

## Women in the Army - Historical Highlights

**1775.** The Second Continental Congress authorized medical support for the Continental Army (27 July 1775). Plans for creating a "Hospital" (Medical Department) provided that a "matron be allotted to every hundred sick or wounded, who shall take care that provisions are properly prepared; that the wards, beds, and utensils be kept in neat order; and that the most exact economy be observed in her department."

**1861.** The Secretary of War appointed Dorothea L. Dix, famed for her work on behalf of the mentally ill, as Superintendent of Women Nurses for the Union Army (10 June 1861). Miss Dix headed the list of about six thousand women who served the federal forces during the war.

**1898.** The Surgeon General requested and received congressional authority to appoint women contract nurses in the Army (28 April 1898). The Surgeon General established a Nurse Corps Division in his office and appointed Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee, Vice President of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Acting Assistant Surgeon placed in charge of the new division (29 August 1898).

**1901.** The Nurse Corps (female) became a permanent corps of the Medical Department under the Army Reorganization Act passed by Congress. Nurses were appointed in the Regular Army for a three-year period, but were not commissioned as officers. Dita H. Kinney, a former contract nurse, was officially appointed the first Superintendent of the Corps (15 March 1901).

**1902.** The authorized strength of the Nurse Corps was fixed at 100 nurses and remained unchanged for ten years.

**1918.** During World War I the peak strength of the newly redesignated Army Nurse Corps (ANC) reached 21,480 (11 November 1918). Three Army nurses received the Distinguished Service Cross and twenty-three received the Distinguished Service Medal among the ANC's numerous achievements during the war.

**1942.** Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall envisioned a women's army auxiliary corps as a conduit for enrolling thousands of women during wartime, thus releasing men from administrative jobs and making them available for combat duty. While congressmen could accept the idea of a women's auxiliary to ease a manpower shortage, they objected to giving women military status as well as the rights and benefits of veterans. Congress established a Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), but did not grant its members military status (14 May 1942).

**1943.** Because the WAAC law did not make women an integral part of the Army, they could not be governed by Army regulations or the Articles of War. If women went overseas they could not be protected as soldiers under the Geneva Convention. Public Law 78-110, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1 July 1943, established the Women's Army Corps (WAC), deleted the word auxiliary and gave women military status, equal benefits and pay, and the same disciplinary code as men. Army regulations excluded women from combat training that involved weapons or tactical exercises and from duty assignments that required weapons. Commanders could assign women to such non-combat duty positions as disbursing or pay officers, intelligence personnel who worked in code rooms, or drivers in certain overseas areas, even though the positions required the use of a weapon. If assigned these positions, WACs received proper

training with appropriate weapons (usually the .45-caliber automatic pistol). To avoid the impression that women were involved in combat duties, public relations officers ensured that the news media did not print photographs of WACs with weapons.

**1947.** Colonel Florence A. Blanchfield, Chief of the Army Nurse Corps, serving in the temporary grade of colonel, received a commission in the permanent grade of lieutenant colonel in the Regular Army, becoming the first woman to hold a permanent commission in the U.S. Army.

**1948.** The Women's Armed Services Integration Act, Public Law 625, 12 June 1948, created regular and reserve status for women in the Army.

**1951.** The involuntary recall of reserve officers for the Korean War marked the first time women were summoned to active duty without their consent. The Secretary of Defense established the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) to interpret the role of women in the services to the public and to promote acceptance of military service as a career for women (11 August 1951).

**1958.** Colonel Inez Haynes, Chief of the Army Nurse Corps, and Lieutenant Colonels Ruby F. Bryant and Ruby G. Bradley were promoted to the grade of colonel in the Regular Army, becoming the first women to hold the Regular Army permanent grade of colonel (4 March 1958).

**1964.** Title VII, Civil Rights Act of 1964 established a federal right to equal opportunity in employment. All persons are to be treated fairly and have equal opportunities in all phases of employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

**1966.** Department of Defense (DoD) Inter-Service Working Group, "Study on Utilization of Women in the Armed Services," 31 August 1966, recommended that the services expand their women's components between 38 and 73 percent over existing forces, but still within the limitation of two percent of the total force; that high standards be retained in any expansion; and that women continue to be concentrated in administrative, communications, and medical care fields, but that the services explore their utilization in other fields.

**1967.** President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Public Law 90-130, 8 November 1967, which eliminated restrictions on women's promotion (including flag rank) and retirement and the two percent limitation on their numbers.

**1970.** Colonel Anna Mae Hays, Chief of the Army Nurse Corps, was promoted to brigadier general, becoming the first woman in the Army's history to attain general officer rank (11 June 1970).

**1972.** The Department of the Army Affirmative Action Plan expanded opportunities for women (June 1972). The percentage of occupations that could utilize women expanded from forty to ninety. With the elimination of the draft, the Army approved plans for a one hundred percent expansion of the WAC by 1978 (24 July 1972). Women began entering the Army's ROTC program. This source of officers quickly replaced the direct commission as the principal source of women officers. WACs received approval to command any unit in the Army except one that had a combat mission.

**1974.** Opportunities for women expanded. Women became eligible to serve in 430 of the Army's 467 military occupational specialties and only combat-related specialties remained closed.

**1975.** The Army discontinued its policy of involuntarily separating pregnant soldiers, replacing it with a new policy that permitted up to four weeks prenatal leave and six weeks postpartum leave. Immediate hardship discharges for sole parents, male or female, and married enlisted women when there was a conflict in performing one's military tasks and providing adequate child care were authorized (June 1975). The service academies became open to women (7 October 1975).

**1977.** Women officers were serving in all branches except infantry, armor, field artillery and air defense artillery. Of the 377 enlisted military occupational specialties, 348, or 92 percent, were open to women. The Army approved a new Basic Initial Entry Training program to provide female trainees with similar basic training as men. Female soldiers participated in annual REFORGER (Return of Forces to Germany) exercises for the first time as the Army studied the effect of women on unit mission during deployment and operations under extended field conditions.

**1978.** Women's Army Corps disestablished (28 April 1978). Major General Mary E. Clarke, commander of the U.S. Army Military Police School/Training Center and Fort McClellan, Alabama, became the first female major general in the Army's history (November 1978). The Army also began integrating male and female recruits in Basic Initial Entry Training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

**1979.** An analysis of integrated basic training programs by Army physical therapists led to changes in equipment need by women and a reduction in their training injuries. The high female injury rate during basic training was reduced from ten percent to less than three percent.

**1980.** The Army expressed its concern over sexual harassment, The Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff in a joint message sent to the field on 4 January 1980, reaffirmed the Army's full commitment to a policy that upholds the human dignity of all military and civilian personnel. The Chief of Staff directed the Inspector General to investigate allegations of sexual harassment and mistreatment of women. The Army's policy made it clear that improper sexual treatment should be dealt with swiftly and fairly. Commanders were responsible for educating and informing their soldiers and for enforcing Army policy.

**1982.** The Secretary of Defense directed the military services to "aggressively break down those remaining barriers that prevent us from making the fullest use of the capabilities of women in providing for our national defense" (January 1982). Women were authorized to serve in 92 percent of all Army officer, warrant officer, and enlisted specialties. Women could be assigned to all units except battalion and smaller-sized units of infantry, armor, cannon field artillery, low-altitude air defense artillery, combat engineers, and certain aviation units. The Army discontinued coeducational basic training because men were not being challenged enough physically in integrated training companies. As part of the Army-wide effort to combat sexual harassment, special training programs for military and civilian personnel, both male and female, were begun.

**1983.** The Army adopted the Direct Combat Probability Coding System (DCPCS).

**1985.** Under the DCPCS female soldiers were authorized to serve in 86 percent of all military occupational specialties. Women composed 10.5 percent of active Army strength.

**1988.** The Department of Defense adopted a Risk Rule to help standardize the services' assignment of women deploying to hostile areas.

**1990-1991.** The Army expanded opportunities open to women, opening ninety percent of military occupational specialties to them.

**1993.** The Secretary of Defense directed the services to open more specialties and assignment opportunities to women. Career opportunities expanded when more than 9,000 previously closed positions in combat aviation opened to the assignment of women.

**1994.** The Secretary of Defense announced a new assignment rule for women based on direct ground combat. The Army applied the rule and opened more than 32,000 positions to the assignment of women. The Army also implemented gender-integrated training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Women composed 13 percent of the active Army by the end of the year.

**1997.** Lieutenant General Claudia J. Kennedy, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, became the first female lieutenant general in the Army's history (21 May 1997).

**1998.** Women accounted for 14.9 percent of the Total Army.

**2001.** Women currently account for 15.9 percent of the total Army.