

Maternity Dress Blues

Why they matter

by LtCol Janine K. Garner, Maj Jessica J. Karlin, & Maj Ashlyn E. King, USMC(Ret)

If you read the title and thought “don’t care, doesn’t apply to me,” and your inclination was to move on, then you are precisely the person who needs to read this. You, like so many others, may be asking: “Women make up less than nine percent of the Marine Corps, and far fewer are pregnant at any one time. Those pregnant Marines have cause to wear Dress Blues on even fewer occasions. So why do Maternity Dress Blues matter?” This matters for the simple fact that *they are Marines*. If we ignore, don’t care, or tell even one Marine that they do not need to conform or look “uniform” with everyone else, then what we are telling them is *they do not matter*.

We would never dream of telling our wounded warriors that they are not required to shave or get haircuts because they were injured, nor wear a uniform properly modified for their physical circumstances. For that matter, we would never allow our male Marines to show up to the Birthday Ball in a tuxedo rather than wearing a dress uniform. No, we always expect our Marines to maintain grooming standards and to wear the uniform of the day.

This brings us to the glaring hole in our uniform inventory: the Maternity Dress Blues uniform. One does not currently exist; aside from there not being anything for pregnant Marines to wear to the Birthday Ball,¹ this is also a significant problem for those pregnant Marines serving in billets (e.g. recruiting duty, working at the district, or serving as a General’s Aide-de-camp) or attending events event requiring some variation of their Dress Blues—espe-

>LtCol Garner is a KC-130J pilot currently attending Johns Hopkins University: SAIS as a Marine Fellow.

>>Maj Karlin is a Combat Engineer Officer currently serving as a strategic planner for HQMC Communication Directorate.

>>>Maj King was a Logistics Officer. Her final active duty billet was as Special Advisor to the ACMC on Talent Management. Maj King retired in August 2019.

cially considering how these Marines wear dress blues more often than most other Marines in the fleet.

The lack of a uniform isolates these Marines from their unit and sends a broader message to all Marines: when a Marine is pregnant, it is her own problem and she is not worth the Marine Corps’ time and effort. As such, many pregnant Marines choose not to attend the Marine Corps Ball as they do not have an appropriate uniform to wear or would have to go in a civilian evening gown. Neither option is appropriate; *all* Marines should attend the Birthday Ball, and *all* Marines attending the Birthday Ball should do so in an appropriate Marine Corps *dress* uniform.

Along these same lines, the current maternity Service Alphas need to be addressed. As a Service that prides itself on its professional appearance and the presentation of history through its iconic uniforms, we need to update the Service Alpha maternity uniforms because they currently do not have a place to put the Service device (Eagle, Globe and Anchor). This leaves pregnant Marines in their Service Alphas to be confused for soldiers in the Army rather than being identified as a Marine—a title for which

they worked exceedingly hard. Additionally, there is no outer “warming” garment—like the tanker jacket—available for a pregnant Marine in maternity “Service Bravos.” The Marine must borrow a blue cardigan sweater from the Navy’s uniform inventory.

It is true that pregnancy is a temporary condition and investment in a uniform for that relatively short period of time for the Service or the Marine may not, on the surface, appear to be worth the resources. However, not having a suitable option available for wear during pregnancy sends a clear message that the Service does not find our pregnant Marines worth the investment of time or resources.

The reply from the formal uniform board on the subject of maternity Dress Blues has historically been that developing a uniform for a small population is cost prohibitive. However, the institution takes great care in providing for small groups: specifically the uniforms for generals. General officers make up less than one percent of the Corps, yet have an Evening Dress Uniform; further, the four female general officers currently serving are supported with uniform guidance for alterations in the absence of uniform items. We have more



Maternity uniform concept art by Elizabeth Waddell.

pregnant Marines every year than we have total general officers, and yet they are not supported with the same level of either dress uniforms or uniform guidance for alterations to existing inventory.

There is also recent historical precedent to follow in this case. In 2008, Gen James T. Conway made the decision as the 35th Commandant to ensure pregnant Marines had a desert Marine Pattern uniform against the advice of the uniform experts. He overrode their cost concerns because he recognized it was important to ensure pregnant Marines were not excluded or highlighted as different. Many objected when Gen Robert B. Neller changed the female Dress Blue coat, but he did it to ensure that *all* Marines wore the iconic “choker blues.”

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clusion into every MOS and unit; therefore, it is all the more important that those women fit in seamlessly, especially while pregnant. The frequency of which a pregnant Marine will be required to wear a more senior uniform or have a Dress Blue equivalent is increasing steadily along with our accessions, and it is past time to address the gap in our uniform inventory and each pregnant Marine’s wardrobe.

Recommendations

Near term.

a. CMC immediately release a message outlining an approved commercial solution pregnant Marines can immediately buy to wear for formal occasions requiring a dress uniform (e.g., a black, knee length maternity skirt, red cummerbund, collared button up blouse, black neck tab, and black blazer with

appropriate rank, and other uniform devices [Marine Corps emblem, miniature medals, wings, etc.] added to it).
 b. CMC immediately release a message authorizing uniform alternations for pregnant Marines with no financial reimbursement (e.g., Marines are permitted to alter authorized blue dress trousers by replacing the waist band with blue stretch knit fabric. The alternations may impact the pockets but will not impede on the trouser seam. Once altered, these trousers are considered maternity dress trousers and are no longer serviceable as Dress Blue trousers).² As the khaki maternity blouse already exists (for the Service uniform), this takes care of pregnant Marines being able to wear Dress Blue Charlies and Deltas immediately.

Long term.

- a. Hold a uniform board to address the listed issues with the priority being the Maternity Dress Blue uniform.
- b. Procure or contract for maternity Dress Blue trousers and skirts available for purchase in the base uniform shops.
- c. Consider a maternity uniform lending facility on bases (could easily be located at the base uniform shop) where pregnant Marines can “check out” maternity uniforms in their size for the short duration of time they will be pregnant. The uniform can then be returned afterward for the next Marine who needs them. This will cut down on the cost of uniforms for both the Corps and pregnant Marines.

The time is now for the current leadership to acknowledge the impact of the

maternity uniform deficiency. The simple fact is there are a group of Marines who are excluded from the opportunity to wear the symbolic blue trousers and

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the blood stripe they have earned. Addressing the lack of maternity uniforms creates a more inclusive Marine Corps, one that demonstrates it values every

Marine’s role and contribution. This makes us a more effective force, utilizing the maximum potential of all our Marines, and therefore a stronger, more lethal team ready to fight and win our Nation’s battles.

Notes

1. At one point, Service Alphas were an acceptable uniform at the Ball because Blues were not issued at boot camp. That changed almost ten years ago, and the Maternity Service Alpha is no longer an appropriate uniform to wear to the Ball.
2. If not all pregnant Marines, then at least MCRC/HQMC as a pilot program.

