

The Integration of Women in to the Australian Army Infantry Corps: Dimensions for Success

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ABSTRACT

This paper overviews reflections and lessons learned against five dimensions for the successful integration of women in to the infantry corps:

- 1. Physical (including nutrition)*
- 2. Professional*
- 3. Environmental*
- 4. Social*
- 5. Cultural*

Over the last two years, the Australian Army has integrated a number of women in to its Royal Australian Infantry corps, and arms corps more broadly. This paper describes some of the key challenges and highlights from this period and explores a number of key themes. Discussed against the five dimensions of success, noted above, are gender and physical fitness standards and gender and nutrition; and the importance of resilience, positivity and determination by recruits. In addition, the significance of tailored mentorship and advice (both professional and personal); the criticality of timely and appropriate access to information and the importance of acceptance and preparedness of staff and peers to the presence of female recruits. Environmental aspects of integration – including physical (co)location – are also discussed.

This paper will also share insights from female soldiers as they traversed the historically male dominated domain of Infantry. Female infantry trainees viewed themselves as soldiers and platoon members primarily, not as women soldiers.

There are a number of cultural factors that are enablers or barriers to the successful integration of women in infantry. They relate to the tolerance of microaggression (accepted as normal ‘banter’), the importance of initiative and leadership at all levels, and education and standard operating procedures that incorporate the nuances of having females in a male dominated domain.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper summarises findings from the first phase of a longitudinal study of the integration of female soldiers in to the Australian infantry. It examines interview findings against five dimensions for success – physical, professional, environmental, social and cultural. These are not exhaustive, however provide a useful framework to discuss the main challenges and considerations that emerged. It will also note changes made to the integration approach as the process evolved and matured.

This paper will also briefly overview the methodology used and provide research reflections. In conclusion it will discuss the initiatives Army developed to respond to issues as they emerged.

1.1 Background

In line with changes that were occurring in other countries, in 2011 the Australian government announced that gender restrictions on specific employment categories in defence would be lifted. This followed a period of close and intense public and political scrutiny of Australian Defence Force (ADF) members behaviours, attitudes and norms with regard to women and more generally.

From 1 January 2013, current serving women could apply to become clearance divers, mine warfare and clearance diving officers in Navy; airfield defence guards and ground defence officers in Air Force; and infantry, armoured corps, and artillery roles in Army.

As of 1 October 2018, women comprise 14.4 per cent of the Army (Reserves and Full-time force), up from 11.3 percent in 2012. Women have been able to undertake the selection process for Special Forces roles since January 2014 and apply for the Special Forces Direct Recruitment Scheme since 1 October 2015.

Defence began direct (ab-initio) recruiting into combat arms employment categories in 2016. Unsurprisingly, and in line with other countries, there has been slow uptake of these newly available roles (see Figures 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4)

As at 1 October 2018, 21 Infantry women have been posted to an infantry unit. This includes 19 soldiers (5 of which are Gap Year Program soldiers) and 2 officers (Table 1.1).

Additional information:

- *Special Measure provisions.* Army has enacted Special Measure provisions under the Sexual Discrimination Act 1984 including Recruit to Area, Recruit When Ready and reduced Initial Minimum Period of Service for women. Four employment categories offer reduced periods of service (2 years) to women only, including armoured cavalry, combat engineer, artillery observer, and rifleman.
- *The Army Pre-Conditioning Program.* The Army Pre-Conditioning Program is a seven-week course designed to improve the fitness of women so they can meet the Army physical fitness enlistment standard prior to commencement of the Army Recruit Course. The program entry standard matches entry standards of Navy and Air Force.
- *Physical Employment Standards (PESA).* The Physical Employment Standard Assessment was implemented on 1 January 2016. The activities within the assessment are derived from scientific analysis of common military and trade specific tasks and are gender and age neutral.

Table 1-1: Training success rates of men and women in infantry since January 2016– service category 7 and service category 6 (Permanent and Reserves) as at 1 October 2018

	Female		Male	
	No	%	No	%
Enlisted in the RAINF	166	N/A	3609	N/A
Trained Force	38	22.9	1516	42.0
Still in training	47	28.3	1209	33.5
Transferred to other employment categories				
	45	27.1%	194	5.4%
Separated from Army	36	21.7%	690	19.1%

- Figures are for **Other Ranks only**.
- Figures do not include soldiers recruited on the **Regional Surveillance List**.
- Figures do not include those that enlisted into other employment categories and transferred into Infantry.

Table 1-2: Women in combat roles – service category 6/7 (permanent)

Headcount		Trained Force	Training Force		Total
		Unit	Recruit Training	IET Training	
RAINF	Commando (ECN 079)			1	1
	Infantry Officer	2			2
	Rifleman (ECN 343)	14	3	12	29
RAA	Artillery Command Systems Operator (ECN 254)	7	1	1	9
	Artillery Gunner (ECN 162)	3	4	5	12
	Artillery Observer (ECN 255)			1	1
	Artillery Officer	12			12
	Operator Air and Missile Defence Systems (ECN 237)*	11	1	1	12
	Operator Unmanned Aerial System (ECN 250)*	22	1	6	29
RAAC	Armoured Cavalry (ECN 060)	15	3	12	30
	Armoured Officer	12			12
Total		98	14	38	150

* Trades previously open to women.

Table 1-3: Women in combat roles – Gap Year

Headcount		Trained Force	Training Force		Total
		Unit	Recruit Training	IET Training	
RAINF	Rifleman (ECN 343)	5		5	10
RAA	Artillery Gunner (ECN 162)			1	1
	Operator Air and Missile Defence Systems (ECN 237)*			5	5
RAAC	Armoured Officer	1			1
Total		6	0	11	17

* Trades previously open to women.

Table 1-4: Women in combat roles – service category 5 (reserves)

Headcount		Trained Force	Training Force		Total
		Unit	Recruit Training	IET Training	
RAINF	Combat Support Operator (ECN 305)	11	17	2	30
	Infantry Officer	5			5
	Patrolman (ECN 304)	14	5		19
	Rifleman (ECN 343)	25	18	9	52
RAA	Artillery Light Gunner (ECN 161)	2	5	4	11
	Artillery Officer	1			1
	Operator Air and Missile Defence Systems (ECN 237)*	1			1
	Operator Unmanned Aerial System (ECN 250)*	1			1
RAAC	Armoured Officer	2			2
	Light Cavalry Scout (ECN 062)	8	7	12	27
Total		70	52	27	149

2.0 STUDY OVERVIEW

The purpose of this study is to gather qualitative data to monitor and better understand the lived experience for women preparing for and entering Infantry corps. However, as action research its primary focus is to provide a rapid feedback loop to key stakeholders in Army - senior leadership and the chain of command - to adjust conditions, processes, and policies, where possible, as required. This is the value of this work. It is not simply observation and analysis, rather it is about providing Army's senior leadership with situational awareness, insight and opportunities for timely intervention.

The project is longitudinal and ongoing, and this paper presents selected findings from the first 18 months of data collection.

2.1 Objective

From the outset the project sought to:

- document the challenges and gains for the first cohorts of women as they enter Infantry corps.
- document the personal and professional growth of these women as they are faced with and overcome any challenges.
- identify the enablers of success and leverage women's personal experiences so that those who come after them may benefit from their experiences.

2.2 Method

This longitudinal project uses a method of rapid ethnography and is framed by a model of action research. It is situated in a sociological framework, examining how women's lived experiences intersect with macro cultural and structural aspects of the ADF. That is, the policies, processes and behavioural norms of the organisation.

Action research refers to a process of progressive problem solving; actively participating in a change situation whilst simultaneously conducting research.¹ Action research is problem centred, client centred, and action oriented. It involves the client system in a diagnostic, active-learning, problem-finding and problem-solving process.

Rapid ethnography refers to a collection of field methods intended to provide fast, efficient data collection when there are time pressures and limited time in the field. The core elements include limiting or constraining the research focus, using key informants, capturing rich field data by using multiple and interactive observation techniques, and collaborative qualitative data analysis.²

For this project, rapid ethnography has also been about collaborative sense-making of the data and co-design of initiatives and strategies to address challenges as they emerged. The output at a practical level involves knowledge sharing between the research team and Army, and identifying opportunities to adjust standard operating procedures, policies and approaches where possible.

The rapid ethnography approach has three key parts:

¹ Dickens, L., & Watkins, K. (1999). Action Research: Rethinking Lewin. *Management Learning*, 30(2), 127–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507699302002>

² Millen, D. R. (2000, August). Rapid ethnography: time deepening strategies for HCI field research. In *Proceedings of the 3rd conference on Designing interactive systems: processes, practices, methods, and techniques* (pp. 280-286). ACM accessed at <https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=347763>

1. Using in-depth interviews as both insight and intervention.
2. Using observation of organisational artefacts - structures, policies etc – to deeply understand the barriers to, and opportunities for, change.
3. Using reflexive research practice – as researchers, understanding our own context as an outsider to the organisation, and being aware of our own biases and assumptions.³

2.2.1 Sample and data collection

Interviews were conducted with women enlisted as Employment Category Number (ECN) 343 riflemen at seven time periods over 2016-2017, allowing experiences to be captured at different stages of the training continuum and in to the Regiment.

- Recruit training (Kapooka) x 1
- Initial Employment Training (IET) (School of Infantry) x 2
- Regimental posting – up to 5 times over 18 months

In total 55 interviews were conducted with 33 women, some soldiers being the subject of multiple interviews over time while others were only interviewed once before they decided to leave.

Interviews at Kapooka ceased in the second half of 2016 due to the large number of women corps transferring prior to arrival at the School of Infantry (SOI). With further investigation it was found that at recruitment women were not being given enough information about the infantry employment category (lifestyle, what the job involved, physical requirements beyond initial training) and were not making informed decisions to enlist. This was rectified through the development of a video for recruits to watch in the early stages of recruitment and a letter from the Chief of Army, both of which provided more details.

Interview questions explored expectations, career intentions, family and personal background, health and wellbeing, challenges and achievements, and reflections and observations of their time in training and/or at the unit.

In addition to interviewing women entering infantry corps, key informant interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders. These included, Commanding Officers at the training establishments, current and previous Commanding Officers at the infantry unit where women were posted, Army Headquarters and Forces Command staff involved in the removal of gender restrictions, Physical Employment Standards Assessment (PESA) implementation, soldier career management, Personnel policy development, and culture reform. Also, Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG) staff/researchers who also developed the PESA requirements, medical staff (physiotherapists for example) in the training establishments and on base, and physical training instructors (PTIs) at each location.

Regular conversations were also had with senior Army personnel including the Chief of Army, Deputy Chief of Army, Head of the Infantry Corps, the Forces Commander, the Commandant Combined Arms Training Centre, the Commandant Army Recruit Training Centre, and the Director General Personnel – Army.

Although not systematic, interviews were conducted (approximately 30 in total) opportunistically with the chain of command (platoon sergeants, warrant officers) at training establishments, and with male recruits, and soldiers at the unit where women were posted following IETs.

³ Mariam Attia & Julian Edge (2017) Be(com)ing a reflexive researcher: a developmental approach to research methodology, *Open Review of Educational Research*, 4:1, 33-45, DOI: [10.1080/23265507.2017.1300068](https://doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2017.1300068) accessed online at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23265507.2017.1300068?cookieSet=1>

3.0 FINDINGS

3.1 Preliminary analysis: Dimensions of integration success

We identified five integration dimensions for consideration in enabling women to succeed in infantry:

1. Physical
2. Professional
3. Environmental
4. Social
5. Cultural

Time doesn't permit a more detailed account of these dimensions; one that contextualises it with the growing body of research on women in combat arms. A systematic review of related literature has been done for the project, however this paper will focus on our empirical data. In what follows each dimension is discussed including observations, risks and issues identified during interviews, and considerations for enabling success. In conclusion, Army's initiatives to address the issues identified are discussed.

The below data only relates to interviews with females.

3.1.1 Physical dimension

The physical dimension has been well documented in international research. It includes nutrition, load distribution, injuries, and risks, amongst other things.

Observations from interview data

Resilience

Recruits all displayed levels of resilience, positivity and determination. Those with stronger physical training histories, knowledge of their bodies (ie time needed for recovery) or that completed pre-conditioning (either provided by Army or done independently) experienced an increased level of success. They were better able to understand, predict and react to any setbacks. Life experience, either related to age or physical training, was perceived and experienced as an indicator of resilience.

Nutrition

Some recruits voiced concerns over nutritional requirements in training, and if the diet while at Kapooka was giving them what was needed to sustain their energy and perform. Many commented on the lack of protein options in the mess, describing a good range of vegetables and salad, but protein, such as chicken or red meat as 'go[ing] straight away' and they miss out.

Interestingly, a number of recruits described having self-imposed restricted diets prior to enlisting; calorie counting, weighing portions and body building to be 'fit' for Army life. This approach obviously does not accord with the realities of mess dining at recruit school (or perhaps any mess dining) and was an uncomfortable reality for some when they arrived.

Injuries

Anecdotally all women noted that hip injuries, whether minor or significant, were common in training (ie. the first six months). These may not all be visible to the chain of command due to the reluctance to report and 'get through'. All women interviewed shared an acute sense of concern for the impact training was

having on their bodies, particularly long term. For a number who subsequently discharged or corps transferred, the unknown impact on their bodies over the long term was cited as a reason for wanting to leave. At the SOI ill-fitting equipment was described by female trainees as a widespread concern. This was also noted as an issue for smaller framed men.

All women interviewed shared the view that younger women (17-19yo) in training were disadvantaged both physically and psychologically.

Key challenges

The School of Infantry undertook a considerable amount of work to prepare for the arrival of the first cohorts of women. Still, there was a disconnect between this, and the implementation of some (not all) of the changes. This was not dissimilar to the implementation of change in other contexts across the broader Defence organisation.

With further investigation, it appeared that small, better fitting body armour was available but had not been issued to female trainees on arrival. While it has been noted by the chain of command that the women could seek out small sizes, the women were not wanting to 'complain' and so were not going to ever do this voluntarily.

The approach to data collection (injury rates for example) was to be gender-neutral and so data was aggregated and de-identified. The focus on being 'gender neutral' in this instance was to the detriment of the female recruits. Special attention needed to be paid to female injury rates, even those at a low and formally unreportable level.

Key considerations going forward

- The appropriateness of PESA without appropriate conditioning;
- Load carrying equipment (ie take in to consideration appropriate fit, sizing and load carriage distribution and impact points on female bodies);
- Personal hygiene requirements and aides (especially the ability to tailor or modify equipment to accommodate these needs);
- Physical fitness and strength training
- Iron, calcium and possibly Vitamin D supplements to assist in preventing stress fractures and aide recovery.
- Minimum age requirements for entry in to SOI IET.
- The possibility of full medical screening prior to entry in to SOI (including bone density, and iron and calcium levels)

3.1.2 Professional dimension

The professional dimension includes the need for mentorship and advice and acknowledgement that there are 'taken for granted' networks that men easily access to get information that may not be accessible to their female peers.

Observations from interview data

Access to information

There were varying levels of acceptance and preparedness of staff and male peers to the presence of female recruits, which often transferred to a sense of either inconvenience or encouragement to the recruits. There

was a clear message that increased clarity over what to expect in regard to processes, protocols, privacy, lodging and the differences to be expected at each stage of training would be beneficial and enable recruits to be more mentally prepared for these realities.

Like all recruits, some female recruits experienced an adjustment to military life, with some having feelings of being over controlled. Although they had a relative understanding that these ‘controls’ were in their interests, there were questions over the systematic withholding and restriction of information and speculation whether it was a necessity or a training tactic. Males appeared to be able to move around these barriers more freely and use networks to gain information. Females tended to not have access to such networks and were left to speculate what would happen, for example at each location. Further, some noted the ‘loosening’ of control once in their initial employment training, with further adjustment being required again.

Recruits had positive experiences with both military and civilian staff who would answer any queries, however there was variability in treatment due to staff attitudes (towards recruits in general, and/or female recruits), particularly apparent when recruits are ‘back-squaded’ or moved to a platoon that was not expecting a female. Some staff appeared to be more suited or prepared to engage with female recruits and ensure they have a positive experience (i.e. sensitive to possible issues they may face, such as living separately). Others were described as not so sensitive, and attributed to (perceived) instructor quality and generally ‘old school’ attitudes to teaching and enculturation. Therefore, the level of support for female recruits swayed between inconvenience and encouragement.

Knowledge was described as key to a smoother experience.

Mentorship and advice

Women described limited opportunities for professional mentorship once in their unit. At the time of data collection, there were no female role models within comparable employment categories (ie combat corps) and the female support network designed to assist the ECN 343 women was perceived to be more like a ‘just in case’ list of names. Women were inclined to over-identify with being ‘anti’ support corps, perhaps as an opportunity to identify with their infantry ‘team’ and be an insider rather than an outsider.

All (infantry) women at Kapooka and the SOI emphasised the value of an opportunity to speak to the women who had completed training and were now at the unit.

Key challenges

A key challenge for the professional domain, and in fact across integration dimensions identified, is the need to balance ‘preferential treatment’ with ‘appropriate treatment’; a gender-neutral approach versus a (sometimes) gendered approach. As a new minority cohort, women in infantry required targeted communications in some instances. Over the course of this project, it was the researcher who often became a conduit for information - able to pass on the experiences from one cohort to the next; answering questions, connecting recruits at different stages in the training pipelines, connecting women who were posted to the same location yet had never met, describing the physical environment of their next stage in the training continuum ie what the School of Infantry ‘looked’ like.

Key considerations going forward

- The critical features of a mentoring model, where there are no employment specific and experienced female JNCOs, SNCOs, WOs or Officers to be drawn on;
- The limitations of a ‘female support group’ model on base that is not aligned with their profession (ie no one from combat corps)
- Opportunities for female infantry soldiers who are now in the unit to visit those at SOI and Kapooka

- Infantry as a pathway to a broader Army career, rather than a career in itself.
- Improved functional and procedural communication

3.1.3 Social dimension

Social cohesion is a key aspect of the success or failure of integration.

Observations from interview data

Peer engagement and support

IETs appeared to be able to fit in well with their platoons, although initial reactions by males to some female recruits was not 'welcoming', which was expressed through body language or conversations that were overheard. There was no mention of social ostracism or direct peer-to-peer harassment at SOI. Collegial banter did occur, but it was good natured and taken as a sign of belonging rather than targeting for the sake of gender. Women felt a sense of validation when some of their male peers who had been the most negative did not make it through training, and they did.

Female IETs viewed themselves as soldiers and platoon members primarily, not as *women* soldiers. Although they did acknowledge their part in this new definition. There were some recruits who did mention that they found it 'easier' to have at least one other female present, often for comparison, whereas others did not mind being on their own.

There were social dynamic changes 'caused by' women being present, such as not to swear or use the term 'guys'. Some female recruits were more bothered by the imposed restraint rather than the terminology being used and were concerned about the flow on effects of behaviours being changed only when they were present. It was acknowledged that these feelings may not reflect those of all female recruits.

The use of senior female staff informally checking on the recruits was taken as a good strategy. Some females were aware of this potential network of support, however had not experienced it, or there were some who felt overwhelmed and did not want to be seen as getting 'special treatment'.

The existence of a female support network however was seen as less useful the longer women were in training, and less so in the unit. It is likely this is due to the women identifying with their corps and the majority of women nominated to the support network were non-combat and therefore perceived to be limited in giving advice.

In the unit, the female infanteers described high levels of social marginalization and in some instances the undermining of their ability to succeed (ie through 'accidental' forgetting to tell them to pick up new additions to their field equipment).

The women in the infantry unit used different strategies to meet other women and broaden their peer group, in particularly through their involvement with ADF sport. Unfortunately, this was perceived by their male peers as 'special treatment' and became the subject of harassment.

Microaggression⁴ appears to be at its peak at the unit and is further fueled by any injuries the women endure. This reinforced the stereotype that the women are 'weak', and, ultimately, don't belong.

⁴ Micro aggressions are 'brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership'. Micro aggressions generally happen below the level of awareness of well-intentioned members of the dominant culture...Micro aggressions can include statements that repeat or affirm stereotypes about the minority group or subtly demean them. They also position the dominant culture as normal and the minority one as aberrant or pathological, that express disapproval of or discomfort with the minority group, that assume all

Key challenges

As a micro minority within an infantry battalion female infanteers have a limited number of peers, at least until a critical mass in a particular location is achieved. To assume that they have female peers from other corps posted into these battalions is erroneous.

Key considerations going forward

- The careful management of cohorts (from recruit training to IET and then to posting within a battalion) so that bonds forged during training are preserved;
- Integration into battalion and mess life;
- The ability to engage in competitive sport; and
- Back squad management at training establishments.

3.1.4 Environmental dimensions

Observations from interview data

At the SOI there was variability in treatment and in feeling a cohesive part of the platoon due to the requirement to be housed in separate quarters (particularly for those whose platoon was in old accommodation). There were unexpected consequences, such as limiting the opportunities to interact and bond with their peers. ‘Pizza nights’ were often cited as examples of logistical exclusion and were suggested that they could occur in the mess hall rather than in the lines. Small things such as dress codes and having to walk a short distance to attend limit the potential for full engagement. There were also logistical consequences for platoons being separated, such as everyone allocated 20 minutes to shower and pack, but females needing to travel for 10 out of the 20 minutes, thus restricting their ability to be prepared.

As women are expected to be ‘treated just like men’ at the unit, more so than ever, questions about appropriateness of facilities and practices, particularly out field, are important. Most women described trying not to urinate for days on end, and that having time to attend to female hygiene was nonexistent (ie time to change a tampon and wash your hands). Women also described being mocked for carrying an extra pouch with feminine hygiene products in it.

Feedback from the chain of command described that women are given time...the “same two minutes” that men are given, and that privacy can be sought behind a tree. This does not take in to account the need to remove clothing and webbing etc. The ‘she-wees’ issued require rinsing after every use (which is not always possible), and there is a perception that they can lead to UTIs as they get so dirty.

These artefacts – pouches, she-wees – acted to further emphasise to women a sense of difference and as not belonging and were perceived and experienced as a subtle reinforcement that they required ‘special’ treatment.

Key considerations going forward

- Safety and privacy in infantry battalion lines without compromising esprit de corps and team bonding;
- Safety and privacy in the field while operating as a member of a mixed gender infantry section; and

minority group members are the same, that minimize the existence of discrimination against the minority group, seek to deny the perpetrator's own bias, or minimize real conflict between the minority group and the dominant culture⁴.

- The appropriate design of social spaces.

3.1.5 Cultural dimensions

Observations from interview data

Physical fitness culture

Beyond important objective factors such as physical standards, physical fitness training and nutrition, there are cultural factors, such as the perception of ‘injury as weakness’ and the ‘exceptionalisation’ of women in frontline roles, that also have a complicating effect on efforts to attract and sustain women soldiers.

Injury as weakness

The image of a stoic ‘hard-man’ soldier is ingrained in traditional Army culture and manifests in the tendency not to complain and to ignore or minimise injuries. This affects men as well as women. However, as injury rates are higher for women and physiologically, women are more susceptible to overuse type injuries (as compared to traumatic injuries like broken bones), the effects may be more pronounced or problematic for them.

To minimise damage and optimise treatment, early identification of injury needs to be reframed as a positive action in support of career longevity (which should outweigh competing preferences such as graduating with cohort or being heroically stoic).

Exceptionalisation

In military culture, women who succeed in physically demanding roles (e.g. in combat training) are widely regarded as exceptions (to the category of women, who normally cannot succeed in those roles). This is not simply a question of small numbers of women being successful. There may also be small numbers of men successful in certain employment categories (eg Special Forces). In their case, however, selected men may be regarded as hyper-masculine. The tendency to see women as successful in spite of their gender – or even against the nature of their gender - likely has flow-on effects for role modelling and influence on others (women who do not see themselves as exceptional).

Key challenges

The culture of an Infantry Battalion, particularly that of the Company, Platoon and Section can best be characterised as hyper-masculine. It is unrealistic and perhaps counter-productive to attempt to change this situation. However, hyper-masculinity in this instance must be compatible with the greater values, ethics and high behavioural standards that is expected of all soldiers in Army.

Micro minorities are particularly susceptible to subtle and covert, yet damaging, behaviours that may be engaged in by the dominant group’s cultural norms (ie micro aggression).

Key considerations going forward

- The likely existence of microaggression and the risk that it is ‘unseen’ by the chain of command.
- The risk of the marginalisation and exclusion of female infanteers from the normal bonding and team building conventions of their male counter-parts as well as by other non ECN 343 women posted to infantry units; and
- Deliberate discrimination

4.0 DISCUSSION

There has been a range of lessons learned as the Australian Army has trained and integrated its first cohorts of women into infantry.

By monitoring and understanding the lived experience for these women, Army has been equipped with the knowledge and insight to consider changes, where appropriate. Where these have been able to be done immediately, they have. Some of the issues identified, however have required more detailed review and more deliberative action. Indeed, some of the issues identified prompted reviews not just as they related to women, but for all men in infantry, and for some, for the whole of Army.

Initiatives that responded to specific women in infantry issues:

- Command initiated oversight of body armour issuing
- Opportunities for women to access Physical Training Instructors (PTIs) and the gym differentially (ie after hours)
- Batching of female recruits where possible (however it is acknowledged that keeping women in their platoon cohort is preferred to keeping women in holding until other women arrive).
- All women interested in enlisting to infantry must watch the information video prior to application
- All women in infantry can have an in-service transfer at any time
- More deliberate posting of senior women in related employment categories to the infantry battalion for support (ie female combat engineers)

Issues that were deemed to have effects broader than just the women in infantry cohort resulted in, or are being addressed by, the following:

- A Chief of Army letter to all 2*s that outlined his approach to recruiting, training and sustaining the whole workforce, including:
 - Recruiting to the combat arms (provision of the ‘right’ information to potential recruits)
 - Initial development of Army’s people (conditioning)
 - Unit life within Army (respectful behaviour)
 - Transition within service (women in combat arms able to transfer out at any time)
- Development of the ‘Good soldiering’ program that focuses on optimizing Army’s culture through its values – initiative, teamwork, courage and respect - and a ‘team of teams’ approach.
- Army has conducted 14 Army Pre-Conditioning Program courses. 81 per cent of graduates (258 women) went on to successfully complete their Recruit Course. These began as being open to only women but are now open to everyone.
- PESA is in the process of being reviewed as part of a conditioning continuum (Kapooka to IETs) for both men and women.
- A nutritionist was recruited to Kapooka to assess nutrition and provide advice.
- Review of the role of PTIs to shift from physical training to human performance more holistically

The women interviewed for this project were, and are, exceptionally resilient. While Army cannot control

how individuals react, it can change how the organisation responds to risks and issues. The last few years of cultural reform in Army have undoubtedly demonstrated this to be the case. For the majority, the integration of women in infantry has brought with it challenges, certainly, but overwhelmingly it has brought an opportunity to examine structures and processes long held captive by unchallenged cultural norms.

The integration of women in infantry brings with it disproportionate benefits; for the men and women of Army who benefit from a refresh of the approach to physical conditioning and subsequent reduced injury rates; for women across all of Army who witness women's success in traditionally male roles; and for the women in the training pipeline (or even earlier) to become infanteers – to have women who have already succeeded as role models and mentors.

To conclude on two final reflections from this research: Firstly, being 'gender neutral' does not necessarily equate to gender equality. That is, an integration approach that assumes women will simply assimilate with the norms that have been created for, and maintained by, males, will not set women up for success. Allowing "the same two minutes", for example, for male and female soldiers to take a comfort/personal hygiene break, does not treat them 'equally'. Secondly, differential treatment is not necessarily preferential treatment. Understanding the nuances here does not come easily and requires ongoing monitoring and evaluation for decision support. In doing this Army has been able to shift from an approach focused on recruitment and retention, to sustainment and success.

5.0 NEXT STEPS

We have broadened the study to include all women in arms corps, that is infantry, armoured and artillery. The next wave of interviews across the entire training continuum and in units begins in February 2019.

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