from junior enlisted men, who feel they are afforded the fewest privileges of anyone.<sup>6</sup>

The emotional and psychological stress of pregnancy is compounded in the military because "it is a uniquely female condition that can further isolate women from the mainstream of the organization." Coupled with active duty service demands and the perceptions of other soldiers, the pregnant soldier can experience a high degree of psychosocial stress which can negatively affect her morale, performance, and ultimately her intentions to stay in the Army.

A report from the Defense Women's Research Program agrees that job reassignment, loss of manpower, and work redistribution may create a stressful, even hostile environment for pregnant servicewomen. Peers and leaders may resent that pregnant soldiers receive full pay and benefits but are exempt from some work, physical training, field exercises, and most importantly, deployments. The result may be negative feelings, reactions, and feedback toward pregnant soldiers.<sup>7</sup> So while pregnancy may impact the

readiness of the Army and the soldier's unit during the year that she is non-deployable, the impact will be greater if she decides to leave because of the experience.

### **The Retention Issue**

According to the aforementioned study on women in the military, a servicewoman's positive and negative work experiences during her pregnancy may play a major role in her decision to reenlist. The study shows that men and women first-term soldiers attrit at comparable rates when attrition related to pregnancy is controlled. "After pregnancy, the primary reason females leave the service is voluntarily for incompatibility with military lifestyle." The study conducted on first term pregnant Marines concluded that the most important predictor of attrition was poor supervisor and work group relationships. Family and career orientation and management of stress were secondary predictors. The results of the study suggest that the "work experiences of pregnant service members may play a primary role in the decision to leave military service and may play an even greater role than the pregnancy or family considerations."

Another study conducted to determine why promotable female captains leave the Army cited 67% of the respondents as having a conflict between their family and their career, which influenced their decision to leave. Fifty-seven percent of those same officers indicated that their experiences as a female soldier had influenced their decision. The officers were asked what might have influenced them to stay and many offered suggestions, including "provide longer maternity leave" and "show more concern for soldiers' welfare."<sup>8</sup> Additionally, more than 80% of 330 individuals questioned in the Defense Research study believe maternity leave should be extended.<sup>9</sup> This same study also found that junior enlisted participants were more likely to plan to leave the military

following a pregnancy. These studies indicate the majority of females leave the Army because of family concerns and how they were treated as service members. The findings also confirm the inadequacy of the current maternity program in retaining female service-members.

### **What it all Means**

The Army must acknowledge the short-term and long-term impact pregnancy has on the soldier and her unit. Physiologically, a pregnant soldier is incapable of performing all of her military responsibilities while she is non-deployable for that year. If her unit is deployed she is unavailable to perform her job creating the reasonable perception that her pregnancy increases the workload of everyone else. All of these factors cause stress for the soldier and may ultimately impact her decision to reenlist

The Army can reduce the impact of pregnancy by instituting a comprehensive maternity leave program. The primary objective of the program is to improve Army personnel readiness. It is possible to incorporate a plan to support the army's need for quality, deployable personnel, and at the same time provide the soldier with the time and conditions to have her baby.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Connie L. Reeves, *Dual-Service and Single Parents: What about the Kids?*, Minerva: Quarterly Report of Women and the Military, (Vol. XIII, no. 3 & 4, Fall/Winter, 1995) 25-68.

<sup>2</sup> Presidential Commission, *Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, Report to the President*, November 15, 1992 (Washington D.C.; U.S. Government Printing Office), C-119.

<sup>3</sup> Cecil S. Landrum, *The Conflicts Surrounding Family and Children versus Mission Responsibilities, What are the Impacts on Readiness?*, (Alexandria, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, Defense Logistics Agency, May 1979), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Army Regulation 600-20, *Army Command Policy*, 30 March 1988, Chapter 5.5.

## Notes

<sup>5</sup> Army Regulation 40-501, *Standards of Medical Fitness*, 27 February 1998, Chapter 7.10

<sup>6</sup> Harrell, xx.

<sup>7</sup>, Mary Ann Evans and Leora Rosen, *Women in the Military; Pregnancy, Command Climate, Organizational Behavior, and Outcome Part I*, (Fort Detrick MD, Defense Women's Research Program, May 1996.) 3-7.

<sup>8</sup> Beverly C. Harris, Alma G. Steinberg, and Jacquelyn Scarville, *Why Promotable Female Officers Leave the Army*," *Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military*, Volume XII, Number 3, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Evans, 117.

## Chapter 4

### Maternal Leave of Absence: Time for the Next Step

*A pregnant servicewoman should not be assigned to or remain in a position with a high probability of deployment.*

—Presidential Commission on the assignment  
of Women in the Armed Forces

This chapter's title is adapted from an Army War College report written by Lt. Col. Linda Christ who proposed a one year parental leave of absence (PLA) tailored somewhat after the Coast Guards Care for Newborn children program. The Coast Guard allows officer and enlisted parents to take an unpaid leave of absence for up to two years upon the birth or legal adoption of a newborn child.<sup>1</sup> The PLA recommended by Christ built upon that concept and addressed the readiness of the Army by using Reserve Component forces to fill in the personnel gaps created by the soldiers taking a PLA.<sup>2</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Christ ran into two basic objections to her proposal. The first objection was who should run the program, and the second was the perception of it being a women-only program.<sup>3</sup> Her "family-friendly" program recommendation was not just for female soldiers, but for either gender interested in taking time off to raise a child. This paper will use the structure of the PLA program, with modifications, to propose a Maternity Leave of Absence (MLA) program, keeping in mind the primary objective of the MLA is to support the readiness of the army.

## **The Maternity Leave of Absence**

The MLA requires that the Army develop a deployment probability coding system as recommended by the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women.<sup>4</sup> The MLA will be mandatory for pregnant women assigned to units with a high probability code (HPC) as identified by the Department of the Army. Service contracts will be modified for females joining the Army and those already serving, stipulating the conditions of the MLA and advising the service member of her liability should she become pregnant while assigned to a unit with a high probability code. Soldiers will also be advised that first-term assignments will be made based on the needs of the Army first, and not based on family planning decisions. All subsequent assignments will be made based on the needs of the Army and will consider the soldier's request.

### **How it will Work**

When a soldier assigned to an HPC unit is medically diagnosed pregnant she is given the same two options that exist today. She can elect to fulfill her contractual obligations to the Army, or choose separation if she demonstrates that parenthood will interfere with her military responsibilities. If she elects to stay in the Army, the MACOM personnel directorate will initiate a request for a Reserve Component replacement upon notification from the pregnant soldier's chain of command. The replacement soldier will be identified from lists maintained by the Regional Reserve Commands and the National Guard Bureau that are comprised of individuals who have volunteered for one year of active duty service. The Reserve component soldier will replace the pregnant soldier for one year, assuming her deployability status at the beginning of her second trimester of pregnancy and through four months after the child's birth. This year is equivalent to the



amount of time the pregnant soldier would spend in a non-deployable status without the MLA.

The pregnant soldier will be transferred to the Standby Reserve once her replacement arrives on station. The MLA is considered neutral time and will not count for pay purposes, retirement, time in grade or time in service. The soldier will receive medical coverage for herself and her family while on MLA, and she will continue to have access to the installation and family support services. If the pregnant soldier occupies base housing she can elect to remain there for the term of the MLA, however she will be required to pay the monthly rate of Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH). If the soldier's spouse is also in the Army this will not be required. Once the soldier returns to duty following the birth of the child she will resume her service obligation where she left off.

The MLA program will be mandatory for all pregnant soldiers in HPC units with some exceptions. For instance, if there are non-deployable vacancies at the soldier's base, and she is qualified and physically able to perform the job, she can request to remain on active duty in that position until she gives birth. Her deployable position would still be filled by a Reserve Component replacement and she would only have four months in the neutral MLA status after giving birth. Conversely, the MLA is optional for pregnant soldiers in low probability code (LPC) units. The soldier can elect to take MLA but it is dependent upon the availability of a qualified replacement.

Six weeks of paid maternity leave would still be available to all pregnant soldiers, regardless of whether they take MLA. For a soldier on MLA her pay and benefits would resume six weeks before she returns to active duty. For non-MLA soldiers they can elect to extend their maternity leave to four months total time, although only six weeks of that

time off would be paid. The additional 10 extra weeks of leave would be unpaid and would be similar to the benefits available to new mothers in the civilian sector who use the Family and Medical Leave Act. The bottom line is that while only females assigned to HPC units are required to take MLA, all pregnant soldiers will be allowed to take up to 4 months off following the birth of their child.

## **Advantages of MLA**

### **Advantages to the Army**

The MLA may seem extreme but it does have significant advantages for the Army. Improved readiness is the most visible benefit. Units like 4<sup>th</sup> ID's DISCOM would reduce their non-deployable rate an average 6%. From a commander's perspective this is a significant reduction. The program gives the commander the power to plan for predictable events like pregnancy, which will ultimately reduce the impact of unpredictable events like injuries and long-term illnesses. From the Army's perspective, "time lost" from a female soldier's service obligation would be reduced because MLA is neutral time and does not count toward an enlistment contract. In conjunction with the MLA the Army should also tighten up on the procedures for voluntary separation and release only those individuals who can clearly demonstrate that parenthood will interfere with their military duties. For example, a soldier's inability to arrange for short-term and long-term care for her child/children in the event of her deployment would be grounds for voluntary separation.

The MLA would benefit the total Army by integrating active and reserve component forces in training and deployments. Christ called the concept the "seamless total force."

Today, more the 50% of the Army is comprised of Guard and Reserve forces and there is an increasing reliance on these forces to accomplish our mission. Assigning a reserve soldier to active duty would benefit both components measurably. Brigadier General Gary C. Wattnem, USAR, Commander, 3d Corps Support Command (CONUS), gave RC support for this policy:

There are soldiers out there in the Reserve Components that have both the time and the talent for just this kind of mission. In fact, we do this already to support the Active Component. If we use the proper channels—through USARC and FORSCOM—we can put out the job-specific mission, so that we can get to the talent in the [Troop Program Units] TPU's as well. It would benefit both Components.<sup>5</sup>

Christ's paper pointed out the Office of the Chief, Army Reserve is exploring a similar concept called Reserve Associate Support Program (RASP), which would place reserve soldiers in shortage positions on active duty. The Reserve soldier would serve two years on active duty and return to his or her unit fully trained.

### **Advantages to the Pregnant Soldier**

Some soldiers may interpret the MLA as punitive, but there are advantages to them, as well. For example, one benefit of the program is its emphasis on family planning. Soldiers (assigned to an HPC) wanting children should be financially prepared to take up to one year off from duty to have their child. The onus is on them to plan, to the highest degree possible, for their pregnancy. A questionnaire administered to active duty obstetric patients at Walter Reed Medical Center found that planning a pregnancy might prepare women psychologically and prevents stress, depression, and decrements to performance. The study also found those women who plan and time their pregnancies may be better prepared to stay in the organization. At the cost of more than \$7,000 to recruit one service-member, to say nothing of the costs of basic training and advanced

schooling, it makes good financial sense to develop programs to keep the soldiers we have.<sup>6</sup>

This same study cited the physical demands of work and home responsibilities along with service demands and obligations as causing a high degree of psychosocial stress on pregnant service members.<sup>7</sup> From these results one can conclude that the MLA will counter the stresses caused by military duty and pregnancy and the retention of these same soldiers will improve, which is also advantageous to the Army. That is, of course, unless the soldier is unhappy with her mandatory participation in the program. The additional four months off after the child is born will also give the soldier the time necessary to return to her pre-pregnancy fitness level, develop a feasible Family Care Plan, and also bond with her new baby.

## **Disadvantages of MLA**

### **Disadvantages to the Army**

Admittedly, there are problems with the MLA for both the Army and the soldier. As previously mentioned, the program may be perceived as penalizing the female soldier for having children. When the MLA is compared against today's maternity leave and pregnancy policies, it obviously favors the Army over the soldier. This is how it should be in an organization that says self-less service is essential to accomplishing its mission. As it stands today, the military offers one of the most liberal pregnancy policies in the country. Consider this, what other organization offers women reduced work hours, job-reassignment, limited training requirements and fully paid six-week maternity leave?

Additionally, the year the soldier spends pregnant and non-deployable counts against their contract obligation, which most definitely benefits the soldier over the Army!

There are legal implications for requiring soldiers to take a mandatory MLA. If the Army were a civilian organization it would be legally justified enforcing the MLA for females assigned to an HPC unit. The Army can argue that distinctions in treatment based on pregnancy are justified by “business necessity” or as a bona-fide occupational qualification. Employment law states that some sort of mandatory leave policy may still be lawful on the basis of business necessity if it is reasonably related to safety or job performance. The ability to deploy is most definitely related to job performance and is a “business necessity.”<sup>8</sup>

The administrative requirements of the MLA are also a disadvantage. Managing the program will place an additional work requirement on personnel managers in both the Reserve and Active components. This is a time sensitive program that begins once a soldier is diagnosed as pregnant and must be executed quickly to take advantage of the full year of non-deployability. Commanders must also realize that not all positions will be filled because it is dependent upon the availability of a voluntary replacement. The cost aspect must be addressed as far as who will pay for the move of the Reserve component replacement. Because it will be a one-year unaccompanied tour (all one-year permanent change of station moves are unaccompanied) the moving costs should be relatively low. The salary of this individual would be paid for by the Army and is offset by the savings of placing the pregnant soldier in the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR).

## **Disadvantages to the Pregnant Soldier**

Placing the needs of the Army ahead of the individual may result in fewer women joining the Army or in women trying to “game” the assignment system to avoid HPC units. Additionally, the MLA could result in financial hardships if unexpected pregnancies occur, especially to single soldiers. The worst case situation is if pregnant soldiers try to conceal their pregnancy to avoid MLA. This would be dangerous to the health of the mother and the child, as well as leaving little reaction time to find a deployable replacement. There could also be administrative issues associated with managing the MLA that may have a negative impact on the participating soldier. For instance, the soldier may be adversely affected by changing positions without enough time to receive a rating, thus creating “dead time” on her performance record.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, Commandant Instruction Manual 1000.6A, *U.S. Coast Guard Personnel Manual*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Coast Guard, 12.F.

<sup>2</sup> Lt. Col. Linda D. Christ, “Parental Leave of Absence: Time for the Next Step”, USAWC Strategy Research project (Carlisle Barracks, Pa., US Army War College, March 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Christ, *RE: Request for Assistance*, email 1 February 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Presidential Commission, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Christ, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Christ, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Evans, 3-7.

<sup>8</sup> Steven C. Kahn, Barbara B. Brown, and Michael Lanzarone, *Legal Guide to Human Resources*, (Boston, MA, Warren, Gorham & Lamont, April 1998), 4-74

## Chapter 5

### Recommendations and Summary

*The Army's mission and unit readiness is not consistent with being a sole parent.*

—Army Regulation 601-210<sup>1</sup>

During the course of researching this paper it became apparent that a significant number of the pregnant soldiers in the Army are unmarried and the majority of these are junior enlisted soldiers. Nearly 40% of the pregnant females in the III Corps at Fort Hood are unmarried.<sup>2</sup> This is an alarming figure not only because of its moral implications but also because of the readiness issues involved. Obviously, our current system supports single-parenthood based on the high number of single soldiers becoming pregnant!

The Army cannot control when soldiers become single parents through divorce or death, but we can affect the epidemic of single-parent unplanned pregnancies. First of all, single parents are prohibited from entering military service in accordance with AR 601-210 because it is not consistent with military duty. This same regulation should apply to single female soldiers who become pregnant on active duty. This is an example of a policy where women must bear the burden of pregnancy. If a single male soldier becomes a father the Army may never know. Also, instituting the MLA would serve as a deterrent to single soldiers if they know they will be taken off of active duty and replaced

with a deployable soldier. Currently, Army policy does nothing to discourage single-parent pregnancies. Further research must be conducted into ways to combat unplanned, single-parent pregnancy.

## **Summary**

The post-Cold War world has brought about many changes for the Army, including a wider range of responsibilities, reduced resources, and increased operational deployments.<sup>3</sup> How well the Army performs its missions is dependent upon the readiness of the force. Personnel readiness is imperative if we are to stay mission ready. Because there is no system in place that aggregates readiness data from one level to the next, the data for the force will often obscure the readiness of individual units. This is exactly what happens when the impact of pregnancy is evaluated. Based on Army data pregnancy has little impact on personnel readiness. This paper demonstrated with the 4<sup>th</sup> ID DISCOM that the impact at the tactical level is significant.

Individual units, and the soldier, are both affected by the pregnancy. When a soldier becomes pregnant she is no longer available for deployments and she cannot participate in the majority of unit training. Depending upon her job, she will likely be reassigned pending the termination of the pregnancy. This can place a great strain on the unit especially if there is a high density of females assigned and if there is no one to assume the responsibilities of the soldier. As a result, the other soldiers in the unit may feel hostility because they perceive greater privileges are given to the pregnant soldiers. This negative experience will often impact her decision to stay in the Army.

A more comprehensive maternity leave program is needed to counter the negative impact that pregnancy has on the Army, while at the same time providing the impetus for



female soldiers to plan their pregnancies. The Maternity Leave of Absence does this by replacing the pregnant soldier with a deployable Reserve Component soldier for the year she is non-deployable. This time off from active duty also benefits the pregnant soldier by giving her the time to return to pre-pregnancy physical condition and time to develop a feasible Family Care Plan. Admittedly, the MLA program does have disadvantages and administrative requirements. The intent of this paper was to bring the issue to the table and provoke ideas about how to offset the impact of pregnancy on Army readiness.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Army Regulation 601-210, *Regular Army and US Army Reserve Enlistment Program*, February 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Christ, *RE: Request for Assistance*, email 1 February 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Posture Statement, 1.

## *Bibliography*

### **Primary Sources**

- Adm Joseph W. Prueher, "Measuring Readiness," *Armed Forces Journal International*, January 1999, 16.
- U.S. Department of Transportation. *U.S. Coast Guard Personnel Manual*, Commandant Instruction Manual 1000.6A, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Coast Guard, date. Chapter 12.F.
- U.S. Department of the Army. *Army Command Policy*. Army Regulation 600-20. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 30 March 1988, Chapter 5.5. Available from <<http://books.hoffman.army.mil>>; Internet; accessed 10 November 1998
- U.S. Department of the Army. *Regular Army and US Army Reserve Enlistment Program*, Army Regulation 601-210, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 28 February 1995, Chapter 2-9.
- United States Army Posture Statement FY99, *America's Army—One Team, One Fight, One Future*, February 1998
- U.S. Department of the Army. *Standards of Medical Fitness*, Army Regulation 40-501, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 27 February 1998, Chapter 7.10. Available from <<http://books.hoffman.army.mil>>; Internet; accessed 10 November 1998
- U.S. Department of the Army. *Army Policy for the Assignment of Female Soldiers*, Army Regulation 600-13, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 27 March 1992, Chapter 1.12. Available from <<http://books.hoffman.army.mil>>; Internet; accessed 10 November 1998
- Government Accounting Office, *Military Readiness: Data and Trends for January 1990 to March 1995*. GAO/NSIAD-96-111BR, (Washington, D.C., March 96). 2-4.
- Government Accounting Office, *Military Readiness: Data and Trends for April 1995 to March 1996*. GAO/NSIAD-96-111BR, (Washington, D.C., August 96). 2,18.
- Department of Defense Report on Readiness. *Personnel Readiness Factors by Race and Gender*. Appendix G, 15 September 1997. Available from <[http://www.dtic.mil/execsec/adr98/g23\\_g32.html](http://www.dtic.mil/execsec/adr98/g23_g32.html)>; Accessed 29 October 1998
- Harrell, Margaret C. and Laura L. Miller. *New Opportunities for Military Women: Effects upon Readiness, Cohesion, and Morale*." RAND, July 1997.
- The Presidential Commission on the assignment of women in the Armed Forces, *Report to the President*, 15 November 1992, Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Sherrow, Victoria, *Women and the Military: An Encyclopedia, 1*. ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, CA, 1996.

Adde, Nick, "Black Hawk Pilot versus Motherhood/Formula Doesn't Mix For Nursing Soldier," *Army Times*, 10 February 1997, 3.

McHugh, Jane, "Thumbs Up to Pregnant Soldiers/Wellness Program Helps Soldiers to Stay Fit," *Army Times*, 3 November 1997, 14.

Jowers, Karen, "Rules on Nursing Mothers May Get Second Look," *Army Times*, 17 February 1997, 8.

Graves, Capt. Emily B., Letter to the Opinion page, *Army Times*, 13 June 94, 36.

Lind, Sgt Eric, Letter to the Opinion Page, *Army Times*, 3 March 1997, 30.

Renz, Maj Diane G., Letter to the Opinion Page, *Army Times*, 3 March 1997, 30

Goebel, Caryn, 124 Moms, Dads Have Taken Two-Year Leave, *Navy Times*, 6 May 1996, 17.

American Academy of Pediatrics, *Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk*, Policy Statement, Volume 100, Number 6, December 1997.

McIntire, Katherine, "Women in the Army; Pregnancy Raises Questions of Deployability," *Army Times*, 18 April 1994, 14.

O'Hanlon, Michael E., "U.S. Military Readiness—Good but Fragile," Opinion Piece, *The Washington Times*, 27 March 1998.

Lee, Deborah R., assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs, *Reserve Components: Being Mission Ready Essential to Strategy*, Prepared statement to the National Security Subcommittee, House Appropriations Committee, 14 March 1995.

Lt Col Kevin L. Watson, Chief, Distribution and Readiness Branch, Department of the Army, Information Paper, 19 June 1998.

Spreadsheet of 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (MECH) Pregnant Non-deployable, Lt. Vaughn, 22 January 1999,

Email message with information from III Corps, Lt. Col Christ, III Corps G1, 1 February 1999.

Telephone conversation, Lt. Jefferson, DISCOM S1, 1February 1999.

Steven C. Kahn, Barbara B. Brown, and Michael Lanzarone, *Legal Guide to Human Resources*, (Boston, MA, Warren, Gorham & Lamont, April 1998), 4-74

## Secondary Sources

Christ, Lt Col Linda D., "Parental Leave of Absence: Time for the Next Step," USAWC Research Project, March 1998.

Landrum, Cecil S., "The Conflicts Surrounding Family and Children versus Mission Responsibilities, What are the Impacts on Readiness?" Alexandria, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, Defense Logistics Agency, May 1979

Monsen, Maj Kathleen P., "Pregnancy in the U.S. Armed Services and its Impact on Readiness," ACSC, Research Paper, March 1997.

Weinstein, Laurie and Christie C. White, *Wives and Warriors-Women and the Military in the U.S. and Canada*, Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1997.

Peach, Lucinda J., *Women at War: The Ethics of Women in Combat*, Indiana University: Indiana Center on Global Change and World Peace, December 1993.

Westwood, John and Hughes Turner, "Marriage and Children as Impediments to Career Progression of Active Duty Career Women Army Officers," SSC Fellow Research Paper, 15 May 1996.

- Sandercock, Debra J., "The Incidence and Duration of Breastfeeding in Active Duty Military Women," Masters Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1993.
- Evans, Mary Ann and Leora Rosen, *Women in the Military; Pregnancy, Command Climate, Organizational Behavior, and Outcome Part I*, Defense Women's Research Program, May 1996.
- Finch, CPT Mimi, "Women in Combat: One Commissioner Reports," *Minerva: Quarterly Report On Women and the Military*, Vol. XII, No. 1, Spring 1994, 1-12.
- Women's International Network News, "United Nations Survey of Paid Maternity Leave for Mothers," Cited from *The New York Times*, 16 February 1998, <<http://www.epnet.com>>, Summer 98, Vol. 24, Issue3, 8.
- Harris, Beverly C., Alma G. Steinberg and Jacquelyn Scarville, "Why Promotable Female Officers Leave the Army," *Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military*, Vol. XII, No. 3, fall 1994, 1-23.
- Reeves, Connie L., "Dual-Service and Single Parents: What About the Kids?" *Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military*, Vol. XIII, Numbers 3 & 4, Fall/winter 1995, 25.
- Rosen, Leora N., et al, "Cohesion and Readiness in Gender-Intergrated Combat Service Support Units: The Impact of Acceptance of Women and Gender Ratio," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol 22, No 4, p537-553.
- GAO Study of the Composition of Active Duty Forces During Operation Desert Storm, Appendix 1, Tables 1.1 through 1.2.
- <CARRIRS@hqda.army.mil>. "RE: Research Project." Electronic mail message to Merideth Bucher <Bucher Merideth @stuos@acsc>. Attachment: FORSCOM non-deployable pregnancy statistics fact sheet. 24 November 1998.
- <WATSOKL@hqda.amry.mil>. "re: FW: PIWG Briefing." Electronic mail message to Merideth Bucher <mbucher@max1.au.af.mil>. 24 November 1998.
- Tice, Jim, "New Personnel Chief: Readiness Top Priority," *Army Times*, 4 January 1999, 22.
- Steven C. Kahn, Barbara B. Brown, and Michael Lanzarone, *Legal Guide to Human Resources*, (Boston, MA, Warren, Gorham & Lamont, April 1998), 4-74