



*In honor of Women's History Month
thought I'd share this:*

Women in the military have a history that extends over 3,000 years into the past, throughout a large number of cultures and nations. Women have played many roles in the military, from ancient warrior women, to the women currently serving in conflicts, even though the vast majority of all combatants have been men in every culture.

Even though women serving in the military has often been controversial, relatively few women in history have fought alongside men. In the American Civil War, there were a

few women who cross-dressed as men in order to fight. Fighting on the battlefield in disguise was not the only way women involved themselves in war. Some also served as nurses and aides.

Despite various, though limited, roles in the armies of past societies, the role of women in the military, particularly in combat, is controversial and it is only recently that women have begun to be given a more prominent role in contemporary armed forces. As increasing numbers of countries begin to expand the role of women in their militaries, the debate continues.

From the beginning of the 1970s, most Western armies began to admit women to serve active duty.

WAVES was established on 30 July 1942 as a World War II division of the United States Naval Reserve, that consisted entirely of women. On 12 June 1948, women gained permanent status in the armed services of the United States. The name was an acronym for "Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service" (as well as an allusion to ocean waves). The word "emergency" implied that the acceptance of women was due to the unusual circumstances of World War II, and at the end of the war the women would not be allowed to continue in Navy careers, but it or its successors continued for decades afterwards. Their official name was the U.S. Naval Reserve (Women's Reserve), but the nickname as the WAVES stuck.

Mildred McAfee, President of Wellesley College, was sworn in as a Naval Reserve Lieutenant Commander in early August 1942. She was the first female commissioned officer in U.S. Navy history, and the first director of the WAVES. This occurred two months after the WAAC (Women's Auxiliary Army Corps) was established, and Eleanor Roosevelt had convinced the Congress to authorize the women's component of the Navy.

Women entering as enlisted personnel in the Navy or Coast Guard attended the V10 WAVE Enlisted Rating Volunteer Program. Women seeking to become officers in the WAVES or SPARS attended the V9 WAVE Officer Candidate Volunteer Program. Officer candidates went through basic training as seamen recruits, then became midshipmen during officer training, and graduated as ensigns. The WAVE graduates from the V9 and V10 programs were considered part of the U.S. Naval Reserve.



Four American F-15 Eagle pilots from the 3d Wing walk to their respective jets at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Keith Brown

The important distinction between the WAAC and the WAVES was that the WAAC was an "auxiliary" organization, serving with the Army, not in it. From the very beginning, the WAVES was an official part of the Navy, and its members held the same rank and ratings as male personnel. They also received the same pay and were subject to military discipline. The WAAC became the Women's Army Corps (WAC) on 1 July 1943, giving its members military status similar to that of the WAVES.

The WAVES could not serve aboard combat ships or aircraft, and initially were restricted to duty in the continental United States. Late in World War II, they were authorized to serve in certain U.S. possessions, and a number were sent to Hawaii. The war ended before any WAVES could be sent to other locations.

Within their first year, the WAVES were 27,000 strong. A large proportion of the WAVES did clerical work, but some took positions in the aviation community, medical professions, communications, intelligence, storekeeper, science and technology.

The WAVES did not initially accept African-American women into the division. In November 1944, Harriet Ida Pickens and Frances Wills graduated from the United States Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (Women's Reserve) at Northampton,

Massachusetts, and became the first female African-American WAVE officers. From the fall of 1944 onwards, the Navy trained roughly one black woman for every 36 white women enlisted in the WAVES; this was about 2.77%, below the 10% cap agreed upon by the armed services in 1940.



Lt. Harriet Ida Pickens and Ens. Frances Wills, first African-American Waves to be commissioned.

Originally sent from Lisa-Jon Trinidad