

**A CENTURY OF SERVICE:  
100 YEARS OF THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY**

**WOMEN WARRIORS: PRAGMATISM, POLITICS  
AND AMERICAN SOCIETY**

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The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines a warrior as 'a person whose occupation is warfare; a soldier, a member of an armed force'. No gender is attached to this definition, yet the next entry is 'warriorress', which is defined as 'a female warrior'. Ask Americans to define warrior and they will probably do so in terms of men. Ask them about women warriors and they are likely to mention the Amazons or maybe television's Xena, Warrior Princess. Americans think of warriors as someone who takes the fight to the enemy, who takes offensive action. Under this characterisation, American women have officially been warriors only since 1991 when they were permitted to become combat pilots.

Nonetheless, throughout American history, women have fought, died and been captured in virtually every war in which the United States has participated. In early American history, women who fought usually did so disguised as men and some were 'accidental' combatants who through happenstance ended up in combat, at least for a short time. The vast majority of women involved in American wars, however, were not combatants but rather provided support services, doing what was considered 'women's work'. Now fast forward to today and you find American military women flying fighters over Iraq, firing cruise missiles from Navy combat ships, on patrol in Bosnia and conducting drug interdiction operations!

How did women move from providing women's services to being servicewomen? It was a combination of three factors. First, pragmatic decisions were made by the military to utilise women when men did not have the needed skills or to fill a void when not enough men were available. Second, changes for military women sometimes depended on the outcome of political disagreements between military leaders and their civilian bosses, between the services and Congress and between influential civilian women and Congress. Finally, underlying the first two factors is the role of American society. Changes in the US from what jobs women performed to whether or not they worked after they married affected how women were treated in the military. This essay will examine each of these factors more closely, beginning with pragmatism which will be discussed chronologically, followed by politics and American society in which examples will be used to show the influence these issues had on women's utilisation in the United States military.

**Pragmatism**

The American military is results oriented—get the job done, complete the mission. It has a preferred way of accomplishing this, and in the personnel realm that has meant using men. But over the years, the military leadership sometimes found that not enough men were available or men did not have the skills needed. Thus, when faced with a choice of not having a job done or having a woman do it, they made the pragmatic choice and opted to use women.

They made this choice, however, very reluctantly and placed major constraints on women's participation. Initially, women were isolated in organisations outside the services so they served *with*, not *in*, the services and they were not expected to become a permanent part of the military. The types of jobs they were permitted to do were limited to those men thought were appropriate for women, and men's estimates of the number of women who would be needed often were well below the number they finally recruited. But over time, men found that their suppositions about women and military service were not correct and the constraints began to disappear. Men learned that women had more abilities than expected or could be taught new skills. In the end, women were put in many more jobs than originally expected which was acceptable because they would 'free a man to fight'.

The pragmatism of the military can be seen throughout US history. The American Revolution, Civil War and Spanish-American War proved the efficacy of using women nurses. Beginning with World War I, the military found that if they wanted certain jobs performed, they would need to recruit women because they were the ones with the requisite skills. In World War II, the jobs women performed exceeded expectations and consequently, military planners dramatically increased the number of women. In the All Volunteer Force, the pool of appropriately aged men was shrinking so much that not enough of them were available to fill all the slots vacated by draftees. Pentagon officials found the answer was to increase the number of women. Increased numbers meant increasing job opportunities for women so as to not adversely impact men's careers. The result of the pragmatism of the military is that today women comprise over fourteen per cent of the armed services and are being assigned to virtually every military job, except direct ground combat.

### *American Revolution*

During the American Revolution (1776-1781), the Continental Army had virtually no support troops, but it did have a ready source of help available—the wives of officers and soldiers who followed their Army husbands. Objections were raised that women would slow the Army's march, but General George Washington believed it was important to use the women because men might desert if their wives were not permitted to work. Consequently, he authorised each company to give rations to three to six women and their children in exchange for the women doing the cooking, sewing and laundry.<sup>1</sup>

The other major need was for nurses. Washington specified that they should be women in order to free men to fight. He authorised the hiring of often nurses and one matron for every 100 patients. The women's duties, however, were limited to emptying chamber pots, scrubbing the wards and bathing the patients, while skilled nursing care was done by men.<sup>2</sup>

### *Civil War*

The next major conflict involving women was the US Civil War (1861-1865). Similar to the American Revolution, women did cooking and laundering, but the vast majority of women associated with the military were nurses. With the huge casualties sustained by both sides, medical care was urgently needed. Inspired by Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War, many American women on both sides volunteered to be nurses. Nevertheless, the public did not believe it was appropriate for women to be in military hospitals. Critics said refined, modest women should not care for rough crude military men and the work was too demanding and exhausting. Army doctors also opposed women nurses on the grounds that an Army hospital was no place for a woman.<sup>3</sup>

But the reality was that every available man was needed to fight so women nurses were the only option. On 10 June 1861, the Union Army's Surgeon General appointed Dorothea Dix as Superintendent of Women Nurses and later ordered that at least one third of hospital nursing jobs be filled by women. To make women nurses more palatable to the Army doctors, Dix required that they be at least thirty years old, be 'plain in appearance' and wear brown or black dresses without bows, curls, jewelry or hoop skirts. In August 1861, Congress authorised pay and a daily ration for the nurses and said they were to serve for six months or the war's duration. The South was slower in organizing its medical department. It was not until September 1862 that the Confederate Congress granted official status to women nurses.<sup>4</sup>

It is not known how many women served as nurses in the Civil War. Including women who went to nurse without formal approval as well as the nurses of the Union and Confederate armies, the best guess is about 10,000. In addition to serving in hospitals, women also were aboard the Navy's first hospital ship, the USS *Red Rover*. Sometimes women were in the thick of battle. Some were wounded and an unknown number died, although more likely from disease than wounds. The war also marked the first time a woman was a prisoner of war. Dr. Mary Walker, the first woman doctor in the Union Army, was captured by the Confederates and held for four months. She was later awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the only woman to ever receive this award.<sup>5</sup>

Initially nurses were given menial jobs, but eventually many also provided skilled nursing care. Although many of the male medical personnel kept their prejudices against women throughout the war, others eventually began to see their worth and praised them. In the north, the head of the US Sanitary Commission, which was responsible for enforcing sanitation regulations in the Army, commented that 'God knows what we should have done without them, they worked like heroes...'. In the south, the Director of Hospitals of the Army of Tennessee praised the nurses efficiency and ability and said they had been of real service to the Confederacy.<sup>6</sup> Overall, women nurses were generally credited with greatly improving military patient care. Nevertheless, at war's end, the US Army returned to using only men in its medical department.<sup>7</sup>

### *Spanish-American War*

At the beginning of the Spanish-American War (1898 - 1899), the Army tried unsuccessfully to recruit several thousand men to tend sick soldiers during a typhoid epidemic. The primary reason they could not find enough male nurses was that in the intervening years since the end of the Civil War, women had come to dominate the nursing profession. If the Army wanted nurses, they would have to be women and so the Army's Surgeon General asked Congress for authority to appoint women nurses. Congress said yes, but made it clear that they were to be contract civilian nurses, not military nurses. Eventually, some 1,500 women would nurse military men in the US, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Hawaii, Japan and China. Navy nurses also served on the hospital ship USS *Relief*. No nurses died in military action, but twelve died of typhoid fever and one died participating in an experiment to prove that the mosquito caused malaria.<sup>8</sup>

The war had shown the military how important women nurses were and so it began to consider giving them a more permanent status. American society had changed— nursing was now a female occupation. Women military nurses had greatly improved patient care and preventative medicine, and had skills beyond those of enlisted hospital corpsmen. The military also found that having the nurses as civilians caused problems because they were not under direct military control. Despite all the arguments for making the nurses part of the military, opposition remained strong to doing so. The Surgeon General was reluctant to have women with the troops in the field and expressed concern that the nurses might want 'luxuries', such as rocking chairs and other furniture.<sup>9</sup>

In the end, however, the indisputable contributions of the women nurses in the Spanish-American War convinced the Army's Surgeon General that having them as a permanent part of his medical services was a good idea. Legislation was drafted to create a Nurse Corps (female) and its provisions were included in the Army Reorganization Act of 1901. Although the Nurse Corps (female) organisation was part of the regular Army, the nurses served under contract and had only quasi military status. They did not have military rank, received far less pay than men and were not given pensions or veterans benefits. In 1908, the Navy also established a Nurse Corps (female) with similar restrictions. Women nurses may not have received equal treatment, but now they had a permanent place at least *with*, if not *in*, the military.<sup>10</sup>

### *World War I*

By the time the US entered World War I in April 1917, women were generally accepted as military nurses, but the thought that women should enter the military as enlisted personnel seemed outrageous. Yet in early 1917, one person began to think exactly that—Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels. The Navy was in the midst of a major buildup of naval forces and faced a manpower shortage. Sailors needed to be sent to sea, but who was going to take their place in the expanding shore establishment? The Navy had civilian women working as clerks, but did not have money to hire more, and the Civil Service Commission did not have enough women to fill even a small fraction of the requirements. Furthermore, civil servants were not under full military control. So Secretary Daniels asked the unthinkable. Did the law require that yeomen (the Navy's clerks) be male? The answer was no, and so Daniels said 'then enroll women in the Naval Reserve as yeomen and we will have the best clerical assistance the country can provide'.<sup>11</sup>

The result of Daniel's order was that, on 19 March 1917, the Navy Department authorised the enlistment of women into the Naval Coast Defense Reserve Force. By the end of the war, 11,880 women had served as Yeoman (F) or, as they were popularly called 'yeomanettes'. Despite their name, they were in a number of different occupations besides yeoman, such as telephone switchboard operators, draftsmen, translators, camouflage designers, fingerprint experts, contract monitors, torpedo assemblymen, telegraphers and recruiters. Thus, these Navy women established the precedent of doing jobs well beyond what military men thought was possible.<sup>12</sup>

The Navy's policy of enlisting women also extended to the Coast Guard which in peacetime was under the Treasury Department, but which in times of war came under the Navy Department. Apparently only a few women were enlisted and all were assigned to the Coast Guard's small headquarters in Washington, DC.<sup>13</sup> For its part, as the war went on, the Marine Corps desperately needed clerical help to release combat marines to replace overseas casualties. Consequently, in August 1918, the Marine Corps began to recruit women, but because the war ended shortly thereafter, only 305 women joined the Marine Corps Reserve.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, despite a need for clerical help and telephone operators, the Secretary of War adamantly refused to enlist women, preferring to use civilians.

A notable aspect of the service of all the military women in World War I was that they were actually *in* the armed forces. Women were enlisted in the reserves and had the same status as men: they swore the same enlistment oath, had the same four year enlistment term, held the same ranks, were paid the same and were entitled to veterans' benefits. A sign of (heir acceptance was that one admiral protested: 'They must not be called yeowomen or yeomanettes. These women are as much a part of the Navy as the men who have enlisted. They do the same work . . .'.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, in 1925 and again in 1938, the provision in the Naval Reserve Act that had permitted women to be enrolled in the Navy during the First World War was amended to require that all enlistees be male.<sup>16</sup>

### *World War II*

Even before the US entered World War II, service leaders began discussing the possibility of utilising women. For example, in 1939, the new Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, realised that eventually the US would be drawn into the war that had started in Europe and that a severe military manpower shortage was inevitable. He directed his staff to undertake a study of the feasibility of using women outside the medical professions. The study concluded the Army could utilise women, but the duties it expected them to perform were demeaning, such as hostesses, cooks, waitresses, chauffeurs and strolling minstrels. Although condescending toward women, the plan was important because, unlike World War I, the Army anticipated having women in uniform as well as using civilian women.<sup>17</sup>

After America's December 1941 entry into the war, the services sent legislation to Congress to create women's military organizations. In May 1942, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was formed. However, its members did not have military status and so, in July 1943, it was disestablished and replaced by the Women's Army Corps (WAC) which was an integral part of the Army. In September 1942, the Army Air Forces established the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). This organisation, however, consisted of women who were hired as contract employees and they were given only quasi military status. In March 1944, Congress considered legislation to militarise the WASP, but, despite the support of the commander of the Army Air Forces, General 'Hap' Arnold, it was defeated in June. Later in 1944, it was announced that, because enough male pilots were now available for stateside duty, the WASP would be deactivated on 20 December 1944.<sup>18</sup>

Within the Navy Department, a Women's Reserve was made a part of the Naval Reserve in July 1942 and a Women's Reserve was founded in November 1942 in the Coast Guard Reserve.

But the other component of the Navy Department, the Marine Corps, did not even begin to consider using women until the Fall of 1942. By then, however, they did not have much choice. It had suffered massive casualties on Guadalcanal in August and anticipated heavy losses as Marines fought their way toward Japan. The Joint Chiefs of Staff told it to add over 164,000 more men within a year, and the President was planning to draft them which threatened the Corps' elite status. They had already lowered their recruiting standards and raised the upper age limit to 36. Yet, they still could not get enough men. Finally, the Commandant decided the only solution was to put women in non-combat jobs. In February 1943, the Marine Corps' Women's Reserve was established.<sup>19</sup>

Although women were now in uniform, it did not mean they were the equals of men. Women had to be older to enlist, and officers were restricted as to how high they could rise in rank. Assignments in the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard were restricted to shore duty in the continental United States until September 1944 when they were permitted to volunteer for duty in Hawaii, Alaska, the Caribbean and Panama. Women were also prohibited from being assigned to Navy ships or combat aircraft. Women killed or injured on active duty were to receive the same benefits as US civil service employees, not those given to military men, such as a lump-sum death gratuity, retirement pay and veterans benefits.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, nurses continued to serve *with*, not *in*, the military. As the war started, Army nurses still had only relative rank, while Navy nurses had none at all (they were simply called nurse or chief nurse). In mid-1942, Navy nurses were finally given relative rank and all nurses received a pay raise, but their pay was still lower than that of male officers. In June 1944, all nurses were authorised commissioned officer status and all the benefits of rank, but it was a temporary measure that was to expire six months after the war ended.<sup>21</sup>

Even though the services recognised their need for women, they greatly underestimated how many women would be required and the jobs they could perform. For example, in December 1941, the Navy projected a requirement for 1,150 non-nurse women, but by 1945, some 81,400 women were serving. In addition the Navy had over 11,000 nurses. The story was similar in the other services. Including women in medical occupations, the Army totalled almost 156,000 women, the Marine Corps about 18,400 and the Coast Guard had approximately 12,000. It is estimated that about 350,000 women were in the military during the Second World War.<sup>22</sup>

Initially the services assumed women would be in traditional women's occupations, such as file clerks, typists, telephone operators and nurses. But women's roles in the American workplace had continued to evolve so that their civilian skills and their ability to learn new skills went well beyond what the military expected. This, combined with the needs of the services, soon resulted in women being in a wide variety of jobs. Women packed parachutes, were air traffic controllers, naval air navigators, weather forecasters and aircraft mechanics. They encoded and decoded military messages and translated captured enemy documents. Women gunner's mates trained American and Russian sailors in anti-aircraft gunnery. They tested rocket propellant and worked as chemists, metallurgists and electronics technicians on the Manhattan project that developed the nuclear bomb. They did almost every job short of direct combat.<sup>23</sup>

World War II also was the first time that significant numbers of American women were wounded, died and captured in a war. At the very beginning of the war, nurses were bombed in Pearl Harbor, Guam and the Philippines. Five Navy nurses were captured by the Japanese on Guam, and 66 Army and eleven Navy nurses were taken prisoner in the Philippines. Although the Guam nurses were repatriated six months after their capture, those in the Philippines remained prisoners until American forces returned three years later. One Army nurse, who survived a plane crash in Germany, was held for about three months before returning to the US as the result of a prisoner exchange. In addition, thirteen Army nurses were in a transport that crashed in German-occupied Albania and spent the next two months climbing over rugged mountains in the middle of winter to reach the coast so they could be rescued.<sup>24</sup>

Army nurses landed on the beach at Anzio, Italy five days after the invasion and four days after the Normandy landing. Six of the nurses at Anzio died when the Germans bombed their beachhead hospital. The Army nurses had the most casualties with 215 deaths. Their valor was recognised with some 1600 nurses receiving decorations, including Silver Stars, Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts. Navy nurses also served worldwide and on hospital ships. None of them were combat fatalities, but nine died while overseas and thirty-one died in the United States. The Navy awarded decorations to 303 Navy nurses and named a destroyer after a nurse.<sup>25</sup>

Non-medical military women also died in the line of duty, albeit in smaller numbers. For example, a Navy enlisted woman was killed when depth charges exploded at the Naval Air Station in Norfolk, Virginia. Although not in a combat zone, the WASP's work was very dangerous. They were testing newly repaired planes which sometimes turned out not to have been fixed correctly, causing crashes. They also towed target sleeves for anti-aircraft gunner trainees to shoot at and sometimes came back with holes in their plane instead of the target. By the time of their deactivation, 38 WASPs had died.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Cold War*

At the end of World War II, the military leadership was effusive in its praise of women. General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower said that 'during the time I have had WACs under my command they have met every test and task assigned to them ... Their contributions in efficiency, skill, spirit, and determination are immeasurable'. General Douglas MacArthur called the WACs 'my best soldiers'.<sup>27</sup> Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz said that 'not only were they equally efficient in many duties previously performed by men, but in certain types of work they proved to be more efficient and psychologically better fitted'.<sup>28</sup> The women definitely had made converts. More important than the words of military leaders, however, was their realisation that it made sense to give women permanent status within the armed forces. Not only had women performed well, but it was becoming increasingly evident that the world still was not totally at peace as the Cold War began to loom on the horizon.

Not surprisingly, the nurses were the first to benefit from the idea of permanent status. In April 1947, Congress passed the Army-Navy Nurse Corps Act. The law established a permanent nurse corps in both services and, in the Army, authorised a Women's Medical Specialist Corps for occupations such as dietitian and physical and occupational therapist. The nurses now were to be commissioned officers and would be eligible to transfer from the reserves to the regular Army and Navy. Congress, however, was still wary about women having status equal to men and so placed restrictions on the number of women who could serve, what rank they could hold and required them to retire earlier than men.<sup>29</sup>

With regard to the line women,<sup>30</sup> all Coast Guard women were discharged as part of the general demobilisation that occurred when the Coast Guard returned to the Treasury Department after the war. The rest of the services, however, found it necessary to retain women, some even involuntarily. Initially they were needed to discharge the men, to care for war casualties and to carry out administrative functions as part of US occupation forces. Later, the Cold War raised the possibility that if war were to break out again, women would be needed. Not wanting to reinvent the wheel, senior male officers began to propose that at least a few line women be given permanent status to form a nucleus around which future mobilisation could occur in event of a national emergency. Consequently, in June 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act which gave non-medical women a permanent place in the American military.<sup>31</sup>

Even though line women now would be permanent members of the military, similar to the nurses, they did not have equal status. Provisions were included in the law to meet virtually every objection that had been raised during congressional hearings for including women in the peacetime military. To guard against there being 'too many' women, the number of women was capped at two percent of the regular force. The service secretaries were given unprecedented blanket authority to discharge women, which took care of the issue of what to do with pregnant women. The service secretaries were also given the power to prescribe the

military authority women might exercise, thus minimising the possibility of women 'giving orders' to men. The women's rank structure was truncated which would force women to retire earlier and thus help to solve the 'problem' that women might receive early disability retirements because of menopause. Concern over a woman getting dependent's allowances for her husband was dealt with by requiring the woman to prove that he was dependent on her for his chief means of support (and the assumption was that no self-respecting man would let this happen). To make sure women did not adversely impact men's promotions, all of the services, except the Air Force, had separate promotion lists for women. On the combat issue, Navy, Marine and Air Force women were prohibited from being assigned to aircraft with a combat mission. Navy and Marine women were also barred from assignment to naval vessels, except hospital ships and transports. However, the law did not specifically outlaw ground combat for women. The problem was that the Army could not come up with a practical, acceptable definition of combat, so the law was silent on the issue. However, it was made clear to the service secretaries that Congress did not want women in combat.<sup>32</sup>

### *Korean War*

Women may have become permanent members of the armed forces in the post-war period, but, similar to the men, they were demobilised in large numbers. From a total of 266,256 at war's end, the number of women on active duty in June 1950, when North Korea invaded the south, had dropped to about 22,000, of which about one-third were medical personnel. Furthermore, limited numbers were serving overseas with only one nurse and no line women stationed in Korea when the war started. Not surprisingly, the most immediate need was for nurses. By the end of the first year of the war, the Army Nurse Corps had grown from 3500 to 5400, with about 500 to 600 nurses serving in the war zone. Requests for line women also came into the Pentagon, but given the fluid nature of the fighting, the service headquarters refused to send them to Korea.<sup>33</sup>

At the beginning of the war, initial manning goals were met by asking reservists to volunteer for extended active duty and involuntarily recalling other selected reservists, marking the first time women were called to active duty without their consent. Still, personnel shortages existed, so the services once again turned to women. However, despite a vigorous recruiting campaign, women did not answer the call the way they had in World War II—the total number of women went up by only a modest 31,000. The attempted expansion failed for several reasons. A 'police action' in Korea did not have the same patriotic draw as World War II. The reputation of servicewomen was not very good and parents often objected to their daughters joining the military. Also, the civilian job market had more to offer ambitious young women, and by the time the recruiting began, the war had already begun to slacken.<sup>34</sup>

### *Vietnam Era*

After the Korean War, the number of women dwindled throughout the rest of the fifties and into the first half of the sixties, reaching a low point of 29,795 in Fiscal Year 1964. However, their numbers began to rise in Fiscal Year 1965 and would continue to do so for the next 25 years. The immediate impetus for the increase was, once again, a manpower crisis, this time caused by the Vietnam War. The war was unpopular and men were reluctant to volunteer for military service. This meant the draft had to be extended in 1967 and to make it more palatable, President Lyndon B. Johnson said he would try to keep the number of men inducted as low as possible. Consequently, a number of military jobs were converted to civilian positions, recruiting standards for male volunteers were lowered and the end-strength goal for military women was raised by 6500. The number of women, however, actually exceeded this very modest goal, rising by a little over 15,000. Nonetheless, it was still only about half the growth rate that had occurred during the Korean War. Similar to men, the Vietnam War was not popular among women.<sup>35</sup>

Unlike the Korean War, however, line women did serve in Vietnam. Most of them worked at headquarters commands in traditional jobs, such as stenographers, supply, administration and personnel. The Army sent a total of about 700 women and the Air Force 500 to 600, but the Marine Corps had only 36 women in-country and the Navy limited participation to just nine

women line officers. None of the line women were killed in action, but they were subjected to frequent artillery shellings and those in Saigon were also targets of terrorist attacks. Although relatively small in numbers, these line women showed that they could function effectively in a combat zone, even under hostile fire.<sup>36</sup>

### *All Volunteer Force*

Although line women's participation in the Vietnam War had been minimal, events immediately after the war would result in an unexpected major expansion of their participation in the military. In early 1973, the draft was eliminated and the military turned to volunteers to fill its ranks. However, when it started doing so, the services found they were facing a long-term shortage of men between the ages of seventeen to twenty-five. In addition, the services had to fill a 1973 congressional mandate requiring that 55 per cent of all enlistees be high school graduates and at least 82 per cent be in the upper three mental categories of the entrance exam. Women were already required to be high school graduates and generally were better educated than male enlistees. Without additional women, the services would not be able to meet either their personnel requirements or the congressional education goals.<sup>37</sup>

Initially the services recruited women aggressively for the All Volunteer Force, but in later years it took some rather firm prodding of the services by civilian defence officials to keep the upward trend going. But the trend did keep going up. From 45,033 at the beginning of Fiscal Year 1973 to a high point of 232,823 by the end of Fiscal Year 1989. At the same time, the percentage of the military that was female rose from slightly under two per cent to 10.5 per cent. Although the number of women declined somewhat during the Cold War drawdown, the female proportion of the armed forces continued to rise, reaching its current level of over fourteen per cent. However, substantial variances exist among the services with the Air Force having the highest proportion at almost 19 per cent and the Marine Corps the lowest at six per cent.<sup>38</sup>

The increasing number of women also resulted in changes in the occupations women could enter and the positions and units to which they could be assigned. If women remained only in the traditional occupations and job assignments, they would begin to adversely impact men's careers. The Army, for example, said that women must be admitted to non-traditional jobs in order 'to prevent a surplus in MOS [military occupational specialty] favored by females, and to insure fair equity and male progression opportunity.'<sup>39</sup> Consequently, the Army opened 437 of its 485 occupations, including such non-traditional ones as ammunition specialist, plumber, military policemen, air defence crewman, heavy vehicle mechanic, and electrical/electronic equipment operator. As a result, the percentage of Army women serving in non-traditional occupations climbed from slightly under two per cent in 1972 to a little over 22 percent in 1978.<sup>40</sup>

In October 1972, the Secretary of the Navy announced that women who wanted to become pilots could begin naval aviation training. The Army did the same in April 1973 and the Air Force and Coast Guard in 1975. Only the Marine Corps decided to keep aviation closed to women pilots. Female pilots were legally limited to non-combat support jobs, but the Navy did permit them to fly combat jets in training missions. Even with the restrictions, well over half of all flight operations were open to women.<sup>41</sup>

On the sea, the Coast Guard assigned women as permanent crew members to two high endurance cutters in May 1977. In the fall of 1978, the 1948 law prohibiting the assignment of Navy and Marine women from duty on ships, except hospital ships and transports, was changed to allow permanent duty aboard non-combat ships and temporary duty aboard any Navy ship as long as it was not assigned a combat mission. The law was changed at the Navy's request because it did not have enough men to 'man' its support ships. Without women in the crews, some ships could not deploy. But the need to change the law was reinforced when a federal court ruled in July 1978 that the combat ship exclusion was unconstitutional. The first women reported for duty aboard the USS *Vulcan*, a repair ship, in November 1978. The program began slowly, but with an ever increasing need for seagoing personnel, it expanded so that between 1981 and 1990 it rose from 2000 to 8000 women aboard ships.<sup>42</sup>

On the ground, the Army started to literally move women forward. In 1987, nearly 12,000 positions were opened to women in the forward support battalions of the Army's combat divisions. As pointed out by Major General Jeanne Holm, a leading authority on military women, 'the Army leadership realized that, given the large number of women in supply and service jobs, the readiness of combat units would be hampered if women were excluded from these forward support battalions. So ... women were moved forward where they were needed'.<sup>43</sup> A year later, the Army opened about 3000 more jobs to women in headquarters units of infantry and armor divisions, air defence artillery battalions, signal battalions and some light infantry divisions. Even the Marine Corps began to assign women to its Fleet Marine Force, in service support groups of the Marine Amphibious Force, in aircraft wings and in division headquarters.<sup>44</sup>

All of the changes were important because now women were moving, albeit slowly, into the core of the military—assignment to operational units. Technically they might not be in combat jobs, but they certainly were edging closer to the battlefield. And this became readily apparent beginning in 1983 when gender integrated Army units deployed to Grenada during Operation Urgent Fury. Women comprised two percent of the force and served in a number of positions, ranging from military police guarding prisoners of war camps, to helicopter pilots who ferried troops, to intelligence specialists who interrogated prisoners, to stevedores who loaded captured weapons and ordnance personnel who detonated unexploded ammunition. Similarly, in 1989, Army women participated in Operation Just Cause and deployed to Panama. This time they constituted four per cent of the force. The incident that received the most publicity was when an Army woman captain led soldiers of her police company in a firefight, but additionally three helicopters with women pilots were fired on and one was hit.<sup>45</sup>

### *Persian Gulf War*

But the real eye opener, especially for the public, was the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Suddenly, Americans were seeing images of women in camouflage uniforms trying on flack jackets and gas masks. In Saudi Arabia, women were shown doing their jobs in what was clearly a combat environment. The percentage of the forces in theatre that were female doubled from the four per cent in Panama to eight per cent. It was obvious that US forces could not go to war without women.

The Persian Gulf War showed that the current laws and policies did not keep women out of harm's way and that the line between combat and non-combat, both in terms of jobs and location, was extremely fuzzy. Women in 'support' assignments behind the 'front' lines were killed in SCUD attacks. An Army woman in a 'support' job of truck driver was captured by the Iraqis. Women flew medical evacuation helicopters as far forward as any of the Army's attack helicopters. One of the medevac helicopters flown by a male crew was shot down and the woman doctor on board was captured. An Army military police unit with women assigned was airlifted forward to take charge of enemy prisoners and ended up behind one combat unit, but ahead of two others. A Navy battle group commander commented that women on supply ships that shuttled to and from combatants in mine infested waters were in more danger than he was on the aircraft carrier. He also pointed out that 'the way naval forces are used today makes it virtually impossible to say what is a front-line area and what isn't'.<sup>46</sup>

After the war, the commander of the coalition forces, the US Secretary of Defense and the Defense Department's report to Congress on the war all praised women's performance and said the war could not have been won without them. The Congress' investigative agency, the General Accounting Office, interviewed men and women who had served in the Gulf and found that attitudes about women's performance were highly positive. Consequently, in December 1991, Congress decided to remove the restrictions on women flying combat missions and modified the combat ship exclusion to permit women aviation officers to be assigned to Navy combatants as part of an air wing or other air element assigned to the ship. About a year and a half later, the Secretary of Defense directed the services to permit women to compete for assignments in aircraft with combat missions.<sup>47</sup>

This left the combat ship exclusion as the only law on the books prohibiting women in combat. It would take another manning crisis to result in its demise. In early 1993, the Navy was in the midst of a drawdown of both ships and personnel. Most of the ships to which women had been assigned were being put out of service or turned over to civilian crews. This left a number of former seagoing women sailors sitting ashore while men were faced with more frequent and longer sea tours. Meanwhile, the Navy was having problems filling critical shipboard jobs aboard combatants but could not use the qualified women sailors who were ashore to fill the gaps because the law prohibited the permanent assignment of women to ships with a combat mission. The solution to the problem came in February 1993, when the Chief of Naval Operations sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense titled 'It's Time', recommending that legislation be forwarded to Congress removing the combat ship exclusion.<sup>48</sup>

The legislation was introduced in the House of Representatives and, in its hearings, the Chief of Naval Personnel said the change was needed because 'it is vital to our readiness, and I stress the word readiness, that we fill each position with the most qualified Navy man or woman'.<sup>49</sup> He also pointed out that the Navy already had fifteen years of experience with women aboard ships and so this change was one of evolution, not revolution. In November 1993, Congress passed the legislation and in March 1994, the first woman reported for duty aboard a combatant, the aircraft carrier USS *Eisenhower*.<sup>50</sup>

In early 1999, the *Eisenhower* continued to show the importance of women to operational readiness. On its previous deployment, only 82 per cent of the *Eisenhower's* jobs were filled. In getting ready for the next cruise, the commanding officer found no additional men were available to make up the shortfall. He did discover, however, that qualified women were ashore who could fill many of those positions, but the ship did not have enough living space for them. He rectified the situation by creating more berthing and bathroom facilities for women, rather than waiting for the next overhaul period when they would have been added. As a result, the ship sailed with about 93 per cent of its positions filled, the highest level for any aircraft carrier in the previous three years. Also, the additional women helped the *Eisenhower* become the only Atlantic Fleet carrier to win the highly coveted Battle Efficiency Award in 1999.<sup>51</sup>

Although all the laws on the assignment of women had been repealed, policies remained in effect that continued to exclude women from direct ground combat—the infantry, armour and much of the field artillery. In October 1994, a direct ground combat policy issued by the Secretary of Defense took effect that excluded women from units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage direct ground combat. Direct ground combat was defined as taking place well forward on the battlefield and having three components: engaging the enemy on the ground, exposure to hostile fire and having a high probability of direct physical contact with the enemy.<sup>52</sup> By service policy, the other major areas still closed to women are Navy submarines and, in all of the services, special forces units.

### Politics

Given the nature of many of the issues concerning military women, it should not be surprising that politics sometimes was a major factor in deciding women's policy issues. Some of the political tugs of war occurred within the military itself. During World War I, the Army field commanders tried to convince the Secretary of War to enlist women in the Army. They were not successful. During the early years of the All Volunteer Force, service leaders wanted to slow the growth of female recruiting, but it took several rejections of the idea by two secretaries of defence in two presidential administrations for them to finally get the message. On Capitol Hill, legislation caused several political battles. One of the biggest was when the military leaders of the Second World War took on the Senate in order to obtain permanent status for line women. Conversely, Congress twice opened opportunities for women that the military opposed: admittance to the service academics and entrance into combat aviation. Lastly, civilian women, both as individuals and as members of military advisory groups, were able to help push changes that were needed through Congress. While military pragmatism was discussed chronologically, political issues will be viewed from the perspective of who the participants were: (1) the uniformed leaders and their Pentagon civilian bosses; (2) the services and Congress and (3) civilian women and Congress.

### *Uniformed Leaders and their Civilian Bosses*

One of the first disputes over the utilisation of line women occurred during World War I when the uniformed field commanders and their politically appointed boss, the Secretary of War, disagreed about having women in the Army. Although the Navy Department enlisted women in its reserve forces, the Secretary of War refused to utilise women in the Army and was even reluctant to hire them as civilians. Commanders facing severe personnel shortages pleaded with the Secretary for authorisation to employ civilian women in essential work for which men were not available. He finally relented, concluding that 'with careful supervision, [civilian] women employees may be permitted in camps without moral injury either to themselves or to the soldiers', provided the women were 'of mature age and high moral character'.<sup>53</sup>

The entreaties of military planners and field commanders to enlist women in the Army, however, were rebuffed by the Secretary. When the commanding general of supply services in Europe asked for 5000 military women for clerical work in order to release soldiers for combat duty, he was sent 5000 unskilled enlisted men instead. Also turned down were the Chief of Engineers, the Operations Branch of the Army General Staff and the Chief of Ordnance. The Secretary of War remained convinced that having enlisted women was just too radical an idea. In responding to a proposal from a congressional committee about forming a women's corps, he said such an idea would be unwise, undesirable, and exceedingly ill-advised.<sup>54</sup>

Even a request for military women clerical workers from the Commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, General John J. Pershing, was denied, so to fill the need he 'borrowed' some from the British Women's Auxiliary Army Corps. When he needed bilingual telephone operators, he received authorisation from the Adjutant-General of the Signal Corps to hire civilians. In recruiting his 'civilians', however, he emphasised that he wanted women telephone operators for a military mission and a newspaper article said that 'in every respect these young women will be soldiers, coming under military restrictions at all times'.<sup>55</sup> The women were actually sworn into the Army, not once, but twice, and wore uniforms. Eventually, 233 of these telephone operators, known as 'Hello Girls', would serve in France. At the end of the war, it was decided that, because General Pershing should not have enlisted the women, the Hello Girls would not receive honourable discharges, but rather be given 'service termination letters'. In effect, they were civilianised retroactively.<sup>56</sup> In this particular political battle, the Secretary of War won, sort of.

A second instance of the uniformed leaders being at odds with their civilian bosses was in deciding how many women should be in the All Volunteer Force (AVF). In late 1971, as the military began personnel planning for the volunteer force, the Office of the Secretary of Defense became concerned about possible shortages of male recruits and told the task force overseeing implementation to study the use of military women. However, in March 1972, before the task force completed its work, Representative Otis Pike held hearings in the House of Representatives on the role of military women. Afterward he said that the services were guilty of 'tokenism' and that 'women could and should play a more important role' in the military.<sup>57</sup>

In response, the head of the AVF task force told the services to develop contingency plans that would double the number of women in the Army, Navy and Air Force and increase the number of women Marines by forty percent between fiscal years 1973 and 1977. Sensing the inevitable, the services actually came up with action plans, and the Navy and Air Force even increased their goals. As it turned out, the services exceeded even these ambitious targets as the number of women increased by over 150 per cent between Fiscal Years 1973 and 1977.<sup>58</sup>

After this dramatic increase, the services assumed they had done enough and that the expansion would slow down in 1976. Also, a former Navy man, Jimmy Carter, was to become President in January 1977 and surely he would understand the need to decrease the growth rate for women. They were wrong. Within a week of Carter taking office, the Secretary of Defense requested a study of the use of women and, although the study did not recommend any numerical goals for the services, it was made clear that the military was better off

recruiting high quality women rather than low quality men. The case for increasing the number of women was also buttressed by a study published that same year by the Brookings Institution, a distinguished Washington think tank. The study's authors concluded that potentially the number of enlisted women could be more than doubled and eventually women could conceivably comprise 22 per cent of the total force.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the Defense Secretary directed that the number of enlisted women be doubled by 1983 and, in 1985, raised the goal to over 250,000 women by the end of fiscal year 1986. Although the number of women grew by almost 60 per cent during the Carter administration, he was not able to follow through on attaining the ambitious goals he had set because he lost the 1980 election to Ronald Reagan.<sup>60</sup>

With the conservative Reagan becoming president in 1981, the uniformed military leaders again assumed there would be a slowdown in women's recruitment. The Army and Air Force secretly gave the Reagan transition team proposals to scrap the Carter administration's projected increases and, in February 1981, the Army testified before a Senate subcommittee that it planned to slow the recruitment of enlisted women. Furthermore, in submitting its manpower requirements, the Army hinted it expected a return to the draft which meant it would need fewer women. All of this caught the Reagan administration by surprise and infuriated Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger who stated flatly that a return to the draft was not being considered. By January 1982, any hope the uniformed leaders had of decreasing the number of women was dealt the final blow when Weinberger wrote to the service secretaries saying that the administration wanted to increase the role of women in the military and expected the Service Secretaries to actively support that policy.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the clear guidance from the Defense Secretary, apparently the Navy forgot the message. In February 1987, the Chief of Naval Operations announced that enlisted women's end strength would stay the same through 1991. He said this freeze was necessary to ensure enough shore jobs for men rotating from sea duty and because the Navy needed to increase the number of men to man its proposed 600 ship fleet. One day later, Defense Secretary Weinberger rescinded the freeze, saying that he was comfortable with the previously planned goals that called for a ten percent increase by 1991.<sup>62</sup>

Overall, the services consistently misjudged the Reagan administration's commitment to the All Volunteer Force and the need to increase the number of women. The reality was that within nine months of the end of Reagan's term, women's end strength reached its all-time high of 232,823 and women constituted 10.5 per cent of the armed forces. The number of women did begin to decline during the administration of President George W. Bush, but it was not because the services were finally successful in fighting their civilians leaders. Rather it was a result of a personnel reduction-in-force caused by the end of the Cold War. Also, although the numbers were going down, as a percentage of the military women continued to increase from 10.5 per cent to slightly over fourteen per cent as of 31 March 2000.<sup>63</sup>

### *The Services and Congress*

In addition to battling their political civilian bosses, the services sometimes found themselves at odds with Congress. As mentioned earlier, after World War II, the military decided that at least a small number of line women should remain on active duty during peacetime. In 1946, bills were introduced to make women a permanent part of the Army and Navy, but both bills died in committee. The following year, the Army and Navy each tried again. This time the Navy bill also included the Marine Corps. The Senate acted rapidly on the two bills, first combining them into the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1947 and, within a month, passing the new legislation. But the bill ran into trouble in the House. Despite a personal letter from General Eisenhower urging quick action, the subcommittee responsible for the legislation announced it would delay the hearings for six months. One reason for the delay was the passage of the National Security Act which created the Air Force thus necessitating adding another service to the bill. But the real problem was a concerted campaign by a number of mostly former servicemen as well as House members who opposed giving women regular status.

Now the stage was set for the pragmatic military, convinced women should be in both the regular and reserve forces, to clash with House politicians who thought women should be confined to the reserves. When the hearings finally were held, the roster of civilian and military personnel who testified was very impressive, including Secretary of Defense Forrestal and the wartime leaders who now headed their services, General Eisenhower and Admiral Nimitz. All the witnesses expressed strong objections to a reserve-only status. The basic message was, in the words of Eisenhower, 'We need them'. In six days of hearings, however, every objection imaginable was raised. The services responded to all the concerns, but to no avail. On 26 April 1948, the House voted to permit women to join only the reserves.

With two separate versions of the bill, the issue now had to be resolved by a committee of members from the House and Senate. At these hearings, an even more impressive array of senior civilian and military leaders testified: Secretary of Defense Forrestal; Generals Eisenhower and Bradley for the Army; Admirals Nimitz, Denfeld and Radford for the Navy; Generals Spaatz, Vandenberg and Eaker for the Air Force and General Vandegrift for the Marine Corps. Eisenhower testified that he considered the legislation a 'must', and Nimitz said women's 'skills are as important to the efficient operation of the Naval establishment during peacetime as they were during the war years'.

The testimony of the military leaders was an unprecedented display of support for military women, but what finally tipped the balance in favor of the Senate bill to put women in the regular forces was the deterioration of the international situation. The Soviets had taken control of Czechoslovakia and, two days after the House vote, had blockaded Berlin. The Army could not recruit enough men, so President Truman had asked for the first-ever peacetime draft. On 19 May 1948, the House gave up and agreed to pass the Senate version of the legislation. President Truman signed the Women's Armed Service Integration Act on 12 June 1948, thereby giving line women a permanent place in the regulars and reserves. In this case, the pragmatic military won the political battle.<sup>64</sup>

Although the military won on the issue of the status of military women, two instances occurred in which Congress imposed requirements the military did not want. The first was the 1975 legislation requiring the services in the Department of Defense to admit women to their academies. The services should not have been surprised for there had been early warning signs it might happen. Legislation to admit women to academies had been introduced as early as 1944, but it would only be in the 1970s that Congress took on the issue in earnest. In September 1972, the House held hearings about military women during which the issue of admitting women to the academies arose. Representative Samuel S. Stratton from New York asked questions about the issue because one of New York's senators had nominated a woman for admission to the Naval Academy and the Secretary of the Navy had turned down the nomination. At the end of the questions, Stratton told the Navy representative at the hearings that 'the world is changing, and ... the Navy in this regard has not changed fast enough ... I am going to say flatly, the day is not far off when you will have women in the Naval Academy'.<sup>65</sup>

In September 1973, two women sued for admission to the Naval and Air Force Academies. They lost in the lower court, but won a federal appeals court decision to send the case to trial. The pressure also continued when in July 1974, the Merchant Marine Academy, which was operated by the Maritime Administration of the Department of Commerce, opened its doors to women. This was followed a year later by an announcement that the Coast Guard Academy would begin admitting women.<sup>66</sup>

In May 1974, the House of Representatives again held hearings on the issue. The services, including all the service secretaries as well as the service chiefs, strongly opposed the admittance of women. They raised a number of arguments against women at the academies, including cost, lowering standards and social issues, such as eroding the academies' unique spirit. But the issue they focused on most strongly was that the mission of the academies was to develop leaders for combat and, by law, women were barred from combat. The problem with this argument, however, was that the facts did not support their case. For example, a study showed that of 8880 graduates of the Air Force Academy on active duty as of October 1974, 29 per cent had never had a career combat assignment.<sup>67</sup>

The services began to realise in January 1975 that the end was clearly in sight. When Congress convened that month, six bills were introduced to admit women to the service academies. On 20 May 1975, the House voted overwhelmingly to admit women and, on 6 June, the Senate approved the measure on a voice vote. The die was cast. The superintendent at West Point considered resigning but changed his mind, telling alumni that it was the will of Congress and therefore the change should be made smoothly and efficiently. In July 1976, the first women entered the Military, Naval and Air Force Academies.<sup>68</sup>

The other change that Congress imposed on the services was the opening of combat aviation to women. In the aftermath of the successful performance of women in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Representative Patricia Schroeder, a strong supporter of military women, introduced a provision in the defence authorisation bill in May 1991 to permit Air Force women to fly combat missions. She chose the Air Force because she thought it had the least defensible argument against keeping women out of combat cockpits and it seemed to be the service most amenable to making the change. Representative Beverly Byron thought it was not fair to exclude Navy and Marine Corps women and so they were added to the proposal. No hearings were held on the issue and the opening of combat aviation easily passed in the House.

In the Senate, however, passage of the proposal was more difficult. Opponents tried to kill it by widening the issue to incorporate the entire women in combat issue, including ground combat. The service chiefs testified that they opposed opening combat aviation to women. Nevertheless, most Senators felt it was time to remove the ban because no persuasive arguments were actually made that opening combat aviation to women would adversely affect readiness. The services' case was not helped when the Chief of Staff of the Air Force testified that he would select a male pilot to fly on his wing over a woman aviator who was better qualified than the man. He even acknowledged that such a decision did not make sense. Realising that they were about to lose, the opponents tried to postpone the vote on women entering combat aviation by proposing that the issue first be studied by a presidential commission. The supporters knew that a delay would probably thwart opening the new jobs to women so they argued that Senators could vote yes on both proposals. And that is what Senators did—voting overwhelming to create a presidential commission, but also voting to repeal the combat aviation exclusion.<sup>69</sup>

Against the desires of the services, Congress had now told them they could put women in combat aviation. However, the law did not mandate that they do so. The presidential commission voted eight to seven to recommend to Congress that the legal ban on combat aviation be reimposed. However, the day the vote was taken was the same day that Democrat William J. Clinton defeated Republican George W. Bush for the presidency. The new, more liberal administration was not convinced by the arguments to keep combat aviation closed and, in April 1993, the Secretary of Defense directed the services to permit women to compete for assignments in aircraft with combat missions.<sup>70</sup>

Congress was successful in imposing new policies on the services, but the military generally remained opposed to them. Although service leaders usually said the right things about accepting the changes, in fact all did not go smoothly. Even today, some men still are not happy to have women at the academies. For example, surveys at the Naval Academy show that men leave it with a lower opinion about their women classmates than they had when they arrived. In aviation, women's acceptance has been very slow, especially in the Navy. Accusations have been made that the standards have been lowered for women in order to ensure their success. This was especially true in the wake of the death of Lieutenant Kara Hultgreen in a crash off an aircraft carrier. The perceived hostile environment has been one of the contributing factors to the low rate at which Navy women are entering the combat jet community.<sup>71</sup> Both of these cases illustrate that Congress may have won the legislative battle, but has not yet won the implementation war.

## *Civilian Women and Congress*

Civilian women have also been involved with issues concerning military women. Sometimes the women acted individually and at other times as members of advisory groups appointed by the military. Mention has already been made of the role Representatives Patricia Schroeder and Beverly Byron played concerning the combat aviation issue, but they certainly were not the first women in Congress to bring about changes for military women.

One of the first congressional women to act with regard to military women was Representative Edith Nourse Rogers during World War II. With US participation in the war seeming ever more likely, in May 1941, Rogers proposed to introduce legislation to create a women's corps in the Army. She wanted women in the Army to ensure that they had the same protection as men because, in her experience, women had not been treated fairly after World War I. Seeing the handwriting on the wall, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Personnel said the Army was willing to permit the organisation of a women's force but only 'along the lines which meet with War Department approval, so that ... we shall be able to run it our way'.<sup>72</sup>

Although Rogers wanted women *in* the Army, she realised that the only way to get any legislation passed was to compromise and let the Army run things 'its way', so she decided to support the Army's bill creating a Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) outside the regular and reserve Army. However, many congressional men, especially in the House of Representatives, were not very receptive to even this modest proposal. In the words of one congressman: 'Take the women into the armed service, who then will do ... the humble homey tasks ... Think of the humiliation! What has become of the manhood of America?'.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, Rogers and the Army succeeded in getting the legislation passed. In May 1942, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was established.

Although the Army got its way, the auxiliary status of the women did not work because they had separate administration, supply and disciplinary procedures outside the Army and commanders did not know who was in charge of the women. In essence, the Army found that Representative Rogers had been right—women should be in the Army. Consequently, it went back to Congress in 1943 for new legislation creating a Women's Army Corps (WAC) under direct military control. The male politicians again were not enthusiastic, but with continued prodding from Representative Rogers and the Army, Congress passed a bill giving non-nurse women military status.<sup>74</sup>

Meanwhile, the Navy faced a dilemma. Navy Secretary Frank Knox wanted to bring women into the Navy again, but unlike Secretary Daniels in World War I, he would need legislation to do so. At that point, the Army's bill, which had women in a separate auxiliary, was already in Congress and he would have to convince its members to pass different legislation for the Navy. The Navy went ahead with a bill putting women in the Navy, but it would take the work of several civilian women to make it happen.

Even before the bill reached the Congress, the Navy ran into a roadblock when the Bureau of the Budget said the legislation would be acceptable only if it were the same as the Army's bill putting women in an auxiliary. Knox would not agree to such a provision, resulting in an impasse. The bottleneck was broken in March 1942 when Dr. Margaret Chung, a woman surgeon who was a friend of a number of naval aviators who supported the bill, asked a congressman she knew to introduce legislation on the issue. Not surprisingly, the bill was virtually identical to the one the Navy proposed, and the House passed it within a month. In the Senate, however, the bill ran into trouble again when the chair of the Naval Affairs Committee insisted that the Navy's bill parallel the Army legislation. He recommended to President Franklin D. Roosevelt that Navy women serve in an auxiliary. The President approved the proposal, but Secretary Knox continued to oppose the idea.

Once again women came to the rescue. Secretary Knox had established a Navy Women's Advisory Council to assist in setting up the Navy's women's program. The council's chair, Dr Virginia Gildersleeve, and one of its members, Harriet Elliott, each wrote to Mrs Eleanor

Roosevelt explaining why Navy women should not be in an auxiliary outside the Navy and asking for her help. Mrs Roosevelt then explained the situation to her husband and gave him Elliott's letter. Meanwhile, she sent Gildersleeve's letter to Under Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, who replied to the President that the Navy opposed placing women in a separate auxiliary corps. Mrs Roosevelt's intercession worked—the President changed his mind and told the Navy Secretary to organise a women's reserve as he thought best. On 30 July 1942, President Roosevelt signed the law creating the Women's Reserve *in* the Naval Reserve.<sup>75</sup>

The idea of having a group of women to advise the military on women's issues was resurrected in 1951 when Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall established the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS). Composed of distinguished American women, initially the committee focused on recruiting women for service during the Korean War, but as time went by they began to work on a variety of issues of importance to military women. In the 1960s, one of these issues concerned the adverse impact some of the restrictions in the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act were having on women, especially with regard to their promotions. DACOWITS recommended that a bill be prepared to correct the situation.

Military leaders supported the legislation, but it was the efforts of DACOWITS members that were critical to the bill's passage. They sought the support of women's groups, veterans groups, former servicewomen and others, encouraging them to write members of Congress. The DACOWITS chair held regular strategy planning sessions with military women. After each DACOWITS meeting held in Washington, DC, the members visited anyone they knew on Capitol Hill to gain critical backing for the bill. Some focused on the media to build public support. They also worked with retired military women who helped draft the bill and talked with anyone who would listen on the need for the legislation.

All of the DACOWITS' hard work paid off. In October 1967, Congress passed the bill and President Johnson signed it into law on 8 November. It provided for the removal of restrictions on the number of women at various ranks, allowed women to hold permanent rank as captains/colonels, permitted women's selection to general/admiral and removed the two per cent ceiling on women's strength levels in the regular forces. As it turned out, while much publicity was given to the promotion of two Army women to brigadier general two and a half years after the law passed, it was the removal of the two percent ceiling that would prove critical when the draft was abolished. Civilian women had not only provided increased equity for women, but removed a barrier for the services which would let them increase the utilisation of women in the All Volunteer Force.<sup>76</sup>

### **American Society**

Underlying the progress, or in some cases lack of it, of military women has been the attitude of American society about what is appropriate for women. Generally, the services have not wanted to get ahead of society in making changes and sometimes have been reluctant to open new opportunities even though society has moved forward. In the case of occupations, for example, changing women's roles in the US sometimes left the armed forces with little choice but to place women in certain occupations, such as nursing. Although sometimes these changes clashed with military culture, Americans have become more accepting of military women's new roles, including combat assignments.

Another aspect of society's views that had a major impact on military women were policies concerning family issues, such as pregnancy and being a working mother. The public tended to be conservative on these issues as did the military. Major changes came in civilian society, however, due to the women's rights movement, the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution and gender specific court cases. On the other hand, until fairly recently, the military has clung to a traditional view that the roles of wife and mother were not compatible with a military career. To examine these issues more closely, the discussion will first focus on women's occupations, both as nurses and in nontraditional, non-medical jobs and then on family policy issues.

## Occupations

Americans have always accepted women tending the sick because they were seen as the nurturing caregivers within the family. Society, however, was very reluctant for women to do this type of work in the male environment of the military. During the Civil War, although women nurses were becoming more common, objections were heard to using women to tend the sick and wounded because the Army was no place for a lady and the work was too difficult. However, with the outbreak of the Spanish-American War at the end of the century, women military nurses were more acceptable. Female nurses had become the norm in society which meant if the military wanted nurses, they would have to be women. The acceptance was not total, however, because women nurses served *with*, not *in*, military. This was a reflection of society's belief at the time that no women, not even nurses, should have a permanent place in the military.

Ironically, despite society's general lack of enthusiasm about women serving in the military, from the very beginning, women nurses served near and sometimes on the battlefield. But society drew the line at other military women serving there. An example of this double standard occurred as recently as the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Nurses were expected to serve in Vietnam; line women were not. Somewhat over 1300 line women went to Vietnam, compared with 5000 to 6000 nurses. The services assumed that line women should not be sent to bases that were hot, dusty and dirty; nurses, however, learned to select camp sites, pitch tents and read maps. During the Tet Offensive, consideration was given to removing the line women; there was never any question of pulling out the nurses. In fact the nurses were among the last Americans to leave Vietnam in 1973. Given the predominance of women in the nursing profession, the military had little choice but to put them in or near the combat zone. However, there was also an assumption that doing so was acceptable to a public accustomed to nurturing women caring for the sick and injured. Having line women in a combat zone just did not seem as compelling, particularly when enough men were available.<sup>77</sup>

Not only was the nursing profession overwhelmingly female, but as the US entered the twentieth century, women also started to dominate other occupations. By the beginning of World War I, businesses were training and hiring women to be clerks, typists, factory workers, telephone operators and technicians. Some occupations had virtually been taken over by women. Previously, the office had been a male domain, but because women learned to use the new fangled office equipment, i.e., typewriters and telephones, they began to take the lead in the field. This left the services with a small pool of men from which to recruit for certain occupations. For example, in 1902, the Bell telephone system had 37,000 female switchboard operators and only 2500 male operators. This was why, when General Pershing needed telephone operators in France during World War I, he turned to women to fill the gap.<sup>78</sup>

The trend of American women moving into new occupations continued over the years and began to include dangerous non-traditional jobs, such as coal miners, police officers, construction workers and firefighters. On television, Americans also saw military women in the combat environments of Vietnam, Grenada, Panama and Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the public began to express more acceptance of women in combat jobs. For example, a 1992 survey by the Roper Organization showed that a majority of Americans approved of women being assigned to aircraft carriers, submarines, destroyers, bomber and fighter aircraft, tank crews, artillery units and special forces units operating behind enemy lines.<sup>79</sup> A survey of military personnel showed, however, that they would not go as far. Although a majority supported women serving on combat ships and as combat pilots and crew, they did not believe women should be in the ground combat arms of infantry, armor, artillery or special forces.<sup>80</sup> The reality today is that women's military occupations more closely mirror the views of the military than society as a whole. Women serve on all combat ships, except submarines, and are combat pilots, but all the direct ground combat occupations remain closed to them. The public's view, however, does give the services some latitude if they should decide to open more occupations to women because a majority of Americans would not disapprove of women on submarines or in tanks, artillery units or special forces.

## *Family Issues*

Provisions in the 1948 *Women's Armed Service Integration Act* restricted women not only in their occupations, promotions, and numbers, but also regulated a number of family matters. The law made it virtually impossible for a woman to marry and have children and remain in the service. Unlike married men, married women were not entitled to family housing, did not receive dependents' allowances and, if the husband were a civilian, he could not use the military medical facilities or stores. The discharge authority in the law resulted in President Truman issuing a 1951 Executive Order that said if a woman became pregnant, gave birth to a child or had a minor child residing in her home for more than thirty days a year, she must leave the service.

These restrictions seem onerous and sexist by today's standards, but reflected societal values at the time. A man was expected to be the breadwinner for the family and not be dependent on a woman for his support. Pregnant women were supposed to leave work, and it was assumed mothers would stay home. But in the 1950s some women began to question these inequities. In 1963, Betty Friedan published the landmark book *The Feminine Mystique* which helped launch the women's rights movement. In March 1972, Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) which, if ratified by the states, would assure equal rights for women in the US Constitution. Additionally, federal courts began to strike down laws and policies relating to women.

Beginning in the 1960s, and accelerating substantially in the 1970s, all of this began to have an impact on military women. For example, five months after the Senate passed the ERA, the Navy's Chief of Naval Operations issued a message on changes for Navy women. The message's subject was 'Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women in the Navy', and showed a clear link to the ERA. Within a year, the All Volunteer Force would be launched and with it came increasing numbers of women in a much wider variety of jobs. But the greatest impact of the ERA and court decisions was in the area of family policies.

The first policy to change had to do with marriage. In the 1960s, the ban on recruiting married women was lifted. Next to go was letting women who married leave the service before the end of their obligated service, a policy that discriminated against men. At first a woman could still get out if the service could not assign her to a job near her husband, but eventually this was changed to discharging married women only if they could show a hardship. In 1970, First Lieutenant Sharon Frontiero, U S Air Force, sued in federal court to overturn the requirements that she provide over half of her husband's support and show that he was incapable of earning an income before she could get dependency entitlements. She lost in the lower courts, but in May 1973, the US Supreme Court declared the law unconstitutional. Subsequently, the services also changed references to 'wife' and 'husband' to 'spouse'.<sup>81</sup>

The next policy to be challenged was the mandatory discharge for having a minor child in the home for more than 30 days. Captain Tommie Sue Smith, a divorced mother with a son, took the Air Force to court on 28 September 1969. The next day, the Air Force announced it was changing its policy to permit mothers to remain on active duty. Next, Major Lorraine Johnson, married with a son, sued in federal court to retain her Army reserve commission. The Army granted her a waiver which then became the norm. In 1975, the Secretary of Defense ordered the practice of discharging women with minor children discontinued.<sup>82</sup>

The pregnancy discharge policy, by far the most emotional issue, went through a series of changes. Initially the policy required that pregnant women be discharged, but slowly the services began by quietly granting waivers to a few pregnant women so they could stay on active duty in order to be eligible for retirement. Beginning in 1970, women in the Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps went to federal court contesting the mandatory pregnancy separation policy and so the services began to routinely give waivers to women who wanted to remain in the service. This meant that women would be discharged from the service, unless they asked to be retained. In June 1974, the Office of the Secretary of Defense told the services that, effective May 1975, they must stop involuntary discharges for pregnancy. Now the policy was reversed: pregnant women stayed in the service, unless they asked to get out but normally

the request was granted. In 1995, the Secretary of the Navy took it one step further by telling the Navy and Marine Corps that pregnancy and parenthood are compatible with a naval career and that although a pregnant woman could request separation, such requests will not normally be approved. Today, the other services, however, generally still discharge pregnant women who ask to get out.<sup>83</sup>

Although significant changes have been made in family policies to more closely reflect what happens in American society, they remain among the most contentious issues with regard to military women. Questions are still raised about the impact of pregnancy on readiness, especially in operational units. Extensive research by the Navy, however, has shown that pregnancy is not a major problem. Men are available for duty 95 per cent of the time and women 94 per cent. Women were more likely to be gone for medical reasons, including pregnancy, while men tend to be absent because of disciplinary infractions.<sup>84</sup>

The data are also reflected in the real world of the fleet. When interviewed prior to a deployment, the commanding officer of the USS *Eisenhower* commented that pregnancy was a cause for concern, but was manageable. He went on to say that women do not seem to leave the ship at higher rates than men who left the *Eisenhower* primarily because of disciplinary problems. The difference with women leaving because of pregnancy, he said, is that they are going to stay in the Navy and may report back to the same ship. When a guy is kicked off the ship for discipline reasons, he is just put out of the Navy.<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

Male military leaders may not have been thrilled with the prospect of using women in 'their' armed forces. Nevertheless, they were pragmatic enough to realise that sometimes, in order to achieve their mission, women would be necessary. Thus, women nurses were used even before the United States was formed and continued to serve throughout the nation's conflicts. Non-nurse women did not make a major appearance until the World War I and even then, the Army refused to enlist them. It would take World War II and the All Volunteer Force before substantial numbers of women would be in the armed forces.

Men may have been resigned to women 'helping', but they did not want them in the military and certainly not on a permanent basis. It would take 170 years for that to happen. They also wanted them doing 'women's work', not assigned to the essence of the military-operational combat units. It would take 215 years for that to happen.

Women, sometimes to the amazement of men, were able to do much more than they were originally asked to do. They went well beyond typing letters and answering telephones to fill virtually every support role in the armed forces and now have moved into some of the combat arms. In war, they were wounded, died and captured, a fact that some men chose to ignore.

The issues involving military women often caused political battles. Sometimes the military, including its most distinguished World War II leaders, had to cajole the Congress into supporting changes it needed made. Other times, the Congress told the military what to do. The uniformed leaders and their civilian bosses got into tugs of war over issues, such as how many women should be in the All Volunteer Force. On at least a couple of occasions, it took the efforts of civilian women to ensure that military women's legislation was passed.

Finally, American society's view of women's role in family life certainly had an impact on military women. Until the 1960s, the traditional roles for women were as wife and mother and so the military tended not to promote married women and would force them out of the service. If a woman became pregnant, she would be discharged. If a woman married a widower or divorcee with children who were in the home more than thirty days, she would be discharged. The man was expected to head the household, so if a woman married, she did not receive any of the normal benefits that a married man would receive. It would take the women's rights movement, the Equal Rights Amendment and several gender specific court cases to change these practices.

Today, although women have certainly moved much more into the mainstream of the US military, they still are not all the way there. Even now, women are prohibited from entering what is seen by many as the very core of the military—direct ground combat. Army women on the ground are being shot at, but are not allowed to shoot first. Nothing on the current horizon makes it seem likely to change in the near future.

But taking the long view, women may move into ground combat through evolution, not revolution. For example, in August 2000, 430 women were in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, and two of them were assigned to infantry regiments. A woman captain—who was an enlisted paratrooper in the division in the late 1980s, is a Gulf War veteran and a master parachutist—was commanding the 82nd Aviation Brigade. All of these women were in support jobs and assigned to headquarters units, but in the future, at least some of them may find themselves in combat. As pointed out by military historian John Duvall, 'A woman in an 82nd unit, particularly in an infantry unit, stands a higher chance of facing a hostile force, being killed or injured more than any other woman in the Army that I can think of'.<sup>86</sup> Importantly, the women in the infantry regiments are there because they can do the job, not because of affirmative action. The commander of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment says the woman captain is there because 'she was my choice. Bottom line, she is the best person for the job. I made my decision based on performance and potential. Period. We will alter nothing because she is here. And she wouldn't expect it. She's a top-notch officer'.<sup>87</sup> As women continue to show they can do the non-warrior jobs in combat units perhaps one day they will find themselves there as infantry soldiers as well.

#### Endnotes

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