Female Ranger graduates put spotlight on gender in the U.S. Army

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.24.15

Word Count 862

FORT BENNING, Ga. — Friday’s graduation at the Army’s rigorous Ranger School marked a historic milestone: for the first time ever, female soldiers had successfully completed the program. They were among the nearly 100 other graduates at the ceremony. This significant moment shines a light on the larger debate happening across the country about the role women should have in the military.

At a ceremony at Fort Benning, First Lieutenant Shaye Haver of Copperas Cove, Texas, and Captain Kristen Griest of Orange, Connecticut, became the first female graduates of the course. Ninety-four men graduated alongside them.
The course is a grueling nine weeks. It tests the limits of young soldiers' leadership and physical strength. The Pentagon is currently deciding whether or not to permit women who meet military standards to hold combat roles in the military.

**Women Still Face Difficult Obstacles In The Army**

Women like Haver and Griest face serious obstacles in the military, especially if they aspire to join all-male combat units, including the 75th Ranger Regiment. Despite the fact that both women are now Ranger-qualified, females are currently banned from joining the elite 75th Ranger Regiment. However, officials say it is among the special operations units likely to be opened to women eventually.

Griest, 26, is a military police officer and has served one tour in Afghanistan. Haver, 25, is a pilot of Apache helicopters. Both are graduates of the prestigious U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Of 19 women who began the Ranger course, Haver and Griest are the only two to finish so far; one is repeating a prior phase of training and hopes to complete the course soon.

The Army opened Ranger School to women for the first time this year. Military leaders are currently debating whether or not to open more combat roles to women.

**Can Army Adapt To Women Serving In All Roles?**

General Mark Milley, the Army's new chief of staff, told reporters at the graduation that he is proud of all the Rangers who completed the course. He said he appreciates the fact that Haver and Griest are pioneers for other women in the field.

"It's a really big deal" for them and for the Army, he said.

And while he praised Haver's and Griest's accomplishments, Milley said he has not yet decided whether to recommend that all Army positions be open to women.

Still, he said, "the Army can adapt. It has and will continue to adapt."

Griest told reporters Thursday she hopes her success shows that women "can deal with the same stresses and training that men can."

**Some Critics Aren't So Sure**

Still, others are unsure. Some people feel that the military may have different standards for men and for women and that these may unfairly favor women.
James Lechner, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and former Ranger, said he doubts whether the Ranger course tests men and women in the same way. He wondered whether the course tested the female candidates under combat-simulated conditions in the same way it does for male soldiers.

"American women certainly serve with honor and distinction, provide some capabilities that males may not be able to provide," Lechner said. "But when you talk about your fighting units, your combat arms units, especially the infantry ... you don't need to just have the minimum standards. You need to have as good as you possibly can get."

Janine Davidson, a defense policy analyst at the Council on Foreign Relations and a former Air Force cargo plane pilot, said Griest and Haver's success in the Ranger program is a significant military milestone. She said their successes, combined with the current debate about opening up more jobs for women, is an example of "policy catching up with reality." Many women have had extensive combat experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. Keeping them out of formal combat roles does not make sense, according to Davidson.

Davidson said the debate also is unique to this generation and suggests that times are changing. She has heard high school students have conversations about women in the military and said teenagers are often "shocked when they learn that women aren't already doing this kind of stuff."

**Most Candidates Drop Out In The First Four Days**

Rangers call themselves "masters of special light infantry operations." They perform different operations, including seizing key areas of land and infiltrating hostile territory by land, sea or air. They are a branch of Army Special Operations Command and U.S. Special Operations Command.

The Ranger School, which began during the Korean War and was called the Ranger Training Command, is challenging for all. Most who enter the course fail. Between 2010-2014, 58 percent of candidates dropped out — most of those within the first four days. The course starts with serious tests of physical stamina, a land navigation course and a 12-mile foot march, according to the Ranger training website.

Rangers have been part of the military force since the Revolutionary War. These soldiers had important roles in the War of 1812 and the Civil War. In the June 6, 1944, D-Day landings on the beaches of Normandy, Rangers famously climbed the steep cliffs of Pointe Du Hoc overlooking Omaha Beach.
Quiz

1. Read the selection from the article.

Despite the fact that both women are now Ranger-qualified, females are currently banned from joining the elite 75th Ranger Regiment. However, officials say it is among the special operations units likely to be opened to women eventually.

Which person from the article would be most likely to oppose opening the units to women?

(A) General Mark Milley
(B) Shaye Haver
(C) James Lechner
(D) Kristen Griest

2. Select the paragraph in the section “Some Critics Aren’t So Sure” that suggests young people may have different attitudes than older people about women in the military.

3. Which of the following are two central ideas of the article?

1. Two women made history by becoming the first female graduates of the Army Ranger School.
2. There were nearly 100 graduates at the ceremony, which took place at Fort Benning, Georgia.
3. In the past, women were not allowed to serve in combat roles, and still today some are not sure it is a good idea.
4. Army Rangers call themselves “masters of special light infantry operations” and are a special branch of the Army.

(A) 1 and 2
(B) 2 and 4
(C) 1 and 4
(D) 1 and 3
4 Which of the following details MOST supports the central ideas of the article?

(A) Griest, 26, is a military police officer and has served one tour in Afghanistan. Haver, 25, is a pilot of Apache helicopters.

(B) Women like Haver and Griest face serious obstacles in the military, especially if they aspire to join all-male combat units, including the 75th Ranger Regiment.

(C) General Mark Milley, the Army's new chief of staff, told reporters at the graduation that he is proud of all the Rangers who completed the course.

(D) Rangers have been been part of the U.S. military since the Revolutionary War.