

Fort Monroe's little-known history: Birthplace of the U.S. Army Warrant Officer

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TRADOC CWO LEADER DEVELOPMENT

For many who work or reside on Fort Monroe, the 22nd of July was probably run of the mill ... just another day on this peninsula.

The flags were unfurled as usual, but no bands were playing. No Soldiers were marching in formation; no cannons roared; and there were no long-winded speeches given that might otherwise symbolize that the day had a special meaning.

A few people on post stood for a moment in silent remembrance and reflection because not only was the day special to them, but also the place on which their feet were planted.

At this point one may ask, "What did I miss that's so important?"

For those thousands of men and women in the Army who have worn or are currently wearing that funny silver bar with the black squares or stripe in the middle of it, the answer to the question is clear. For it was on that day in 1918 the War Department established the grade of Warrant Officer within the Army Mine Planter Service of the Coastal Artillery Corps. This marked Fort Monroe as the official birthplace of the U.S. Army Warrant Officer Corps.

As submarine mine technology developed during the first decade of the 20th century, the War Department faced the obvious question, "who would install and maintain these mines?" The U.S. Navy seemed the logical choice, but did not have facilities in every major harbor. Since the Army was already providing coastal defense for these areas and was in the process of modernizing and expanding its operations, the choice was a simple one. Thus the submarine mine mission was assigned to the Army and the Army Mine Planter Service was formed as a part of the Coastal Artillery Corps headquartered at Fort Monroe.

In World War I, the Coastal Artillery Corps was responsible for mine defenses in major ports. Vessels ranging in size from small motorboats to 1,000-ton, ocean-going ships were used to lay and maintain minefields. Over the years, several of these craft called this post home.

Eventually, conflicts between crews of Soldiers and civilians necessitated manning the boats with military personnel. Warrant officers served as masters, mates, chief engineers and assistant engineers aboard these vessels.

Another historic milestone was reached when the Army opened a



Courtesy photo

U.S. Continental Army Band members pose during a Music Under the Stars concert in 1934. MUTS was begun by a warrant officer in 1932.

school to train their mariners at Fort Monroe commanded by an officer who had graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md.

This school trained newly selected WO candidates in seamanship, navigation and marine engineering. This event marked the first training institution for teaching specific technical skills to the newly formed Corps.

The use of WOs was expanded by the Act of 1920, which authorized appointment of WOs in clerical, administrative, and band leading positions. The Act also authorized 1,120 WOs, provided for appointments in the Army-at-large rather than in specific branches and established WO assignments in various headquarters and tactical units.

In 1921 a distinctive insignia was approved for WOs. It consisted of an eagle rising with wings displayed, adapted from the great seal of the United States. The eagle is standing on two arrows, which symbolize the military arts and sciences. The eagle rising is enclosed within a wreath. WOs of the Tank Corps were the first to wear this new insignia.

In 1922, WO authorizations were reduced from 1,120 to 600, exclusive of the number of Army Mine Planter Service WOs and Army bandmasters. No WO appointments other than bandleaders and the Mine Planter Service were made between 1922 and 1935.

The two female field clerks became the first female warrants in 1926. They were Jen Doble, on duty at IX

Area in San Francisco, Calif. and Olive Hoskins, on duty at the VII Corps Area headquarters in Omaha, Neb. Today, over 1,300 women serve as WOs in all branches except Special Forces.

In 1934, Music Under the Stars Concerts at Fort Monroe were initiated by Chief Warrant Officer Michael A. Quinto, Bandleader of the 2nd Coast Artillery Regiment Band from 1932-1938. Quinto was appointed a WO in 1921. The building in which The U.S. Army TRADOC Band now resides is named for Quinto.

In May 1945, when peak personnel strength was reached during World War II, almost 57,000 WOs were serving including flight officers in the Army Air Force. After World War II appointments of WOs virtually ceased because of the Army downsizing.

After 1942, the danger from an ocean-launched attack upon the coast of the U.S. declined. Mine operations were scaled back and eventually curtailed altogether. In June 1946, the Coast Artillery School left Fort Monroe for good, as did the mine-planting vessel, *General John M. Schofield*. The Army continued to deploy several mine-planters and support vessels until the Coast Artillery Corps was deactivated in 1950.

The inception of the WO Flight Program in 1953 led to the training of thousands who later became helicopter pilots during the Vietnam War. The Warrant Officer Personnel Act of 1954 established WO grades

W1 through W4, also officially eliminated the Mine Planter Service. In April 1955, the 1st Aviation Class was graduated at then Camp Rucker, Ala.

Today's WO is a specialized technician in a particular field and is an officer, serving in the active and reserve components of the Army.

We number a little over 25,000 and comprise just over 2 percent of the total Army strength and roughly 14 percent of the officer corps.

We can be found in 15 branches and 67 various military occupational specialties. Sixty-five percent of us are technicians while 35 percent are in the aviation branch flying rotary or fixed-wing aircraft.

In 1991, then CW3 Thomas J. Hennen made history as the first and only WO Astronaut. He flew aboard NASA's Orbiter Atlantis as a Payload Specialist, completing 109 orbits.

In 2004, Army WOs were integrated into the Officer Branch of their primary occupational specialty. They were transferred from management by the separate Warrant Officer Division of the Army Personnel Command to management by the respective Army Branch of their Warrant Officer Occupational Specialty.

The Eagle Rising insignia and WO Brown trim on their dress uniforms were replaced by the Branch Insignia and trim colors of their branches.

Today's WOs enhance the Army's ability to defend our national interests, and to fight and win our nation's wars. We serve at all levels within the active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve. We are also found in other positions within the DoD, in Joint and Multi-national organizations deployed throughout the world, engaged in combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and at home in support of our Army and defense of our National Values.

While the WO Career Center at Fort Rucker, Alabama is our current "home", Fort Monroe will always be the place where we can trace our common heritage as WOs.

I hope, the next time that you run into one of us you won't mistake us for a well-seasoned lieutenant or foreign military officer. You will, instead, call us by our first name, Mister (or Ms.), Sir (or Ma'am), Warrant or even better, Chief and wish us a Happy 90th Birthday.

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