

# Women in combat arms?

## Paper by Army Diversity Office's chief urges end to restrictions

By Kelly Kennedy  
KELLYKENNEDY@ARMYTIMES.COM

Women should be allowed to serve in combat-arms branches, the newly appointed head of the Army Diversity Office said in a recent paper.

"If Congress lifted the gender restriction on combat-arms service, the Army would be able to progress even further toward work-force diversity by boosting both the number of women officers and the number of black officers (both men and women), particularly in the senior ranks," Col. Anthony Reyes wrote in "Strategic Options for Managing Diversity in the U.S. Army."

Reyes chose not to comment for this story because, he said, he wants to establish a strategy for the Diversity Office before he makes public comments. But he said he stands behind the paper he wrote earlier this year as a military fellow for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

As officers move up, Reyes wrote, the percentage of black soldiers steadily decreases in the senior paygrades. Part of the reason is that only 7 percent to 8 percent of black officers enter combat arms, branches that account for 59 percent of the Army's generals.

Black soldiers make up 12 percent of the commissioned-officer ranks and 22 percent of the Army.

By allowing women in combat-arms jobs, Reyes argued, the number of blacks in higher-ranking positions would increase because about 40 percent of black cadets are women, according to the U.S. Army Cadet Command.

And it could increase the number of women in the general-officer ranks. As of Oct. 3, there were 14 female general officers, or 4 percent of the general-officer ranks. Women make up 14 percent of the Army and 14 percent of officer ranks.

Reyes' paper comes as some say it's time to look at whether women should officially be allowed to serve in positions they already hold on the battlefield.

Andre Sayles, head of the electrical engineering and computer science department at West Point, advised Reyes in his research. In a 1998 paper, "On Diversity," Sayles talked about the need for interchangeable pieces in the Army — people, including women — who could fill any role.



LANCE CPL. CLIFTON D. SAMS/MARINE CORPS

"I really don't know if anyone is in a rush to make that happen," Sayles said. "But I think the timing for change will become obvious down the road."

Maj. Gen. Rita Broadway, commander of the 89th Regional Readiness Command, said there should be more to the argument for women in combat arms than increasing diversity.

"If women are serving admirably in every branch, as well as in the asymmetric battlefield, perhaps it's time" to re-examine the restrictions, she said.

Army leadership "continually" looks at whether women should be allowed in combat-arms fields, Broadway said.

"We're just now starting to see women in the higher ranks because women started coming in in larger numbers in the late '70s and '80s," she said. "As we move along in the ranks, I think you'll see some change in the next few years."

Ideas from the top are changing as society changes its outlook on women's roles, Broadway said.

"As Gen. [Peter] Schoomaker said, 'Our values are on the table,'" she said. "As we try to make some of these changes, more and more of those stereotypes will be looked at just as a matter of course. I'm encouraged by the way the Army is looking at soldiers regardless of sex."

Col. Chris Short, a Special Forces soldier who is black and recently returned from a stint as commander of the Counterinsurgency Academy in Iraq, said he sees in many black female soldiers what he saw in himself as a young soldier — a love for their jobs and a competitive need to achieve.

"I'm not surprised that they're successful," he said. "I'd like to say, 'Let's let them in.' But not every female can carry a gun."

But then he added, "Just like every guy can't."

He fears it would become a gen-

der issue, he said, rather than an issue of who can do the job. If a guy screws up, leadership can "make fun of him or kick him out," Short said, laughing. But if it's a woman? He's not sure how that would play, he said.

"I would never say I don't want a female who can do the job," he said. "But we do it differently."

Lt. Col. Bert Ges, plans chief for the Joint IED Defeat Organization and an artilleryman, said he doesn't think allowing women in to increase black diversity in the ranks makes sense. "I don't see it as a solution that way," he said. "We have to figure out why black cadets are not interested in combat arms."

But, Ges said, as a commander in Kandahar, Afghanistan, he headed a military-police platoon with four women. "They were doing the same things we were doing," he said. "Combat arms is wherever you're at."

One female soldier performed so well that she was promoted to platoon sergeant, he said.

"There was significant enemy, and we had to send them on infantry tasks," Ges said. "The enemy doesn't know if it's an infantry platoon, my TAC or supply. Everyone downrange is fighting the enemy — regardless of race or sex."

Staff Sgt. Tara Abrams, a logistics specialist for G-3 in Japan, said it should be a matter of who qualifies.

"I feel like if women can do the job, they should be allowed," she said. "You do have some females who are just as mentally and physically tough who could do it. You'd still have females who can't, but you have men who can't."

In fact, Abrams could be one of the black officers Reyes is looking for: She's considering the Green to Gold program, which allows enlisted soldiers to become officers.

"It's a hard decision," she said. "Ever since I got in, I've wanted to be a sergeant major. It will take too many years to make general." □

The Army should consider lifting restrictions on women in combat, says a paper written by Col. Anthony Reyes, now chief of the Army Diversity Office. Here, Spc. Jennie Baez with 47th Force Support Battalion provides security during a September operation in Iraq's Anbar province.

## Diversity could make Army stronger, officers say

By Kelly Kennedy  
KELLYKENNEDY@ARMYTIMES.COM

When Col. Chris Short joined the Army 30 years ago, he knew he had a game to play. As a black man, he had to adapt to a predominantly white culture, because it sure wasn't going to work the other way around.

"You have to act in the broader — I'll call it the 'business' — culture of which the U.S. military is just a microcosm," said Short, a Special Forces soldier who most recently served as commander of the Counterinsurgency Academy in Iraq.

The Army officer corps is 70 percent white, according to Pentagon statistics.

"You're joining the military," he said, "they're not joining you."

But Col. Anthony Reyes may rework that mind-set as the new head of the Army Diversity Office. A paper he wrote during a recent fellowship at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies — a private think tank founded by black intellectuals and professionals to look at policy issues that affect blacks — could offer insights into how he might shape Army policy.

Reyes would not comment for this story because he and his staff are still discussing the new strategy, but he said his beliefs are expressed in the paper he wrote, "Strategic Options for Managing Diversity in the U.S. Army."

In that paper, he outlined a plan to use a top-down approach to diversity: Leaders need to embrace and incorporate differences rather than just focus on providing equal opportunity.

The Army's equal opportunity program, he wrote, consists of rules that say people must be given equal chances to compete for jobs and promotions. But Reyes contends that equal opportunity doesn't encourage leaders to learn about the differences among people in the ranks, which is necessary to better understand soldiers and abilities that could make the Army stronger.

Diversity "reaches out to the future: What do we want to be like and look like? How should we be driven by what American society looks like and our future missions?" said Col. Andre Sayles, who helped set up the Army's Di-

versity Office, which opened in June 2005.

A diversity plan could address the need to boost the minority population not only in the Army as a whole, but among particular communities. Special Forces, aviation and other combat-arms occupations, for example, are historically low in such representation.

Reyes incorporated large parts of Sayles' diversity plan in his paper.

The overall plan, according to Reyes' paper, will have to do more to increase demographic diversity even as it encourages leadership to embrace cultural diversity.

Not enough black cadets enter ROTC and West Point programs. Blacks make up about 12 percent of the Army officer corps and about 23 percent of enlisted ranks.

And not enough of those cadets are entering combat-arms fields — the surest route to top command. Blacks make up only 7 to 8 percent of combat-arms officer ranks.

Reyes, Sayles and Short listed possible reasons blacks

might not be joining or going combat arms: They're not performing well enough as cadets to get their first choices for branches. They're not qualifying to get into West Point. They're choosing non-combat fields they believe will help them when they get out of the military. Their parents are talking them out of ROTC. There is no family history of becoming a combat-arms officer. And cadets don't see people who look like them succeeding in combat-arms officer positions.

Reyes' paper also called for: ■ Bringing more white officers to ROTC programs at historically black colleges so cadets encounter diversity early.

■ Providing alternatives for black students who feel they don't have time for sports, academics and military history classes.

■ Taking another look at how Army officers are selected for branches and promotions.

Reyes, who concentrated on black soldiers because they are the largest minority group in the military, wrote that issues with other minority soldiers would fall into place as the Army worked on black issues. □

**Diversity 'reaches out to the future: What do we want to be like and look like?'**

COL. ANDRE SAYLES