

# Evolution of women in the military

Government, Army



The Evolution of Women in the Military Abstract Women are without doubt an integral part of the military services. It took the determination of women throughout history to pave the way for the 400, 000, women that serve today. From the early years of the military to the present conflict in Afghanistan, women have made continuous progress toward equality. It is through their contributions that the military has evolved, consistently opening more jobs to women in combat. Time has proven that war does not discriminate; a successful military uses the strengths of all members despite their gender.

The Evolution of Women in the Military Women in Military History Although not officially enlisted into the services, women have been a part of the military dating back to the American Revolutionary War. Throughout history, they have challenged the norms of society and pursued their dedication to the Nation, fighting for our freedom. Women in the military have fought through challenges and obstacles in both fighting for equality and establishing their roles in combat. It is clear that the military services would not be what they are today without their contributions and sacrifices.

The Early Years From the American Revolutionary War through the Civil War women contributed to the war in both conventional and unconventional ways. In serving as what we would call today Combat Service Support, they took care of the wounded, brought water to troops, provided laundry services, and served as cooks. Many women directly supported the cause by disguising themselves as men in order to fight in the war. Two such documented cases were Deborah Sampson during the American Revolutionary War and Elizabeth Newcom during the Mexican War.

Sampson served in the Continental Forces for over a year, she only earned half of the pension the men received during that time. Newcom enlisted in the Missouri volunteer Infantry and marched for over 600 miles. Once discovered, the military discharged her with no benefits. There were also several women who fought alongside their husbands with no pay or benefits. If their husbands received wounds during the conflict, they did not hesitate for a second to step in and continue the fight. One of the most well-known women of the Civil War was Dr. Mary Walker.

She was unable to find a paying job in the military simply because she was a woman, She volunteered on the front lines, saving thousands of lives. Although the military did not call these women “ Soldiers,” at that time, I would argue that their actions and contributions whether directly in the fight or support were that of Soldiers. From the Spanish American War in 1898 to 1908 women continued to progress. With the number of casualties from the war overwhelming the medical system, the military services were in dire need of help. They had no choice but to allow women into the services, but continued to restrict them as contract workers only.

By the war's end, the Army hired over 1, 500 nurse contractors that served at hospitals throughout the world. The performance of the contract nurses was not without notice; this prompted Dr McGee to write legislation creating a permanent corps of nurses. This was a major turning point for women in the military, which resulted in the first woman appointed as the Acting Assistant Surgeon General, Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee. It was evident that the Army could not meet the demands of the war without the use of women resulting in the establishment of the Army Nurses Corp in 1901 and the Navy

Nurse Corp in 1908 (" Highlights in History," n. . ). The period of World War I and World War II brought significant advancements for women in the military although it would prove that women were expendable. After the passing of the Selective Service Act and the draft initiated, there were over 4. 8 million men served fighting in the war. This had a significant impact on the women of the nation not only were they needed to fill the millions of jobs left on the home front, but the military needed the women to free the men of noncombatant duties. The Navy and Marines were the first to enlist women ignoring red tape from congress.

The Navy enlisted over 12, 000 Yeomen and 1, 500 nurses and the Marines enlisted over 300 women in the reserves as telephone operators and clerks. The Army unofficially enlisted over 21, 000 nurses as contract workers and volunteers. The Army Signal Corp trained over 300 bilingual telephone operators and stenographers. At the end of the war, the military did not recognize women for their service or consider them Veterans. For example, the telephone operators left the military with little appreciation, receiving no ceremonies and no formal discharge or benefits. These women performed duties no less important than the men did and the mission would have failed without them, yet the military was able to dismiss them with no concern for their contributions. In 1979, the Army reviewed the women's service and determined that they performed duties as any other Soldier had. They gave them full recognition; unfortunately, for many it was too late, they passed away never receiving the title of " Veteran. " As women volunteered for service for a resistant military, compared to the many men that the

government drafted it was clear the military did not appreciate their commitment, sacrifices and value the worth of women.

This was evident by the Army Reorganization Act in 1920, which granted military nurses "relative rank" of an officer, not receiving the same pay, benefits, and privileges as that of male officers of the same rank ("Chronicles of," 2007). As World War II began, the military could not ignore the contribution of women during World War I and knew they could not fight another war without them. During World War II, over 400, 000 women served in the military in both the United States and Overseas. We know World War II for the number of women that served; emphasizing both the need for women in the military and their commitment to duty.

However, women would bear many challenges during this time. Women in the military continued to go against the norms of society that considered women's place to be at home taking care of the home and family. The majority of men in the military did not accept them as equals; although they held many positions previously only held by men. The problems with date rape and slander continued. According to Gruhzit-Hoyt (1995), a quote heard often among men in the Navy, they had "joined the navy to ride the WAVES" (Women Accepted for Volunteer Service).

These challenges continue to exist even in today's military. Highly trained women were underutilized and ranked far below their duties and responsibilities. It was common for higher ranking individuals to assign some women as babysitters and personal servants. The Corps of Engineers and Medical Services used their assigned women as "mop commandos" (Weatherford, 1990). One example is of a private named Mary McMillin. She

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held the womens world altitude record in parachuting, having jumped from 24, 800 feet and known for her work as a daredevil in the flying circus.

Her duties in the Army were to pack parachutes for young men who had never jumped before in their lives (Weatherford, 1990). The rank of women during this time was far below that of men. One such case was Oveta Culp Hobby; she was responsible for over 60, 000 women, formed an organization from scratch, and took on complex missions. Her rank was Colonel, which compared to the rank of a man who would command no more than 500 Soldiers (Weatherford, 1990). These are only a few examples but women felt the inequality throughout the military for many years.

Women not only had the issues of being a female in the military, but they dealt with the same issues that the men did being at war. They had substandard living conditions, which were sometimes worse than the mens, lack of supplies and fear of the Enemy. In 1942, the Japanese held sixty-seven women for over two years as Prisoners of War (POW). They also captured five Navy nurses holding them for five months and a second group, holding them for 37 months. The Japanese treated the women worse than the men POW, raping and harassing them on a consistent basis.

These events further supported the view of the majority of society who believed the military service was no place for a woman. This did not stop women from fighting to be in the services. By the end of the war, the military made significant strides in establishing women into the military. All services had developed either a corps or reserve for women; the Army established the WAC, the Air Force established the Women Air force Service Pilots (WASP), the Navy established the Women Excepted for Volunteer Emergency

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Service (WAVES), and the Marines and Coast Guard established the Women's Reserves.

It is hard to imagine how the war would have ended without the 400, 000 women that served. Nether less, it was clear that history would repeat itself and once again, the military dismissed the majority of women even if more qualified than their male counterparts. Time for Change The years following World War II through Post Korean War would bring much change and initial uncertainty for women in the services, yet would prove to be a time of positive and lasting change. In 1945, the WAC closed for enlistment, closing all training centers.

The number of women in the WAC decreased from over 150, 000, to barely 3, 000. Although some women were happy to return home to their lives before the war, found that they had the need and passion to do more. The Army realized the need to maintain women in the regular Army, therefore, a year later the Army Chief of Staff Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower began the process of making the WAC a permanent part of the Army. After three years with Lt. Col. Mary Louise Milligan leading the way, President Truman signed the Women's Armed Service's Integration Act. This was a historic time for women throughout all services.

The first enlisted women entered the Regular Army was in July 1948, and the first WAC officers received Regular Army appointments in December 1948 ("Women in the," n. d. ). This opened the door for the military to recognize women for their service and made it possible for women to make the military a career. It was through the Korean War and the years following that women would begin to understand what being part of the Regular Army would mean.

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The Army recalled many Officers for duty and involuntarily extended those enlisted that had planned to leave the military.

More than 500 women served in the combat zone. The Koreans killed Seventeen women during the war, which was considerably less than World War II; fortunately, the military gave these women the same courtesies and benefits as the men. Following the Korean War, more positions opened to women, and training available for women increased tremendously. A true testament to women fully integrating into the services is the addition of reenlistment bonuses and pay increases and for the first time implementation of uniforms for women.

Women could finally say that they were officially part of the United States military organization although the battle for true equality was far from won. The military's expectations of women were in contradiction to the growing feminist movement in the United States during the Vietnam War but would eventually have to adhere to the expectations of the nation (" Highlights in History," n. d. ). The military expected women to look like women. They were to dress appropriately in skirts and high heels, where make up, and use appropriate ladylike manners.

These guidelines even applied to the women in Vietnam. The military spent money to retrain women to perform what they considered a women's work, such as typing and cooking, even if trained and proficient in other technical skills. These actions further restricted promotions for women making them uncompetitive and ineligible for promotion to Admiral or General. Eventually the military could no longer go against the demands of female service members for equality; congress voted to allow women's

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promotion to higher pay grades to include Admiral and General in 1967. "Women in the," n. d. ). This movement would propel many firsts for women throughout the Vietnam War to include; first woman enlisted in the Air National Guard, promoted to Brigadier General, aircraft maintenance officer, promoted to Major General, first naval vessel sails with female and male crew, and the Army's first woman helicopter pilot. Although this was a step in the right direction, there was still a long road to equality. The Armed Services Committee of the US House of Representatives made the following statement making that clear. ... here cannot be complete equality between men and women in the matter of military careers. The stern demands of combat, sea duty, and other types of assignments directly related to combat are not placed upon women in our society. ... It is recognized that a male officer in arriving at the point where he may be considered for general and flag rank passes through a crucible to which the woman officer is not subjected—such as combat, long tours at sea, and other dangers and isolation (" Women in the," n. d. ). From the post Vietnam Era to the present, women continued to earn their way to the highest ranks in the military.

They took on the toughest jobs and assignments and proved that they were as capable as men to complete the most complex missions. During this time, women enter into the service academies and graduate, a woman commands a major military installation, the first African-American woman promoted to Brigadier General. During Operation Just Cause in Panama, two woman Command companies and the list continues. Women would continue to show their relevance through Operation Iraqi Freedom and presently in Operation Enduring Freedom.

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) would prove to be both a time for women to excel and time of great challenges for women in the military. There have been more women killed in OIF than in any war since World War II with over 200, 000 deployed. Unfortunately, the war itself has not been the only challenge. The biggest challenge has come from within our own ranks. According to several studies of the US military funded by the Department of Veteran Affairs, 30% of military women are raped while serving, 71% are sexually assaulted, and 90% are sexually harassed (Benedict, 2009).

While deployed leadership issues women whistles, ordered them to stay with battle buddies. Is this what a Soldier deserves while fighting for her country? With the increase of sexual misconduct, the military has taken a more proactive approach to training and has given victims more options for reporting. Although not officially authorized to serve in direct combat, they are. They conduct patrol, female searches at checkpoints and serve as pilots just to name a few. This has led to the debate of women's roles in combat. Women's Roles in Combat Women's roles in combat have been a subject of debate.

Both in the military and within society, people believe that women do not belong in direct combat or on the front lines. Those that do support women in combat argue that some, not all women are just as capable as men to perform combat duties and should be afforded the same opportunities as men in the military. There are compelling arguments on both sides, but the truth is that women will continue to fight for equal treatment in all facets of

the military. Although the thought of women fighting on the front lines of combat is at times difficult to imagine, it is reality.

There are concerns with physical capability, mental ability, and effects on the unit. The opposition says that women are caretakers, nurturers, life givers and everything that combat entails goes against those roles. Combat as defined by General Robert Barrow, former commandant of the US Marine Corps, “ exposure to danger is not combat. Being shot at, even being killed, is not combat. Combat is finding...closing with...and killing or capturing the enemy. It is killing, and it’s done in an environment that is often as difficult as you can possibly imagine...Brutality.

Death. Dying. It’s uncivilized! And women can’t do it” (Muir, 1992, p. 3). This statement is very broad and stereotypes all women. However, not all women are the same and many women want the same opportunity to fight and die if need be for their country. Another common argument is that women do not have the physical strength and stamina to conduct combat missions. Most would agree that the majority of women, as with many men, are not physically capable to perform combat duties. Therefore, the military should develop a physical test to determine MOS eligibility.

This would enable the most qualified personnel to perform in combat, regardless of sex. Is a woman mentally capable of killing, can they pull the trigger? Women may go through a different decision-making process than a man, although with training, and mission analysis, they will do what they have to do. Combat has an effect on all service members. Women will have post combat issues, but no different than men. Effects on the units can be

minimal if the military develops a slow and deliberate plan to integrate women into the units.

Change is difficult, but we are a Military that must adapt to a constantly changing environment. As with the repeal of "Don't ask, Don't tell" it is the leader's responsibility to educate, train, and enforce changes that in the end state will only make us a stronger military. The Military Leadership Diversity Committee is currently in support of women fulfilling combat roles. It is clear that women have been serving in combat roles unofficially for years. Units have cleverly attached women to combat units instead of assigning them or simply tasking them to perform missions in direct combat.

The mission will place many women not attached or tasked in direct combat with the enemy meeting the exact definition of General Robert Barrow. Therefore, the reality is that women are on the front lines, and it is time that the military opens all jobs to women. Considering the major contributions of women, and the impact they had on the military, it is imperative that the military gives women the same opportunities to serve their country as their male counterparts. Contributions of Women throughout History Many legendary women throughout military history are not well known.

Early in history they did not serve in legitimate roles; therefore, nobody wrote about or recognized them until many years later. Yet it is important to understand without their contributions things may be different today. Catherine Moore Barry was primarily responsible for General Morgan defeating Gen Cornwallis at Cowpens during the Revolutionary War, which ultimately resulted in the Colonies winning their independence from Britain.

Rose O'Neal Greenhow who became one of the best-known spies during the Civil War sent a message to Gen Beauregard resulting in him taking Bull Run. Col Ruby Bradley who is the most decorated Army Nurse served for 34 years, participating in the WWII and the Korean War. More recently, Maj Marie Therese Rossi, she was the first female combat Commander to fly into battle. She paid the ultimate sacrifice when her helicopter crashed in March 1991. Finally, Sgt Leigh Ann Hester who is the first female to receive the Silver Star Medal since World War II. These are only a few examples of woman's contributions throughout the years, but if they had been there where would we be today. Conclusion

From the days of the Revolutionary War when women disguised themselves as men to fight in the war to today when women are closer than ever to equal treatment as the men they serve alongside of, they have endured through numerous challenges and obstacles. Women battled against sexual harassment and assault, rape, slander and unequal pay and benefits. During the early wars, many underestimated the value of women. Commanders in charge did not want women in their ranks. As time and war, progressed Commanders had a newfound respect for females in their units and would ask for them over the men.

Although the military had become dependent on women to fill the noncombat positions, they immediately discharged them at the war's end until 1948 when they enlisted in the Regular Army. From this point on women had fought the uphill battle to today in 2012 when congress opened another 14, 000 jobs for women closer to the front lines. Through their contributions, sacrifices and determination women's relevance in the military

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is clear; they have challenged the norms of society and assisted in the success of the military we know today as the best in the world. References Benedict, H. (2009). *The lonely soldier*.

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