

## Female veterans in the armed forces

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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Did you know...?

—For service in the American Revolution, Margaret Corbin, dubbed “Captain Molly,” became the first American woman to receive a military pension? At the defense of Ft. Washington, when her husband John Corbin was killed at the cannon, she assumed his post and was wounded. On July 6, 1779, the Continental Congress granted her money equal to one-half pay drawn by a soldier and one suit of clothes. Captain Molly is buried at West Point.

—During the Civil War, women filled many roles supporting and serving with the Union and Confederate forces? Women helped organize and run public relief and sanitary commissions that gathered and distributed supplies to the armies. Women nurses and matrons staffed government and regimental hospitals of the Union and Confederacy, served as disguised male soldiers fighting at the front; as laundresses, cooks, and spies; and, at least one, as an Acting Assistant Surgeon tending to the wounded.

—Over 1,500 nurses served with the Army in the Spanish-American War? These nurses served with the Army in Hawaii, Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, on the hospital ship Relief and in stateside hospitals. Dita Kinney, former contract nurse, became the first Superintendent of the Army Nurse Corps when it was founded in 1901. Esther Voorhees Hasson, one of the Relief nurses during the war became the first Superintendent of the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908.

—The first women who enlisted in the United States military joined the Navy and Marine Corps in World War I? Over 12,000 of them served stateside “freeing a man to fight.” Overseas, Army and Navy nurses, volunteers in the American Red Cross, the YMCA, YWCA, Salvation Army and American Women’s Hospitals all worked together caring for the doughboys. Over 230 bilingual women telephone operators recruited by AT&T served overseas with the US Army Signal Corps. Over 400 women died as a result of their World War I service.

—In World War II approximately 400,000 American military women served stateside and overseas? Women served in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and as members of the Women Airforce Service Pilots. Women served in every theater of the war and in many nontraditional roles. Eighty-eight female military nurses were held prisoners of war. More than 460 women lost their lives during World War II.

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—Women did not receive permanent military status until the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 (Public Law 625-80th Congress)? This bill, signed into law by President Truman on June 12, 1948, granted women permanent status in the Regular and Reserve forces of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and newly created Air Force.

—During the Korean era over 50,000 women served stateside and overseas? In-country Korea, Army nurses served in Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (M.A.S.H.) and general hospitals, while Air Force nurses supported air evacuation missions and Navy nurses served on nearby hospital ships.

—7,000 American military women served in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War? The majority were military nurses assigned to military hospitals, air evacuation, hospital ships, and field units. Some were wounded and the eight women who died are memorialized on the wall at the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial.

—The first woman general was promoted in 1970? On Nov. 8, 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Public Law 90-130 removing legal ceilings on women's promotions that had kept them out of the general and flag ranks. This law also dropped the two percent ceiling on officer and enlisted strengths for women in the armed forces.

—In the fall of 1976, women enrolled in the military service academies? Only months after President Gerald Ford signed Public Law 94-106, establishing the admission of women into the academies, 119 women entered West Point, 81 entered the US Naval Academy, and 157 enrolled at the US Air Force Academy. Women also enrolled in the Coast Guard Academy and the Merchant Marine Academy.

—Approximately 41,000 American military women deployed for Operation Desert Shield/Storm making it the largest single deployment of military women in US history? Women served in all areas of the operation except direct combat. Two women were prisoners of war and five women were killed in action.

—Women have participated in US military operations in Grenada, Panama, Honduras, Bosnia,

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Croatia, Somalia, Rwanda, and Haiti? They deployed in expanded roles and with new risks because the laws banning women flying in combat were repealed in 1991, and those banning women from duty on combat ships were revoked in 1993.

—In March 1996, Sergeant Heather Lynn Johnsen became the first woman to earn the badge for guarding the Tomb of the Unknowns? Later that same year, Patricia Tracey, USN, and Carol Mutter, USMC, became the first women promoted to three-star rank. US military women are deployed throughout the world and have supported major missions including Operation Able Sentry on the Serbian/Macedonian border; Operations Joint Endeavor and Decisive Edge, NATO missions in Bosnia; and Operations Southern Watch, Pacific Haven and Provide Comfort, supporting the no-fly zone established against Iraq and offering humanitarian relief to Kurdish evacuees

—In 1998, for the first time, a woman fighter pilot delivers a payload of missiles and laser-guided bombs in combat? She is in the first wave of US strikes against Iraq in Operation Desert Fox. A year later, for the first time a woman, Air Force lieutenant colonel Eileen Collins, commands the space shuttle. Also in 1999, the first woman and first African-American, Evelyn Fields, commands the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Corps (NOAA). In 2000, the first Coast Guard women are promoted to flag officer rank. That same year a woman, for the first time, commands a Navy warship at sea.

—Women were among the first deployed in response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001? A month later, when Operation Enduring Freedom was launched, women were also among the first deployed in support of the operation. On March 23, 2003, Army PFC Lori Piestewa was the first servicewoman to be killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom. She is also the first Native American servicewoman ever to die in battle. She, along with Army PFC Jessica Lynch and SPC Shoshana Johnson, became prisoners of war during the early days of the operation. By the end of 2004, 19 servicewomen had been killed as a result of hostile action since the war in Iraq had begun in 2003, the most servicewomen to die as a result of hostile action in any war that the nation had participated.

—In 2005 the first woman in history is award the Silver Star for combat action? SGT Leigh Ann Hester, from the Kentucky Army National Guard, is one of 13 women in history to be awarded the Silver Star and the only one to receive the award for combat action. The other 12 were awarded for valor to nurses in World Wars I and II.

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Today military women serve in all jobs and assignments stateside and overseas except in direct ground combat and in units with a high probability of direct enemy contact. They are also prohibited from serving in Special Forces and aboard submarines. There are currently an estimated 344,500 women in the armed forces; on Active Duty, in the National Guard and in the Reserves. They serve in every enlisted rank, and in the officer corps, all but the four-star general/flag officer rank.

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Submitted by Shirley Kadlec