

**Qualitative Report for the Study of  
Women In Combat**

**By Berkshire Consultancy Ltd**

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## Executive Summary

As part of one work strand towards the 2009/2010 review of the exclusion of women from ground close combat roles in the British Armed Forces, Berkshire Consultancy Ltd was commissioned by DCDS Pers (ref. Contract Number: 0945/270) to undertake a piece of qualitative research to explore the impact of mixed gender teams on small team/section cohesion during ground close combat. Semi-structured interviews were carried out during September and October 2009, exploring 27 ground close combat incidents involving small mixed gender teams/sections in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002. A total of 105 interviews were held, 28 with women and 77 with men. The women involved in these incidents had a variety of roles, including medical assistants, dog handlers, searchers, FST commanders and engineers.

The central focus of the research was the exploration of perceptions of cohesion during ground close combat; this report explains that the experience of the vast majority of interviewees was that cohesion worked well during these incidents. Additionally, interviewees expressed wider attitudes and views about women in ground close combat, which have developed to some extent as a result of their experiences, and these are also recorded within this report.

**Leadership:** Leadership during the incidents was viewed more positively by women than men overall, and men were more positive about male than female leaders. However, leadership did not emerge as a key determinant of cohesion. Most of those who commented, felt that the presence of a woman had no impact on the leader or the leader's judgment, and that the leaders treated everyone the same, within the context of their roles/abilities.

**Perceptions of the impact of the presence of a woman:** The majority of interviewees felt there was no impact due to the presence of a woman on getting the task done; for the small minority of men who felt there was a detrimental impact, this was due to lack of perceived competence in her role and her lack of strength/training, reflecting her not having been selected or trained to deliberately undertake ground close combat.

A majority of men felt there was no impact on them of having a woman present. For some who did, it was more an awareness of a woman being present with a view to potential rather than realised dangers. For a few leaders it was about keeping the woman safe and not being able to use her as flexibly as more fully trained men. However, the majority of women and men felt that the woman was an equal member of the team, and most men said they would not have treated the woman differently had she been a man. More men felt there was an impact on others present, due to a variety of pre-conceived attitudes, but this did not impact the immediate task.

**Attitudes towards women in ground close combat:** The majority of interviewees' attitudes have not changed as a result of their experiences; where they have, some were now more positive, others less. Although actual experiences have rarely borne out people's fears, these still often remain. Key concerns (expressed by men and women) were around women being a distraction and the dangers associated with close relationships, men's desire to protect women and women's lower physical strength and stamina. In spite of having positive experiences of women in the roles they currently fill, a significant number of men felt that they would not want women in the Infantry; they would not feel comfortable asking a woman to close with and kill the enemy at very close range, and were concerned about the woman's and others' response to this situation should it arise. This final step is felt to be different, and a step too far. Many women, despite their own positive experiences in theatre, also felt that women should not be

allowed into the Infantry and that few would want to undertake the role; a high proportion of female interviewees said they would not want to.

A minority of interviewees were in favour of women in ground close combat roles, women having proven that they can be just as capable of fulfilling the role demands as men; with the absolute proviso that they are assessed, on selection and training, exactly equally to men. Some said everything depends on the individual; some women do everything they can not to be a distraction, to muck in, spend all their time with their teams and become “one of the lads”. A question remains: to what extent would the women’s proven capability and behaviour overcome male instincts to protect them in the most extreme situations and men’s unwillingness to put them into these situations? Also, interviewees consistently said that in contact, training kicks in and everyone just gets on with their job; would this override these same concerns?

**Cohesion:** Cohesion in mixed gender teams during ground close combat incidents was consistently reported to be high. The overwhelming message from the interviews was that cohesion is fundamentally about trust and confidence in other team members to do their job, and that this builds over time. The most important contributory factors are time spent together before and during an operation - shared experiences, shared and adequate training, and to some extent previous incidents. Women need to have the time and opportunity to prove themselves, particularly given some men’s pre-existing pessimistic attitudes and expectations of women’s capabilities, especially where they are unused to working with women.

Given the nature of the women’s roles, these contributory factors were harder for the women to demonstrate – they often had spent less time with their male colleagues, sometimes being attached to the section/company when they arrived at the start of an operation or for a particular task, not having trained with the men and sometimes having had little opportunity to prove themselves. This accounted for the difference in cohesion for the very small minority of men who felt that cohesion was better in all-male teams than in mixed-gender teams during incidents.

A consistent issue encountered during the interviews was the distinction (or otherwise) between cohesion during incidents and at other times. Overall, cohesion is important, and is built, outside of incidents; during incidents, any issues within the team are generally overshadowed as training kicks in and the team members go about doing their jobs in order to meet the common objective. Capability at this point becomes key, and is how the women seem to be judged – their ability to do the job, under extreme pressure, which appears in turn to be related to experience, training and their individual character. Where cohesion was rated lower, it was due to lack of capability, technical expertise and knowledge.

**Caveats** to using the current research findings to inform the review of the legislative exclusion of women from ground close combat roles:

- Memory issues – some interviewees struggled to remember details of specific incidents.
- Some interviewees were unable to be specific about their “small team/section”.
- Interviewees differed in their ability to specifically answer some of the questions, and the quality of output of some interviews was lower than others.
- The difference between women’s roles to date and the excluded ground close combat roles.

We recognise that some of the issues addressed were not always easy for interviewees to talk about, and would like to thank them all for their openness and commitment to this research. We would also like to thank military colleagues for all their support in making the interviews happen.

## 1. Introduction

This work was carried out by Berkshire Consultancy Ltd (BCL), an independent civilian contractor, on behalf of DCDS Pers. The task comprised a qualitative piece of research, being part of one work strand towards reviewing existing policies on the exclusion of women from ground close combat roles.

The Ministry of Defence is obliged to assess whether the justification for excluding women from ground close combat roles can be maintained and to notify the European Commission of the results of the assessment. The policy was last reviewed in 2002. On the advice of the Ministry of Defence's Legal Advisers, the Secretary of State has agreed that a review of this policy should be carried out in 2009-10.

The focus of the review will be on the exclusion of women from ground close combat roles. Other roles, such as the exclusion of women from service in submarines, will not be considered. It is not the intention to re-evaluate the work carried out as part of the previous review in 2002, but to build upon it.

The review will comprise:

1. A review of recent literature (published since 2002) on the effectiveness of mixed gender teams in a combat environment;
2. An assessment of women's roles in recent operations;
3. Consideration of the experience of other nations in employing women in ground close combat roles.

This report addresses strand 2 only. For this strand, BCL were commissioned in September 2009 to undertake both quantitative and qualitative research to investigate the impact of mixed gender teams on small team cohesion during ground close combat incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002. This report incorporates the qualitative research only; the quantitative research is reported in a separate document.

## 2. Background

The role played by women in the UK Armed Forces was formally recognised after World War II with the permanent establishment of Women's Services. Further significant changes took place in the 1990s, and from 1998 onwards women were allowed to serve in the front line onboard ships, as pilots of combat aircraft, and in combat support roles in the Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers. However, women remain excluded from serving in ground close combat roles whose primary function is to close with and kill the enemy. Such roles are currently required of the Royal Marines General Service (RMGS) the Household Cavalry and Royal Armoured Corps (H Cav/RAC), the Infantry, and the Royal Air Force Regiment. (In addition, women do not serve on submarines or as mine clearance divers due to medical reasons.) (Women in Armed Forces. May 2002) | 1 |.

The exclusion of women from specific male roles in the military is covered under Section 85(4) of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Application to Armed Forces etc.) Regulations 1994, which

states that "Nothing in this Act shall render unlawful an act done for the purpose of ensuring the combat effectiveness of the naval, military or air forces of the Crown". An unsuccessful challenge to this regulation was mounted in the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in 1999, whose ruling was that Member States can derogate from the principle of equal treatment in the interests of combat effectiveness, but such derogation must be necessary and appropriate.

Under the European Community Equal Treatment Directive, a review of the role of women in such combat environments is required every eight years, in order to determine whether maintaining such derogation from the Act is still justifiable. The last review was carried out in 2002, and the decision was taken to retain the existing policy of employing only male personnel in certain combat roles.

### **Reasons for Decision taken in 2002**

*The Secretary of State is satisfied that as some women will certainly be able to meet the standard required of personnel performing in close combat roles, the evidence of women's lower physical capacity should not, in itself, be a reason to maintain the restrictions. Nor are the identified psychological differences between men and women, or the gap in the capacity for aggression, compelling evidence that women would perform less well in close combat.*

*The key issue is the potential impact of gender mixing in the small teams essential to success in the close combat environment. The small size of the basic unit in ground combat, coupled with the unrelenting mental and physical pressure extending over days or weeks, sets them apart from other military roles. Even small failures in a high-intensity close combat environment can lead to loss of life or the failure of the team to meet its objectives. None of the work that either has been, or could be, done can illuminate the key question of the impact of gender mixing on the combat team in close combat conditions.*

*Given the lack of direct evidence, from either field exercises or from experience of other countries, the Secretary of State concluded that military judgement must form the basis of any decision. The military viewpoint was that under the conditions of a high intensity close-quarter battle, group cohesion becomes of much greater significance to team performance and, in such an environment, the consequences of failure can have far-reaching and grave consequences. To admit women would, therefore, involve a risk with no gains in terms of combat effectiveness to offset it.*

*The above arguments have been considered in relation to each of the units and roles in question - the Royal Marines General Service, Household Cavalry and Royal Armoured Corps, Infantry and the RAF Regiment - to decide whether or not they apply equally to them all. As all the roles necessitate individuals working together in small teams which have to face and engage the enemy at close range, the Secretary of State for Defence concluded that the case for lifting the current restrictions on women serving in combat roles has not been made for any of the units in question. Taking the risk that the inclusion of women in close combat teams could adversely affect those units in the extraordinary circumstances of high intensity close combat cannot be justified.*

The next review is due in 2009/2010, and the findings of the present study will form part of the evidence base towards informing future policy decisions relating to this issue.

Since 2002, the UK has entered two significant conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, where there have been a high incidence of ground close combat incidents. Women have often been involved in these incidents, whilst fulfilling various roles. This allows us now to investigate the

impact on small team cohesion of having women present during ground close combat, by reviewing these incidents.

## **Research Aim**

The aim of this piece of qualitative research is:

***To carry out interviews with men and women who have been involved in ground close combat incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002, in order to provide objective evidence of the impact of mixed gender teams on small team/section cohesion.***

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Selection of incidents/participants**

This task was carried out by DM (A) Employment Branch. Information for this section of the report has been taken from a report supplied by DM (A).

#### **Selection of incidents**

Single-Service 1\*s wrote to their respective Commanding Officers of units through the chain of command in May 2009 in order to gain information on incidents where women had been involved in ground close combat. COs were tasked to trawl through their unit's corporate memory, Regimental War Diaries and the recollections of their Officers, SNCOs and soldiers in order to identify specific instances where members of their unit were involved in ground close combat and where these situations included Servicewomen who took an active part.

Directing units to gather this information was assessed as being the most efficient and effective approach, as:

- All units were approached, thus generating a high level of responses from different regiments in a short space of time;
- Resulting incidents came from a wide range of locations and dates;
- Incidents were easy to record via a standardized system. This method provided qualitative data about what happened in these incidents to enable DM (A) to assess if they were ground close combat or not, and also quantitative data with an indication of the potential number of incidents.

Disadvantages of the method were recognised as being:

- Descriptions of the incidents were largely based on anecdotal evidence and memories. This left many of the descriptions of the incidents incomplete and not entirely accurate; this was addressed by a number of follow-up questions to clarify events and confirm that the incident should be researched further through interviews;
- Some incidents would have been unrecorded or unreported;
- Potential reliance on the 'gatekeepers' to assist in providing details of incidents;
- Turnover of personnel in each unit would limit the corporate knowledge of earlier incidents to some extent.

As a result, it was accepted that, potentially, many incidents could not be captured.

Returns were received in June / July 2009 and the resulting potential ground close combat incidents were collated in a database by DM (A). Each incidence was given a *serial number, date of incident, unit involved, detailed description of incident itself, name/service number/contact detail of female/s involved in incident, location, names/contact details of males involved.*

A large number of incidents were collected, and a refinement process was implemented to filter out the incidents that could be taken through to the next stage, i.e. those that were confirmed as fitting with the agreed criteria and definition of “ground close combat”.

A definition of **ground close combat** was agreed by a tri-service working group set up for this project as:

**“Ground close combat is combat with the enemy over short range on the ground.”**

Confirmation of whether incidents in the database matched this definition was achieved by DM (A) filtering them according to the following criteria:

- Factors which resulted in the incident being included in the interview phase:
  - Was the female involved in a contact situation?
  - Was the female fired at by direct fire weapons?
  - Did the enemy fire result in the individual having to participate actively in a response to the fire?
- Factors which resulted in the incident being excluded in the interview phase:
  - Was the incident involving an IED with no follow up contact?
  - Was the incident an ambush where only the IA of driving through was used?
  - Was the female inside a FOB at the time of the incident?
  - Was the incident only due to enemy indirect fire?

Initial analysis of the incidents by DM (A) staff, endorsed by the tri-service working group, re-categorised incidents as:

1. Clear case of women in ground close combat that fit with the definition.
2. Unclear case of women in ground close combat which would require further investigation.
3. Incident did not meet criteria for ground close combat.

Further refining was conducted by SO2 Diversity through investigations into each of the incidents under “1” (to confirm those who had been involved in the incident and establish their contact details and locations), during which further information came to light about incidents which resulted in some re-classification. The incidents that were not followed up by interviews were retained for audit purposes.

## **Selection of interviewees**

DM (A) arranged the interviews, selecting from each incident:

- The female(s) involved;
- The Commander (if male);

- Ideally 2 other men from different ranks, being the most pertinent in terms of being closest to the incident/female

Availability often was a contributing factor to exactly who was interviewed, given time and budget constraints, and it was not always possible to talk to an additional 2 men from different ranks.

For some of the incidents identified, the individuals involved were still on ops or on post-op leave, and could not be interviewed within the timescales of the project.

In total 27 incidents (24 from Afghanistan and 3 from Iraq) were researched through interviews. Of these, 25 involved personnel from the Army, 2 from the Navy and 5 from the RM. None involved personnel from the RAF, including the RAF Regiment. The majority of incidents took place since 2007.

### **3.2 Interview design**

It was agreed that a semi-structured interview format would be adopted, to ensure a balance between consistency and freedom to explore particular issues or views that came up.

The structured interview process was developed by BCL in consultation with Occupational Psychologists from DCDS Pers and DAPS (Directorate of Army Personnel Strategy) Science. It was then reviewed by the Scientific Advisory Committee, and ethically reviewed by Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committees.

The interview was then piloted with an Infantry officer and soldier (Pte), to represent the ranks that would be included in the research. They were taken through each question by a BCL consultant, and gave feedback on how easy the questions were to understand and answer, and on terminology to use/exclude.

All interviewees were sent in advance a briefing sheet on the background, purpose and use of the interview – this participant briefing is included in Annex A. Along with this, was included a consent form which they were asked to bring along to the interview, included in Annex B.

At the front of the interview schedule was a copy of the briefing sheet, which interviewers were to go through with the interviewee if they had not yet had chance to read through their version, before conducting the interview, and before asking whether they agreed to the interview.

The main part of the interview then was split, essentially, into 4 parts:

1. Background factual data – gathering information about the participant (woman's role, interviewee's rank at time of incident, number of ground close combat incidents they had been involved in) and the small team/section they were with at the time of incident:
  - Size of team;
  - Number of attached members (male and female);
  - Length of time the team had worked together – in total and prior to the incident;
  - How long they had known the other team members for; and
  - How many times the team had worked together before the incident.

This information was gathered because it was thought to be potentially relevant to the perceived

cohesion of the team, based on previous work on cohesion.

2. Leadership – of the small team/section during the incident. Identifying the gender of the IC and 2IC and exploring the interviewee's perceptions of:
  - How well these commanders performed;
  - How they could have improved;
  - Extent to which they treated everyone in the team the same, and if not, how;
  - How, if at all, the commanders' behaviour affected the team.

This information was gathered because previous research suggested leadership was an important influence on cohesion, and specifically because we were interested to see whether the commanders treated the women differently in any way from the men.

3. Perceptions – of the impact of having a mixed gender team. Interviewees were asked to focus on the incident and the following areas were explored:
  - Extent to which the woman was an equal member of the team;
  - Impact of the presence of the woman on the section/small team commander;
  - Impact of the presence of the woman on anyone else in the team;
  - Impact on getting the task done.

Male interviewees were also asked about:

- The impact on them of having a woman present;
  - Whether they were aware of her being a woman during contact;
  - Whether it affected their behaviour in any other way;
- And, assuming they had been involved in ground close combat incidents with men only in their small team/section, which would provide a comparison:
- If they would have treated her differently had she been a man;
  - If the commander had behaved any differently towards the woman (than towards men);
  - If the commander had behaved any differently towards anyone else (than if only men had been present);
  - If the woman's presence had affected the commander's judgment in any way.

Men and women were then asked:

- How, if at all, has this incident affected your attitude towards women in ground close combat? Why?

Their attitudes and beliefs were then explored.

4. Cohesion. The definition of cohesion was shared with the interviewees and their reactions to this sought. They were then asked about their perceptions of cohesion during this ground close combat incident:
  - Rating cohesion on a scale of 1-5 and reasons for this rating;
  - Factors positively affecting/influencing cohesion;
  - Factors negatively affecting/influencing cohesion;
  - What would have made cohesion excellent.

Interviewees were then asked to compare cohesion between incidents, if they had been involved in more than one mixed-gender incidents, and to explain their perceptions of the

reasons for any differences. They were also asked specifically whether they felt cohesion was different in later incidents as a result of having been in previous incidents.

Men were then asked about a comparable incident involving a male-only small team/section, again exploring:

- Rating cohesion on a scale of 1-5 and reasons for this rating;
- Factors positively affecting/influencing cohesion;
- Factors negatively affecting/influencing cohesion;
- What would have made cohesion excellent.

Additionally, interviewees were asked early in the interview to describe the incident itself – background to the incident, how it arose, where it took place, what the woman was doing during it. This was not actually used directly in the analysis, but more provided the context for the discussion and also sometimes provided prompts for further exploration under the headings above.

A copy of the interview schedule for both men and women is included in Annexes D and E.

### **3.3 Definitions**

For the purposes of this project, definitions were needed to correctly and consistently focus interviewees' attention. These were included in the briefing notes and taken to the interviews on a separate handout, for easy reference during the interview. This is included in Annex C. The definitions were agreed as follows:

#### **Ground close combat**

As mentioned above, the definition of **ground close combat** was agreed by all 3 services as:

***“Ground close combat is combat with the enemy over short range on the ground.”***

#### **Incidents of ground close combat**

This definition was agreed by DM (A) and MoD DCDS Pers, as:

***“A situation arising from a section coming under attack, where the small team/section came under direct fire (RPG/small arms) and had to respond as a result. These incidents are therefore examples of ground close combat, and form the focus of this research”.***

#### **Cohesion**

The original definition agreed by the Steering Group was the military's definition of *Moral Cohesion*, which is:

“A source of moral fortitude to fight and to keep on fighting....cohesion occurs when individuals want, or are encouraged, to work together, normally to share tasks, provide each other with support and to achieve a common enterprise. Moral cohesion depends on cultural solidarity, shared experiences, a commonsense of worth, appropriate discipline and an expressed collective identity, which is sustained by shared common values and standards. It embodies

genuine and deep comradeship that endures, notwithstanding violence and fear of death and injury”.

A different definition of cohesion had been used in the 2002 review:

“The ability of a unit to remain committed towards the same goal utilizing the unit members’ shared standards and support for each other. This will be especially vulnerable in the harshest of conditions (combat), when the commitment of individuals to remain in the unit, and the motivation to complete the assigned goal, will be under extreme pressure”.

The researchers felt that it was important that the definition be simple to understand by all interviewees, and so a new, more succinct definition was proposed and agreed, that was a combination of the above 2 definitions, and did not specifically refer to moral cohesion, which it was agreed might appear too narrow:

***“The ability (of a section) to remain committed and motivated to reaching a shared goal and to support, trust and depend on each other in doing so. It is particularly important in combat, when commitment and motivation are under extreme pressure”.***

### **Combat Effectiveness**

Combat effectiveness was not specifically addressed within this research, but this definition was included, as it references the importance of cohesion. Based on the definition in JDP 0.01 Edn 7, Jun 06;

***“Combat effectiveness is defined as the ability of a unit/formation/ship, weapon system or equipment to carry out its assigned mission, role or function. The cohesion of a unit is a vital factor in its combat effectiveness”.***

### **3.4 Conducting the Interviews**

Wherever possible, we travelled to meet interviewees face-to-face. This entailed visiting a number of locations around the UK and Germany, aiming to carry out as many interviews as possible each day (ideally 5-6, depending on travel time) in order to do this in the most cost-effective way. On some occasions, 2 interviewers went to the same location so that parallel interviews could be conducted. 27 interviews were carried out over the telephone, as it was not possible to physically meet everyone within budget and time constraints. 8 BCL consultants acted as interviewers; all were briefed thoroughly on the project and the format of the interview.

Military personnel (usually a project lead from DM (A)) accompanied the BCL consultant(s) to the interview location, partly for ease of entry/movement around the camps, and partly to confirm the incident to be discussed with the interviewee. They then handed over to the BCL consultant to conduct the interview. No Army personnel were present during any interview. Interviews were scheduled to last an hour; in reality, some were shorter and others longer, depending on how much the interviewee had to say.

The interview format was then strictly followed:

1. Check the interviewee had read the background briefing; if not, go through this with them.
2. Remind them that participation is voluntary and, if they wish to go ahead, ask them to sign the consent form, and the interviewer also to sign.

3. Go through the interview questions, in order, probing where appropriate for further information.
4. Ask if the interviewee has anything else to add. Thank them for their participation.

Interviewees were guided to focus throughout the interview on the small team or section they were with and to focus on the duration of the incident(s) only. This was emphasized at the beginning and throughout the interview.

A number of issues were often encountered in guiding interviewees to the specific incident identified:

- They were unable to remember the specific incident they had been asked to talk about – in this case they either spoke about another incident with the same team (in the men's case, the same female) or spoke more generally about incidents involving this team;
- Men had not been close to the female in the incidents identified for discussion but were able to talk about others where they had been with her;
- A male interviewee had not actually been close to the female during any incident. In this case, the interview was excluded from the analysis as it was not able to provide evidence towards the research aim. The DM(A) officer accompanying the BCL consultant was then often able to identify, with the interviewee, an alternative male interviewee who was present, and to set up an extra interview with this other male.

Sometimes interviewees were not able to respond to one or more of the initial factual questions, e.g. number of incidents they had been involved in, number of times the exact team worked together. This was usually due either to lack of memory (some interviewees were talking about operations a few years ago) or to the way in which small teams were put together at different times; for example, medical personnel being selected from a pool that was with a company for 6 months, such that a male interviewee might have worked with 1 or more medical personnel on and off throughout the tour, and could not remember or identify exactly who he had worked with when or how many times. Interviewees gave approximate answers where possible, in other situations these items were left blank on the schedules.

The interviewers took notes onto the interview schedule, which provide the raw data record. These were then entered, by each interviewer, onto a spreadsheet for analysis.

### **Advantages of the methodology**

- Richness of data, through gathering many quotes and examples from a range of servicemen and servicewomen. This provides a much fuller picture than would a questionnaire project alone, as it helps us understand what lies beneath people's perceptions and ratings of cohesion, and to explore some of the subtleties within their different experiences.
- Semi-structured interview format encouraged both consistency in focus and also different experiences and perceptions to be more fully explored as relevant to each individual situation.
- Interviews were particularly helpful in this situation, as they allowed the interviewer to focus the interviewee on the central research question. In particular, interviewees often tended to talk about their general perceptions or attitudes, and the interviewer was able to re-focus them on actual incidents/experiences; also, where interviewees were initially

vague, for example about specific incidents or the teams they were in, the interviewer helped them to be more specific by careful listening and questioning.

### **Disadvantages of the methodology**

- Memory issues. This was relevant in two ways: 1) identifying incidents in the first place relied upon the memory of the chain of command; and 2) some interviewees struggled to remember details of the incidents they had been involved in, and sometimes were unable to remember specific incidents at all at first. However, usually as the interview progressed, interviewees did talk about particular incidents as they started to remember more.
- DM (A) reported difficulties at times in gaining access to relevant personnel to identify and confirm incidents, resulting potentially in the exclusion of incidents from the research.
- Some interviewees were unable to be specific about the small team they were in, and related more to the much wider group, some stating their team comprised more than 50 people. Where men were not physically close to the female their interviews were excluded, however, we cannot be sure for all the interviewees that they were thinking about a small team throughout the whole interview.
- Interviewees differed in their ability to specifically answer some of the questions, and the quality of output of some interviews was lower than others. A few appeared unable to identify or explore any subtleties beyond what appeared to be didactic and generalised perceptions and attitudes, despite the best efforts of the interviewer to focus them on the actual incident(s).

Note: The incidents discussed in interviews were situations where women had been involved in ground close combat, and as such met the criteria for the research aim of investigating the effect on cohesion of having women present during ground close combat. Clearly, in terms of the overall review of the exclusion of women from ground close combat roles, this is the closest we can currently get to understanding the likely impact on small team cohesion in situations where women and men would together be closing with the enemy. A caveat to the research overall would be that it does not, and cannot, by definition, include incidents where women have been closing with the enemy.

## 4. Analysis

Overall, 105 interviews were carried out, 28 with women and 77 with men. In total, 8 interviews with men were not used in the analysis due to the interviewee not actually having been present alongside the female during the incident and therefore being unable to comment on the impact of having her there. Details of the 97 interviewees – 28 women and 69 men – whose interviews were included in the analysis are included in Annex F.

Two spreadsheets were set up, one for male interviewees and one for female, into which each interviewer entered their responses. Each interviewee was given a unique code, providing an ultimate audit trail back to the notes taken during the interview.

Once all the raw data and quotes had been entered, certain data were grouped, e.g. size of team, number of times the team had carried out tasks together, for ease of reporting and analysis.

The analysis then essentially comprised looking at each question/group of questions in turn and going through the responses to pull out:

- Key themes;
- Quotes to illustrate both the themes and the diversity of responses;
- Any patterns of responses or observed differences depending on gender of interviewee;
- Any other patterns or differences around other factors such as cap badge, size of team etc. These factors were specifically checked where they were thought to be potentially relevant, notably on ratings of cohesion. However, the small sample sizes and the sometimes quite large proportion of interviewees who had not answered a particular question, made this exercise generally difficult and unreliable, and it was not carried out systematically for all questions. Where these factors are mentioned in the findings, it is important to note that they are observations aimed at adding richness to the overall findings, and not statistical analysis/conclusions.

A copy of each (male and female) interview schedule is included in Annexes D and E cross-referenced to the findings section.

## 5. Findings

This section presents back what men and women said during the interviews, structured around the interview schedule. We have pulled out themes and clearly identified these, supporting them with a range of quotes. We have also indicated where interviewees held more disparate views, and again given a flavour of what these were through a range of quotes.

### 5.1 Background Factual Data

The following background factual data was collected to understand the context within which each incident took place, in terms of the number of incidents the interviewee had experienced and also the nature of the small team/section they were in. This information was collected because it was considered relevant to perceptions of cohesion, and is presented here for background information. Where any clear patterns were discernable in the main findings, according to any of these factors around nature of the small team/section, they are clearly highlighted.

#### 5.1.1 Number of ground close combat incidents with a woman attached.

Men and women were asked how many ground close combat incidents (according to the definition in front of them) they had been involved in. Some found this difficult to answer, and gave approximate answers, or a range. Some were unable to estimate this at all.

No of Incidents where section has included a woman (approx)	Men	Women	Total
1	20	3	23
2-5	17	6	23
6-10	7	5	12
11-20	5	6	11
21-50	11	7	18
51-100	3	1	4
101+	3	0	3
Couldn't answer	3	0	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>97</b>

Men were also asked how many all-male incidents they had been in. Many found this difficult, several saying "too many to count/remember". Most men had been in more all-male incidents than mixed-gender; a small minority had been in fewer all-male incidents:

No of Incidents where section has included men only (approx)	Total
0	2
1	1
2-5	12
6-10	6

11-20	8
21-50	18
51-100	4
101+	6
Couldn't answer	12
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>69</b>

### 5.1.2 Size of small team/section at time of incident

Interviewees were asked to focus during the interview on the small team/section they were in during the incident. The number of interviewees who identified with various sizes of teams are shown below. From the table below, it can be seen that some interviewees found it difficult to identify a small team/section, identifying instead with larger groups (e.g. platoon, company).

Size of Team	Men	Women	Total
1-3	3	0	3
4-6	14	6	20
7-10	15	7	22
11-20	13	9	21
21-30	10	5	15
31-60	10	0	10
61-100	3	0	3
101+	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>07</b>

### 5.1.3 Type of team

The type of team/section was recorded as being either an intact/formed team or a completely ad-hoc team put together for the purposes of the particular task or operation during which the incident occurred.

Type of Team	Men	Women	Total
Intact/formed	59	23	82
Completely ad-hoc	10	5	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>97</b>

Where teams/sections were intact/formed, the number of attachments (male and female) was identified by the interviewee. This gives a flavour of the composition of the teams, which was felt to be important as attached members would not know the other team members as well as the permanent intact team/section members knew each other. This in turn would be expected to influence cohesion, as knowing each other/time spent together was expected to be (and found to be) a key influence on small team/section cohesion. The table below shows the number of attachments, male, female and total, as present for male and female interviewees:

Number of attachments	Male interviewees	Female interviewees	Total
<b>Female attachments:</b>			
0	8	4	12
1	43	17	60
2	4	1	5
3	2	1	3
4+	0	0	0
Unidentified	2	0	2
<b>Male attachments:</b>			
0	18	10	28
1	6	2	8
2	2	3	5
3	7	3	10
4+	19	4	23
Unidentified	7	1	8
<b>Total number of attachments</b>			
0	6	4	10
1	13	6	19
2	5	2	7
3	3	2	5
4+	25	8	33
Unidentified	7	1	8

#### 5.1.4 How long did team work together (as formed at time of incident)

How long did the team work together?	Men	Women	Total
Less than a day	3	1	4
1-2 days	5	4	9
3-6 days	2	0	2
1 week	1	2	3
2 weeks	2	2	4
3 weeks	2	1	3
1 month	4	1	5
2 months	5	2	7
3 months	6	3	9
4 months	3	1	4
5 months	0	1	1
6 months	13	4	17
7 months	3	1	4
8 months	2	0	2

9 months	3	1	4
10 months	0	0	0
11 months	0	0	0
12 months	3	0	3
1-2 years	8	0	8
(blank)	4	4	8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>97</b>

### 5.1.5 How long had the team worked together before the incident?

How long did the team work together?	Men	Women	Total
Less than a day	6	7	13
1-2 days	3	2	5
3-6 days	3	1	4
1 week	3	2	5
2 weeks	3	3	6
3 weeks	2	0	2
1 month	4	0	4
2 months	6	2	8
3 months	6	2	8
4 months	5	4	9
5 months	1	0	1
6 months	8	0	8
7 months	1	0	1
8 months	5	0	5
9 months	3	1	4
10 months	0	0	0
11 months	0	0	0
12 months	0	0	0
1-2 years	6	0	6
More than 2 years	1	0	1
(blank)	3	4	7
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>97</b>

### 5.1.6 How long had the interviewee known the other team members?

This is difficult to represent in summary form. A couple of comparisons, however, show that a higher proportion of men generally reported knowing more of their team for longer:

- 4 women had known some or all of their team for a day or less, and 7 had known at least half their team for less than a week.... in contrast, 7 men had known some or all of their team for a day or less, and 5 had known at least half their team for less than a week.
- 12 women had known all or most of their team for over a month..... in contrast, 61 men had known all or most of their team for over a month.

Whilst this cannot be considered 100% accurate, it does suggest that men typically have spent more time with most of the team than have women.

### 5.1.7 How many times had the team carried out tasks together?

Overall, there was a large range of responses to this question, and it was not possible to meaningfully group responses, as many interviewees were not able to put a number on this, often responding “many” or “ongoing” over a period of time, for example. At the other end of the scale, there were 4 women and 8 men who said that the small team/section had never worked together before.

## 5.2 Leadership

This section covers interviewees’ comments around the leadership of their small team/section during the incident. Leadership was specifically covered during the interview as it has been found in past research to be an important factor in determining cohesion. The extent to which this appears to have been the case for interviewees in the current research is covered in the next section on cohesion: this section sets out the context in terms of information about the leaders and their performance, as assessed by the interviewees.

### 5.2.1 Gender/identity of the IC/2IC

#### Gender

The gender of the IC and 2IC for each interviewee’s small team/section is shown below.

Gender of section commander	Male interviewees	Female interviewees	Total
Male	60	25	85
Female	9	3	12
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>97</b>

Gender of 2IC	Male interviewees	Female interviewees	Total
Male	60	20	80
Female	0	1	1
N/A	9	7	16
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>97</b>

Gender of 2IC was given as N/A when interviewees did not identify a 2IC present in the small team/section.

## Identity of the IC/2IC

Interviewees were asked whether they themselves were the IC or 2IC in the team/section:

Role	Male interviewees	Female interviewees	Total
IC	31	3	34
2IC	6	1	7
Neither	32	24	56
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>97</b>

### 5.2.2 Performance of IC and 2IC

Interviewees were asked how well the IC and 2IC performed. Some who were themselves in these leadership roles did not answer this question. Others were sometimes unable to answer, usually because the commander was not physically present with them the whole time or had been injured.

A majority of interviewees who commented on their commander's performance, rated it as "very good" or "excellent", around a quarter said it was "good" and several said it was "OK/fine". Only 1 (male) interviewee said their (female) commander had not performed well.

There were a few gender differences in answers to these questions:

- Women were more positive about their commanders' performance than men were, more often saying their commander performed excellently or very well;
- Overall, men with female commanders felt the commander performed less well than did men with male commanders, i.e. men seemed to rate male commanders more highly than female commanders;
- No men rated the performance of female commanders as excellent or very good, saying their performance was "good" at best.

There were only 3 female section commanders in the incidents we researched, and we did not interview any women working under a female section commander, so it is not possible to comment on this aspect of gender and leadership.

In terms of the performance of the 2IC, overall a very similar pattern of responses was given across all interviewees, although there was a larger majority commenting that the 2IC performed excellently or very well. Women again appeared overall more positive about the 2IC's performance than did men. However, many interviewees did not comment on the performance of the 2IC, again sometimes (for men) because they themselves identified as the 2IC, and sometimes because there was not a 2IC present with them at the time. Since only 1 of the 2ICs was female it is not possible to identify any patterns in terms of how male versus female 2ICs were perceived.

### 5.2.3 How could the leaders have improved?

Most interviewees were unable to identify anything specific or said that the IC/2IC could not have done anything better. Where specific improvements were mentioned they tended to be around the need for greater experience or technical skills, greater knowledge of the team or acting more quickly.

*“More experience in coming under fire and confidence/knowledge of how to deal with the situation - we'd only been in theatre a short time”. (M)*

*“I knew that the incident wasn't as potentially dangerous as others, but I was unsure of the capability of the team, so held more close control. Therefore giving orders was slower and more intricate. Also I was unsure what the ANA would do. I used more centralised command and control than later on when I dished tasks out more”. (M)*

### 5.2.4 To what extent did the leaders treat everyone the same?

These questions were asked in order to help understand the extent to which men and women appeared to be treated equally by the commander.

Predominantly, men and women felt that leaders treated everyone the same and this was the case for male and female leaders. From interviewees' comments, however, often where they said they were all treated the same, they went on to qualify this statement and described how the leader had actually taken account of individual differences in a number of ways, hence not treated everyone exactly the same. This was not seen to be a problem.

Points made by those who felt the leader treated everyone the same included (all about male commanders):

- Women treated as equals

*“I forgot I was a woman. The Commander focused on priorities, getting the rounds down and getting out, not focused on me. I didn't feel treated differently in any way or afterwards at debrief” (F)*

*“He made us women feel equal - treated us as equals. (F)*

*“He treated me as 'one of the lads” (F)*

- It is within the context of people doing different jobs

*“According to the job individuals were there to do” (M)*

- It is within the context of being aware of different people's capabilities

*“I chose the woman over a Para-trained man for this patrol as she was the best person to do job. It is more about competence and attitude than gender” (M).*

- Women were treated equally as they proved themselves

*"We were all treated with the same professionalism, the Ghurkha's initially tried to look after the girls, but once they proved themselves capable they stopped. There was a good team spirit and atmosphere, and regardless of rank and gender, everyone was consulted" (M)*

*"I would have had more confidence in him- and him in me- if I had trained with them. By the 3rd incident we could trust each other more but I was initially a bit unsure" (F)*

- Within the context of different levels of experience

*"Depending on the situation, if a young marine had been shaken up, you exercise a bit of humility" (M)*

*"I was straight out of training (5 days). My 2IC helped by providing me with advice whilst allowing me to make decisions" (M)*

- Within the context of differences in rank

*"He was fair, but didn't have the same relationship with everyone due to rank, he didn't find it so easy to talk to lower members of my team You would expect him to go and chat to them after incidents - he only did 2 or 3 times." (F)*

- Familiarity with women

*"He was Royal Artillery, used to having women present, he knew how to look after them. The Infantry had no clue because they don't work with them" (M)*

A minority of both men and women answered the question by saying that the leaders did not treat everyone the same. Points included (all about male commanders except where indicated otherwise):

- Women treated differently

*"You needed to be aware of the woman in case she was injured or needed help"(M)*

*"He probably treated me nicer than the lads included in the Section". (F)*

- Physical ability

*"Allowances were made for the female who couldn't carry enough, which was not a problem.... others didn't have to carry more as a result so there was no impact" (M)*

- Lack of experience

*"They sidelined the female slightly, it was their baby and they had no reason to consult her. They would rather have people with more experience." (M)*

*"I treated the medic differently – she was out of her depth, so there was more telling her what to do. She seemed to freeze a bit, she stood like a frightened lamb; she didn't seem to have been exposed to the battle. I paid more attention to her, because she was with me, protecting me" (M)*

- Differential capabilities (positive)

*“In a good way. They were aware of their weaker/stronger people and treated them accordingly” (F)*

*“Yes and no. I try to - but realise people react differently. You identify different people's abilities, rely on some more for different things. In terms of it's about getting the job done - yes, treat all the same”. (M)*

- Personality clashes

*“The (female) boss didn't get on with 1 of the crew” (M)*

- Familiarity with women

*“The IC was used to women, no questions or comments. The 2IC was not used to women (Infantry) – for example he checked if we'd had breakfast, showed more concern over our day-to-day needs – but this stopped after couple of days” (F)*

NB some of the above comments seem to be not directly relevant to contact.

### **5.2.5 Did the leaders' behaviour affect the team?**

This explored whether the leader had any particular impact on the team, as perceived by the interviewee, which yielded, in some cases, some information on how the leaders' behaviour might impact cohesion.

Many interviewees did not answer this question (often because they were the leader) or were unable to say. Of those who did answer, there was an equal split between those who said the leader's behaviour did affect the team and those who said it did not.

Where interviewees felt there was no impact, they generally made comments about the team just getting on with the job and everyone doing what they were told, which is identified in section 5.4 of this report as being a key factor contributing to cohesion, e.g.

*“Everyone was left to do what they know to do” (M)*

For those who said the leaders' behaviour had a positive effect, there were a range of comments around the leaders' ability to encourage, inspire, direct and motivate:

*“They encouraged us and told us how well we were doing all the time. They kept morale high even when things happened”. (F)*

*“Being positive, leading with example, going first, demonstrating ability” (M)*

*“It makes a difference to the team when the command chain are decisive” (M)*

*“Was influential throughout from point of contact in a positive way”. (M)*

3 interviewees (2M 1F) said the leaders' behaviour had a negative impact, although only 1 was specific about what this was:

*"She needed more experience, knowledge and a willingness to listen" (M).*

### **5.3 Perceptions**

This section explores interviewees' perceptions of the impact of having a woman present during ground close combat incidents. These questions did not specifically ask about cohesion, but were designed to obtain interviewees' views about the impact of having a woman in the small team/section during ground close combat incidents, and to identify what, if anything, was perceived (by the men) to be different than if the team/section had been all male.

#### **5.3.1 Extent to which the female was an equal member of the team**

This question was asked, as it was felt that if women did not feel, or were not seen by others to be, an equal member of the team, this might have an impact on cohesion.

##### **Female equal**

The majority of both men and women felt that the female involved had been an equal member of the team.

Several commented on the woman's behaviour /performance being no different to the men's:

*"I felt like an equal member as everyone including me was tasked with carrying a mortar round." (F)*

*"Pretty much. We were on top cover, she on the right, me on the left. We both turned and started firing at same moment – it didn't matter she was a medical sergeant, just that she was getting rounds out. The kit was not an issue - she carried her own and was happy to carry her own weight". (M)*

*"There was no difference in the professional manner in which she conducted herself compared with a similar rank - she performed better than the 2IC. She was a highly professional and effective team member, she showed genuine courage, and gave an exemplary performance." (M)*

*"100%, it's just a team, each member needed others to do their jobs, all had to rely on each other" (F)*

Some women commented that they had not been treated differently by the men or were not seen as being different because they were a woman:

*"There was nothing different about the way they acted towards me than any other attachments, sometimes I was treated even more equally than the male attachments – there was more banter, more confidence in me. I/ they didn't tone down the banter at all" (F)*

*"In every way- I was Captain of the Royal Artillery doing an FST Commander role- not a female in the Royal Artillery doing a female FST Commander role" (F)*

One woman said *“No doubt about it”, and pointed out that “you have to prove yourself more as a woman, but it’s not a problem once you have.” (F)*

Some extended their responses to beyond the incidents:

*“For the whole time. I was treated like one of the lads. I chatted to them. There were about 100 people there. I talked to everyone. We were living together, I shared my tent with 2 lads” (F)*

Some interviewees also differentiated between different situations.

*“She moved slower than men in the field but on patrol could patrol better than some of the blokes. On patrol she was wrapped in cotton wool a bit but as soon as contact happened, she was treated as an equal member of the team.” (M)*

### **Female not equal**

A minority of interviewees did not believe that the female was an equal member of the team, and had behaved and/or been treated differently than the men.

*“She was a very good dog handler, but she should have been firing back. I would have expected this to be the case had the dog handler been a man. Some colleagues were surprised she didn’t fight.” (M)*

*“She was asked to carry back weapons rather than bodies.” (M)*

A number of interviewees talked about how the woman was treated differently, but this was more due to her role or cap badge than her gender; some said that a male in the same role might have been treated the same although others said he would not have.

*“But this was more about the cap badge than gender. They are infantry so it’s what they do. Any medic, male or female, would feel inferior in trade. There were guys there that we less fit than me so wasn’t about gender at all.” (F)*

Interestingly, in relation to cap badge, men in the Infantry were generally more likely to say that the woman was an equal member of the team than men from other cap badges, which suggests that the above view, where held, may be held more by the women working with the Infantry than by the Infantry themselves. However, numbers for several cap badges were small, and so no reliable generalizations can be made.

### **5.3.2 Impact of female presence on male interviewees**

When asked what the impact was on them of having a female present during an incident, the majority of men said “none”. This was also the view of a very small majority of the male section commanders. The majority of men interviewed also said that the presence of a female did not have any effect on their behaviour.

Some went on to comment that during the heat of the moment they were focused on getting the task done and were not thinking about having a female present.

*“No impact, straight to job what you are trained to do” (M)*

*“I got my head down quicker than she did!! It became quickly apparent she was part of the team” (M)*

*“At the time of contact I was more worried about myself!” (M)*

Some commanders specifically identified how there *had* been an impact on them of having a woman present:

*“She wanted to fight. I had to calm her down.” (M)*

*“I didn't feel any huge need to protect them. As Commander in the incident all had to perform duties. But in build-up to incidents I was careful where I put them - like single & married soldiers. I was unsure if she was up to it. I had to re-task men (do 2 jobs) as I was 2 people (the women) down at certain points.” (M)*

*“It detracted from the task in hand” (M)*

A couple of other men also identified particular impacts on themselves e.g.

*“I didn't treat the male and female medic any different. But I did have to keep looking round and making sure she was keeping up, I wouldn't have had to worry as much if they were all men” (M)*

The remaining interviewees did not specifically answer this question in terms of impact on *them*, some talking about the impact on other people, others making more general comments, often not specifically related to the incident, e.g.

*“There was better banter and they had a massively good impact on the team.” (M)*

### **At the time, were male interviewees aware of her being a woman?**

Overall, there were slightly more men who said they were not aware of the female being a woman than those who were, and a number of men were unable to say.

- **Not aware**

Those who said they were not aware of her being a woman during the incident, mostly commented on being more aware of people's roles and tasks rather than their gender:

*“Not to start with- then I was aware of needing to know where my medic was” (M)*

*“Not gender specific, she's there for a job” (M)*

*“They did their job effectively repeatedly and earned respect from all others” (M)*

- **Aware**

Those men who were aware of the female being a woman gave a variety of different reasons. Comments included concerns about the female getting hurt/shot and the difference in the female's physical ability.

*"I didn't want her to get shot - reactions of guys would have been very different."(M)*

*"They had to be aware of her because of the threat to her. They needed to know where she was at all times." (M)*

*"As Commander on the ground, there was a lot more going on. Once the women were OK, once they were dealt with, I pushed forward." (M)*

*"I heard her high pitched scream while returning fire". (M)*

*"She did well for a girl. However when we needed to move fast she couldn't keep up." (M)*

### **Would male interviewees have treated her different if she had been a man?**

The majority of men, especially section commanders, said they would not have treated the female any differently if she had been male.

- **No**

Not all interviewees elaborated on their answers, however of the non section commanders who said they wouldn't have treated the female differently if she had been a man, one-third commented that they treated the female according to her role, experience and capability rather than her gender:

*"It's based on performance, if the person is prepared to fight and do their job, it doesn't matter if they are female" (M)*

*"People just pull together in difficult situations- if you need someone's expertise it doesn't matter what gender they are" (M)*

*"No - she's a Captain, It doesn't matter if a male or female is commanding, you do as you are told"*

Most section commanders said they wouldn't have treated the female differently if she had been a man, a quarter of them again saying that they treated the female according to her role, experience and capability rather than her gender:

*"During contact, the female's job was to keep her head down, because she was a valuable asset as a dog handler. I would have expected a male dog handler to shelter during contact." (M)*

*"Not if they were men with the same skills - it is the capability of the individual not their gender which is the issue." (M)*

One commander, whilst saying that he had not actually treated her any differently in the incident, commented that *if* the incident had required hand to hand fighting with the enemy he may have hesitated to send her forward instead of a man.

- **Yes**

A small number of non section commanders said they *would have* treated the female differently if she had been a man. All of these commented that they would have told her to do or would have expected her to, undertake different tasks:

*“I would have told her to fight/return fire.” (M, 2IC)*

*“When dismounted, the other guys had to carry some of her kit. This didn't happen with the man in the role.” (M)*

A minority of the commanders said they would have treated the female differently if she had been a man, two of them saying they would have been a bit more aggressive/abrupt with her if she had been a man.

Additionally, there were comments from a few other men during the interview, that they were less happy giving the women extra tasks or that they had had less flexibility with the women, as they were not skilled in a wide a range of fighting tasks as the trained men.

Again, a couple commented that they had treated her differently but that was because of her role not her gender:

*“She was treated different as a medic – a valued resource” (M)*

### **5.3.3 Impact of female presence on section commander**

For some of the questions asked in this section, many interviewees did not comment because a) the interviewee was the section commander (men's comments on the impact on them of having a woman present then being captured in 5.3.2 above) and b) some of these perception questions overlap and not everyone separately answered every question.

- **No impact on section commander**

The vast majority of those who did answer felt that there was no impact on the commander of having a female present, regardless of the female's role or the interviewee's cap badge.

Most comments were around the commander being too busy controlling the company to be concerned with the female. Interviewees described the incidents as happening very quickly and the commander's attention was more focused on returning fire:

*“He was far too busy controlling the company. We suppressed the enemy while he was finding out about the casualty etc” (M)*

*“I didn't have to think about 'what allowances do I need to make?’” (M)*

*“The Platoon Sergeant was too busy to think about anything but the task at hand” (F)*

For the women who believed their presence had had no impact on the section commander (in these incidents, 18 of the commanders in question were male and 2 were female), comments were also made that:

- Any impact that they believed their presence had had on the section commander was about their role not gender (2 females said this and both were Medics), and
- By the time of the incident, females had had enough time to prove their capability:

*“The CLP Commander didn't treat me any differently, he gave me as hard a time as anyone else” (F)*

*“We had been together nearly 5 months at this point. Normally I think it would play on their mind more. He knew I wasn't weaker than any of the men by this stage as I had been carrying more weight than some of the guys. If it was earlier on it might have.” (F)*

- **Some impact on section commander**

A minority of both men and women felt that the female's presence had had an impact on the commander during contact.

The women who felt that their presence had an impact on the section commander all thought that their section commander had performed well or very well. Their comments were predominantly around being protected more:

*“The commander asked a young soldier to stay with me” (F)*

*“I was protected in a ‘safe area’ during contact” (F)*

*“At first, we (females) were his first priority. We were told to ‘stay there’.” (F)*

*“One Sgt Major would get very worried (about me) and that annoyed me” (F)*

One woman said she had to “prove” herself to the commander.

The men who believed that the presence of a female had had an impact on the commander, also talked about the commander keeping the female out of the firing zone. One male talked about his commander refusing to take advice from the female involved, despite this being her role in the team.

*“(The Commander) said to drag her back out of firing zone” (M)*

**Did the presence of a woman during contact have an impact on the small team/section commander's judgment?**

Men were specifically asked this question, as they would be in a position to make a judgment compared with situations where women were not present. A small majority felt there had been no impact.

This includes the perceptions of some interviewees who were also the section commander of the incident and were therefore commenting on the impact on their own judgment (although many did not comment here on their own performance). The majority of the section commanders interviewed thought that having a woman present did not affect their judgment.

A minority (including 3 commanders) thought that having a woman present did affect the commander's judgment, although they were not clear about how, particularly under fire. Two of these mentioned being aware of the potential impact/public perception of female casualty but did not say how this impacted judgment. A couple of others mentioned the woman's physical capability, although it was unclear the extent to which this related to during an incident:

*"Physical judgment in terms of how far we could go across open ground - but she did keep up and didn't slow us down" (M)*

*"Would assign her less arduous and shorter patrols" (M)*

#### **5.3.4 Impact on others during contact**

The majority of all interviewees believed that having a woman present didn't have an impact on anyone else during contact, including the vast majority of the women.

#### **No impact on others during contact**

Comments by those who felt there was no impact included references to:

- People all being too busy with their own jobs and seeing the woman in a role not as a woman

*"No, everyone has got a job to focus on." (M)*

*"He saw me as a medic - said needed to know where I was at all times. They don't look on you as a female". (F)*

- The woman fitting in – there were lots of comments about joining in the banter and being treated as "one of the lads", although this was sometimes more to do with time outside of incidents.

*"I've always got on better with men than women, occasionally chat when there wasn't too much noise, didn't act any differently." (F)*

*"I feel my presence was different to some other females; I mixed in well, was a bit of a tomboy and had the same banter. I know that there are many women out there who flirted and that would make a big difference to the way the men treated them" (F)*

*"To be accepted you need to take initiatives, laugh, be able to take practical jokes. She gave as good as she got" (M)*

- The woman "proving" herself and then being accepted

*"I think everyone had same thoughts as me at first, but quickly dispelled - she was very quickly accepted" (M)*

*"The Marines were not used to women - it was disheartening to see the look on their faces when they saw a female in the camp and were unimpressed. When in contact they thought "she's brilliant, a really good FOO". (F)*

*"Because I'm someone who just gets on with things & step up to the plate, everyone just gets on with their own job." (F)*

One woman commented that this was not always the case however:

*'In some situations they had to do something they wouldn't have been doing to protect me- but not in this incident' (F)*

Interviewees recognised that a female presence could have an impact but that it was more dependent on the individual than their gender per se.

### **Some impact on others during contact**

Only 1 female believed that her presence had had an impact on others and she describes this as a positive impact.

*"I guess so but not a big impact. Morale was really low and the worse morale is, the nicer it is to have a female around. It's nothing sexual but more of a mothering thing, especially as I am a medic, they like the sympathy". (F)*

Some men, however, did believe that the presence of a female had had an impact on others in the team. Most of these talked about individuals that had various problems with the presence of a female. These included:

- Females were seen by some as competition
- A minority had trouble taking orders from a female
- Many were not used to working with females.

*"A colleague had a chip in his shoulder about working with females, he made her life difficult" (M)*

*"One person had difficulty taking orders from a woman, I pulled him up for it. During contact there was a focus on the task all differences were put aside" (M)*

*"Before we went down a lot of the guys were annoyed as she was competition" (M)*

*"I was aware of pre-conceived attitudes - not wanting to put woman in harm's way" (M)*

*"The other soldiers were conscious of protecting the girls" (M)*

In cases where other team members were not used to working with females, which was most often the case for the Infantry, the situation often improved over time once the female had had a chance to 'prove herself'. There were also occasions where these male soldiers maintained the same view however after time they no longer attributed their view to the individual's gender.

*"Some OP Assistants refused to work with her - so I had to have her. There was a bit at the start of not wanting to work with female but come round if she proves herself." (M)*

*“Gender may have been an issue to some of the lads at the start, but it quickly became focused on her poor performance, overshadowed by lack of trust.” (M)*

Males often felt protective towards females present and this tended to lead to them being seen as a distraction. Many talk about a feeling of not wanting to put the females in harm's way and in some cases, females had to be escorted by males.

*“The men positioned themselves as an enclave around the women during combat” (M)*

*“On initial contact, close friends ensured she kept cover, rather than engaging with enemy.” (M)*

*“If one of the girls was injured, the men would drop everything, you begin to doubt that your best friend would have your back in a combat incident, bickering and fighting for the attention of women.” (M)* (NB This was a hypothetical scenario not an actual one).

### **5.3.5 Impact on getting the task done**

The majority of interviewees felt that the presence of a woman had had no impact on getting the task done in contact. Of those who felt there was an impact, the majority felt this was positive, although a few men felt it had a negative impact.

#### **No impact on task**

Despite some recognising the impact that a female presence had on certain aspects of the team, for example the female being a distraction or others being fearful for their safety, a large majority believed that the presence of a woman had no impact on getting the task done.

*“When adrenaline is pumping you don't have time to think about it- it's just about protecting the 'person' and keeping them safe, not gender based at all.” (M)*

#### **Positive impact on task**

Some interviewees felt the presence of a female had had a positive impact on getting the task done. Often this was due to a female being necessary to carry out a particular task, for example searching or talking to local females, although this is not specifically to do with being in contact.

*“Helped as a woman in the company as she could act as a female searcher” (M)*

There were also reasons given that were more about the individual's personality that were seen as helpful in getting the task done.

*“She had a calming presence” (M)*

#### **Negative impact on task**

A small number of men felt that the female presence had impacted negatively on getting the task done and their reasons were about the woman's lack of capability – both in her role and in terms of her lack of strength/training due to her not being there primarily to undertake ground close combat.

*"We trust and depend on her to do what she does best. She didn't perform - everything she needed to treat the casualty was still in her bag - she didn't use - help of second medic saved his life" (M)*

*"A bit - physical side e.g. getting casualty out of ditch. If we'd been ambushed we'd have been in serious trouble as she wouldn't have been able to fight her way out of it. I thought she was ready to burst into tears any minute." (M)*

*"Would have had 2 more people firing if they had been male." (M)*

### **5.3.6 Affect on attitude towards women in Ground Close Combat**

This section explores the affect, if any, that being in mixed-gender close combat incidents has had on men and women's attitudes towards having women in ground close combat. Attitudes are one determinant of behaviour, and understanding them is an important part of this research. Now that men and women have actually been together in ground close combat, their attitudes will reflect their actual experiences as well as their underlying beliefs and values.

Whilst this question was focused on attitudinal responses to the incidents interviewees had actually experienced, interviewees usually shared more general views and spoke about future hypothetical situations (if women were allowed into the Infantry) as well. These views were explored and are detailed below.

The majority of interviewees' attitudes towards having women in ground close combat has not changed as a result of their experiences; of those who have changed their attitudes, some have become more positive about having women in ground close combat, others less.

#### **Views unchanged**

Of those whose attitudes have not changed overall, a small majority of men were against women in ground close combat, some of them extremely so. Most were not against having (good) women in their current roles, but many spoke about the extremely unpleasant nature of ground close combat and about the risk of having women there.

Around one-third of women whose views were unchanged also thought that women should not be in Ground Close Combat roles, again sometimes expressing their views very strongly.

*"There are women who are physically capable but these are small percentages - the idea is ridiculous. I am really against women going into infantry roles. It would have a detrimental effect, it's not even appropriate for training. If there are women who think they can go in for these roles then they are thinking of themselves, not of the effects on the team. There is always a chance that male instinct would kick in and they would think more of protecting the women than doing their jobs. I wouldn't join up even if I could, and if there were more than one or two female infantry soldiers in the team I was due to join, I would refuse to go. Women are bitchy and could make things awkward. Women trust men, men trust men, but women don't trust women" (F)*

A tiny minority of interviewees had concerns about women in their current roles, based on their experiences.

*“It’s OK having female clerks, in the kitchen/office etc, but you need men out on the ground. We trusted our female medic but when the real thing happened she didn’t show what she had taught us to do. I wouldn’t want to take a woman medic out again” (M)*

One woman also commented that not all the women in these roles should be there.

*“There are women who can do attached roles (medics, dog handlers etc) which is acceptable, but I do believe there are women who shouldn’t even be allowed to do these roles. You need to be professional and they are flirty and inappropriate (F)”*

Around a quarter of the men whose views were unchanged were positive about having women in these roles – although many of these qualified their views with some caveats about capability especially physical, and whether women would be able to undertake all aspects of the role.

A small majority of those women whose views were unchanged also felt that women should be allowed into Ground Close Combat roles.

### **Views have changed**

Almost half the men and half the women whose views had changed had become more negative as a result of their experiences; a similar proportion of both sexes do not feel women should be in ground close combat roles.

*“I used to discount the physiology/distraction argument, and having patrolled with them and seen the sexual tension and physiology limitations, my opinion has changed”. (M)*

*“It’s consolidated my attitude and confirmed my previously unproven beliefs. There is a role for women as medics but not closing with the enemy – it’s unpleasant, it requires someone physically up to it (some women are) and there’s also the mental side. Men are more suited to the final closing bit, they’re more mentally and physically prepared, we’re brought up from day 1 to be more aggressive. You need total confidence in everyone in the team – there would be doubts in lads’ minds about a woman; it would stop the cohesion of the blokes. I had no preconceived ideas but I think the closing stages of battle is a man’s world. Such small numbers of women would be willing and able, they would be put out on a limb. There’s no need for them to be there”. (M)*

*“Women should definitely not be in the infantry. In my role as a medic it’s fine - I bring something different they need. If I was one of them there would be competition, and women are not as strong or robust, we’re not built in the same way.” (F)*

Around half the men whose attitudes have changed now have a more positive attitude than before their experiences with women in incidents, although fewer were positive about having women in Ground Close Combat roles.

*“It’s strengthened my view. All 3 women were exceptional, 2 were special - all quite robust and their personality/attitude towards their job made our job a lot easier. Having women with the right attitude in close combat is key. One went out on patrol more than I did, another*

*went out 2 or 3 times a day and sometimes she was ahead of me, closer to the enemy. I firmly believe some women could do it - those 2 could have done exactly what I do, they carried same weight as us. They would be the exceptions. I've always thought there's no reason why not - some women are stronger than me - although whether they want to is another question". (M)*

*"It has changed my attitude. I was not used to working with women. I thought I would have a problem but I didn't. In my experience females have reacted well, proved their robustness within the boundaries of the role/task". (M)*

*"15 years ago we thought differently - I would have wanted a man; now I'm happy to have a woman Medical Assistant/driver/manning machine gun" (M)*

*"It's improved my attitude. Previously, from the Infantry, there was a mindset of not wanting women around. I have seen medics doing good jobs, have seen couple of women work harder and better with their troops than men. As long as they can do the job I don't care; having women as medics, or in mounted vehicles, fine. I still say no to the fighting role, they shouldn't be in Infantry. They can carry med kit but I still think about strength. People's attitude would change - you'd be worried for her. I never wanted a woman fighting beside me and I still don't." (M)*

Less than half the women whose views had changed had become more positive, and less than half thought women should be in Ground Close Combat roles.

*"I think even more we should be allowed to join the Infantry. There is no distinction in any roles - I came close to shooting someone with a pistol 20 feet away because my protection let me down - he froze, he was an 18 year old kid. We sign on the dotted line the same as men, it's no worse to lose a woman than a man". (F)*

### **Key concerns over having women in Ground Close Combat roles**

As mentioned above, with 1 or 2 exceptions, interviewees agreed that women were generally performing well in the roles they are currently undertaking in theatre, and should continue to perform these roles. Many interviewees, of both sexes, drew clear distinctions between these roles and Ground Close Combat roles where deliberate closing with the enemy may be required, believing that women should not undertake these roles.

*"Not in the Infantry/front line. I'm not saying they couldn't do it, but it's different with bayonets fixed – it's a frightening experience" (M).*

*"The female did acquit herself well, no issue with her being a woman in that role, I would take a woman artillery/engineer in to support me again. I don't think I could have deliberately sent her into ground close combat..." (M)*

The strength of people's views varied considerably, some having very strong beliefs, others much less so. Those with the strongest feelings tended to feel women shouldn't be in ground close combat roles. Looking at both those whose attitudes have changed and those whose have not, the most commonly cited reasons against having women in ground close combat roles were, for both men and women (in order):

- Lack of women's physical capability/robustness (11M 5F)

- Women being a distraction/problems with relationships between men and women (13M 3F)
- Men want to protect women/react differently if hurt/harder to deal with female casualties (8M 2F)

Additionally, 4 men also talked about women not being as mentally tough or aggressive as men (as did 1 woman) and 3 men spoke about the environment being primeval and disgusting. Other reasons included:

- Impact on the group/destroy cohesion (2M 2F)
- Men's lack of confidence in the woman (1M 1F)
- Women would be treated differently/men change their behaviour (1M 1F)
- Facilities/woman isolated by being separate (1M)
- Women would need to do all the tasks men do (1M)
- Women wouldn't be accepted/hard for them (1F)
- Men not used to it (1F)

The main objections are illustrated by the following sample of quotes:

- **Physical ability**

*"Happy to have a woman as medic, but not as an Infanteer because they need aggression and to carry the weight; for example, for casualty evacuation, 4 women wouldn't be able to carry a stretcher" (M)*

*"Would she be able to drag a man who had been hit away"? (M)*

*"Physical ability lets some women down. If I was asked to patrol now I could do it but I would struggle" (F)*

One woman felt that the other oft-cited reasons below really are not an issue and that ultimately it all comes down to physical fitness. She believed the issue is that women would need a different training regime:

*"There's no harm having women in front line; men don't think they've got to get the female - they've got enough to think about, enough kit to carry, they don't care. I used to think that men would automatically look after the woman but it didn't go through my mind at all while I was there. No-one ever offered to take my kit, they had their own. But I wouldn't have women in the infantry because of fitness needed during training - many women can't carry the weight/endure the training/keep the fitness because of testosterone. It would damage the body of a female. Women need slower progression into physical training so there's not such a harsh impact into the body. Then, if you're deemed capable enough, pass all the tests, go out and do it. (F)*

- **Distraction/relationships**

*"The issue is not so much in a fire fight, but in the build up and back at base. Tensions and conflicts are going to happen with presence of opposite sexes. Not so much if female is of high rank, but big issue if lower rank embedded with blokes. Prime problem would be*

*damage to male cohesion and the effect of the presence on families back home (men & women)” (M).*

*“Soldiers will bicker for the women's attention - try and out-do each other to get affection. The longer you're out in the field, outward appearance gets grotty, you start to see other things in them - personality, background etc. I've seen this outside combat on ops - fights between men removed 2 good quality men - it's the effect, not the cause.” (M)*

*“Lads would never mean to be disrespectful but 'lads will be lads'.” (M)*

*“Relationships would be a big issue in GCC”. (F)*

It is worth noting here that most women as well as most men mentioned this at some point during the interview. Those women who were interviewed mostly pointed out that you cannot put all women into the same category in this respect:

*“Some women used their feminine wiles to get what they wanted- I made sure I never did that, I never flirt. I have strong opinions about relationships in units- other females don't.” (F)*

When pushed, most men admitted that this had not caused a problem during contact.

*“The rest of the guys in the vehicle may have had more concentration if she had been a man; during contact it didn't make a difference.” (M)*

*“When not firing soldiers positioned themselves around them. They would have taken up better defensive locations if girls not there. Affected their behaviour - not during incidents, but during downtime - topics discussed, base level swearing.” (M)*

Others, however, felt that it could do:

*“It could affect men out on patrol, worrying about what to say to other men later, not focusing on the job, looking for IEDs. The female medic we had was great but others I wouldn't have taken because of effect on blokes - would have affected cohesion” (M)*

- **Men will protect women**

*“It's different with bayonets fixed - it's a frightening experience. I would have been more protective to a woman in that situation.” (M)*

*“The desire to look after women takes attention from the fight” (M)*

*“If a woman fell, the male instinct would be to go and help. A woman would expect help. This could mean possible loss of life or serious injury for him. If a man falls, a male would just say “get up”.” (F)*

*“It got to stages where, as a father with daughters, I was concerned with the girls, where are they, are they safe – it's the male instinct to protect women more. It's not wrong to have them there but in the front line, but older men would worry 110% re the woman, 100% for male soldiers.” (M)*

*“He’d lose support and trust from fellow men because we feel if we go into a fight he will look after her not me.” (M)*

Interviewees spoke about this as a natural instinct, and a couple of men talked about social/cultural norms.

*“In a fighting role the men would be constantly worrying about the female – and try and protect the women. It’s an unnecessary risk” (M)*

*“It’s cultural/social issue. Women and children first. We’re conditioned, there’s possibly a genetic inbuilt requirement to protect women because they bear future generations. Animals protect females too.” (M)*

- **Mental toughness**

*“She was wanting on the mental side too. Only the odd few could do it physically and mentally. Men are more suited to the final closing bit - more mentally and physically prepared, brought up from day 1 to be more aggressive.” (M)*

- **Environment**

*“A small proportion will be fit enough but it’s a risk. Men and women will form relationships which will massively diminish cohesion. In GCC the situation is wholly unpleasant, carnal, animal and men will protect women” (M)*

*“GCC is an ugly, disgusting, violent business” (M)*

- **Impact on group cohesion**

*“For a woman who is capable I think that there is no major issue, but for a full infantry role I don’t really think that it is a good idea because of the impact on the rest of an infantry group. Some men would just leave the forces, others would be concerned about them, others would fear being let down”. (F)*

*“GCC is primeval and women would adversely affect cohesion” (M).*

- **Harder to deal with female casualties**

*“And it’s a cultural thing. It’s a sad day if we send women in to combat and they come back in coffins” (M).*

*“Feelings around female casualties get very high – this can get in the way of the task needs” (M)*

## **Why women should be allowed in ground close combat roles**

The key point made by interviewees who were positive about having women in ground close combat roles was that it is all about ability to do the job. They spoke about the need to look at both men and women on their individual merits.

*"I'm all for it, it's no different if they are male or female, as long as they can do the job" (M)*  
*"The biggest factor should be that they are good at what they do, some women are just as strong as the men- it's all about perceptions" (M)*

*"In a strong infantry group everyone should be able to do every job; this could be difficult for some women." (M)*

Ability/performance was spoken about generally, and also specifically in terms of physical capability, mental characteristics and professionalism.

*"It should be considered on an individual basis; it's more to do with attitude, personality and competence than gender." (F)*

*"The boundaries are fitness, stamina and robustness. If they can't do the long distance, we're going to have casualties. A unit is only as strong as your weakest link. Mentally, there's no real difference" (M)*

*"More serious incidents/the whole tour gives me the view that it's all character-based, we're not all built the same, some take the big bang, others break down". (M)*

*"If you're mentally/physically strong enough you should be allowed. There were some things I didn't do because I wasn't fit enough or strong enough. I'm so emotional, some things really affected me; I don't know if it was because I'm a girl, some men had problems when they came home too. I always said I was an infantry soldier with a medical bag on my back, everyone's a soldier first – it's the same training same for all. There are no roles women shouldn't be doing if they can do it." (F)*

The importance of having opportunities of proving yourself capable as a woman was also highlighted.

*"If a woman wants to do it, fine. As long as the woman is capable. Once you prove yourself, everyone thinks of themselves as a soldier, not a woman." (F)*

The importance of training was again reinforced:

*"With the correct training and the right female, she should be able to. The training paid off - on the day we knew what to do" (F)*

A few women felt that women were already doing the role and proving themselves capable, although as the quote below shows, they did recognise that (as many men indicated) the role has not been exactly the same as an Infantry role would be.

*"All the time I was there I didn't think we shouldn't be there – I proved it to myself and others. It may be different with foot patrol. I proved we can do the job, we're pretty much doing same job as the infantry (F)*

*"I think we are in those roles anyway, what is the difference? Men didn't want women in the army, they have just started accepting it. It would be hard for any women joining the infantry, they won't get accepted, just leave it as it is" (F)*

The key point was made by some that men and women would need to be treated equally in terms of both selection and training, should the exclusion be removed.

*“Women should be allowed in combat provided they have the same entry requirements and equal treatment” (M)*

*“It goes on performance - you have to pull your weight, which links to how people are tested. There are different standards required of women and men in training - if we can't get away from that we can't have women in GCC. If women can't physically carry the kit and travel the same distance they can't do the job. If you can do your job the same as a man. You should be judged the same”. (M)*

*“You'd need gender-free testing, you need to do period of training within a male group in harsh conditions with no outside support - if you have any weaknesses, they need to be found. You shouldn't try it until you know you can.” (F)*

In terms of the specific way forward, a couple of interviewees suggested having all-female platoons,

*“If they meet the physical requirements and can do the job, not a problem if in an all female platoon. Social dynamics are the real problem, with guys arguing about the woman.” (M)*

*“Men and women work differently - men need 1 person to take charge, women better if can work it out together, sparking ideas off each other. Also, there would be conflict if you had women in with men - men wouldn't feel we were doing infantry role – we might have second chances to do training, or have an easier time in training - men wouldn't feel like it was the Infantry any more "it can't be" - would damage their egos. Individually, women are probably OK, but collectively would be negative” (F)*

And another suggested *“It should be done on a case by case basis. The exclusion should remain with occasional cases that do get in. If you make the grade and are given the opportunity to prove yourself, why not” (F).*

A couple of men suggested that women should be allowed to be officers/leaders but not Infantry soldiers. One of these explained:

*“She was in Company HQ, always with a reasonably rigid depth of rank. An Infantry section would have less depth of rank. We should be careful extrapolating - officers are expected to act differently than soldiers. The Infantry have rough backgrounds, they're not a “PC” bunch. You might find female soldiers act differently than a female officer.” (M)*

## **Gender irrelevance**

The above sections clearly show that some people do feel that women are less suited to Ground Close Combat roles than men, whilst others do not. Across both groups, a number of people specifically drew attention to the fact that some of their concerns were not just gender-specific. This underlines the fact that men can be as unsuitable for the jobs as women, or more so.

*“There have been some females that are more a hindrance than a help. They tend to stay in the camp. The effective ones go out of camp. But the same applies to lads; I’ve had lads who have never left” (M)*

*“Most of her failings were not due to her being a woman, a male could be equally not up to it. She hasn’t coloured my view” (M)*

*“I have witnessed male dog handlers who couldn’t carry as much as this woman, and needed putting on quad bike due to weight of Burgen.” (M)*

*“A Medical Assistant is a 'bolt on' and it doesn’t matter if you’re male or female so long as you’re competent and have a good attitude.” (M)*

*“An unfit white male or one with extremely bad attitude shouldn’t be there either. It’s like saying he’s Asian or Black so he can’t perform as well.” (F)*

*“50 yrs ago we didn’t think Blacks could be in the military – I don’t see why not the same with women.” (F)*

*“I was stronger than 5 of the team in training.” (F)*

*“Physical capability - unable to carry on backs what they need to be self sufficient for 24 hours - not about gender though as can be the same for overweight males.” (M)*

### **Would women want to do it?**

Despite the positive feelings expressed by many about including women in Ground Close Combat roles, the majority view (especially as expressed by women) was that very few women would probably want to undertake these roles, even if they could. This was a common view expressed regardless of capability, acceptance by men, or women feeling strongly about equality.

*“Some people can, others can’t. 10 years ago I’d have said it’s outrageous you can’t do it, I’ll be the first, but it’s because you’ve said I can’t! Now, having done it, I don’t think the majority of women would want to”. (F)*

*“I can’t see the majority of women wanting to do what we do”. (M)*

Many of the women interviewed said they would not want the roles themselves.

*“I wouldn’t want to be in the infantry. Generally female skills are more useful employed in other roles. In close combat, everyone’s a soldier anyway. I think we can do more by being soldiers and bringing a specialism. At moments where you need to think as a killing group, I don’t think many women would want to fit into that as their bread and butter .... My experiences have confirmed that I don’t want to be in the infantry but also that a female officer could do everything a male counterpart can” (F).*

*“I wouldn’t want to be in the infantry, not because of my gender or capability, but because I enjoy my job in the Artillery and find it more interesting” (F)*

And in relation to do the jobs they were currently doing, there were mixed feelings amongst the women, a number feeling like this interviewee:

*"I'd do it again if I had to but wouldn't choose to go." (F)*

### **Other points raised**

- **The "novelty factor"**

Many felt that differential treatment of women and also the issue of women being a distraction to men, is largely due to the fact that they are not used to having women in this environment, and that the issues are overcome as the women become less of a novelty.

*"Attitudes/behaviour did change. It took about 1 day to win people over then treated as equal. With time, women will be equal." (F)*

*"Because I worked with them so long they were over the female issues, for example treating you as a girl opening doors." (F)*

*"The IC was from Artillery, grounded, used to women. Not like the paras we were supposed to be out with whose reaction was "oh God we know what sort of operation this is going to be" when they saw girls." (F)*

*"The Marine commander said 'no problem as long as she can keep up with us' - they started wearing less clothes when I turned up! After 1-2 days they forgot I was a female, I think it would have been the same for any male newly attached members" (F)*

*"(The distraction) is down to immaturity/lack of familiarity - soldiers asked "can we have the girls over here to talk to", they hadn't seen a woman for 2-3 months. It's built-in, the sexual part of natural habitat - women/men always look at each other. It gets easier as the lads get used to having women around" (M)*

*"There were initially juvenile comments when the infantry started training with female FOO. The comments stopped once they saw she could do the job." (M)*

*"The more the girls go out with the guys on patrol, the less they think of her in a sexual way. Time together at camp makes a big difference. When the other female came back from mixing with the other girls at camp, it took bit longer for boys to warm up to her again" (M)*

- **Women need to prove themselves more than men**

*"We were taught at Sandhurst "you need to work double hard as a girl and you have to cut it with the best of them". As a female officer entering a male dominated environment, you have to prove yourself, being true to your word and physically capable" (F).*

*"We were under extreme pressure and putting ourselves under extreme pressure because we didn't want to let people down. Being a woman, it kept me motivated - so many times I wanted to give up but we didn't want to let ourselves down or give the men something to throw back - "you can't do this". I didn't want to be asked twice." (F)*

*"Women would need to prove themselves time and time again." (M)*

*“If a man cocks up, well, it's just one of those things. If a woman cocks up, it's because she's a woman and shouldn't be doing the job. Therefore, it's more difficult to gain the respect initially.” (M)*

One male interviewee felt that this backfired on the woman he worked with; he ended up feeling negative towards her because she tried to do too much.

*“She sometimes pushed herself too hard to prove herself. It was more pride than anything.” (M)*

One woman had had mixed experiences – for her it seemed to be more about *what* you had to prove, and the fact of having to prove it to each new team she worked with, which highlights the problems for women in terms of the expectations that some men may have of women (and many men, as seen in the preceding sections, did start off with negative assumptions about women).

*I had to win the Commandos over but went from being low in their estimation to higher than a man would have been with the same performance - If I have the same ability as a man I'm perceived as better once they know I'm capable and not a typical woman who cries. I didn't think I'd been particularly effective but a Marine came back and raved about me - I didn't cry and I kept up with them. I went out with a Marine Commander - I was quite aggressive, angry, swearing - he was impressed, my swearing was typical of a man. You're really looked down on until you do a good job. I did get tired of having to prove myself every time into a new group of men. And every mistake a woman makes is highlighted therefore our job is more difficult.”*

- **If it ain't broke...**

A recurring comment from the men in particular was that, given the risks and the lack of perceived benefits to including women in Ground Close Combat roles, there is little point opening up these roles to women – “if it ain't broke, don't fix it”.

*“The bravery of women on the battlefield is not in doubt - in support roles. It's down to risk - with no evidence to support putting women into GCC are we prepared to take the risk of affecting cohesion?” (M)*

*“I can see many drawbacks to having women present but no benefits, so disregarding physicality issues, don't see the point in changing policy. It might not make it worse.” (M)*

- **Attitudes are a key blocker....**

Attitudes were often mentioned – attitudes of the men, the women and the public

*“The average soldier isn't as liberal as me, there would need to be a step change in attitude” (M).*

A number of men were concerned about the potential media interest in women casualties and the consequent impact of the enemy knowing this.

*“The British public don't want to see that a female has died in the paper.” (M)*

*"It makes the enemy more aggressive, they come at us more because if female dies it attracts more headlines." (M)*

- **Banter/teasing/social "fit" etc**

Joining in with the banter appears to be really important in terms of "fitting in" and developing cohesion. This came up throughout the interview.

*"If men tease each other, and are blunt – it's OK. If I say the same rude thing to a man they think I'm being bitchy. A male doesn't like it if I tell him off. It could be me or it could be because I'm a woman" (F)*

*"The female has got to be one of the lads" (M)*

It also appeared to be more of an issue at base/in barracks.

*"Barracks life is harder - sitting round listening to chat, degrading women, the way they talk about their wives. You don't get this on ops." (F)*

A handful of men also mentioned that it affected their communication with women, and for a couple, the cohesion during the incident, as they felt they could not be as blunt with a woman.

*"You have to be careful what you do/say e.g. swear, tell people to do things. I'd say to a man "come on, take that (heavy load) there" – you have to ask a woman nicely. Fear of sexual harassment. Mostly women don't do heavy lifting. Before I didn't have that mentality with women. Now I have to think twice."*

- **Benefits of female support/viewpoint**

*"The lads feel they can talk to you back at the FOB, about any issues. I am trained to recognise PSD. The lads are more likely to talk about problems at home etc with a female rather than a male medic. You are perceived as being more sympathetic as a female." (F)*

*"She sometimes thought about things differently which we needed – e.g. thinking about the people that would be coming back to a deserted town when we were wrecking it during training. She was right and we were being idiots." (M)*

- **Mental strength**

*"On his tour 3 soldiers were sent back from the front line to an HQ role - 2 men and 1 woman, representing a much higher proportion of women." (M)*

- **Facilities**

Some men expressed concern over having women in theatre due to the need to provide privacy/separate facilities.

*“You can't use the showers if a female is in there – it's OK in camp, not in the field – it puts security at risk and breeds distrust between men and woman.” (M)*

*“It did affect people's behaviour in PB, for example you had to hide away to strip wash. A female Infanteer wouldn't be able to live with us, sleep with us in the fields - you wouldn't know her 100% so wouldn't be able to trust her 100%” (M)*

*“It made it awkward, if they wanted to go to the toilet outside the compound they had to send 3 people - one to use the toilet, another woman to keep a look out, and a man to watch the watcher. This slightly damaged the R&R of others - drained the men, who didn't get as much rest as they should have.” (M)*

*“I had the extra job of digging their latrines” (M)*

*“They need special provision – this can become a problem for the blokes, as we all need the privacy- but we're all blokes. Small things come to mean a lot” (M)*

Again, however, the degree to which this needs to be a problem appears to depend on the woman, as well as on the men, and some had not found it an issue.

*“In PB I had my own toilet, the only 1 with a door. I had to tell people it was OK to use the others while I was in there. These issues can be overcome depending on the woman.” (F)*

*“She never made a fuss – she did what she had to do where she had to do it out in the field” (M)*

- **Difference between barracks/ops and base/in the field**

Some interviewees referred to the impact of women's presence/cohesion issues being different depending on where they were. For example:

*“It affected behaviour - not during incidents, but during downtime - topics discussed, base level swearing” (M).*

## 5.4 Cohesion

This section of the report explores the central question of cohesion in small teams/sections during ground close combat.

### 5.4.1 Definition of cohesion

Interviewees were asked what they thought of the definition of cohesion being used in the research.

Interviewees were generally happy with the definition, saying that it did capture what cohesion meant to them.

A few people said they would add in something about 'team' or 'teamwork' or "*being one entity to achieve that*" (M).

Associated with this, a small number mentioned the importance of knowing/accepting individual differences in the team:

*"Understanding each other's strengths and weaknesses and tolerance is important- without that, no part of the definition will work" (M)*

Whilst some (mostly men) agreed cohesion is particularly important in combat, a few people specifically commented that it is broader or suggested that cohesion is particularly important after the event:

*"And knowing what's going on in people's lives and supporting them. I don't like the reference to combat and extreme pressure – it should be the same whether you're in or out of camp, you should have the same level of cohesion in both." (F)*

*"A team might have sufficient cohesion to complete a task, it is after that cohesion can suffer, it could be rephrased as 'did the incident affect cohesion after the event?'" (M)*

A small number questioned the 'shared goal', as "*someone just tells you what to do*" (M), or "*it's also about what you need to achieve for yourself (staying alive) as well as your commitment to achieving goals set by others*" (F).

One male commented:

*"It's a bit task oriented. It doesn't start and end with task, but friendship and trust" (M)*

However, interviewees understood and agreed with the definition sufficiently to apply it to the incidents in question. When the questions were asked, it is worth noting that interviewees often found it hard to stick to the context of contact, and some seemed to find it almost impossible to separate contact from other times, although others clearly separated the two.

#### **5.4.2 Rating cohesion during ground close combat incidents**

Interviewees were here focused back to their specific incident(s) and asked to rate cohesion on a scale of 1-5 (very poor – excellent).

Around half of all interviewees rated cohesion during close combat incidents in mixed-gender teams as excellent, and around three-quarters rated it as excellent or very good. A small minority of men (4) and no women rated it as poor or very poor. Reasons for giving these ratings, and fuller exploration of the factors identified by interviewees as being related to cohesion follow in the sections below.

Firstly, however, interviewees' ratings of cohesion were compared according to various biographical/ contextual factors to see if there were any obvious patterns:

- Due to the different numbers of females holding the various roles, and the small numbers in some of these categories, it is not possible to make any overall comments about differences in cohesion depending on the woman's role.
- Similarly, it is not possible to identify any differences by cap badge, other than to note that the ratings given by men in the Infantry were amongst the highest, with a large majority of Infanteer interviewees rating cohesion as "very good" or "excellent", and none of them rating it lower than "quite good".
- Ratings of cohesion did not appear to be related to the number of mixed-gender combat incidents interviewees had been involved in, although there was some evidence that it tended to be slightly lower where the team had worked together for less than a week before the incident.
- It was difficult to reach any conclusions about the impact on cohesion ratings of the lengths of time interviewees had known different numbers of people in their team. There did not appear to be any particular link for the women, although it did appear that where the men had given very low ratings for cohesion, there was a greater tendency to have known some of the team for a short time (days) only.
- In terms of team size, again there was no consistent pattern in terms of relationship with cohesion. It was interesting perhaps to note that for all categories of team size reported by the women, the majority of women rated cohesion excellent. Amongst men, the majority felt cohesion was excellent only for some team sizes: 1-3, 7-10 and 11-20, with cohesion being rated particularly high in teams of 1-3 and 11-20.
- There appeared to be no overall difference in how cohesion had been rated, depending on whether interviewees were in intact teams with attachments or completely ad-hoc teams.
- Ratings of cohesion did not appear to be linked overall to how well interviewees perceived the section commander to have performed or to their perceptions of the leader's characteristics (and see further comments on leadership in section 5.4.3).

## Reasons for “excellent” or “very good” ratings

Reasons given for rating cohesion as “excellent” tended to focus around knowing each other, working as a team and everyone knowing what they were doing. Men also tended to speak a bit more specifically about time spent together, everyone knowing their job due to previous training and experiences, focus, trust and pride. Comments included:

*“We were working in the team in the way we were supposed to; it was good to see everyone supporting each other” (F)*

*“The whole group all knew each other, we’d been through a lot together, just like family” (F)*

*“We trusted with all we had been through, that we would be alright.” (M)*

*“Everyone had a vested interest, and knew their job. They worked for each other to get the job done - especially the medic” (M)*

Ratings of “very good” were accompanied by similar comments:

*“We knew what was expected of each other” (F)*

*“We had no time to think, we all did what we had to, with no hesitation” (M)*

*“It’s the way the infantry operate. They are very bonded and do this every day. She had worked with them for at least a year so there was trust both ways.” (M)*

A small number of respondents who rated cohesion “very good” commented that it was never going to be perfect, that there would always be some obstacles/conflict, or that specifically there had been a bit of “whingeing” or confusion:

*“In a heated moment, everyone trying to get their point across, feeling their idea is the best – it slowed down a decision” (M)*

## Reasons for “poor”/“very poor” ratings

A very low number of men rated cohesion as poor or very poor, some of these relating to the same incident/team. In this team and one of the others, the female was in a leadership role. There were no consistent themes amongst these in terms of length of time the teams had worked together, size of team, woman’s role, cap badge etc.

Reasons for poor or very poor cohesion were various issues related specifically by the interviewee to the woman present. Two interviewees specifically mentioned *lack of trust* in the woman, two specifically commenting that the woman had been present during PDT and lack of trust in her had begun then. All four referred in various ways to the woman’s *lack of capability/experience* and her *not knowing the drills*. None of the interviewees gave the impression that cohesion was low specifically because of the presence of a woman per se

Other, 1-off references were made to: the woman having poor leadership capability; the woman not being “part of the team” and “not mucking in”; and the interviewee would have had more confidence/trust in the woman (and cohesion would have been higher) if she had been stronger

and more robust, and talked about cohesion being higher in all male incidents partly due to this greater physical robustness and more “forceful effect”.

The woman who rated cohesion as quite good and one other mentioned *confusion* in the moment as being the reason for the slightly lower rating.

#### 5.4.3 Factors positively/negatively affecting cohesion during contact in mixed gender teams

Interviewees interpreted the open questions about what positively and negatively influenced cohesion during the incidents in different ways. Some referred back to, and re-inforced, the elements within the definition, others did not. Since interviewees did not disagree with the definition’s references to trust, support, depending on each other, commitment or motivation, lack of mentioning these again was not taken as implying they were not important. Some interviewees talked more about what happened during the incident, others more about what contributed to that cohesion more generally. In either event, comments appeared generally to be about what contributed to or detracted from trust, support and ability to depend on each other.

A number of factors appeared to be recurring themes in what interviewees identified, unprompted, as positively influencing/contributing to cohesion (shown below). It is important to remember that these were not offered as prompts to interviewees, and so not raising them does not imply that interviewees did not feel they were important. When taken alongside the definition, however, the factors listed below do provide a good indication of what interviewees felt to be important in terms of cohesion during contact.

Most obviously, there were clear, strong themes around ***trust, time spent together/knowing each other*** and ***people knowing their jobs***. Both of these last two factors appear to relate in turn back to trust; as one woman summed it up “*Trust comes from knowing each other and having confidence*”.

Factors positively influencing cohesion, as mentioned by men and women:

- Trust (35M 22F)
- Shared experience/time spent together (39M 21F)
- All knowing the job (38M 14F)
- Drills/training (24M 9F)
- Joint goal/mission/threat (18M 11F)
- Humour (13M 4F)
- Female’s behaviour at base (12M 4F)
- Leadership (2M 4F)

The absence of many of these also came up in terms of negatively impacting cohesion. The other key negative influence on cohesion was found to be:

- Conflict/lack of “gelling” as a team (6M 1F)

Each of these is explained further, and illustrated with quotes, below.

### **Trust**

This was clearly a major factor for both women and men. Essentially, it seemed to be about having trust in everyone in the team to do their job, i.e. *“trust that the people round about you are the right ones to make things happen” (M)*.

A few interviewees specifically mentioned trust in the leadership, e.g:

*“The 2IC and Commander worked with us on training so I could trust them” (M)*

*“The other 4 worked well together, with a very good 2IC; if he said ‘jump’, we would, I trusted the 2IC, I knew him for years” (M)*

Conversely and unsurprisingly, lack of trust was a key factor leading to ratings of poor cohesion. Specifically, where cohesion was rated poor or very poor (by men), lack of trust in the female’s capabilities was key, and, less consistently, lack of trust in her physical robustness.

A number of interviewees talked about trust taking time to develop, and there seemed to be a link between trust and time spent working and training together:

*“Cohesion is influenced by trust, depending on each other. It comes with time working with them and seeing them do their job”. (M)*

However, a minority disagreed:

*“I felt I could trust her from day one” (M)*

*“I trusted them even though I had just met them. They depended on me, knowing I had the right kit and was a medic” (F)*

One female medic felt that men and women are viewed differently in this way:

*“It took a while for me to build up my trust in them - but not as long as it took them to build their trust in me” (F)*

Interestingly, only a couple of interviewees specifically mentioned lack of trust as a negative influence on cohesion, but it was implied in many other responses.

### **Time together/shared experiences**

This consistently came through as being crucial for building trust and cohesion. It covered getting to know each other as individuals, going through experiences/incidents together, spending time in each others’ company and training together (this last point is further explored separately on the next page). Typical comments included:

*“Cohesion was good because it was a small team, you lived on the vehicle with them and talked to them everyday” (M)*

*“We lived together, worked together; you celebrate together, mourn together - you just get on with it.” (M)*

All this seemed to be important to trust and cohesion in two distinct ways:

1) Building confidence in others' capabilities and contributing to combat effectiveness

*"It wouldn't have been as good during the first contact. We'd been through it many times before by this occasion and knew how each other worked". (F)*

*"Knowing each other really well is important to the task - knowing who to ask for what. Everyone worked together, trusted, knew where each other were coming from, their strengths and knowledge" (F)*

*"Everyone had proven their worth" (F)*

*"From the operations we had been on, you get confidence as you see how they react to real incidents" (M)*

*"In the Paras we have this long before we're even deployed; our training is the same, same lingo, same tactics." (M)*

*"We've had training, been through contact, understood individual strengths and weaknesses and could play to strengths and mitigate the weaknesses" (M)*

One woman mentioned knowing each other so well that you are able to *anticipate* each other.

2) Social/emotional bonding

*"We'd had the same experiences, same things to laugh about, been scared at the same time. It was also about taking time to talk to people, even those I didn't like, to develop a link... taking time to listen and understand what people had to say" (F)*

*"I knew all the guys, they knew me, they didn't treat me any differently. They wanted to protect me, they didn't mind, we had a laugh together. I knew everything about them by the end, they trusted me to tell me their life experiences" (F)*

*"When we were exhausted everyone would keep each other going" (F)*

*"Cohesion is a function of support, ethos, supervision, counselling, pastoral care" (M)*

Several interviewees reported that the tougher the shared experiences, the greater the bonding and cohesion:

*"Challenging circumstance - from early on the situation exploded - danger and fear are good at bringing people together and making lifelong friendships" (M)*

*"We were isolated and cut off so being in the same situation meant there was a bond and there still is now, even though we are separated (M)*

*"After losing one (colleague), not losing another was a big driver" (M)*

Some men specifically mentioned time together and shared experiences as being important in terms of trust and cohesion with the woman they were working with, and it came through as a factor differentiating cohesion in different incidents (see later), as well as being commented on by women:

*“You get to know people better if you work with them longer; you go into the flow when attacked. Lots of medics don't get that opportunity - we often didn't know what to expect. But eating, sleeping, living together - get to learn what they're like” (M)*

*“Cohesion was influenced by the fact that confidence grows in each other's ability over time. Confidence in the woman had grown due to the fact she had spent 2.5 months in the company” (M)*

*“We knew each other very well from training, living in the same room, eating at the same table, doing the same thing every day. She slept and ate with us too – she was a tomboy.” (M)*

Indeed, a minority of interviewees specifically commented that lack of shared experiences and time together was a negative influence on cohesion, e.g.:

*“It didn't help that I was always working to different groups of people, often guys from different troops to me. It was also tricky for them. In sections that stayed the same throughout, they had shared experience. Every time I was in difficult situations I felt quite isolated.” (F)*

### **All knowing/able to do the job**

The whole issue of individual capability came across as critical to cohesion and perceptions of women generally. Essentially, this was about everyone knowing what to do and being capable/competent in their roles. This clearly affected cohesion positively:

*“All individuals being professional and competent at their role/task” (F)*

*“We all knew what we were doing, didn't have to worry about anything.” (M)*

*“They knew exactly what I wanted and did it fast, aggressively, did as they were told”. (M)*

There was a strong sense coming through capability overrode other issues or concerns, such as personality clashes or other fears, during contact. Conversely, perceived lack of competence had a huge negative impact on perceptions and cohesion.

*“When it gets noisy (under fire) they are focussed on carrying out orders, there is no problem (with cohesion) during incidents.” (F)*

*“She didn't flap under fire - but she didn't know her job.” (M)*

Again, capability was also linked by some to experience or training:

*“It would have been different if this was the first time it had happened to us.” (M)*

People's failure to do their job and/or their lack of experience was mentioned by a small percentage of interviewees as negatively impacting cohesion. Most of these were men, who

were specifically referring to the woman, some of these commenting that she hadn't been trained to deal with that kind of situation or *"hadn't come across anything like this before"*.

*"There needs to be a reliance on each other for your own safety, the lack of dependability on the capability of the women brought the cohesion levels down" (M)*

### **Drills/training**

Another important factor in determining cohesion was training. Training seemed to positively impact cohesion in a number of ways:

- Ability to do the job (quickly)

*"You don't have to think – you do it without thinking." (F)*

- Providing an invaluable opportunity to get to know each other and how each other work:

*"Training was invaluable, I trained my lads to death so the job becomes easier, you need to know the guys' strengths and weaknesses. (Cohesion was excellent) ultimately because we trained together, and knew each other well." (F)*

- An opportunity to observe and develop confidence (and hence trust) in each other:

*"You gain confidence as you see them go through the training and see how they react to incidents" (M)*

*"Trust comes from knowing we've all done the same training, knowing he can be pushed as far as myself." (M)*

- An opportunity to bond

Both women and men remarked on the difference this sometimes made for the women, many of whom had not been through the same training as the men, and had sometimes not trained with them at all:

*"You also need to go through the shit training with the team – it's important for bonding. We had never trained with the HQ guys. It was different in the battery, it's like an extended family you go through the shit together" (F)*

Two interviewees commented on lack of training as being a negative influence on cohesion, and two specifically mentioned lack of familiarity with equipment.

### **Joint goal/mission/threat**

This was primarily about being focused on the same end result during contact, and there were various takes on this.

*"The immediate threat drives everyone to do their job and do it well." (F)*

*"...because of the shared goal, we wanted to come across as a good team" (F)*

*"We all knew the goal, knew we had to get the guys away and pulled together to make it happen" (F)*

For some, sharing arduous circumstances and threat was the important part.

*"A shared significant mutual threat also contributes towards cohesion." (M)*

*"Challenging circumstances, from early on the situation exploded, danger and fear are good at bringing people together and making lifelong friendships" (M)*

### **Humour/banter**

This was a recurring theme during the interviews, and many people talked about the importance of having a laugh and joke together. One male interviewee summed up the importance of humour/banter: *"half the guys in the army are still there because of the banter."*

However, relatively few people referred to it specifically as influencing cohesion during contact. It seems to be important after contact and more generally on operations/at base, and often to contribute to a woman being accepted as part of the team – in this way of course it is an important indirect influence on cohesion during contact, when other factors as mentioned above appear to be more directly relevant.

The effect of having women present appeared to be mixed. A small number of men said that the presence of a woman had a detrimental effect in that they had to tone down their language or humour, and one male interviewee said that having someone in the team who was "stand-offish" and did not engage in banter negatively impacted cohesion.

Other men, and many women, felt that it made no difference, that the women joined in and often "gave as good as she got", and that those women who did join in were accepted as "one of the lads".

*"I shared similar humour to the men in my team" (F)*

Some men and women commented that having women present was actually an advantage in terms of providing a different take and even toning down the worst language/humour in a positive way.

### **Female's behaviour at base**

This, again, came up regularly throughout the interviews but was not mentioned by many as specifically affecting cohesion during incidents.

Positive comments from men included joining in the banter, not making a fuss about facilities, having "no airs and graces".

Negative comments were usually around being a distraction, living apart from the lads (and hence not bonding) and needing separate/special facilities. Distraction was the main concern, e.g.

*"She wasn't unattractive and when we were at base she was a distraction. The lads treated her differently- made a bit more of a fuss of her" (M)*

Women were also aware of the issues:

*"I didn't attract unnecessary attention at FOB, I kept covered up in the showers and didn't sunbathe; I didn't want to tease them." (F)*

*"I have known women to be flirty and as it is not in a dangerous place, the men are more likely to respond to it" (F)*

*"My professionalism around the FOB (positively influenced cohesion)" (F)*

The interviews demonstrated that there are a range of behaviours exhibited by different women, which was recognised by both men and women. A few men and women recognised the benefits of having women around, e.g.

*"The lads feel they can talk to you back at the FOB, about any issues. I am trained to recognise PSD. Lads are more likely to talk about problems at home etc with a female" (F)*

*"It's good to have the girls there when someone comes out with something crass." (M)*

However, a large proportion of men still felt that distraction of men from their work by having women around, both in incidents and more generally, is a major concern – since this is predominantly not based on objective observation during close combat incidents, it is not reported here, but covered elsewhere under "perceptions".

### **Leadership**

Leadership was specifically mentioned as a positive influence by very few people, the majority of whom were women. Trust in the leader and their capability/experience were critical in these cases, e.g.

*"Trust in people above takes a lot of pressure away" (M)*

*"It made me properly realise why the army needs officers. They looked at me and followed me even though they are capable and well trained, possibly because I was their troop commander or because it was logical to follow me" (F)*

Another commented:

*"It made me properly realise why the army needs officers, they looked at me and followed me even though they are capable and well trained, possibly because I was their troop commander or it was logical to follow me." (F)*

Leadership was commented on negatively by as many people again (3F 3M), i.e. poor leadership capability or other faults in the leader impacting negatively on cohesion:

*"The commander didn't listen... he made an error of judgement" (F)*

*"She needed more experience, knowledge and a willingness to listen." (M)*

*"It was possibly not because she was a woman, just who she is, wanting to get out there and prove herself. We all want to. I have met men like that too" (M)*

Although there is clearly a balance to strike:

*“Leadership has a strong effect; if I was a better FOO, and knew what we were doing more in terms of technical things in the gunnery... but sometimes needing the guys to give answers improved cohesion.” (F)*

It is interesting that leadership did not come through more consistently as being a factor determining cohesion, as it has been found to be an important factor in past research. A little more information can be gained from these interviews by comparing interviewees' comments earlier in the interview about leadership and their comments later on about cohesion. This shows that where the leader's performance was considered to be excellent, very good or good, the majority of interviewees felt that cohesion was either excellent or very good.

In terms of gender, cohesion was did not seem to be rated differently depending on whether the commander was male or female. Where cohesion was rated as poor or very poor, (by 4 men) there was a mix of male and female leaders. 1 of these interviewees was himself the section commander and clearly felt that the leadership by himself and the 2IC was good, and not a contributory factor to the poor cohesion.

Of the other 3 men, 2 were involved in the same incident and did comment on poor leadership/lack of capability of their female commander; the other's negative comments about the female were not to do with her leadership per se.

#### **Conflict/lack of “gelling” within the team (6M 1F)**

This was mentioned by 5 men and 1 woman as a negative influence on cohesion. “Gelling” within the team appears to be about a number of different factors described elsewhere, notably spending time together, especially in more adverse circumstances, and shared banter/humour. One man commented explicitly:

*“Women don't 'gel' to same extent as men, adversely affecting cohesion, especially in an infantry role” (M)*

Another man identified an inappropriate relationship between the woman and a senior colleague, which *“caused a lot of friction because she paid more attention to this man than to her own team”*.

#### **Other factors**

Some of these factors would appear to be linked to those discussed more fully above, others are more 1-off comments made by a small minority of participants. None were mentioned by more than half a dozen people in total, specifically with reference to cohesion.

- **Teamwork/helping** each other out

*“Taking it in turns to carry the stretcher so no-one felt too fatigued” (F)*

*“Good team work. She contributed a lot to me (M)*

- **Communication/involvement**

*“This overcame any animosity between ourselves. If we felt we didn't get the job done properly, we all discussed it and how we could do better next time – this increased cohesion.” (F)*

*“Making a plan together and being happy with it builds cohesion” (M)*

Communication was mentioned by more interviewees (4M) when it was poor, as negatively impacting cohesion.

- **Individual's attitude/character and reaction under fire**

*"She was willing to get amongst everything, wanting to be the 1st. Their attitude was key – they wanted to get amongst everything. They never asked for special treatment - it made them more a part of us, they ate and lived with us" (M)*

*"It was because of who she was not because of her gender, success of cohesion stems from an individual's character" (M)*

This was commented on by 4 interviewees (twice as many) when it was a negative influence on cohesion under contact:

*"We depended on her, trusted her but she didn't show what she was capable of or trained for (when under fire)" (M)*

*"One guy froze during contact and others had to go back and help" (F)*

- **Standards/values/professionalism**

*"General values & standards of UK army. Commitment, dedication, desire to uphold highest traditions of military service" (M)*

*"Physical robustness and reputation – the Army did as they were told because of who we (Marines) were and we were doing it well" (M)*

- **Lack of commitment** of some team members – this was mentioned by 2 men as a negative influence.

- **Men protecting women**

This was only mentioned specifically as reducing cohesion by two men, but then it appeared to be as much about the woman's capabilities:

*"In downtime cohesion was good, but in combat, poor. Under extreme pressure, cohesion drops because of the inherent idea of a male protecting a female and not trusting their capabilities". (M)*

*"Perhaps I was subconsciously being protective because she looked like a young girl who shouldn't be there – I'm not sure if it was because she was a girl or because she didn't know the drills". (M)*

- **Number of women present**

At various points during the interview, an interesting point was raised by a small number of interviewees, which highlighted the potential impact of having more than one woman present. One woman had been really grateful for the presence of another female:

*"We kept each other motivated. It was good to have another woman there – to be there for each other, talk, listen. On your own would be awful – you couldn't say to a man what you could to a friend." (F)*

A couple of other interviewees felt that having more than one woman present could be detrimental, ultimately to cohesion:

*"If there were more than one or two female infantry soldiers in the team I was due to join, I would refuse to go. Women are bitchy and could make things awkward. Women trust men, men trust men, but women don't trust women" (F)*

*"1 medic mixed in on the ground then left the boys and mixed with other girls at camp. Our med sergeant stayed with us – it made a lot of difference." (M)*

One man recognised a double problem for a lone female commander:

*"Psychologically it's no easy with 100 men, she couldn't chat with the other women because she was in charge - I think she found it isolating. The rest of team were all living in the same room but she had her own room." (M)*

#### **5.4.4 What would have made cohesion excellent?**

Responses to this question re-inforce the points already made in the section above. The following factors were mentioned, in descending order of frequency:

- **Working together longer/ training together/ knowing people better** (3M 3F)  
*"Having worked together before going out and having them (the women) for the full 6 months, not just 3. One of them was with us all 6 months - cohesion was better with her. It took the other one a week to bed in" (M)*  
  
*"If we'd spent longer together in training beforehand and they'd proved themselves capable – we'd have been more confident and aware in the capability of the women" (M)*  
  
*"More experience as a section in combat" (F)*  
  
*"If we'd been with our own battery lads – we'd have had the banter to keep spirits up" (F)*
- **Better communication** (4M) - e.g. listening to different views, all having their say and participating, easier communication within the vehicle
- **Training** (2M 1F) - drills slicker/better; equipment easier to use/better trained on it
- The individual **knowing/doing her job** (3M)
- No personality clash/inappropriate relationship (1M)
- Having a strong, robust medic – could have been female (1M)
- Having the right mindset and fitting in (1M)
- Being under extreme pressure (1M)

#### 5.4.5 Differences across mixed gender incidents

Where interviewees had been involved in more than one mixed-gender incident they were asked to compare cohesion across incidents. Interestingly, a significantly higher proportion of women than men reported differences – of those who had comparative experiences they could comment on, a majority of women said that cohesion did differ across incidents, whilst a majority of men said it did not.

The following factors were mentioned as being responsible for the differences, in descending order of commonality.

- **Higher later on, as a result of knowing people better and more shared experiences (3F 3M)**

*“The team knowing each other better. Greater trust and confidence. The guys were glad I turned up to patch the guy up even though another medic was already there - they knew I would give the best treatment possible” (F)*

*“More time with team, we'd all hit rock bottom, bonding time together, you know how far you can push people with banter once you know them” (F)*

*“Every company gets better as time goes on. Cohesion is there from training but increases during the tour because we get to know each other” (M)*

*“Cohesion got better as time went on. I became more candid with the female medic, she was more approachable” (M)*

- **Experience of previous incidents/more experience (4F 1M)**

This seemed to be particularly important for the women. In addition to those who specifically mentioned this here, many others said during the interview that incidents became routine, or normal, and the impact of having been in earlier incidents on cohesion in later ones was explored as a separate question (see below).

*“I became more comfortable and confident under fire, I realised I could cope with it” (F)*

- **Being more of a team (3F 1M)**

*“At the start everyone is trying to establish themselves; at the end it is very much a team, having gone through experiences together” (F)*

A couple of people mentioned the negative impact of team members falling out with each other, or conflict arising. One woman who fell out with another team member said it impacted on the team, but not during incidents and felt it did not affect task performance.

Another interviewee referred to 2 conflicting characters in his team:

*“On some occasions it was an issue.... it escalated a bit. You keep quiet and stay away from it. It did cause divisions in the team. They should have sorted out their differences” (M)*

- **Severity of the situation (3F 1M)**

*“The worse the situation, the more cohesion, especially when our guardsman was killed. Cohesion was very tight after that- a lot was unspoken. We got cut off for 24 hours, no food or water, just sitting and waiting. Camaraderie was better than any other point in the tour” (F)*

*“The only difference was that the enemy was closer, more direct contact, casualties. Afterwards it did impact on cohesion – it was a very sad time, and it made our resolve stronger - we wanted to go and get one back” (M)*

- **Individual characteristics (2M)**

*“Cohesion was lower for one woman, as she was a bit more girly, less mature, also less outgoing. Others had more life experience, one had lived in an Infantry mess and another had been in the army a while and gave back as good as she got” (M)*

- **Nature/location of incident (2M)**

*“Cohesion was lower in another incident where we were attacked in open cornfield. We could have extracted slightly quicker if she had been a man, as she moved slower with her med pack than the men with their ECMs” (M)*

*“When on the ground (as opposed to in a vehicle), I'd keep more of an eye on her because she's not in the Infantry, the same as I would keep an eye on anyone who's not Infantry. I did the same with reporters. This had no impact on the task” (M)*

#### **5.4.6 Impact of being in previous incidents**

Many interviewees spoke about how close combat incidents became “normal” or “routine”. This question asked specifically about whether cohesion in later incidents differed from those in earlier ones, simply due to the fact of having been involved in mixed gender ground close combat incidents before.

- **Impact on cohesion**

A minority of men and women said that there was an impact on cohesion, due to having been in previous incidents. Mostly, the impact was a positive one, related to familiarity and slicker response, and also to trust and confidence:

*“For the first incident, everyone says the training kicks in. I had to take a moment to say, “Right, do this”. As I did more, my commitment/cohesion got better, the less I had to think about it, it becomes normal” (F)*

*“Cohesion was stronger later on as we were getting used to it, we could tell when it was going to happen” (M)*

*“It made me feel I could trust everyone, I felt I would be safe; I was confident that if anything happened I'd be OK. I previously thought of it as a normal exercise, then thought “this is for real” (F)*

*“As we had more ops/situations, I still put more emphasis on her than rest of team, but less so – the same as for a new soldier” (M)*

*“The baptism of fire from previous incidents very early on was a bonding experience” (M)*

A small number of men felt that a high number of previous incidents could negatively impact cohesion:

*“It was worse, as blokes starting to get on each other's nerves” (M)*

*“The iterative nature - contact again and again – it wears people down, it gets harder” (M)*

- **No impact on cohesion**

A small percentage of men and women said there was no impact on cohesion, specifically as a result of having been in previous incidents. One interviewee made the following distinction:

*“But it increased due to having worked together more – we understand each other more, I understood individuals' foibles better, understood what did and didn't affect cohesion. The ability of us all being able to do our job was more relevant than being bombed together” (F)*

#### **5.4.7 Comparison of mixed gender and all-male combat incidents**

Some men were in the position of being able to comment on the cohesion in all-male incidents as compared to that in mixed gender incidents. Not all male interviewees were able to specifically rate, identify or remember a comparable all-male ground close combat incident. Most were able to do so, and the majority rated cohesion as being excellent or very good. A small minority rated cohesion either poor or quite good and no one rated it very poor.

The majority rated cohesion the same as on all-female incidents, 1 rated the all-male incident lower (due to arrogant style of command and lack of trust) and 7 rated it higher, 3 significantly so. Many of the men said that the influences on cohesion were the same, i.e. people knowing their job, time spent together, bonding with each other etc.

#### **Significant differences**

For those men who rated cohesion significantly higher (4 or 5 as opposed to 1 or 2) in the all-male incidents, reasons given were:

- **Later in the tour/more experience/time together**

*“We were more swept up, it was heavier fighting” (M)*

*“We had been in the field together longer, more time to gel - did impact cohesion” (M)*

- **Being able to use men more flexibly than women**

*“We could overlap, it was easier to manage – we knew everyone's job, could do our own job or the next man's” (M)*

*“With the women gone, we were tighter, it was easier to command because 1 element of planning was removed” (M)*

- **Physical/mental toughness**

*“We worked well as a team; people were aggressively doing their job – there was not the same forceful effect when girls were doing it. Also physical strength – for example I saw a casevac carried 200m on someone's back – a female couldn't have done this” (M)*

- **Gelling as a team/banter**

*“It was a diverse group, with a shared natural love of football, rugby etc - arguing amongst each other, a kindred appreciation of football makes them really good friends. This was especially useful towards the end of tour when people were tired, we’d had lots of injuries” (M)*

*“He was more experienced and knew our mindset” (M)*

- **Practicalities**

*“Routines could overlap - showers etc. It was more awkward with women there”. (M)*

### **Other differences**

Other factors differentially affecting cohesion with all male and mixed gender teams are summarised below. None of these appeared to be significant specifically in the context of cohesion during ground close combat incidents, as these respondents had rated overall cohesion the same or slightly higher (excellent as opposed to very good). None were mentioned by more than 3 or 4 people.

- **Training**

It was recognised that differential exposure to training was important.

*“The instinctive urge to get up there and put yourself in harm’s way - this comes from training which the females hadn’t had” (M)*

*“They all had specific Infantry jobs and got on and did them rather than having to be told, because of the drills” (M)*

*“In a similar incident, some guys were already up there - all were willing and prepared to join in. I accredit this to pre-deployment training (which the female had not been part of)” (M)*

- **Time together and amount of previous combat experience**

*“I knew them for 6 yrs and we did PDT together, they knew me and how I worked” (M) (versus attached female with them for 3 months)*

*“Training before Afghanistan and we had worked together for years or months. (M) (versus attached female, ad hoc team)*

- **Severity of the situation**

*“We lost one of our medics. Although everyone was shattered, the shared experience made the bonding unbreakable” (M)*

*“The only difference was that the enemy was closer, more direct contact, casualties. Afterwards it did impact on cohesion – it was a very sad time, it made our resolve stronger – we wanted to go and get one back” (M)*

- **Physical capability**

*“There were no different factors, except the weight issue – I would give men more than women” (M)*

- **Feeling happier using men more flexibly**  
*"I felt better asking the male engineer to do extra things" (M)*
- **Communication** (for this interviewee, communication had been an issue with the woman)  
*"Getting your point across, being listened to, getting a sensible answer back. We were all treated as equals. If anything needed to be said you were pulled to 1 side". (M)*

### **Irrelevance of gender**

Whilst most of the differences mentioned in the previous section are not specifically related to gender per se, or are indirectly related to gender (e.g. women's roles by nature meaning that the women will typically have spent less time with the men and involved less training, when compared to a permanent all-male section), a small number of men did explicitly point out that gender is irrelevant when comparing cohesion. Comments included:

*"It's difficult to compare. The same person under rocket attack can be fine one day, then wetting themselves the next. It's nothing to do with gender" (M)*

*"I witnessed an all male team where one Commander 'wobbled' under pressure when he realised he would have to go back for 2 men left behind during close combat; there was lots of very close fire and I'd never seen him like that further back in vehicles. He didn't perform as strongly as the woman" (M)*

### **What would have made cohesion excellent?**

There were very few responses here, as for the majority cohesion in all-male incidents was felt to be excellent. Responses were varied and there were no clear themes. They included:

- More severe incident – *"A big ambush situation, men would be 100% committed and motivated – you see different mentality." (M)*
- Relationships – *"Uncomplicated relationships and not holding grudges" (M)*
- Time together – *"Not having got on each others' nerves after such a long time together" (M)*
- Speed of response

## **6. Conclusions**

### **6.1 Cohesion**

The central research question was whether the presence of women in ground close combat would affect the cohesion of the small teams they are in. Overall, interviewees rated cohesion highly in the incidents they spoke about; the majority of men who had been in both mixed-gender and all-male teams in these situations rated cohesion the same for both, and there was no real difference overall in how women and men rated the mixed-gender teams' cohesion.

It has been interesting to uncover what interviewees believe to impact cohesion. Essentially, cohesion builds over time. It is fundamentally about trust and confidence in other team members to do their job. As such, the most important contributory factors are time spent together before and during an operation - shared experiences, shared and adequate training, and to some extent previous incidents. It was recognised that women need to have the time and opportunity to prove themselves, particularly as some men's pre-existing attitudes and expectations of women are more pessimistic than optimistic about their capabilities, especially where they are unused to working with women.

As a result of the nature of the roles the women were undertaking, these contributory factors were harder for the women to demonstrate – i.e. they often had spent less time with their male colleagues than the latter had spent together (often being attached to the section/company when they arrived at the start of an operation, for example), and many had not trained with the men in the team even for PDT. As a result, these factors were inevitably mentioned as accounting for much of the difference in cohesion when men felt that this had been higher in all-male than in mixed-gender teams. In this respect, some difference in cohesion between male-only and mixed-gender team cohesion was probably inevitable in terms of the incidents/female roles considered in this research.

A consistent issue encountered during the interviews was the distinction (or otherwise) between cohesion during incidents and at other times. Overall, cohesion is important, and is built, outside of incidents; during incidents, any issues within the team are generally overshadowed as training kicks in and the team go about doing their jobs in order to meet the common objective. Capability at this point becomes key – and it is in this way that the women seem to be judged – their ability to do the job, under extreme pressure, which appears in turn to be related to experience, training and their individual character (reacting to the stress of the situation). Where cohesion was rated lower, it was due to lack of capability, technical expertise and knowledge.

### **6.2 Leadership**

Leadership during the incidents was viewed more positively by women than men overall, and men were more positive about male than female leaders. However, leadership did not emerge as a key determinant of cohesion, although men tended to rate cohesion lower when they worked with a female leader who they felt was less effective. Poor cohesion here was perceived to be as much about the woman's capability in her technical role as about her leadership capability.

Most of those who commented, felt that the presence of a woman had no impact on the leader or the leader's judgment, and that the leaders treated everyone the same, within the context of their roles/abilities.

### **6.3 Impact of women in mixed gender teams**

In terms of the impact more generally of having a woman present, the majority of interviewees felt there was no impact on getting the task done; for the small minority of men who felt there was a detrimental impact, this was due to lack of perceived competence in her role and her lack of strength/training – this being in turn reflecting her not having been selected or trained to deliberately undertake ground close combat.

Whilst a majority of men felt there was no impact on them of having a woman present, others felt there had been although they were not well able in many cases to explain exactly what this was. In some cases it was more an awareness of a woman being present with a view to potential rather than realised dangers, and for a few leaders it was about keeping the woman safe and not being able to use her as flexibly as the other men.

However, the majority of women and men (especially those from the Infantry) felt that the woman was an equal member of the team, and most men said they would not have treated the woman differently had she been a man. Most of those who commented, felt that the presence of a woman had no impact on the leader or the leader's judgment. More men felt there was an impact on others present, due to a variety of pre-conceived attitudes, but generally there did not seem to have been any impact on succeeding with the immediate task.

Overall, there was little actual evidence of any detrimental impact of women being present during incidents, but some clearly felt there could have been, and it might well be that in some situations more could have been done/confidence would have been higher if the woman had been trained and effective in all the same skills as the male soldiers specifically trained for close combat.

Indeed, an interesting issue in interpreting the findings of this study is separating out actual experiences from hypothetical situations and assumptions about these, which are often based on deeply held beliefs. Whilst actual experiences have often not borne out people's fears, these still remain for many.

### **6.4 Attitudes about women in ground close combat**

As suggested above, many men (and some women) had very firm views about whether women should be in ground close combat roles. For a majority of men and women, their views have not changed as a result of their experiences, and where views have changed, there is a roughly equal split between people becoming more and less positive about having women in these roles. Key concerns (expressed by men and women) are around women being a distraction and the dangers associated with close relationships, men's desire to protect women (exacerbated by the previous concern) and, despite the fact that we explicitly said this study was not addressing the issue, women's relatively lower physical strength and stamina. A significant number of men felt that, despite having had positive experiences of women in the roles they currently fill, they would not want women in the Infantry – there was a feeling amongst many that they would not feel comfortable asking a woman to close with and kill the enemy at

very close range, and that they were concerned about the woman's and others' response to this situation should it arise. This final step is felt to be different, and a step too far.

Interestingly, many women (and men) felt that even for those women who might be physically and mentally capable of carrying out these roles, few would wish to do so, and many of our female interviewees said they would not want to themselves.

Notwithstanding this, a minority of interviewees were in favour of women having the opportunity of doing these roles, with the absolute proviso that they were assessed, on selection and training, exactly equally to men – women would need to prove themselves capable of all the tasks men carry out in the Infantry etc, and interviewees talked about not just physical strength but also character and attitudes. Many people expressing positive attitudes spoke about the fact that some women have proven themselves capable in theatre in these ways and are just as capable of fulfilling the role demands as men. We also heard how everything really depends on the individual – some women do everything they can not to be a distraction, to muck in, to overcome any potential issues with facilities, and to spend all their time with their teams, joining in the all-important banter and becoming “one of the lads”.

A question remains: to what extent would the women's proven capability, behaviour and attitude overcome men's instincts to protect women in the most extreme situations and their potential unwillingness to deliberately put women into these situations? Also, interviewees consistently said that in contact, training kicks in and everyone just gets on with their job; again, would the training/ getting on with the job override these same concerns?

## Participant Information Sheet

‘Review of the grounds for exclusion of Women in Ground Close Combat Roles: MoDREC reference number 0945/270.’

We would like to invite you to participate in this research project being undertaken by *Berkshire Consultancy on behalf of the MOD*. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. If you would like to take part, please let us know if you have been involved in any other study during the last year.

### Who We Are

Berkshire Consultancy Ltd – We have been brought in by the Army as an independent body to carry out this research. Our team comprises consultants who are experienced researchers and who have worked on many other projects with the Services.

### Aim of Research

The aim of the research is to provide objective evidence that will inform the review of the policy that excludes women from being employed in ground close combat roles. This policy was last reviewed in 2002. We will be collecting information from women and men who have experienced incidents of ground close combat in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002. An **Incident** is a situation arising from a section coming under attack, where the section came under direct fire (RPG/small arms) and had to respond as a result. These incidents are therefore examples of Ground Close Combat, and form the focus of this research.

This data will concentrate on exploring these individuals’ collective experiences and views on unit (section) cohesion during incidents leading to ground close combat.

### Research Objective

The main research question to be addressed is: To examine whether having women in ground close combat situations impacts small unit (section) cohesion. Cohesion is defined as the ability (of a section) to remain committed and motivated to reaching a shared goal and to support, trust and depend on each other in doing so. It is particularly important in combat, when commitment and motivation are under extreme pressure.

The review in 2002 looked at the comparative physical abilities and psychological differences between men and women and concluded that these were not in themselves reasons to maintain restrictions, so we will not be covering these areas in this study.

## **The Project**

Our work sits alongside two other work streams. The first is looking at recent research literature of the effectiveness of mixed gender teams in the combat environment. The second is a consideration of the experiences of other nations in employing women in ground close combat roles.

We will be gathering data from women and men in the following ways:

- Questionnaires will be distributed to all women with experience of ground close combat and to a sample of men with experience of ground close combat, some of whom will have had a woman attached to their section at the time, others not.
- Interviews will be carried out with women who have experience of ground close combat and some of the men who were with them at the time.

Interviews will be taking place throughout September and early October and will run concurrently with the distribution of questionnaires. We will report the findings from the interviews and the questionnaire by the end of November, for inclusion in a paper to Minister of the Armed Forces by the end of the year.

## **Structure of Interview**

The interview will last approximately 1 hour. I will be asking you some questions based around the experience you have had, focusing particularly on the 'cohesion' of the section (as defined in the Research Objective) during the incident. I will ask for more details or further examples if necessary.

## **Confidentiality**

I will be making notes throughout the interview to ensure I capture what you are saying accurately and fully. Any notes taken will be used in our analysis and will be unattributable and confidential. Totally anonymised 1 page summaries of each interview will be given to the MOD and retained as qualitative raw data by Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff Personnel Branch in accordance with the Data Protection Act. We may include quotes and specific examples in our final report but they will be totally anonymised and untraceable; we will not mention names, sections, roles, specific locations or dates etc.

## **Support**

We understand that talking about these experiences may be difficult and would like to stress that your involvement in the research is voluntary. You are free to leave the interview at any time or to take a break/pause if you feel you need to. There are support lines available to you, should you wish to use them after the interview. Please see attached sheet. Your unit is also prepared to provide support as required.

You may at any time withdraw from the study without giving a reason. If you have started the interview whatever notes have been collected will be destroyed and will not be used in the study. If you ever require any further explanation, please do not hesitate to ask.

Any information obtained during this research project will remain confidential as to your identity: if it can be specifically identified with you, your permission will be sought in writing before it will be published. Other material, which cannot be identified with you, will be published or presented at meetings with the aim of benefiting others. You may ask the Principal Investigator (see details below) for copies of all papers, reports, transcripts, summaries and other published or presented material. All information will be subject to the current conditions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

A full scientific protocol for this research has been approved by the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee. This study complies and at all times will comply with the Declaration of Helsinki<sup>1</sup> as adopted at the 52nd WMA General Assembly, Edinburgh, October 2000 and with the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, concerning Biomedical Research, (Strasbourg 25.1.2005). Please ask the Project Officer if you would like further details of the approval or to see a copy of the full protocol.

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator:

Sandra Buckley

Berkshire Consultancy Limited, The Old Barn, Priory Court, Beech Hill, Reading, RG7 2BJ

**Telephone:** 01189 883749

**E-mail:** [consultancy@berkshire.co.uk](mailto:consultancy@berkshire.co.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> World Medical Association (2000) Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects. 52<sup>nd</sup> World Medical Association General Assembly, Edinburgh, Scotland October 2000.

## **Annex B - Participant Consent Form**

### **CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES**

**Title of Study: Review of the Grounds for Exclusion of Women in Ground Close Combat Roles**

**Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee Reference: ASAC 111**

- **The nature, aims and risks of the research have been explained to me. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and understand what is expected of me. All my questions have been answered fully to my satisfaction.**
- **I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and be withdrawn from it immediately without having to give a reason. I also understand that I may be withdrawn from it at any time, and that in neither case will this be held against me in subsequent dealings with the Ministry of Defence.**
- **I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.**
- **I agree to volunteer as a participant for the study described in the information sheet and give full consent.**
- **This consent is specific to the particular study described in the Participant Information Sheet attached and shall not be taken to imply my consent to participate in any subsequent study or deviation from that detailed here.**

**Participant's Statement:**

I \_\_\_\_\_

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Participant Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

**Signed**

**Date**

Witness

Name

Signature

**AUTHORISING SIGNATURES**

The information supplied above is to the best of my knowledge and belief accurate. I clearly understand my obligations and the rights of research participants, particularly concerning recruitment of participants and obtaining valid consent.

Signature of Principal Investigator

.....

Date

Contact Details

## Annex C -

## Interview Schedule – Male

### Interview Guidelines (Men)

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We will be gathering data from women and men in the following ways:

- Questionnaires will be distributed to all women with experience of ground close combat and to a sample of men with experience of ground close combat, some of whom will have had a woman attached to their section at the time, others not.
- Interviews will be carried out with women who have experience of ground close combat and some of the men who were with them at the time.

Interviews will be taking place throughout September and early October and will run concurrently with the distribution of questionnaires. We will report the findings from the interviews and the questionnaire by the end of November, for inclusion in a paper to Minister of the Armed Forces by the end of the year.

## **Structure of interview**

The interview will last approximately 1 hour. I will be asking you some questions based around the experience you have had, focusing particularly on the 'cohesion' of the small team/section (as defined in the Research Objective) during the incident. I will ask for more details or further examples if necessary.

## **Confidentiality**

I will be making notes throughout the interview to ensure I capture what you are saying accurately and fully. Any notes taken will be used in our analysis and will be unattributable and confidential. Totally anonymised 1 page summaries of each interview will be given to the MOD and retained as qualitative raw data by Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff Personnel Branch in accordance with the Data Protection Act. We may include quotes and specific examples in our final report but they will be totally anonymised and untraceable; we will not mention names, sections, roles, specific locations or dates etc.

## **Support**

We understand that talking about these experiences may be difficult and would like to stress that your involvement in the research is voluntary. You are free to leave the interview at any time or to take a break/pause if you feel you need to. There are support lines available to you, should you wish to use them after the interview. Please see attached sheet. Your unit is also prepared to provide support as required.

You may at any time withdraw from the study without giving a reason. If you have started the interview whatever notes have been collected will be destroyed and will not be used in the study. If you ever require any further explanation, please do not hesitate to ask.

Any information obtained during this research project will remain confidential as to your identity: if it can be specifically identified with you, your permission will be sought in writing before it will be published. Other material, which cannot be identified with you, will be published or presented at meetings with the aim of benefiting others. You may ask the Principal Investigator for copies of all papers, reports, transcripts, summaries and other published or presented material. All information will be subject to the current conditions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

A full scientific protocol for this research has been approved by the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee. This study complies and at all times will comply with the Declaration of Helsinki<sup>2</sup> as adopted at the 52nd WMA General Assembly, Edinburgh, October 2000 and with the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, concerning Biomedical Research, (Strasbourg 25.1.2005). Please ask the Project Officer if you would like further details of the approval or to see a copy of the full protocol.

For the purpose of this interview please answer the questions about the small team/section involved in the incident for the duration of time in which that group of people operated together. i.e. the small team/section Commander (who may or may not be you), the small team/section members and any attachments who were involved in the incident. (Attachments include any people who have been temporarily posted to a small team/section, this could be because they offer an additional skill such as a medic or dog handler.)

Is there anything you would like me to explain in more detail? Do you have any questions?

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<sup>2</sup> World Medical Association (2000) Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects. 52<sup>nd</sup> World Medical Association General Assembly, Edinburgh, Scotland October 2000.

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Incident number: \_\_\_\_\_

Rank at time of incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Woman's role at time of  
incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary interview notes (please make a note of any key themes/supporting quotes):

## Structured Interview Questions

### Start of interview

Are you happy to proceed with the interview?

- If yes, = Thank you, can I have your signed consent form please?
- If no = Thank you, you are free to go. Please be assured that your commanding officer will not be informed.

### Incidents

How many ground close combat incidents have you been involved in where your small team/section has:

- Had a woman attached?
- Consisted of men only?

For the next part of this interview, I would like you to focus on the incident you were originally contacted about as part of this research, when your small team/section had a woman attached.

### The Small Team/Section

*When we refer to small team/section, we would like you to only consider the small team/section as it was at the time the incident occurred. This will include the permanent small team/section plus attached members providing additional skills for the purpose of the task that day.*

#### *Small team/section composition*

What was the size of the small team/section, including attachments?   
 How many attached members were there?   
 Were the attached members men or women?

#### *Small team/section lifetime*

How long did the small team/section work together (exactly as formed at the time of the incident)?   
 How long had the small team/section worked together before the incident?

Before the incident happened, how many people in the small team/section would you say you had known for;

• 1-2 hours	
• Half a day	
• 1 day	
• 2 days	
• 3-6 days	
• 1-2 weeks	
• 3-4 weeks	
• more than 1 month	

Before the time of the incident, how many times had that small team/section carried out tasks together?

**Leadership**

What gender was the small team/section Commander? 2IC?

How well did the small team/section Commander perform?

How well did the 2IC perform?

How could the small team/section Commander/ 2IC improved?

Do you feel that the leaders treated all small team/section members the same?

Do you think that the leaders' behaviour affected the team in anyway?

- How?

**Background**

What were you doing before the incident happened?

What was the woman's role?

How long did the incident last?

- If more than a few minutes: How did the situation develop over that time?

What was particularly challenging about the ground you were in?

- Were you in a built up/urban area
- What was the climate like?

**Perceptions**

To what extent did you feel the woman was an equal member of the small team/section?

- Why?
- How?

Do you feel it would have made a difference if the small team/section had been all male?

What was the impact on you of having a woman present during contact?

- At the time, were you aware of her being a woman?
- Would you have treated her differently if she had been a man?
- Did it affect your behaviour? e.g. towards your colleagues?

Do you think having a woman present had an impact on the small team/section Commander during contact?

- Did they behave differently towards the woman
- Did they behave differently, than if you had been all men, towards the rest of the small team/section? How?

Do you think having a woman present had an impact on the small team/section Commander's judgement during contact?

- How?

Do you think having a woman present had an impact on anyone else during contact?

- Did anyone behave differently, than if you had all been men? How?

Do you think having a woman present had an impact on getting the task done?

- (If necessary: What do you think would have been different if there had only been men there?)

How many times have you worked as part of an operational small team/section with a woman attached?

How if at all has this incident (or these incidents) affected your attitudes towards women in ground close combat?

- Why?
- How?

**Definition of cohesion (using handout 01)**

What do you think about this definition?

- What do you like?
- What do you agree with?
- What don't you like?

**Cohesion within the small team/section**

For the next part of this interview, I would like you to focus on the incident you were originally contacted about as part of this research, when your small team/section had a woman attached.

Rate cohesion within the small team/section on a scale of 1-5

(1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = quite good; 4 = very good; 5 = excellent)

- Why?
- What do you think positively affected or influenced cohesion?
- What do you think negatively affected or influenced cohesion?
- What would have made the team cohesion excellent?

If you have been involved in more than one incident where your small team/section had a woman attached;

- How did cohesion compare between incidents?
- What were the differences due to?
- Was cohesion different specifically as a result of you having been in a previous incident? Why?

Please think about a recent comparable incident that involved a men only small team/section.  
How would you rate the cohesion of the small team/section during this incident on scale of 1-5?  
(1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = quite good; 4 = very good; 5 = excellent)

- Why?
- What do you think positively affected or influenced cohesion?
- What do you think negatively affected or influenced cohesion?  
What would have made the team cohesion excellent?

## Annex D - Interview Schedule – Female

### Interview Guidelines (Women)

‘Review of the grounds for exclusion of Women in Ground Close Combat Roles: MoDREC reference number 0945/270.’

We would like to invite you to participate in this research project being undertaken by *Berkshire Consultancy on behalf of the MOD*. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. If you would like to take part, please let us know if you have been involved in any other study during the last year.

#### Who We Are

Berkshire Consultancy Ltd – We have been brought in by the Army as an independent body to carry out this research. Our team comprises consultants who are experienced researchers and who have worked on many other projects with the Services.

#### Aim of Research

The aim of the research is to provide objective evidence that will inform the review of the policy that excludes women from being employed in ground close combat roles. This policy was last reviewed in 2002. We will be collecting information from women and men who have experienced incidents of ground close combat in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002. An **Incident** is a situation arising from a section coming under attack, where the small team/section came under direct fire (RPG/small arms) and had to respond as a result. These incidents are therefore examples of Ground Close Combat, and form the focus of this research.

This data will concentrate on exploring individuals’ collective experiences and views on unit (small team/section) cohesion during incidents leading to ground close combat.

#### Research Objective

The main research question to be addressed is: To examine whether having women in ground close combat situations impacts small unit (small team/section) cohesion. Cohesion is defined as the ability (of a small team/section) to remain committed and motivated to reaching a shared goal and to support, trust and depend on each other in doing so. It is particularly important in combat, when commitment and motivation are under extreme pressure.

The review in 2002 looked at the comparative physical abilities and psychological differences between men and women and concluded that these were not in themselves reasons to maintain restrictions, so we will not be covering these areas in this study.

## **The Project**

Our work sits alongside two other work streams. The first is looking at recent research literature of the effectiveness of mixed gender teams in the combat environment. The second is a consideration of the experiences of other nations in employing women in ground close combat roles.

We will be gathering data from women and men in the following ways:

- Questionnaires will be distributed to all women with experience of ground close combat and to a sample of men with experience of ground close combat, some of whom will have had a woman attached to their section at the time, others not.
- Interviews will be carried out with women who have experience of ground close combat and some of the men who were with them at the time.

Interviews will be taking place throughout September and early October and will run concurrently with the distribution of questionnaires. We will report the findings from the interviews and the questionnaire by the end of November, for inclusion in a paper to Minister of the Armed Forces by the end of the year.

## **Structure of Interview**

The interview will last approximately 1 hour. I will be asking you some questions based around the experience you have had, focusing particularly on the 'cohesion' of the small team/section (as defined in the Research Objective) during the incident. I will ask for more details or further examples if necessary.

## **Confidentiality**

I will be making notes throughout the interview to ensure I capture what you are saying accurately and fully. Any notes taken will be used in our analysis and will be unattributable and confidential. Totally anonymised 1 page summaries of each interview will be given to the MOD and retained as qualitative raw data by Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff Personnel Branch in accordance with the Data Protection Act. We may include quotes and specific examples in our final report but they will be totally anonymised and untraceable; we will not mention names, sections, roles, specific locations or dates etc.

## **Support**

We understand that talking about these experiences may be difficult and would like to stress that your involvement in the research is voluntary. You are free to leave the interview at any time or to take a break/pause if you feel you need to. There are support lines available to you, should you wish to use them after the interview. Please see attached sheet. Your unit is also prepared to provide support as required.

You may at any time withdraw from the study without giving a reason. If you have started the interview whatever notes have been collected will be destroyed and will not be used in the study. If you ever require any further explanation, please do not hesitate to ask.

Any information obtained during this research project will remain confidential as to your identity: if it can be specifically identified with you, your permission will be sought in writing before it will be published. Other material, which cannot be identified with you, will be published or presented at meetings with the aim of benefiting others. You may ask the Principal Investigator for copies of all papers, reports, transcripts, summaries and other published or presented material. All information will be subject to the current conditions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

A full scientific protocol for this research has been approved by the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee. This study complies and at all times will comply with the Declaration of Helsinki<sup>3</sup> as adopted at the 52nd WMA General Assembly, Edinburgh, October 2000 and with the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, concerning Biomedical Research, (Strasbourg 25.1.2005). Please ask the Project Officer if you would like further details of the approval or to see a copy of the full protocol.

For the purpose of this interview please answer the questions about the small team/section involved in the incident for the duration of time in which that group of people operated together. I.e. the small team/section Commander (who may or may not be you), the small team/section members and any attachments who were involved in the incident. (Attachments include any people who have been temporarily posted to a small team/section, this could be because they offer an additional skill such as a medic or dog handler.)

Is there anything you would like me to explain in more detail? Do you have any questions?

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<sup>3</sup> World Medical Association (2000) Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects. 52<sup>nd</sup> World Medical Association General Assembly, Edinburgh, Scotland October 2000.

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Incident number: \_\_\_\_\_

Rank at time of incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Role at time of incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary interview notes (please make a note of any key themes/supporting quotes):

## Structured Interview Questions

### Start of interview

Are you happy to proceed with the interview?

- If yes, = Thank you, can I have your signed consent form please?
- If no = Thank you, you are free to go. Please be assured that your commanding officer will not be informed.

### Incidents

How many ground close combat incidents have you been involved in?

For the next part of this interview, I would like you to focus on the incident you were originally contacted about as part of this research.

### The Small Team/Section

*When we refer to small team/section, we would like you to only consider the small team/section as it was at the time the incident occurred. This will include the permanent small team/section plus yourself and any other attached members providing additional skills for the purpose of the task that day.*

#### *Small team/section composition*

What was the size of the small team/section, including attachments?

How many attached members were there?

Were the attached members men or women?

#### *Small team/section lifetime*

How long did the small team/section work together (exactly as formed at the time of the incident)?

How long had the small team/section worked together before the incident?

Before the incident happened, how many people in the small team/section would you say you had known for;

• 1-2 hours	
• Half a day	
• 1 day	
• 2 days	
• 3-6 days	
• 1-2 weeks	
• 3-4 weeks	
• more than 1 month	

Before the time of the incident, how many times had that small team/section carried out tasks together?

**Leadership**

What gender was the small team/section Commander? 2IC?

How well did the small team/section Commander perform?

How well did the 2IC perform?

How could the small team/section Commander/ 2IC improved?

Do you feel that the leaders treated all small team/section members the same?

Do you think that the leaders' behaviour affected the team in anyway?

- How?

**Background**

What were you doing before the incident happened?

What was the woman's role?

How long did the incident last?

- If more than a few minutes: How did the situation develop over that time?

What was particularly challenging about the ground you were in?

- Were you in a built up/urban area
- What was the climate like?

## Perceptions

As a woman, do you think your presence had an impact on the small team/section Commander during contact?

- (If necessary: What if anything do you think would have been different if there had only been men there?)

As a woman, do you think your presence had an impact on anyone else during contact?

- Did the others behave differently towards you than towards each other?

As a woman, do you think your presence had an impact on getting the task done?

- (If necessary: What if anything do you think would have been different if there had only been men there?)

To what extent did you feel that you were an equal member of the small team/section?

- Why?
- How?

How if at all has this incident affected your attitudes towards women in ground close combat? Why?

- How?

**Definition of cohesion (using handout 01)**

What do you think about this definition?

- What do you like?
- What do you agree with?
- What don't you like?

**Cohesion within the small team/section**

For the next part of this interview, I would like you to focus on the incident you were originally contacted about as part of this research.

Rate cohesion within the small team/section on a scale of 1-5  
(1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = quite good; 4 = very good; 5 = excellent)

- Why?
- What do you think positively affected or influenced cohesion?
- What do you think negatively affected or influenced cohesion?
- What would have made the team cohesion excellent?

If you have been involved in more than one incident;

- How did cohesion compare between incidents?
- What were any differences due to?
- Was cohesion different specifically as a result of you having been in a previous incident? Why?

## **Annex E - Handout given to participants**

### **Project Team Contact Numbers**

If you have any questions then please do not hesitate to contact Berkshire Consultancy Limited (Nina Stone or Sandra Buckley) on +44 (0)118 988 3749 or alternatively Major Little on 01980 61 5755.

### **Definitions for the Purpose of this Project**

#### **Cohesion**

For the purposes of this research we have defined cohesion as;

*“The ability (of a section) to remain committed and motivated to reaching a shared goal and to support, trust and depend on each other in doing so. It is particularly important in combat, when commitment and motivation are under extreme pressure.”*

#### **Combat Effectiveness**

Based on the definition in JDP 0.01 Edn 7, Jun 06;

*“Combat effectiveness is defined as the ability of a unit/formation/ship, weapon system or equipment to carry out its assigned mission, role or function. The cohesion of a unit is a vital factor in its combat effectiveness.”*

#### **Ground Close Combat**

Ground Close Combat is combat with the enemy over a short range on the ground.

## Annex F - Interviewee Breakdown

The following tables show the breakdown of those interviewed, *who were included in the analysis*, by individual criteria.

### Interviewees by gender

	Total
Male	69
Female	28
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>97</b>

### Female interviewees by role

Woman's Role	Total
Dog Handler	2
Female Searcher	1
FST Commander	3
HET Troop Commander and Logistic Element Commander	1
Medic	13
Psy Ops	2
Royal Military Police	2
Signaller	1
Troop Commander	2
Vehicle mechanic	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>28</b>

### Interviewees by gender and cap badge

Cap Badge	Men	Women	Total
Inf	37	0	37
RA	13	5	18
RAC	2	1	3
RAMC	0	9	9
RAVC	0	2	2
RE	2	2	4
REME	4	1	5
RLC	1	2	3
RMP	0	2	2
RN	1	3	4
RSIGNALS	0	1	1
RM	8	0	8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>97</b>

## Service by gender

Service	Male	Female	Total
Army	60	24	86
Royal Marines	8	0	9
Royal Navy	1	3	1
RAF	0	0	0

## Interviewees by gender and rank

Rank at time of incident	Men	Women	Total
Pte or equivalent (Gun, MA, Mne, Spr)	10	8	18
LCpl/LBdr	6	8	14
Cpl/Bdr	5	5	10
Sgt/PO	17	1	18
CSgt/SSgt	2	0	2
WO2	5	0	5
WO1	1	0	1
2nd Lt	3	0	3
Lt	4	3	7
Capt	4	3	7
Lt Cdr	1	0	1
Maj	11	0	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>97</b>