



All US Special Ops Units Open To Women

Most often when we write about “modernisation” efforts, we are reporting on the latest in tactical gear and high-tech weapons system. However, USSOCOM recently announced something that will make it a more “modern” force that has nothing to do with any of that.

USSOCOM Commander, General Joseph Votel, decided he would not request exemption to Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter’s intention to fully integrate women into all military positions. In a statement to the press, Votel said he “stands behind Secretary Carter’s decision, and fully supports opening all special operations specialties and units to female service members.”

Carter’s original order regarding female integration was given on January 2013. At that time all the Services,

including USSOCOM were given an opportunity to request specific exemptions to this policy. After two and half years of study and thoughtful consideration, Votel, did not request an exception, when Carter finalized plans for integration in December of 2015.

Review and Integration Concerns

Votel and his teams looked long and hard at the question of female SOFs.

USSOCOM also contracted with the RAND Corporation to conduct external surveys and examination of how integration of women into what were once closed career fields and units, would impact the performance of the force.

Of immediate concern was if USSOCOM would make any special considerations for qualifying and/or training



General Votel – Official Photo USSOCOM.



Female Soldier: Courtesy US Army.

► female special operatives.

Votel said that USSOCOM, “absolutely will not lower, raise, or create multiple sets of standards for special operations. If candidates meet time-tested and scientifically validated standards, and if they have proven that they have the physical, intellectual, professional, and character attributes that are so critical to special operations – they will be welcomed into the special operations forces ranks,” regardless of gender.

The SOF Truth

In examining all of the data, Votel said he based his decision not to request any exemptions from the integration order based on four principal factors, the first of which is what he refers to as the “SOF Truth.” One of the cornerstones of US Special Ops, the “SOF Truth,” states that “Humans are more important than hardware.” This truth applies equally to women as it does to men, and special operations benefits from a more diverse force, according to Votel.

The remaining three factors that influenced his decision were:

History of Integration: Votel said that he was proud of the long tradition of SOF recognizing the value of diversity, and it has always led the way in integration of

women among the forces. He pointed out in USSOCOM’S preceding organization, the Office of Strategic Services “one in five team members was female.” USSOCOM has had support programs in place for over 25 years that were open to women, Aircrew positions in Air Force Special Operations Command were opened to women in 1993, and since 2011, women have been effectively employed as part of SOCOMS Cultural Support Teams in Afghanistan.

The Research Data: Votel said that after detailed analysis of internal and external study results, there was “no compelling analytical data that would support an Exception to Policy for special operations.”

Commitment to Opportunity: Votel said that SOF has always been about giving Americans the opportunity to prove they can be their best, mentally and physically, and to serve with pride in defense of freedom in our nation’s most elite forces. That challenge, and that opportunity should not be denied to women.

Still, Votel recognizes that his decision is not without controversy, however, he expressed that he is confident that it “will ultimately serve to benefit the community, the military, society, and the nation.” ■