

# Women and U.S. Special Operations

## *Barriers to the Successful Integration of Women into Special Operation Forces*

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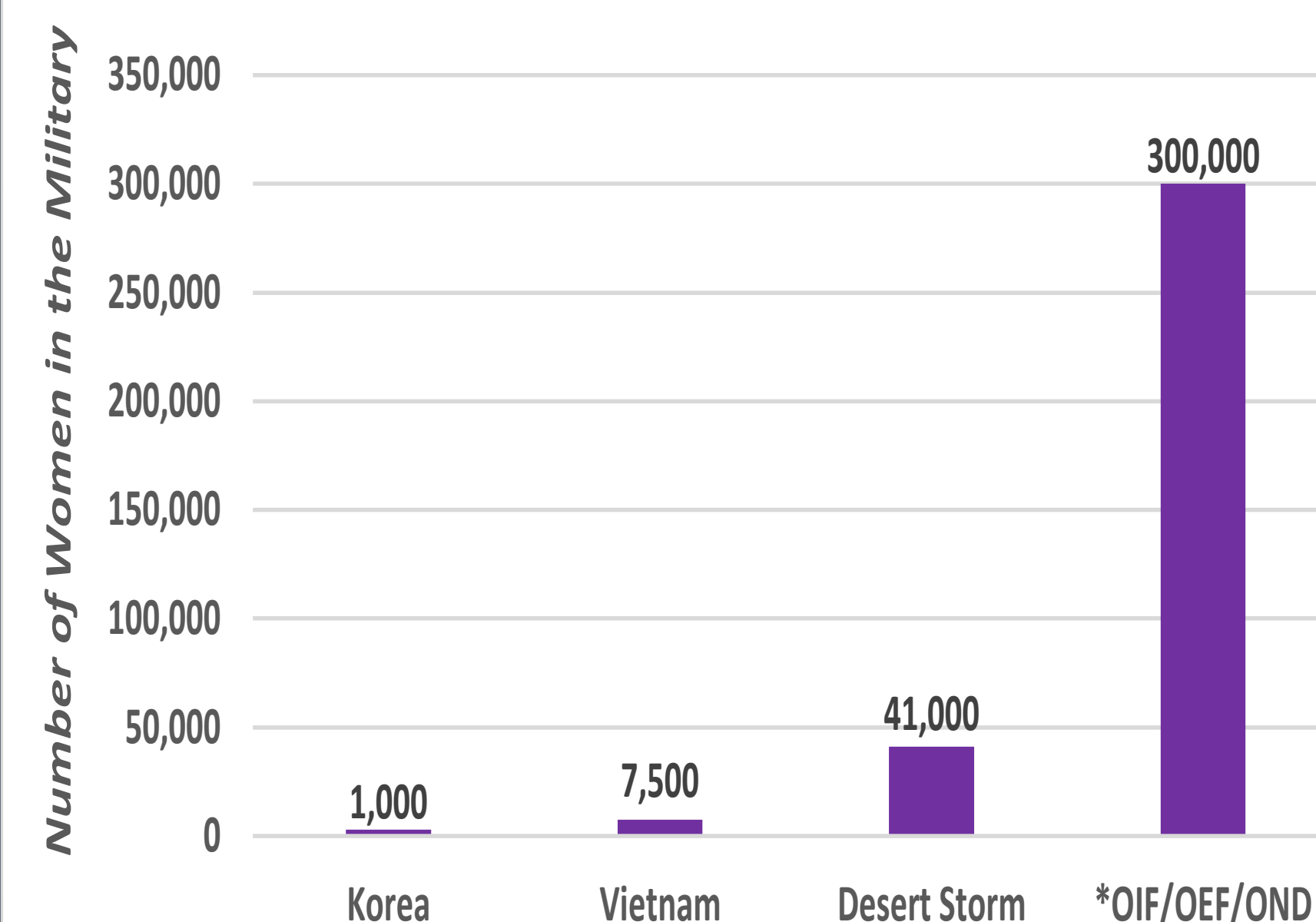
### Introduction

In January 2016, nearly 220,000 combat military occupations opened to women, including all Special Operations positions. Assessment, Selection, and Qualification into the ranks of Special Operations Forces (SOF) are very selective, and they present extremely difficult physical and mental barriers to all personnel who attempt to join. Right now, female membership into these elite units is strongly opposed, creating additional barriers unique only to women. In my research I identify and address three of these barriers:

1. *Special Operations Organizational Culture*
2. *Discrimination Based on Sex and Gender*
3. *Standards*

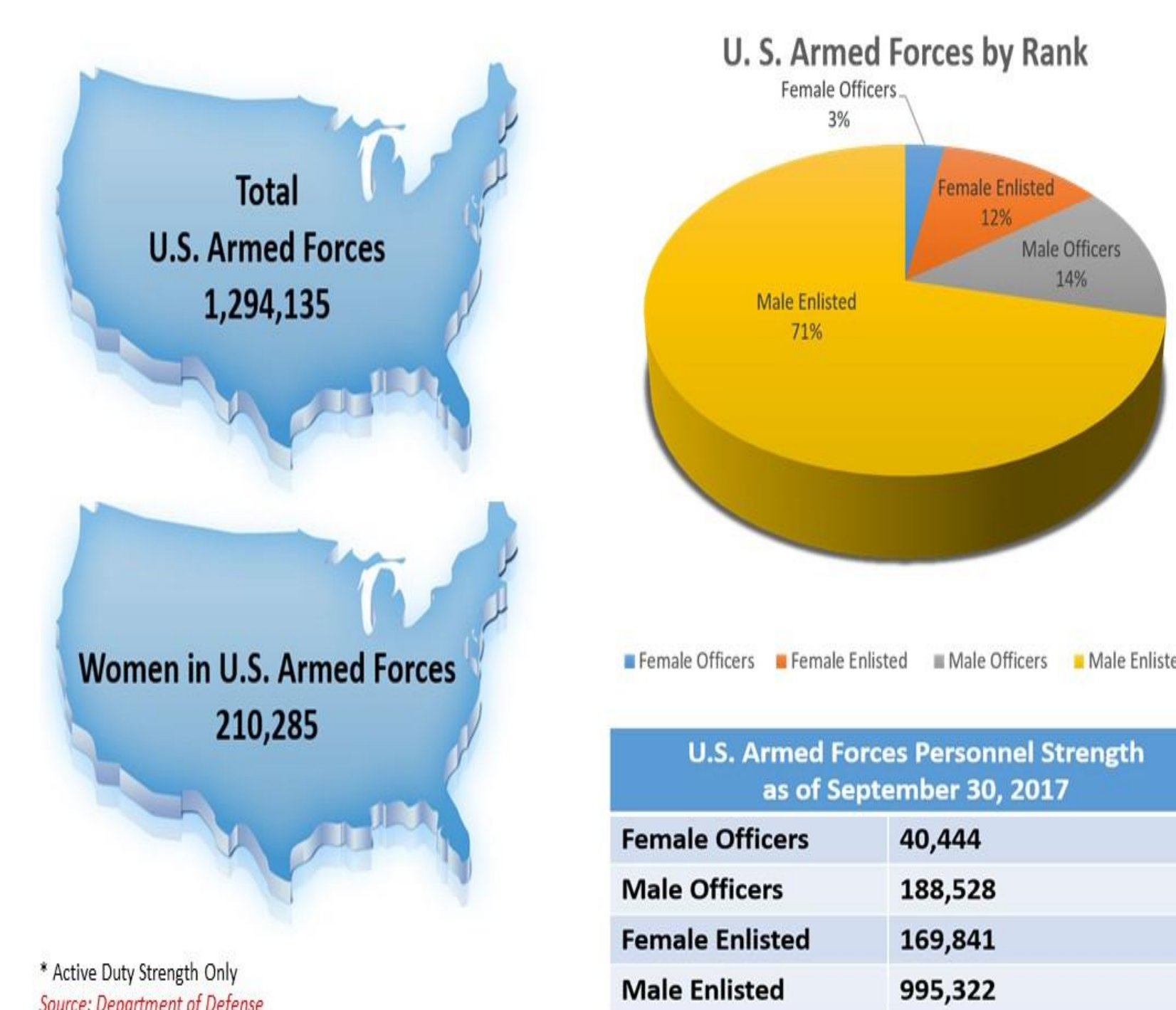
Special Operations is a masculine, male dominated culture; most SOF personnel fear that integrating women will change this culture and decrease the standards they are known for. In turn, effecting unit cohesion and decreasing combat readiness. These are concerns that need to addressed head on to help mitigate/prevent the additional barriers facing women.

### A History of Women at War



\* Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation New Dawn  
Source: Women in the Military for America Memorial Foundation, Department of Defense

### United States Armed Forces\*



### Recommendations

Based on my research the following principles are particularly relevant to the successful integration of women into Special Operations:

- Strong Leadership
- Education not Death by Power Point Training
- Targeted Recruitment
- Adequate Preparation of Female Candidates
- Valid, Gender Neutral Standards
- Expectation Management
- Monitor and Assess Integration Over Time

### Methods

1. For my research I conducted literature reviews of:
  - United States (U.S.) Armed Forces' Previous Force Integrations
  - U.S. Special Operations Forces
  - Leadership and Ethics
  - Society, Culture, and Organizational Diversity
  - Organizational Theory
  - Organizational Inertia
  - Biological, Physiological and Cognitive Differences Between Men and Women
2. I conducted interviews with Special Operations Personnel.
3. I drew on my personal experiences as a female Soldier in the U.S. Army.

### Barrier I

- *Special Operations Organizational Culture*
  - Male Dominated, Masculine Culture
  - Combat

### Barrier II

- *Discrimination Based on Sex and Gender*
  - Sexual Assault
  - Sexual Harassment

### Barrier III

- *Standards*
  - Assessment, Selection, and Qualification Standards
  - Operational Environment
  - Biological, Physiological and Cognitive Differences Between Men and Women



### About the Author

I have served over 25 years as a Human Resources Soldier in both the United States Army's Active Duty and Reserve forces; with a total of 16 years Active Federal Service. I enlisted as a Private in 1992 and later commissioned as a 2LT through the University of Texas' ROTC Longhorn Battalion in 2003. I served back to back tours in Afghanistan in 2009 and 2010. In addition, I have over seven years experience at Fort Hood's Mobilization/Demobilization Platform. I currently hold the rank of Major and I am assigned to the 120th Infantry Brigade on Fort Hood as the Reserve Brigade S1 (Adjutant).

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### Literature Cited

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