

The History of Women in the Military



Figure 1. The 2015 Women of the 173d Fighter Wing, Oregon Air National Guard

Today, there are approximately 2 Million Women Veterans and 500,000 women currently serving in the US Armed Forces. There are over **11,000 female Veterans** just in the state of Utah. All of these women have paved the way to allow women in the military today to propagate to higher ranks, filling positions previously not allowed.

In 1775, women started serving with the military in the American Revolution filling roles as nurses, water bearers, seamstresses, cooks and spies. During the Mexican War in 1846-48, Elizabeth Newcom disguised herself as a male to enlist into the military. **She marched 600 miles** before being discovered—ensuring a new era of enlistment for women with her idea of enlisting as a male. Nonetheless, women continued to disguise themselves as men in order to serve in the military through the Civil War.² During the Spanish-American War, Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee changed the face **of women in the military** by becoming the **first female** Acting Assistant Surgeon General and writing a legislation to create a permanent corps of nurses. Thanks to Dr. McGee, in the early 1900s the Army and Navy Nurse corps were established, allowing women **to freely join the military in medical roles**. The Army, Marines, and Coast Guard all had women serve during World War I.¹

The Army Reorganization Act of 1920 granted military nurses the status as officers only ranking from O2 to O4, not yet allowing them to fill higher ranking roles. World War II paved new paths for **women in the military**, including letting women serve as pilots (stateside), communications, intelligence, supply, medicine and administration. Servicewomen who had joined the Reserves following World War II were involuntarily recalled to active duty during the Korean War serving in many capacities. **The number of women in the military grew**, and approximately 7,000 women served in the Vietnam War. In 1968 the first woman was sworn into the Air National Guard with the passage of Public Law 90-130.¹



Another major feat for women was when the Chief of the Army Nurse Corps and the Women's Army Corps Director, was promoted to brigadier general in 1970. In 1983 approximately 200 Army and Air Force women were among the forces deployed to Grenada on Operation Urgent Fury, serving on air crews, as military police, and as transportation specialists. In 1988 NASA selected its **first Navy woman** as an astronaut, leading the way for women to enter into NASA. During the War in the Persian Gulf, 40,000 women were deployed during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In 2001, a female Air National Guard Security Forces member became **the first woman** to complete the counter-sniper course, opening opportunities for new roles in the military for women. In 2008, **for the first time** in US military history a female was promoted to the rank of four-star general by the U.S. Army. ¹

Today, women are commanders, pilots, nurses, security forces, maintainers, and they hold many various jobs in all of the services of the military. We owe **our thanks** to all women in the military who have come before us. These women paved the way for future women in the military because of their valiant efforts and sacrifices. **Thank you to all of the Veterans from the past, present, and future for your sacrifices and commitment.**

¹ Women In Military Service For America Memorial. (n.d.). Retrieved February 16, 2015, from <http://www.womensmemorial.org/Education/timeline.html>

² Women in the United States Army. (n.d.). Retrieved February 16, 2015, from <http://www.army.mil/women/history/early.html>