KEY AREA #6

GENDER ISSUES

1. As this publication is written, women soldiers comprise 14.7% of the Active Army. The Army will not be combat ready if our male and female soldiers cannot work together.

2. Commanders must insure that neither their own perspectives nor those of unit members hinder the ability of men and women to work together in a professional manner. The approach combines education about the roles and status of female soldiers in today's Army with lessons designed to introduce or reinforce soldiers' awareness of differences in perception between genders.

3. This area is particularly related to Team Building, Ethical Development, Equal Opportunity, Family Concerns, and Quality Individual Leadership.

Historical example and case study:

THE 6888TH CENTRAL POSTAL DIRECTORY BATTALION

Most Americans take the daily delivery of mail for granted. For soldiers, especially those serving overseas in wartime, mail is a vital link to home and loved ones. Troop morale often waxes and wanes based on the reliable delivery of mail. Insuring that the mail gets through is one measure by which soldiers also gauge the concern and consideration accorded their welfare by their leaders.

By 1945, as army units moved quickly across Western Europe into Germany, a gigantic snag had developed with regard to the delivery of mail to servicemen. A shortage of manpower had allowed mail to accumulate in British warehouses for months and delayed its delivery to the frontlines. Further delays in the delivery of mail had the potential of dampening soldier morale as American armies thrust into the German homeland, where they expected to meet stiff resistance.

To alleviate the backup of undelivered mail, Army leaders turned to the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. The battalion was the only unit of African-Americans in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) to serve overseas. With a strength of 855 African-American women – 824 enlisted women and 31 officers – the 6888th was composed of African-American women from a variety of military occupations who previously had been assigned to Army and Army Air Forces installations throughout the United States. While most of the African-American WACs of the 6888th were postal clerks, others held service and support positions and operated the 6888th's own mess halls, motor pools, and supply rooms, making the 6888th almost entirely self-sufficient.

When the WACs of the 6888th reached Birmingham, England, in January 1945, floor-to-ceiling stacks of undelivered mail and packages and the trainloads of mail that continued to arrive overwhelmed them. The magnitude of the task and limited workspace necessitated working around the clock in eight-hour shifts. Poor working conditions added to the stress of their monumental task. Eyestrain was common because of the poor lighting from windows painted black for war-related blackouts. The inadequate heat forced women to work in their ski pants and field jackets. Ventilation was especially poor. But by may 1945 the 6888th had reduced the backlog of troop mail in England.

Transferred to Rouen, France, in May 1945, the 6888th faced a similar heavy task. Most of the mail in France had been held up for months; some items for as long two or three years. Directed to eliminate the backlog in France in six months, members of the battalion, aware of the importance of mail for front-line soldiers, were determined to get the job done in three months. Despite living and working in less than ideal conditions at Rouen, members of the 6888th had developed strong group ties and a strong sense of sisterhood that enabled the units to work efficiently. Selfless individual dedication, teamwork, and methodical attention to detail by members of the 6888th reduced the backlog of mail France.

For the vast majority of American soldiers in Europe in 1945 the African-American women of the 6888th were anonymous, as were the names on the millions of pieces of mail that members of the 6888th processed. The 6888th took great satisfaction in its accomplishments, recognizing that its work improved the quality of life of millions of GIs. For each member of the 6888th, enlistment in the Army also fulfilled some individual need as well. For women, and for African-American women in particular, World War II offered unprecedented opportunities to serve their country. The deployment of racial minorities and women in the Army during World War II represented milestones that led in subsequent years to racial and gender integration in the Army and all the armed services.

This area is directly supported by the following *suggested lesson plans* contained in this publication:

Prevention of Sexual Harassment
EO Complaint Procedures
Racism & Sexism
Diversity Training
Values, Attitudes, Behaviors, & Self-awareness
Conflict Management
Professional Ethics