

Service with Character, Courage and Commitment: Military Women Lead the Way

By CW5 Phyllis Wilson
Command Chief Warrant Officer, U.S. Army Reserve



SENIOR WARRANT OFFICER LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

Throughout the month of March, we celebrate the history of American women whose contributions blazed trails for women's empowerment and equality. We look to the past to commemorate their stalwart determination to break down barriers in the face of adversity; and we look to the future as we continue this legacy of our mothers and grandmothers.

This year's theme for Women's History Month is "Celebrating Women of Character, Courage and Commitment," three aspects that define our Soldiers, civilians, and their families quite well. Against social convention and often legal restraints, women have created a legacy that expands the frontiers of possibility for generations to come. They have demonstrated their character, courage, and commitment as Soldiers; mothers; educators; institution builders; business, labor, political, religious, and community leaders; relief workers; and CEOs. Their lives and their work inspire girls and women to achieve their full potential and encourage boys and men to respect the diversity and depth of women's experience.

The character, commitment, and courage of women have been demonstrated time and time again in the defense of this nation's principles and interests. They served in the United States Army since 1775, both uniformed and civilian, with distinction in every war this nation has ever fought. From the early years of the Revolutionary War, women have stepped forward to serve alongside men for the cause of freedom. They tended the sick, mended clothes, served as spies, and even armed cannons on the battlefield.

During the attack on Fort Mifflin, PA, in 1776, standing by her husband's side, Margaret Corbin served as his ammunition handler. When he was fatally wounded, she immediately took his place at the cannon until she was also wounded.

In 1782, at 22 years of age, Deborah Sampson became the first woman known to enlist as a Soldier in the American Army. She put on male clothing, adopted the name Robert Shurtliff and enlisted in the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment. Sampson was wounded in her left thigh during the Battle of Tarrytown in New York, and, to keep her secret safe, she treated herself.

Eighty years later, during the Civil War, Dr. Mary Walker served as assistant surgeon with General Burnside's Union forces. She was captured by Confederates in Chattanooga, TN, and imprisoned in Richmond, VA as a spy. Eventually, she was released and returned to serve as a hospital surgeon at a women's prisoner-of-war hospital in Louisville, KY. After the war, President Andrew Johnson awarded her the Medal of Honor. Dr. Walker is the only woman to have been awarded this highest honor.

A great deal has changed in the 145 years since the Civil War. The move to the All-Volunteer Force led the


Army to begin recruiting women aggressively for the reserve components. As with the active force, recruiting, training, and opportunities improved for women. By the end of September 1978, the Army Reserve had approximately 25,000 members of the Women's Army Corps, which was the women's branch of the United States Army, and the Army National Guard had over 13,000.

Women entered the Army Reserve Officers Training Program (ROTC) beginning in September 1972. South Dakota State University was the first to graduate women in the college ROTC program, on 1 May 1976. By May 1981, approximately 40,000 women were enrolled in college and university ROTC units throughout the United States. Young women of at least 14 years of age could enter the Junior ROTC in 1972. By May 1981, more than 32,000 were enrolled in the high school units.

Women were certainly ready, willing, and able to meet the needs of our nation, be it in their backyards or overseas, however opportunities to do so were not as prevalent as they are today.

Any deployed Soldier, regardless of their gender, military specialty or unit mission, may find themselves in hostile action, but the number of women serving in the Army continues to grow.

Today, the Army Reserve's mission benefits from the leadership, resiliency, and technical proficiency of more than 45,000 female Soldiers, or 22% of the Reserve force. This includes approximately 36,000 enlisted, 8,000 officers, and 500 warrants in 305 diverse career fields. Our team must maintain its combat edge during this period of persistent conflict and constrained resources; this would not be possible without the contributions of its female Soldiers.

We must carry on the work of the women who came before us and ensure our daughters have no limits on their dreams, no obstacles to their achievements, and no remaining ceilings to shatter as they continue to serve as the strength of the Army Reserve and the strength of the nation. 



**You've served us,
Let us serve you!**

Your Custom Order Class IX MRO Specialists

In Hawaii, contact
**Gary Hendershot at
(808) 630-4719**
all other locations call
(800) 527-4126
www.winzer.com



**GSA Schedule
GS-06F-00895**

**CAGE: 01FM8
DUNS: 08-904-0331**