

I am writing this anonymously for fear of reprisal or retribution from current Congress members, Air Force leadership, and the Special Tactics/Special Operations Forces (SOF) leadership. I need to blow the whistle on an ongoing dangerous and comprising situation. This issue resides at multiple levels – starting with representatives of Congress, the Air Force Special Operations Command Commander, and leadership from the 24th Special Operations Wing. My hope is that this story gets shared enough to spark change for the SOF community, and offer a more scrutinized look at the process of accepting women into combat roles.

First, in case you are unaware, let me explain who Special Tactics (ST) Airmen are and what ST is. ST operators (Combat Controllers, Special Reconnaissance Airmen, Pararescuemen, SOF Tactical Air Control Party, Special Tactics Officers, and Combat Rescue Officers) bring the power of the Air Force to SOF ground elements such as the Navy SEALs, Green Berets, and Army Rangers by delivering global access, precision strike, personnel recovery, and battlefield surgery. To be in the ST community, Airmen go through a rigorous selection processes and ~2 years of training that challenge the mind and body. Overall, ST operators earn a coveted beret that symbolizes the accomplishment of one of the most difficult training pipelines in the Armed Forces, the commitment to the cause, country, the teammates around them, and the fortitude to never quit. Generally, the SOF community is unique in a way because there is comfort in knowing that the strongest survived, and the person next to you has never given up despite the odds. ST in particular is riddled with numerous heroic stories, but one that has made recent news is that of Medal of Honor Recipient, Technical Sergeant John Chapman. A man who fought until his last breath saving his teammates.

The question that prefaces the ordeal I'm going to explain is "Are women ready to serve as coveted Special Operations Forces Operators?". In short, the answer is yes. Some women may be physically and mentally ready to serve in these direct-combat roles; however, standards for SOF Operator men and women must be upheld in order to see progression in the community and maintain the lethality of SOF units. Unfortunately, the manner in which Congress and Air Force Special Operations Command is approaching the topic is degrading the force and jeopardizes the readiness, and lives, of Special Tactics Operators/Special Operations Forces and boots-on-the-ground forces.

In 2015, the Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter opened all direct-combat roles, in

each branch of the military, to women. This fueled a notion within Congress that the status of all females trying out for Special Operations Forces should be briefed on a routine basis to national-level leaders. Due to this idea, females are inherently given the spotlight before they have proven themselves to be among the elite of the SOF community. This very notion of national-level attention has forced military leaders in all branches to take a special look at all females within SOF training pipelines. This enhanced consideration of women in combat roles is problematic because (at times) standards are being lowered to accommodate them, and women are given preferential treatment over men. This is currently causing waves of issues amongst most members in SOF.

Of note, a large issue regarding this idea within SOF resides in Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). Lieutenant General James Slife, the AFSOC Commander, is a major player to the degradation of SOF standards by pushing a female, Captain Morgan Mosby, through the Special Tactics training pipeline after she made the choice to self-eliminate/quit. I will explain the full details of this story as I know them, in order to shed light on an issue that may jeopardize the lives of fellow SOF members.

In 2018, Captain Morgan Mosby made it to her first Special Tactics Officer (STO) Phase II – the first challenging week-long selection process to get into the ST community and STO career field. She quit during a rigorous pool session, but remained at Phase II and was given the chance to finish. This was my first known instance of preferential treatment towards a woman within the ST community. It is against societal norms for the ST community to keep a quitter through the entirety of Phase II; however, since Mosby was one of the first females to go through Phase II, the hype of having a female present radiated through the community. After much deliberation amongst Phase II cadre, Mosby was a non-selectee during the 2018 STO Phase II. However, Mosby was invited to return – a second major violation of a societal norm for ST, as people that quit are not normally invited back.

In 2019, Mosby returned to her second STO Phase II and received a unanimous “non-select” from cadre based on her performance. However, higher leaders dictated that she be selected as a STO trainee candidate because of her gender. The argument has been made that females could bring a different skillset and provide potential access to places men cannot go. Although true, this was a third instance of preferential treatment toward Mosby.

In January 2020, Mosby began the 2-3 year-long STO training pipeline at the Special Tactics Training Squadron (STTS) at Hurlburt Field, FL. During her training, Mosby became known for quitting and getting preferential treatment. She quit during various points of her training, and yet all accounts were “brushed under the rug” since she was closely looked at, and her status monitored by Congress and AFSOC leadership (O-6 and above) on a weekly basis. For example, during the Special Warfare Pre-Dive Course at Lackland Air Force Base, TX, Mosby quit in a pool session while next to multiple students. The 350th Special Warfare Training Squadron instructors that were present and monitoring the course pulled Mosby from the pool, and sent her back to the STTS at Hurlburt Field. There she was allowed to attend a special offering of a more relaxed version of the Pre-Dive Course, despite the course officially being run in Texas by the 350th – a fourth instance of preferential treatment. She completed the special Pre-Dive course at the STTS in Hurlburt Field, and then continued on with the pipeline. All the while, Mosby’s progress throughout the pipeline was briefed to Congress on a weekly basis, and numerous Wing-level leaders (O-4, O-5, and O-6s) would continually check-in on her. This type of treatment and individual monitoring is not common when compared to the treatment of male trainees.

In Spring 2021, Mosby attended Combat Control School (CCS) at Pope Army Airfield, NC. CCS is run by the 352nd Special Warfare Training Squadron, and is the most challenging and technically focused school of the ST training pipeline. This is where STOs, Combat Controllers, and Special Reconnaissance Airman go to earn their coveted berets that distinguish them in the SOF community. While at CCS, Captain Mosby self-eliminated during a solo land navigation event. When a self-elimination occurs, the student is typically returned to their previous duty assignment and either reclassified by the Air Force, or given the option to separate from the military. In Mosby’s case, she was presented very different circumstances that amount to a fifth instance of preferential treatment. Upon returning to the STTS at Hurlburt Field, Mosby met with numerous senior leaders from the 24th Special Operations Wing (24 SOW) and AFSOC. The 24 SOW Commander (at the time), Colonel Matthew Allen, and Vice Commander, Colonel Allison Black, talked to Captain Mosby about staying in the training pipeline despite her effort to self-eliminate/quit. Colonel Allen and Colonel Black were even known to offer Captain Mosby a highly selective spot at a Tier One Special Mission Unit (SMU). Typically, a SOF member must go through an entirely separate selection progress to be considered for an SMU, but in this case, the offer was open to Mosby without the need to try out. This sixth preferential treatment event is unheard of in the ST community to date.

After Mosby's self-elimination from CCS, the wave of preferential treatment continued. She was given the opportunity to train with a personal trainer of her choosing, was able to take weeks off of work without leave or repercussions, and had the ability to meet with various senior leaders. All of the aforementioned opportunities are atypical for any quitter in the ST community. In addition to this, Mosby has been known to tell numerous ST trainees that she was "too good" for the community, and that she quit because no one was continually praising her efforts. Just to note, no ST trainee, male or female, is praised for their efforts or progress within the ST pipeline.

In Spring 2021, shortly after returning to Hurlburt Field from CCS, Mosby was given the opportunity to write and present an After Action Report (AAR) to the AFSOC Commander – another instance of preferential treatment (while AARs are common amongst trainees, they are never raised to the level of leadership that hers was). This AAR detailed Mosby's experience as a female in the ST pipeline, and launched an investigation into the treatment of women in the AFSOC community. Operators, students, instructors, and leaders from across the community were questioned about their interactions with Mosby and the future of women in the organization.

In Spring/Summer 2021, Mosby was then selected to work directly under the AFSOC Commander, Lieutenant General James Slife, at AFSOC Headquarters. She worked to audit courses and designed new Combat Control standards despite her never working within AFSOC, nor gaining her ST beret, and quitting the training pipeline. This action demoralizes the community and has created rifts amongst operators. Additionally, working directly for a 3-Star General Officer in this way is atypical for any training candidate that quits the ST pipeline.

In the midst of Mosby's work at AFSOC Headquarters, she filed an Equal Opportunity complaint which painted a false narrative that instructors from the 352nd Special Warfare Training Squadron coerced her into quitting the pipeline at CCS. This complaint was filed even though Mosby has been known to tell other ST trainees that she quit of her own free-will, and that she disliked the ST community as a whole.

In December 2021, and the ST community was just told that Captain Mosby's training status will be actively re-instated on 3 January 2022, despite her choice to quit and her negative viewpoint of ST. She will be rejoining the Special Tactics Training Squadron (STTS) as an ST trainee, and pick up where she left off. This decision was pushed down to the STTS Commander, Major John Wylie, regardless of the demoralizing effects it has on the remainder of the ST community. This decision was driven by the AFSOC Commander, Lieutenant General James Slife, and supported by Colonel Jason Daniels, the current 24 SOW Commander.

Captain Mosby is slotted to return to CCS in April 2022, and the Commander of CCS, Major Spencer Reed, informed the 352nd Special Warfare Training Squadron staff that she WILL graduate regardless of if she meets standards or not. Overall, Mosby will gain a coveted ST beret and the title of the first female STO despite the negative affects it has on the rest of the ST community.

If you were to ask the ST brothers in the community, "Are women ready to serve as SOF Operators?", the answer would be yes. The community is ready for a female operator; however, it has to be the right female that is capable of meeting the same standards asked of the men. The argument has been made that females have the ability to provide SOF with access into places that men cannot go. This is certainly true, but at what cost? Does that notional access require a female to wear a beret, unearned? The second and third order effects that Congress, the AFSOC Commander, and 24 SOW leaders are not thinking of is how this impacts the men that are already on the battlefield. Setting up a quitter for success, regardless of gender, sets a dangerous precedence for all SOF members. Can that person be trusted to not quit when on the battlefield, when their teammates need them most? Moreover, giving Mosby the mentioned special treatments degrades the image of women in ST as they will be doubted by all members for years to come.

Mosby is not the first case of this preferential treatment of SOF women. In July 2020, Army Times announced that the first female Green Beret completed the Army's Special Forces Qualification Course (see article <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/07/09/a-woman-became-a-green-beret-today-a-huge-milestone-for-the-army-and-the-military-but-she-isnt-the->

first-female-to-earn-the-title/). However, it was not publicized that this female Green Beret also had a number of training issues including negligent discharges of her weapon throughout the pipeline. Then, five months later, Military.com reported that the same female Green Beret faced a civilian misdemeanor charge for a negligent discharge of a pistol in a Colorado apartment (see article <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/12/31/1st-female-green-beret-faces-minor-misdemeanor-charge-accidentally-firing-gun-police-say.html>). At what point are these women held accountable for their behaviors and actions in their training? To what end are military leaders forcing females to be SOF operators just to satisfy Congress's desire? To what end are we altering standards or practices in the SOF community to allow for Congress's demands? Someone from the Green Beret community has done just what I have done with this anonymous email, and yet nothing is being done about this issue (see article <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/11/30/2-star-responds-to-anonymous-email-blasting-watered-down-special-forces-training-standards/>).

SOF and other boots-on-the-ground forces will bear the brunt of these detrimental decisions by military leaders, and I cannot stay quiet on the matter any longer. Writing this and sending it to you will hopefully get the word out on this issue. Please bring light to this story. We cannot continue to degrade and jeopardize the lives of good operators and SOF standards to appease Congress and AFSOC leaders.

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