



Kristen Griest during Ranger School training at Fort Benning, Georgia

WOMEN WARRIORS

Three women just graduated from the Army's elite Ranger School. But will they be allowed to go on missions with their male classmates? BY REBECCA ZISSOU

Last summer, 96 soldiers completed one of the most grueling training programs in the world: the U.S. Army's prestigious Ranger School at Fort Benning, Georgia. During the 62-day program, they scaled cliffs in the middle of the night, crawled through muddy trenches covered with barbed wire, and marched for miles—all while carrying gear weighing up to 100 pounds.

Those who finish—only about 3 percent of active-duty Army soldiers—can try out for the 75th Ranger Regiment, an elite combat unit that's sent on some of the military's most dangerous missions.

Women were allowed to attend the school for the first time this year, and in August First Lieutenant Shaye Haver and Captain Kristen Griest made history as its first female graduates. (A third woman, Major Lisa Jaster, finished the

course in October.) But despite having met all the same requirements as their male classmates, they aren't allowed to compete for a spot in the regiment—because they're women.

About 240,000 combat positions in the U.S. military—20 percent of military jobs overall—are currently off-limits to female soldiers, mainly in infantry, armor, and special forces units.

But that's about to change. Next month, the Pentagon is expected to open most—if not all—combat positions to

▶ Watch a video on women soldiers in Iraq at upfrontmagazine.com



Shaye Haver trains with heavy gear in the Georgia mountains

BY THE NUMBERS

161

NUMBER of military women killed since 2001 in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; 1,016 have been wounded.

15%

PERCENTAGE of active-duty military who are women.

2,931

NUMBER of women enrolled in U.S. military academies.

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

women. The move comes nearly three years after the military's momentous decision to lift the 1994 ban on women in combat. The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines had until this fall to recommend which jobs, if any, should remain closed to women. (Officials say only the Marines asked for exemptions.) U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter is reviewing their recommendations and will make the final call.

"I do hope that with our performance in Ranger School, we've been able to inform that decision as to what they can expect from women in the military," Griest recently told reporters. "That we can handle things physically and mentally on the same level as men."

Women have served in the military since the nation's founding. They were nurses, spies, and cooks during the American Revolution (1775-83). In the Civil War (1861-65), some women

disguised themselves as men to fight. During World War II (1939-45), hundreds of thousands of women took jobs as pilots, mechanics, and radio operators.

Tough Enough?

Today, more than 200,000 women serve in the U.S. armed forces. They make up nearly 15 percent of active-duty military personnel, working as medics, intelligence officers, military police, and in other non-combat roles.

Regardless of their job titles, women have often been involved in fighting, especially during the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In those conflicts, traditional front lines didn't exist. Firefights could occur anywhere and at any time. As a result, female soldiers routinely dodged bullets, shot back during ambushes, and were threatened by roadside bombs—even though they weren't officially allowed in combat.

At least 161 women have been killed in action since 2001. And more than 1,000 have been wounded.

Supporters of opening all positions to women say the policy has prevented female soldiers from moving up in the ranks, since top military jobs often require combat experience.

Ray Mabus, head of the Navy and Marine Corps, insists that if women can meet the physical and mental requirements for a job, they should be allowed to apply. "Gender alone is not a justification for prohibiting a Marine from serving in a position for which she is qualified," he recently wrote in *The Washington Post*.

Proponents also point to countries like Canada, France, Germany, and Israel, where women have served in combat roles for years.

But many other people worry that allowing female soldiers to take part in the fighting will weaken our military. They say studies show that women aren't as naturally strong as men and are more prone to injuries.

"We need our combat units to be the most lethal fighting force our tax dollars can buy," says retired female Marine Jude Eden. "Adding women creates more danger for everyone and risks compromising missions."

Critics are also concerned that physical standards will be lowered to make it easier for women to compete with men—something military leaders insist won't happen. Even if some female soldiers are strong enough, opponents say women will disrupt unit cohesion and distract the men in their ranks.

Second Lieutenant Michael Janowski, Haver's training partner during Ranger School, disagrees. He says there's no question women are capable of serving in combat positions. In fact, he credits Haver with helping him graduate. During a particularly grueling training exercise, Haver volunteered to help Janowski carry his heavy gear up a rocky cliff.

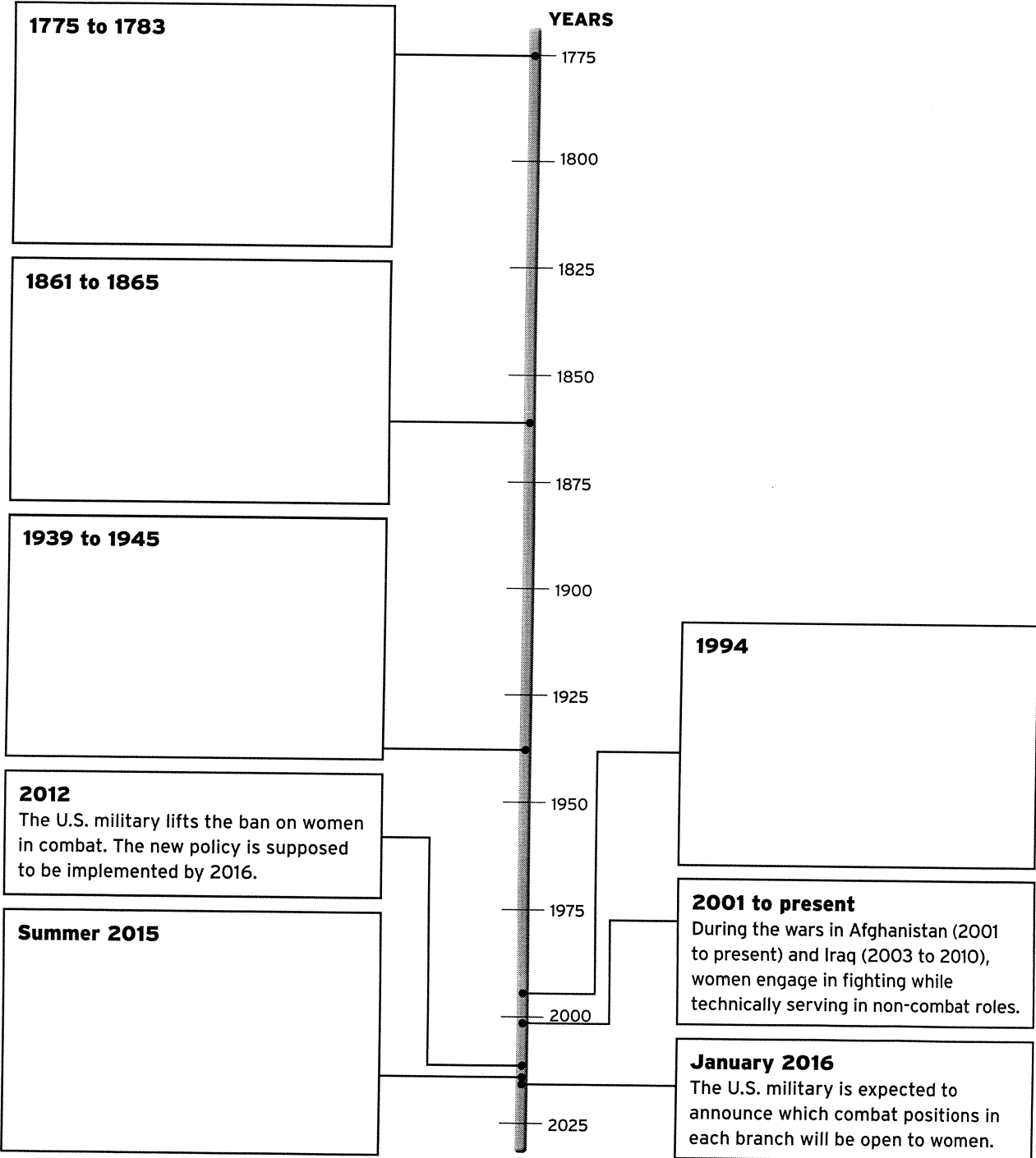
"I probably wouldn't be sitting here right now if it wasn't for Shaye," he says. "I would trust her with my life." •

ANALYZING A SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

For use with "Women Warriors" on p. 6 of the magazine

How Women Served

Use information in the article "Women Warriors" to complete the following chronology of important events in the history of women in the U.S. military. Then answer the questions that follow.



SYNTHESIZE: Looking at the chronology, do you see instances in which one event may have caused or significantly shaped a later event? Explain. What events do you think might be added to this chronology in the decade to come?

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