

Strength and Weakness - Female Soldiers in the Royal Danish Armed Forces

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Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen my name is Linda Larsen I am 35 years old, an officer and captain in the royal Danish Air Force, where I have been for the last 15 years. I am currently working in the Royal Danish Air Force Academy where I am reaching the cadets in psychology, theory of education and leadership. Prior to that I was working with military employees of all types and on all levels training men and women in military skills and giving them leadership courses. I myself have been working as a commander, second in command for almost 10 years. In my spare time I have been training for triathlons on a very low level and today I run 2-3 times a week.

I have been working with women and men – together or separated in the Forces and I will try to give you a very short version of our experiences.

The Royal Armed Forces in Denmark

In the Armed Forces DK there are about 18000 military employees. There are approximately 860 women. 80 officers, 160 mid-level managers, and the rest are the rank of private first class. So women make up 5% on the entire armed force. We have at the moment women in all kinds of jobs not only in administrative positions but also in operative and strategic positions. We have helicopter pilots; we have infantry soldiers, navigators, etc. There is one limit for women to day, and that is in the submarines. Right after implementation of new and modern submarines we will also see women there!

History

In 1962 the Danish government established a law saying that women were allowed to work in the military system and in 1971 the first woman started in the military. In the beginning they were not able to work in position with “act of war” assignments. It was a big and revolutionary step for Denmark to have female soldiers and in the beginning there were many problems with the environment – the lack of enough (female) toilets, bathrooms, bedrooms, the tone – the special military and sometimes a bit rough tone among men did not leave room for the feminine tone, the attitudes – men were and still are very much afraid of being pushed away from important position by a woman and sometimes you still see the border between the two sexes, and the requirements – women were not able to live up the same requirements as men and in the beginning women were not supposed to the same physical requirements which gave an attitude problem among the men.. and the never ending discussion about same job, same requirement no matter if you are a man or a woman.

Same job, same career, same physical requirements

Women have absolutely the same career possibilities as men. There are no consideration to the sex but only to the qualifications and the needs of the forces. Today we only have about 10 female commanders on the rank of major level in the Home guard we have 2 female lieutenant colonels.

In a typical class of officers we have about 20 students and only 1 is a woman.

And we also see a couple of marriages between military employees – and normally the malepart “wins” in the discussion of “the career or not” – just like in the civilian system. But normally women work in the same career fields and we have a lot female soldiers participating in the Yugoslavian Mission as well as many other mission assignments outside of Denmark.

In a statistical report we see that female soldiers are leaving the forces in order to establish a family or give birth a child. The biggest unsuspected departure has been when the women are students or privates. More women than men leave in the Initial training period. Basically, because of the physical requirement and bad physical training stage – the women are too “weak”.

Physical Education on all levels – strength and weakness

Since 1971 we have had many problems finding the best way of education both male and female soldiers – physically. There have been difficulties in solving the questions of the physical demands required for a particular job, and the fact that women have about 10 percent lower muscular strength, the attitude of prejudice among the male employees, and of course the problems of having a suitable environment. The problems the solution have been dynamic, changing several times and in many directions.

It is not a secret that the physical requirements have been a barrier for many of the women who want to apply for a job in the forces. The Danish Force is utilizing two tests – a Coopers test and a muscular test And statistics show that 50 percent of the female of the applicants do not pass and only 6 percent of the male applicants do not pass. And it also a fact that many women have problems in fulfilling the physical examination at the end of the initial training period. They have many problems in the running disciplines and in the muscular disciplines specially push and body-lifts.

Today we do not have any differences between men and women according to the physical education or training. On all levels it is very normal that the students have between 2 and 4 hours of physical training per week and it is very normal that everybody participate in the same kind of exercises – we do not take any considerations to the women and they do not want us to that either – and if we try to suggest they, women, become angry – some of them are very good and sometimes you cannot if it is a woman or man – they are trained the same way. And their are very enthusiastic and they want to do the physical training as good as the men.

And we often see and it has become a fact that when the women are training – their results are just as good a their average male colleagues – it just takes the women a **longer training time** to get the same fitness level as the men.

It is also a fact that even if all the jobs in the forces demand physical skills in the regulations – 95 percent of the women fulfil the requirements for the job. There are no problems in solving an average working day at all. They do it just as good as the men.

An interesting result of having women in the forces is that when they increase their physical condition they also increase their mental capability and while the men sometimes seem to stay at the same mental stage – we often see that women become even better and brighter. So actually female soldiers are able to have better qualifications for special jobs where the need for good mental capacity is required.

The vision – female employees

In 1997 it has been stated that the forces have to make the physical requirements more equally suitable for the sexes. In a very well written report completed by medical and well-educated sport/fitness professionals and issued by the chief of Defence it shows the following element: (what report??)

It is a fact that there are quantitative differences between the two sexes with regards to the maximum Absorption's of oxygen, but in proportion to changes in fitness and circulation – the qualitative factors – there are minimal differences. So, in situations with increased or decreased training, the same changes will occur in both sexes.

Women are able to bear the same long endurance work as men. Therefore and again there is no need for making sex-specific considerations according to planning and performance of the fitness-training program.

The most important factor is the actual of training

The report also shows that a person is able to increase his/her own fitness level by 20 percent through regularly for 8-12 weeks (2-3 months). That gives the force the possibility to lower the requirements by 20 percent, proportional to the demands of the forces and the requirements after the initial 2-3 of training.

The report also gives the same conclusion, as always – we have to have the same physical entrance examinations as well as the same education examinations for both sexes. Therefore we will see, in the future, that on the manual level, a female private first class will have to go through the same entrance examinations as a the male private first class – no extra physical or educational demands are needed. The idea is that even if they do not fulfil the physical demand – after a 2-3 month regular training period – they will be able to handle the needs of the unit. And to avoid that the quality of a good soldier fails – there will be a probation period, and after this period the person must be able to perform the physical requirements for the job.

In the academy and in the Special Forces the aspirant has to run his/her Cooper's test – 2000-m in 12 min. And longer the 2400-meter - because of the improvement after regular training – thus the 20 percent. So the final test initial training period will be about 2400-meter because of the 20 percent.

It is also important that result of the physical development is on the same level that is needed in the units. For many years it has been typical that the student/aspirant has to be better than necessary for the job or the position the basic training. Which was a waste of good energy and time, and it did cost a lot of not necessarily training.

It is also a vision that all the aspirant for all career fields should have a physical training guideline and if an aspirant can not perform her/his physical test they will be offered a new test after 2-3 months.

Cost-benefits of having female soldiers

Why should we bother having female soldiers in the forces – why should we use so much money making extra toilets, dealing with all the prejudices, and using time and energy solving

this physical problem – when men have been fighting in the military throughout the centuries – why should we?

Perhaps it is because society needs to think in a more humanistic way and female soldiers are a very positive combination to the power of the male soldier – and that this combination – makes a whole and more realistic military system. When you see what the world is fighting against – and when you really look at the military technology – you do not see the need of walking 1000 km over – you go by tank, train, truck or plane. So, maybe you do not have the same physical requirements – as was needed in the old days – maybe today and tomorrow you need soldiers, whether it be male or female, with a good mental capacity and stable personality – who can control all of the high technology.... So, perhaps it is time to change the focus and equalize the forces with men and women.

Ladies and gentlemen – I hope that experiences from Denmark will give you inspiration to develop the idea of having female – soldiers on an equal basis – we can only wish you good luck, because that what you will have by having a more equally balanced colorful military system.

Physical Requirements

- Women on the lowest level – same requirements as privates
- Men and women same physical exercises during training – officer/sergeant
- 2000 meter running test in the entrance examination
- Realistic physical goals (training/job)
- Training-program to all aspirants

Women in the Royal Armed Forces Denmark

- 80 Officers
- 160 Mid-level Managers (sergeant)
- 620 Privates First Class