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## The Promotion Of Women Within The Irish Armed Forces

Tom Clonan

*Technological University Dublin*, [tom.clonan@tudublin.ie](mailto:tom.clonan@tudublin.ie)

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

# The Promotion of Female Personnel Within the Irish Armed Forces

The aim of this study, to critically examine the status and roles assigned female personnel in the PDF, has been addressed in a number of ways. The role of women in the PDF has been examined in chapter seven, in terms of the deployment policies and practices as promulgated by the military authorities. The pattern of women's employment within a gender division of labour was charted through a number of unit audits. The women's attitudes to this pattern of employment and their aspirations in this respect were also assessed through a simple analysis of interview data. In the chapter on training, an analysis of the PDF training environment, particularly as it impacts on women, gave some insights into the role envisaged for female troops, and their perceived status within a male dominated organisation.

The issue of status, in terms of the numbers and visibility of women, was assessed in the chapter on recruitment. PDF policies in this regard were shown to have had an effect on any possible impact women may have had on the organisation by limiting the numbers of those eligible to apply for service and imposing quotas on the numbers of those selected for service. Issues of status were also examined in the chapter on deployment in terms of the appointments assigned female personnel over the primary and secondary roles of the organisation. The issue of status is now further examined in this chapter on promotion. There is a discussion of the criteria for promotion and how PDF deployment and training policies impact on women's promotion opportunities in this regard. There is a simple analysis of figures in relation to female (other ranks) promotion and female officers' promotion. There is also a qualitative insight into the perceptions of female troops in relation to their promotion prospects and their aspirations for promotion.

The power or status of women within the organisation through this simple analysis can be assessed by applying the models outlined by Adler (1994) in terms of access to "strategic power" and Reskin and Padavic (1994) in terms of "autonomy" for female personnel. It will be of interest to note if the PDF operates to proactively promote women in the workplace in accord with EEA guidelines (1998) and in line with the spirit of equality of opportunity literature, or if indeed the PDF is a work environment hostile to equality of opportunity with an ad hoc and "informal promotion policy and a work culture that froze (sic) women out". (Reskin and Padavic, 1994: 98-9)

## 8.1 Promotion, other ranks

Table (xvi), supplied by Enlisted Personnel Section at DFHQ and based on the statistics contained in Strength Return 1 (SR1), shows the breakdown by rank of both male and female personnel, (other ranks) as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 1996. The table consists of five columns and eight rows. The first column on the left hand side lists the ranks held in descending order with the most junior rank of private in the bottom row. The remaining columns respectively from left to right contain the relevant numbers of male and female personnel along with the percentage of the total as calculated by EPS. The table is useful in comparing the numbers and percentages of male and female personnel holding non-commissioned rank.

Table (xvi): Ranks held by male and female personnel (Other Ranks) 30.09.96

| Rank Held      | Male  | % Male | Female | % Female |
|----------------|-------|--------|--------|----------|
| Sergeant Major | 44    | 0.4%   | Nil    | 0%       |
| BQ             | 53    | 0.5%   | Nil    | 0%       |
| Company Sgt    | 273   | 2.6%   | Nil    | 0%       |
| CQMS           | 370   | 3.7%   | Nil    | 0%       |
| Sergeant       | 1,593 | 15.7%  | 9      | 8%       |
| Corporal       | 2,394 | 23.6%  | 26     | 21%      |
| Private        | 5,401 | 53.5%  | 88     | 71%      |

Source: SR1, DFHQ, Confidential, 30 September 1996.

The table shows that as of 30.09.96 71% of female personnel (other ranks) held the rank of private. A total of 33 women had been promoted to the ranks of corporal and sergeant. There were no women promoted to senior NCO rank as of September 1996.

Female personnel (other ranks) have been serving in the army since 1982. Due to the amended syllabi of training (TS INF 8/90 Females, TS 10/90) with an additional 39 hours of training in administrative duties, it could be said that female personnel were being 'groomed' for administrative type work. Certainly because of the absence of the majority of tactical training on these syllabi, most line or regimental appointments were closed to women.

These syllabi, devised by the military authorities and chosen for these women, greatly restricted the roles envisioned for women in the army. The net effect of these training policies, deployment policies and deployment practices since 1992 is that at present the ratio

of female personnel involved in line to support roles within the Defence Forces is in the order of 25.8:74.2. This is in comparison to a ratio of 67:33 for their male colleagues. In terms of the teeth to tail ratio women are certainly at the tail-end of the operational job market. This internal re-segregation of the workforce has led to a diminution in the status of these women and this is reflected in their rate of advancement through the ranks.

Promotion competitions within the Army are internal affairs with the deliberations of Promotion boards deemed confidential. Supposedly open and based on merit, promotion competitions are difficult to scrutinise as they are shrouded in confidentiality. In attempting to analyse their deliberations one is hampered by secrecy and access. Most competitions are held within the unit with the attendant issues of objectivity and the internecine nature of internally-run promotion competitions. There are no equality of opportunity policy, statement or aspirations in the area of promotion. Having said that, however, there is a comprehensive and complex appeals system for unsuccessful competitors. It is within this environment that male and female personnel compete for promotion. Amongst the criteria deemed desirable would be:

1. Seniority (Time served in present rank)
2. Successful completion of military courses at home
3. Successful completion of military courses abroad
4. Command of troops at home
5. Command of troops overseas
6. Confidential reports (AF667)

Through no fault of their own, many female personnel have been denied many of these experiences. Through past and present training and deployment policies and practices, women are in effect handicapped when it comes to promotion. This is evidenced by the fact that as of 30.9.96 not one of the 740 Senior NCO's vacancies currently available was filled by a woman. Only 7% of women as opposed to 15.7% of men had achieved the rank of Sergeant, while 71% of female personnel found themselves still at Private rank as opposed to 53% of their male colleagues. This situation is worth comparing to the situation for female personnel which exists as of 31<sup>st</sup> October 1999 and shown in table (xvii) overleaf. The table provided by EPS in DFHQ consists of three columns and eight rows. The first column on the left hand side lists the ranks held in descending order with the most junior rank of private in the bottom row. The remaining columns respectively from left to right contain the relevant numbers of female personnel along with the percentage of the total of female personnel as calculated by EPS.

Table (xvii): Ranks held by female personnel (Other ranks) 31.10.99

| Rank held        | Female | % Total Female |
|------------------|--------|----------------|
| Sergeant Major   | NIL    | 0%             |
| BQMS             | NIL    | 0%             |
| Company Sergeant | 1      | 0.3%           |
| CQMS             | 1      | 0.3%           |
| Sergeant         | 11     | 3.6%           |
| Corporal         | 33     | 10.8%          |
| Private          | 260    | 85.0%          |

Source SR1, EPS, DFHQ, 31 Oct 99. Confidential.

The figures for breakdown by rank for female personnel (other ranks) for October 1999 reflect the increase in the numbers of women serving in the PDF. Their numbers have grown from a total of 123 (other ranks) in 1996 to a total of 306 (other ranks) in October 1999. In terms of status as defined by rank, currently 85% of female personnel are at the rank of private. This percentage is higher than that of the 71% recorded at this rank in 1996. This is due to the virtual tripling of numbers of women recruited during the period (from eighty-eight in 1996 to two hundred and sixty in 1999).

The number of corporals has increased from twenty-six in 1996 to thirty three in 1999, a total increase of seven. This brings their representation to 10.8% of total at this rank. With the increase in numbers at the rank of private, and through the uptake of courses and throughput of personnel, this percentage should increase. As it stands, 10.8% of the total at this rank is quite low and suggests women are under-represented at this rank. Given that the majority of these women at private rank enlisted since 1994, however, this representation is likely to increase dramatically. (Promotion to corporal normally takes five to seven years from enlistment).

The number of female sergeants has increased from nine to eleven in three years. This is a modest increase. The overall representation at this rank has dropped from 7.3% to 3.6% in the three years. This proportional drop, again, could be said to be related to the increase in the numbers of women who have joined the army in this period.

What is significant is the advent of women's promotion to the senior NCO ranks of company sergeant (one), and company quartermaster sergeant (CQMS) (one). These women were

promoted in 1999. This is a positive phenomenon, and it will be interesting in the future to see if and at what rate this trend might continue.

## 8.2 Promotion for female officers within the PDF

Promotion for officers comprises both a fixed-term and competition process. Initially on commissioning, promotion to Captain takes place after a fixed period of seven years. Promotion to commandant and beyond is determined by an agreed competition system known as 'promotion on merit'.

Prior to the Gleeson Commission of Enquiry into the PDF (1990), promotion was based on seniority alone. The new 'merit' system is governed by:

1. D.F.R. A.15 'Promotions'
2. Gleeson Commission, Chapter 2, para 2.2.7
3. Integrated Personnel Management Systems (IPMS)

In the case of DFR A 15 'Promotions', this refers to the strictly legal criteria necessary for promotion including such provisions as the necessity for the individual in question to be a member of the Defence Forces as defined in the Defence Acts. D.F.R. A. 15 does not contain any list of criteria for promotion that comes under the scope of this study in that the strictly legal definitions it contains apply to those establishment conditions necessary for a vacancy within the organisation to be filled by means of promotion. The criteria as listed apply to the competition as such and not the determination of an order of merit as outlined by both the Gleeson Commission and the Integrated Personnel Management System.

In the case of the Gleeson Commission, Chapter 2, para 2.2.7., the following points arise.

Chapter 2, para 2.2.7., states:

A promotion system, if it is to serve the best interests of the individual and the organisation, must be and be seen to be

- (i) fair to the individual
- (ii) based on acceptable criteria of performance and achievement
- (iii) based on the impartial judgement of competent assessors, and
- (iv) supported by proper personnel management policies, particularly a career development strategy which ensures adequate mobility for individuals to provide them with broadly based experience.

Para 2.2.8., goes on to state:

Proposals for a new system of promotion in the Defence Forces are outlined in the following paragraphs. The Commission accepts that the details of these arrangements

will need to be developed further but it recommends that revised promotion procedures which incorporate the features outlined be devised and implemented without delay  
(Gleeson Commission, 1990: 28-9)

The proposals outlined in paragraphs 2.2.9 – 2.2.13 cover such criteria as the requirement for the candidate to have completed the requisite military courses deemed necessary for promotion, have a satisfactory rating by reporting (commanding) officers, have a satisfactory sick leave record, minimum service in the present rank and in the case of certain senior appointments have a minimum potential service in the higher rank.

These proposals became the basis for the subsequent formulation of the Integrated Personnel Management System or IPMS by the military authorities for serving personnel competing for promotion. The IPMS was formulated in the Adjutant General's Branch and stresses the careful management of career profile for promotion purposes. Four "core elements" of the 'desirable' career path have been identified by IPMS:

1. Unit (Line) Appointments
2. Career Courses
3. Staff, Instructor Appointments
4. Overseas Service.

(IPMS, 1991, Para 26)

In order to be considered a serious contender for promotion one must achieve appointments in these critical areas. The career-oriented officer will have command experience in an operational unit, will have all necessary career courses passed and preferably have staff (Military College, Brigade or DFHQ) experience. The paramount ingredient for promotion however is overseas experience and such service, particularly with observer status, is seen as a key factor in promotion.

Given these criteria for success, it is obvious that women have been handicapped by deployment policies. To date, no female officer has attended a foreign career course, and only two female officers have been selected for an observer mission abroad. Operational units have in the past been closed to female personnel as have command and staff appointments at HQ level. To compound this, female officers were, in the 1980s, excluded from the tactical phases of the Standard Infantry Course and various corps 'Young Officers' or Y.O.s courses. (This situation has since been rectified and all officers undergo the same training). A description of this situation is included in the 1992 PDF study group on female

soldiers. The study group however do not comment on the implications of such a situation for promotion:

- (1) The Female Course Syllabus was approximately 100 hours, or three weeks shorter than the Male Course Syllabus.
- (2) The main difference between both syllabi was in Tactical Operations and internal Security. There were 17 hours allotted to Tactical Operations on the Female Syllabus in comparison to 132 hours on the Male Syllabus. There were 10 hours allotted to Internal Security in the Female Syllabus in comparison to 31 hours on the Male Syllabus.
- (3) The Female Syllabus did however include 62 hours on Command and Staff duties in comparison to 32 hours on the Male Syllabus.

(Study Group - Female Soldiers, 16 Dec. 1992: 4, Restricted)

As a result of complaints from female officers, special “female officers’ tactical courses” were run in 1992 and 1993 to rectify this deficit in training. This artificially-created environment places an additional strain on relations with male colleagues. When female officers enter the promotion competition (circa 2000) their progress will be hindered through that systematic tampering of their career profiles euphemistically called ‘deployment policy’.

The deployment policies, flawed as they are, compound the vicious circle of unease created by discrimination. This unease or resentment among male and female peers was highlighted in the last chapter and comes into focus when male and female personnel compete for appointments or promotion. Such unease is exacerbated by an unhealthy work environment, one which does not respect difference. As Tanton writes:

The organisational environment which is not healthy for women is similarly unhealthy for men (...) and will continue to reinstate the formidable hierarchical structures which eliminate the potential for individual respect, flexibility and difference.

(Tanton, 1994: 2)

In addition to those aspects of women’s service which prove problematic for promotion and form part of an ‘unhealthy’ work environment is the assessment of merit based on the consolidation of officer’s annual confidential reports. This has serious implications for female officers. An already contentious and subjective sub-unit assessment, the “451” (Annual Confidential Report) has been shown in studies abroad to be inimical to the interests of female officers.

A study of this type of subjective, sub unit assessment in the U.S. Navy found Unit Commanders allowed the gender of subject officers to colour their assessment of their



performance. A study by Thomas (1983) of anonymous narrative accounts of appraisals of the job performance of female and male U.S. Naval Officers investigated whether gender influenced the judgements of the job behaviour of individuals. She concluded it did. The study in 1983 found female officers were rated on average lower than their male counterparts on satisfaction rating scales because of their sex. This type of subjective assessment which rates women lower than men in terms of their management prowess on the basis of the constructed masculinity of management is referred to by Tanton (1994:37-8) as 'managerial sex typing'.

Given these implications for women arising from written reports and allied with the full range of obstacles to promotion for women enshrined in policy, the PDF seems at bald variance with the Equal Opportunity Policy and Guidelines issued to the Public Service:

24. There should be equality of opportunity at all stages of the promotion process.
25. Management (...) (should) ensure that there are no impediments (e.g. lack of experience or training) which would disadvantage them in the promotion situation.

(Equal Opportunity Policy, 1986, para 24, 25 "Promotion": 8)

Table (xviii) gives the breakdown by numbers and rank of male and female officers in the PDF as of April 1995. The table consists of three columns and ten rows. The left-hand column lists the officer ranks held by male and female personnel as of 30.04.95. in descending order with the most junior officer rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the bottom row. The middle column lists the numbers of male officers holding each rank as listed in the left-hand column. The right hand column lists the numbers of women holding the ranks as listed. The table is useful for the purposes of comparison of the numbers of male and female officers holding commissioned rank. The table also gives an indication of the assignment of status to female personnel in the work environment as discussed.

Table (xviii): Ranks held by male and female officers as of 30.04.95

| Rank Held          | Male | Female |
|--------------------|------|--------|
| Lieutenant General | 1    | N/A    |
| Major General      | 3    | N/A    |
| Brigadier General  | 8    | N/A    |
| Colonel            | 37   | N/A    |
| Lieutenant Colonel | 142  | N/A    |
| Commandant         | 478  | 6      |
| Captain            | 589  | 30     |
| Lieutenant         | 173  | 13     |
| Second Lieutenant  | 60   | 5      |

Source Officers Records, DFHQ Confidential, 30.04.95

As a result of a combination of factors, female officers find themselves disadvantaged in terms of promotion. As of 30<sup>th</sup> April 1995, the vast majority of female officers were 'trapped' at junior officer level. Roughly 88.7% of female officers were Lieutenants and Captains compared with only roughly 54.6% of their male colleagues (Source SR1, 30 April 1995).

The six female Commandants were direct entries, Dental and Medical officers, whose appointment and promotion takes place outside of the 'merit' competition applicable to line officers. Given the nature of the 'merit' competition and the criteria laid down in the IPMS guidelines, it is unlikely that female officers will be adequately represented amongst senior officer ranks. Table (xix) shows the situation for female officers as of the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1999. The table consists of three columns and nine rows. The left hand column lists the ranks in descending order with the most junior officer rank held by female personnel as of 31.10.99 in the bottom row. The middle column lists the numbers of female personnel occupying the corresponding rank in the left-hand column. The right hand column consists of the percentage of the total number of women as calculated by officers records. This table gives an indication of the status in terms of strategic power and autonomy as achieved by female personnel at the rank of senior officers.

Table (xix): Ranks held by female officers as of 31.10.99.

| Rank Held          | Total Female | % Total Female |
|--------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Lieutenant General | N/A          |                |
| Major General      | N/A          |                |
| Brigadier General  | N/A          |                |
| Colonel            | N/A          |                |
| Lieutenant Colonel | N/A          |                |
| Commandant         | 5            | 8.1%           |
| Captain            | 31           | 51%            |
| Lieutenant         | 19           | 31.1%          |
| Second Lieutenant  | 6            | 9.8%           |

Source; Officers Records, DFHQ, Confidential. 31/10/99

The figures for October 1999 show an increase from fifty-four female officers in 1995 to sixty-one in 1999. This increase in numbers does not mirror the almost three fold jump in the numbers of female other ranks in the same period. The representation of women at senior officer level has reduced from six commandants in 1995 to five in 1999. There is a similarity in terms of representation at junior officer rank between the situation as it stands now and as it stood in 1996. Today 91.9% of female officers are at junior officer level, with 88.7% in 1996. Women have not yet entered the competition for promotion to senior rank.

This problem of under representation is highlighted by comparison abroad. In the U.S. Army:

Today one lieutenant in six is female (...) only one colonel in thirty. Only three of the Army's 407 General Officers are women.

(Moskos, 1990: 12)

These figures are considered to represent rates of participation in management so low as to be discriminatory. Other commentators have accused the military of being discriminatory in this regard:

A glass ceiling, pay inequities and rising counts of sexual harassment (...) the military has been openly discriminating against women in ways that would be unthinkable in the private sector (...) Today 45 years after President Truman's decision to desegregate the Armed Services, a black American is the most senior soldier in the U.S. military. (Hopefully) (...) a generation from now, Gen. Powell's job may be held by a woman.

(Peak, 1993: 1)

Given the complex array of obstacles and blocks to women's promotion, a range of proactive and affirmative steps must be taken to redress the balance and to create a work environment where men and women can succeed in an open and fair manner.

### 8.3 The promotion environment of the PDF

The issue of promotion, and the prospects for promotion came up for discussion during the interview schedule. Of the forty-three women interviewed at home in Ireland, thirty-eight expressed the opinion that they did not have an equal chance at promotion as their male colleagues. Five of the forty-three women interviewed felt that the promotion system as it stands would give them a fair chance at promotion. Of the seventeen women interviewed in the control sample in the Lebanon, fifteen felt that they were handicapped in terms of promotion prospects.

Out of a total of sixty women interviewed, fifty-three women felt they were handicapped under the present promotion system. In expressing the opinion that they were handicapped when it came to promotion, the women referred specifically to those areas of experience deemed necessary or desirable for promotion under the IPMS system.

In terms of access to career courses, and its impact on promotion:

The lads get all the courses in the Battalion. So they get the promotion. From our recruit platoon, none of the girls have made corporal yet.  
(Interview No. 41, 11/9/99)

The NCOs courses are almost impossible to get on. In our unit, when there's a vacancy, the guys always get first call. They don't think we're fit to be in charge.  
(Interview No. 31, 31/8/99)

The feeling that women's chances for promotion are curtailed due to practices which deny them the experience/training identified by the IPMS as desirable for promotion is one that is shared by other ranks and officers alike. The following quotes from officers interviewed give an idea of the attitudes of female officers to the promotion system:

When it comes to promotion, women will have a problem competing with their male colleagues. For example, there's never been a female company commander overseas. All the important areas, the career jobs – women just aren't in them.  
(Interview No. 4, 14/4/99)

Well, up to captain certainly, the system is fair enough. It's automatic. But in the long term, no. Not when you consider the overseas dimension. We're going to enter the promotion competition at a disadvantage. Overseas wise, we're not on a level pegging with the guys.

(Interview No. 16, 21/4/99)

If we continue to have problems getting overseas in command appointments, then the system will cause problems for us in the future. Even now there's problems. Just looking at numbers. There are no female lieutenant colonels. There is going to have to be a fight for promotion.

(Interview No. 29, 26/8/99)

Yes, the promotion system will cause problems for women once the competition opens up. If some guy spends all his time on courses and overseas, then that's what it's all about. It wouldn't do for us who rarely get courses overseas, or appointments overseas, to be seen to get preferential treatment.

(Interview No. 23, 10/8/99)

Many of the female officers interviewed specifically mentioned the 'vicious circle of unease', (Tanton, 1994: 2) created by discriminatory practices and perceived difference in status:

My career path to date, with its attendant restrictions, has left me at a disadvantage promotion wise. Prior to 1992 we weren't allowed serve outside 'A' appointments. The same applied to overseas jobs, we weren't allowed to do the real work. A lot of the 55<sup>th</sup> Cadet class will take redresses against our class if we get promoted commandant in the next few years. But I don't know how problematic this really will be because of the original eight of us in the class, only two are left. Not a very encouraging picture, is it?

(Interview No. 8, 15/4/99)

Interviewee No. 8 is here expressing the fear that if she and her female colleague from the 54<sup>th</sup> Cadet class are promoted commandant, this will cause male members of the 55<sup>th</sup> Cadet class who have competed in the same competition to initiate what is termed in the Defence Forces, a 'redress of wrongs' procedure. This redress of wrongs or grievance procedure would be based on questioning why male personnel who have satisfied IPMS criteria for promotion should be unsuccessful in a competition for promotion in which female personnel who do not satisfy the criteria are successful. The military authorities in denying female personnel the range of appointments necessary to satisfy promotion criteria have placed female personnel in the invidious position of having any promotion subject to hostile scrutiny from male peers. This de facto situation does not fit with the hypothesised work environment typical in an equality friendly environment.

I don't feel that we do have an equal shot in the promotion stakes. I've asked this a hundred times to be clarified, you know, the boxes to be ticked. I'm not credited with them. Through no fault of my own. One doesn't get to choose one's appointments overseas as a woman. Am I to be penalised for these choices, made for me by others? This has the potential to be a huge problem. If I am promoted, then male colleagues who have ticked the boxes are going to be complaining and saying, why the fuck did I do these things? They would be perfectly within their rights to get a redress of wrongs on this basis. You see as a woman, you're damned if you do, and you're damned if you don't, when it comes to a promotion. Basically, the criteria are okay. But not letting us tick the boxes will keep women out of the senior ranks. (Interview No. 24, 11/8/99).

For the majority of women interviewed, the feeling was that given present deployment practices, it simply was not possible for women to meet all of the requirements deemed necessary for promotion.

In relation to the promotion issue seven of the sixty were confident of their long-term prospects for promotion. The following quotes illustrate their optimism and confidence:

Me personally, I think I've a better chance for promotion than most, male or female. I'm convinced I'll be the first female sergeant major in the army. (Interview No. 32, 1/9/99)

Yes, I think I'll get to senior NCO rank. I think I've a very good chance of making major. Sooner or later it's going to dawn on them, we need a female sergeant major. That would suit me fine, thank you. (Interview No. 19, 27/7/99)

In discussing with me their thoughts on the promotion system, the women interviewed went on to discuss their future in the PDF. Of the forty-three women interviewed at home, twenty-five stated that they were actively considering leaving the PDF. Six stated that they didn't know what they would do. Twelve stated that they wanted to remain in the PDF and serve the maximum number of years possible. Of the seventeen interviewed in the Lebanon, seven stated that they were thinking of leaving the PDF. Four stated that they didn't know what they would do and six stated that they wished to remain in service.

Approximately half of those interviewed (thirty-one) stated that they were actively considering leaving the PDF. This possibly is a function of the "Celtic Tiger" economy. With employment prospects healthy in the civilian workplace, many of these women may simply be attracted by improved rates of pay and prospects elsewhere. An examination of their responses tells a different story, however. The following quotes give a qualitative insight into the mindset of these women:

Morale amongst women in the army is low. I don't think the job measures up to people's expectations.  
(Interview No. 3, 13/4/99)

I had a big army background. My brother and my father were in the army. The army has not lived up to my expectations. It's not a challenge. In the infantry you're hidden behind corners. You just feel you're not worth anything.  
(Interview No. 6, 14/4/99)

I wanted to do something different. I saw the cadetship as challenging. I did it out of curiosity. It hasn't lived up to my expectations. There's a lot of bullshit. And there is so much begrudgery. It's very stifling.  
(Interview No. 16, 21/4/99)

I joined the army to be a soldier, not a cleaner. I wouldn't recommend it.  
(Interview No. 20, 28/7/99)

There's no future in the army for women. If you're a career woman. Forget it.  
(Interview No. 21, 28/7/99)

I would not recommend the Irish army for women. Outside the army there's a better atmosphere for developing people. The PDF is potentially, I think, a very unhealthy place for women.  
(Interview No. 26, 13/8/99)

I joined because of a strong family influence. But I can tell you I found out pretty quick. I joined a different army to my brothers. I joined as a woman. And that means you're immediately demeaned.  
(Interview No. 28, 25/8/99)

I always wanted to join the army. You know. It's not the average nine to five. But I am very disappointed at the way women are treated in the army.  
(Interview No. 42, 11/9/99)

I feel that these women's feelings are summed up by one officer with seventeen years service. In what I feel is a very poignant response, she states:

I wanted to be a soldier since I was at least ten years old. I was a real warrior. But the army won't let me be a soldier.  
(Interview No. 33, 31/8/99)

Of the eighteen women who expressed the desire to stay within the PDF, sixteen listed as a reason to stay the pension and security of the job. Two stated that the job offered the opportunity to combine parenting with a job as a result of the flexibility of local working arrangements and time off, i.e.:

As an organisation, the army has some attractive conditions of service. The money is fine. As officers we effectively have flexi time. As we say, hey, you mightn't have much of a career, but you can drop off the kids and collect them later.  
(Interview No. 11, 19/4/99)

In terms of recommending the PDF as a career for other women, of the forty-three women interviewed at home, thirty-nine said they would not recommend the PDF as a career for women. Of the seventeen interviewed in the Lebanon, sixteen stated they would not recommend service in the PDF for other women. If fifty-five of the sixty women felt that they could not recommend service in the PDF for women, it seems to suggest that the majority of women in the PDF are disillusioned with their experience of service life and prospects for promotion.

It therefore behoves the military authorities to reconsider the promotion system and the IPMS criteria in light of deployment practices for female personnel. A good starting point for such a review might lie in consulting female employees on this issue. Of the sixty women interviewed at home and abroad, only one of these women had been canvassed by the military authorities for their views on any aspect of service life, in terms of conditions of service, pay or equipment. This is at variance with the equality of opportunity agenda, which presupposes such a rapport in its literature.

## 8.4 Chapter summary

Chapter eight focussed on the status assigned female soldiers within the Defence Forces on the basis of rank achieved through the current promotion system. The chapter demonstrates the link between the roles assigned female personnel within the setting and the status achieved by these female personnel in an examination of the criteria for promotion in sections one and two. Section three contains a simple account of female personnel's attitudes to the promotion system as outlined at interview. The chapter lends itself to the equality audit as suggested in the equality of opportunity literature in chapter three in that the examination of promotion for female personnel gives an indication of female personnel's access to "strategic



power” (Adler, 1994) and “autonomy” (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Such access is posited in the theoretical outline as an indicator of an equality friendly environment.

Section one deals with the promotion system as it applies to female personnel (other ranks). The data obtained from Enlisted Personnel Section in Defence Forces Headquarters (EPS, DFHQ) as of September 1996 show that 71% of female personnel (other ranks) were at the rank of private. Twenty-nine percent of female personnel (other ranks) had been promoted to the ranks of Corporal and Sergeant with 26 female corporals and 9 female sergeants in the PDF in September 1996. No female personnel (other ranks) had been promoted to the senior non commissioned officer ranks of company quartermaster sergeant (CQMS) company sergeant, battalion quartermaster sergeant or battalion sergeant major. Therefore, as of September 1996, female personnel (other ranks) had no representation at the level of senior NCO.

The data supplied by EPS, DFHQ, for October 1999 show women entering the ranks of senior NCO with two female personnel promoted to company quartermaster sergeant and company sergeant respectively. This is positive trend in terms of women’s access to strategic power or autonomy. The data from 1999 show that 85% of female personnel serving in the Defence Forces hold the rank of private. A modest increase in the number of corporals and sergeants is also evident with 33 corporals (an increase of 7) and 11 sergeants (an increase of 2). These figures and the increase in numbers of women over the period 1996 – 1999 are positive indicators in terms of an increase in the numbers of women entering military service and a modest increase in the numbers of those being promoted. At 3% of strength however, the overall numbers remain low by international military standards (15% NATO) and the remainder of the public service (48%). The criteria for promotion for female personnel (other ranks) as listed in section two give rise for concern in terms of the deployment practices as outlined in chapter seven. It is reasonable to argue that unless those restrictions which have evolved in practice in terms of female personnel’s access to overseas service and the nature of the appointments assigned them are reviewed, then female personnel (other ranks) cannot compete for promotion on an equal basis with their peers.

Section two outlines the situation in terms of promotion for female officers in the PDF. The section begins by outlining the criteria for the promotion of officers as prescribed by the Gleeson Commission (1990) and the Integrated Personnel Management System (1991). The criteria as listed suggest that unless those deployment practices and policy statements as outlined in chapter seven are revised, female officers would not be in a position to compete

for promotion on an equal basis with their peers. This would seem to be at variance with the equality of opportunity guidelines as issued to the public service in relation to promotion.

The data obtained from officer's records in relation to those ranks held by female officers reveals the following. As of April 1995, 88.7% of female officers were holding junior officer rank. Six female officers had reached the rank of commandant. These officers however fell outside the scope of the promotion competition as described in that they were all medical and dental officers who had entered the PDF under the direct entry scheme as described in chapter five. Data obtained from officer's records for 1999 show that 91.9% of female officers remain at junior officer rank. At this point in time, female officers had not yet entered the competition for promotion to senior officer rank.

Section three consists of data obtained at interview in relation to promotion for female personnel within the PDF. Of the 60 women interviewed, 57 expressed the opinion that they were handicapped by the current system of promotion in that they were denied access to some of the appointments (roles) deemed necessary for promotion (status). This would appear to be the experience and opinion expressed by both officers and other ranks alike. Many spoke of what Tanton (1994:2) refers to as the 'vicious cycle of unease' created by the uncertainty created by deployment practices and promotion criteria. This was expressed by some interviewees in terms of a fear that promotion for female personnel might be subject to hostile scrutiny from male colleagues and that redress procedures might arise from such promotion. Thirty one of the sixty women interviewed stated that they were actively considering leaving the organisation. Fifty-five out of the sixty stated that they would not recommend the Defence Forces to female colleagues as a setting to work in. Of the sixty women interviewed, none were ever consulted by the military authorities on the promotion system. The equality of opportunity literature as discussed in chapter three presupposes such a rapport to exist in the workplace. The data gathered in this section appears to confirm a deal of uncertainty and unease generated by the problems posed for female personnel in terms of the deployment practices and criteria for promotion as promulgated by the military authorities. The chapter demonstrates a link between the roles and status assigned female members of the Defence Forces.

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